



Good BEHAVIOR

Did your sourdough starter die a quick death? Were your marathon dreams tripped up before the starting line? Is your great American novel still just fiction? 🐼 We all set grand goals during the pandemic, but for many of us, they remain fantasies. It's not entirely our fault: According to experts at the University of Colorado Anschutz Health and Wellness Center at the Anschutz Medical Campus, the anxiety that accompanied COVID-19 made it difficult for people to change their behaviors. Difficult...but not impossible. Guided by the research of three CU Anschutz scientists, as well as lessons from those who managed to keep their pandemic resolutions, we outline how to achieve a new you in the new normal. 🐼

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PLUG INTO A HIGHER POWER

Small changes are easier to make when connected to big beliefs.

In 1946, Viktor Frankl published *Man's Search for Meaning*, a memoir about his time in Nazi concentration camps. The Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist surmised that prisoners who held on to a sense of meaning had a better chance of surviving. "Our thinking was, 'Maybe this is a way of helping people sustain behavior,'" says Kevin Masters, the director of clinical health psychology at the CU Anschutz Health and Wellness Center. Finding a link between "higher order constructs"—not just religion, but also things like family and politics—and behavior proved difficult. People only think about "purpose" at weddings and funerals; it doesn't factor into daily decisions about whether to binge *The Great British Baking Show* or actually learn to bake. Recently, though, Masters and his colleagues have asked patients to rank what's most important to them (it's overwhelmingly personal relationships) and, through smartphone apps, have begun sending them daily prompts to help them focus on what they selected. The idea is to remind people that if, say, they want to be able to play in the park with their grandchildren, they need to eat right and exercise so their bodies will remain healthy as they age. "Truthfully, I don't know how well we will succeed with this, but I do think it's worth a try," Masters says. "And [subjects] who have been involved in our research seem to believe that we're onto something." —SC

Family Time, Reinvented

SCHOOLS CLOSED FOR COVID-19 on Friday, March 13, 2020.

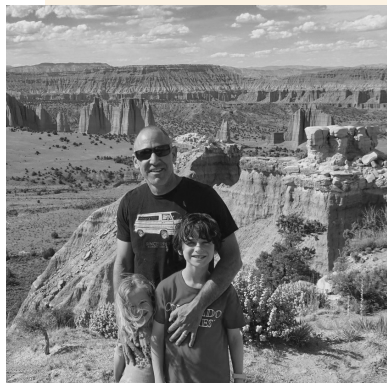
"Enjoy an extended spring break," the official district email communiqué advised us. With the weekend upon us, my wife, an attorney, and I didn't grasp the implications until Monday. I had two impending writing deadlines, and she was steeped in litigation matters. What at first had seemed like a rare gift—bonus hours with our kids—quickly morphed into what felt like a theft of time. How could we possibly work a normal day with our kids at home? Because COVID-19 had vaporized our childcare, we resorted to iPads as babysitters. While the kids binged on ninja anime and Dude Perfect, I slammed through my assignments. A week later, I got COVID-19.

It was an inauspicious start to a global pandemic. As spring inched toward summer, though, we knew we needed to make big decisions. Two full-time working parents without childcare was unsustainable. So I quit, a decision that came easily because we had that luxury—and because two decades of hustling for freelance gigs had left me feeling uninspired. A pandemic sabbatical to be a stay-at-home dad felt like a prudent career move.

With a sudden windfall of family time, making it purposeful became our priority. First, we ditched the iPads after remote school ended in May. In early June, the whole family departed for Utah for seven days of camping near Capitol Reef National Park. But when the prospect of

returning to a 9-to-5 workday routine loomed, we added another week to our trip and began devising a scheme to keep our kids in the screen-free outdoors for at least the next few months.

After establishing a pod with another family whose kids were similar ages as ours, we camped and backpacked together throughout Colorado for much of the summer. Life on the road was gloriously simple and also safer. In Utah, for example, we were boondocking on a scarcely populated plateau situated in a county that had, at that point, recorded zero cases of the virus. By early September, our family had spent more than 40 days off the grid. My wife worked remotely from our five-year-old pop-up camper, seeking out Wi-Fi in nearby towns when necessary. When our daughter asked me, "Dad, can we do this every summer?" I knew we'd succeeded in creating something special that our kids would remember long after the virus relents. —Michael Behar



LIFE ON THE ROAD WAS GLORIOUSLY SIMPLE. BY EARLY SEPTEMBER, OUR FAMILY HAD SPENT MORE THAN 40 DAYS OFF THE GRID.

Courtesy of Michael Behar



A Meditation On Meditating

"OOOOHHHHKAAAAAYYYY. Just...take your seat...and...close your eyes. And take a few deep breaths. And try to arrive, all at once, for the next 10 minutes." Sam Harris, the man whose soothing voice visits me through my earbuds, had me until that phrase, "arrive, all at once." *What does it mean to arrive somewhere when you're sitting perfectly still? I wonder. Where am I arriving? How will I know when I get there?*

Nearly two years into the practice of (almost) daily meditation, I'm still waiting for answers. I have not reached nirvana yet; I figure that's because I can't even get through 10 minutes of meditation without getting lost in thought about work, my teenage boys, my aging parents, and whether the wind speeds are optimal for a bike ride.

I've meditated sporadically since college, but it never really took—until I found Harris' Waking Up app. I subscribed to the app about a month after Denver's stay-at-home order commenced because, like so many others, I felt lost and out of control. I was searching for something more, something beyond the mundane existence we were living. So I decided to embark on a more regular meditation practice.

Turns out that's not as easy as it may sound. Harris says things like, "Look for the looker" and "Recognize that consciousness is something that's just appearing." Sometimes, I feel like I'm growing. Other times, I get pissed at Harris' vagaries. This, I will admit, is very un-Zen.

But I keep meditating, because if this pandemic has taught me anything it's A) that our time here can be very short, B) there is more to life than Twitter, and C) meditation has actually helped me to be less reactive and calmer, at least some of the time. I keep at it because one day I hope that when Harris asks me to arrive, all at once, I will recognize that I'm already there. —Geoff Van Dyke

Derek Cooper Photography Inc./Getty Images

Ag Living

AS A CHILD, I was lactose intolerant. I eventually outgrew it, but I continue to love goat milk because, well, it tastes awesome. So when, in 2018, my family moved from Denver to a small farm north of the city, I started dabbling in goats—cheese making and stuff. I was bragging about my feta during a vacation to Napa Valley, California, the next year when one of my girlfriends dared me to live only off what I could grow on my farm for 12 months. I had been drinking just enough wine that that sounded like a good idea.

The challenge itself would run from August 2020 to August 2021. As I was preparing, though, COVID-19 hit Colorado. My husband kept telling me that nobody would blame me if I delayed for a while. But during the pandemic I needed something to aspire to and something I could control. Whatever else was happening outside our farm's fence, I could control what was happening inside it in a way that was super healthy to me.

It was hard, though. I went from six to eight cups of coffee a day to nothing. I've never done hard drugs, but I was in withdrawal. Then, one of my pigs figured out how to eat live chickens. That was stressful.

But it was worth it. I'm 38. My entire life has been focused on politics, which I got into to try to change the world. The last few years, though, have ground anyone in politics into dust. By doing this challenge, I thought I could maybe recapture the spark of life. And when I sat down to milk my goats, it was thrilling. Seriously. Part of this challenge was trying to

claw back my own sense of values and internal relativism and recognize the millions of people lost to history who have gotten us to a place where we can take milk from a goat and turn it into cheese. It's basically magic. It sounds kind of trite when I say it like that, right? But it's amazing. ▲

—Kelly Maher, as told to SC

