

Stronger Month by Month

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WELCOME + HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

WELCOME

In 2016, after our son Nathan entered this world, things changed for me. Some all at once, of course—goodbye sleep, hello love like I've never before experienced. But most of the changes came slowly and, at times, painfully.

We've all gotten used to a certain way of living, being, moving through our days. And as I learned how to be a parent, I realized that my way of living needed to shift.

Making change intentionally is hard. It takes work.

But making shifts intentionally is hard. You have to identify what needs to change, make a conscious decision to do so, and then figure out how to see it through—and while the first two are tough, the third is what (to me) took the most work.

As 2017 drew near, I felt very strongly that I needed to figure out a new way to make intentional change happen in my life. What I was doing—identifying tons of changes to make, making a daily checklist that included each one, failing and feeling terrible about it—just wasn't working any longer.

I'm inviting you to join me in choosing one thing to focus on each month.

So I decided I would choose one change to focus on each month. I would choose something I felt would make a big difference in my life, something I wanted to continue after the month was through.

And because I'm not very good at keeping my own word without external accountability, I decided to post about my progress each week on Instagram.

And then because I know I'm not alone in wanting to make these kinds of changes, I invited you to join me.

And that's where this guide begins.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This process can be as simple or as involved as you like.

Some of us tend not to do things if they're complicated. If that's you, take only what you need from this guide and leave the rest.

But some others of us need to add in process and ritual to feel that we're doing our best. If that's you, I've listed details and ideas to help you go deeper.

Do what works for you, and leave the rest behind. This process is for *you*.

What I'm trying to say here is that you should choose your own path. How you make change is up to you; I'm here simply to shine a light on some possible ways to do so. The only wrong way to do this is one that doesn't work for you!

THE MONTHLY PROCESS

1. DECIDE YOU WANT TO DO THIS.

This may seem like a simple step, but often it's one of the hardest.

Are you ready to change how you approach, well, making change happen in your life? Are you open to truly focusing on one change each month?

This doesn't mean you can't make any other changes. I don't limit myself—just the opposite; I often find that sticking to this one anchor change helps make other shifts in my life possible.

I simply make an agreement with myself that if I change nothing else, I'll change this one thing and that it takes precedent.

Decide you're ready to change
how you approach change
before you begin this process.

Are you ready for that? If not, come back when you are. I'll be here! And if you'd like a little help, reach out: erica@ericamidkiff.com. I'm happy to listen to why you feel you're not ready and lend any guidance I can.

2. COMMIT TO AN INTENTION.

I know, I know. There are tons of changes you want to make. (Me, too!) How do you choose?

What will make the biggest
difference in your life *now*?

Make a list of all your options. Then look back over it. What's the one thing that will make the biggest difference in your life and/or work right now?

For example, if you decide to start taking vitamins, that may give you a sense of wellbeing that you enjoy, which could make you more interested in exercising and eating well. Or if you begin meditating or doing intentional writing, you may find that taking a walk each day is easier because your mind isn't quite as full and you feel peace around taking a few more minutes for yourself. Or if you decide to make your bed each day, you may find yourself taking a bit more care with your space, less likely to leave your PJs

in a pile on the floor.

There's no guarantee that those things will happen, of course, but if you can look at your list and pick somewhere to start, you'll be further along in a month than you are right now, and you'll learn something along the way.

Some examples of intentions you could set include:

- Meditation (guided, loving-kindness, silent)
- Exercise (walking, running, yoga, Pilates, barre)
- Mindset (positive affirmation, visualization, intentional writing)
- Action (pausing before you respond, making your bed, eating a specific serving of veggies)

The possibilities are endless! Which, I know, can make this feel overwhelming.

Choose just one thing to focus on. You'll have another chance to choose in a month!

But as I said, if you can choose just one thing to focus on, and then actually do it, you'll be in a much better place a month from now than if you tried to make all those changes at once!

I've created a worksheet with some questions you can ask yourself each month, in case you'd like a bit of help. You'll find it at the end of this guide!

3. TRACK YOUR PROGRESS.

Keep this simple. Find a place to check off the days you succeeded, x off the days you didn't, and make a squiggle (~) for the days you did ok but could've done better.

I also like to jot down a quick note about any victories or room for improvement from the day, but whether or not you do that part is up to you.

In the past, I've used the monthly calendar page on my planner (which otherwise goes unused) for all this, and I've also used a

Choose something that feels both motivating and realistic.

You can sign up for Amanda's tracker on her site right here:
dennellydesign.com/free-resources

Join me on Instagram if you like, but if not, this process will still be powerful! This is about what works for *you*.

special worksheet I created (included at the back of this guide). Both have worked well for different reasons. You could use:

- The monthly calendar page in your planner
- A monthly calendar page from somewhere else (wall calendar, printed page, etc.)
- A note on your phone with the number of days in the month and a checkbox beside each one
- A beautiful monthly goal tracker created by my friend Amanda over at Dennelly Design (seriously, it's gorgeous!)
- The worksheet I created for you (at the back of this guide)

The point is to find a simple place to track your progress...and then do it!

4. [OPTIONAL] SHARE YOUR INTENTION AND COMMIT TO WEEKLY CHECK-INS.

Each Monday, I share a post on Instagram in which I let you know how I'm doing with my intention and invite you to share how you're doing. On the Monday before the new month begins, I also let you know what my intention will be for the following month, and invite you to do the same.

In this way, we can provide accountability and support for each other. There's something about writing down, in public, how you're doing—it can help you celebrate your victories and can take the sting out of a week that didn't go quite so well.

But of course, there's no requirement to do this part. You can work quietly on your own intentions, celebrating your victories and giving yourself support when you don't do as well as you'd hoped. Or you can find a friend who wants to check in privately.

Remember, how you do this entire process is up to you!

Note: I'm @ericatmidkiff on Instagram, and the hashtag we use is #strongermonthbymonth if you'd like to join in!

5. KEEP GOING AND DON'T GET DISCOURAGED.

Change can be tough. That's why we're doing this work! But even when you have a process to follow and a supportive place to check in, there will still be times you struggle.

Think ahead about what might trip you up and try to keep those things from happening.

Here are some things you could do (most of which I have done) to keep up with your intention:

Keep it visible. You could make it the lock screen or background on your phone, you could tape it up by your desk, you could record it into an app like Think Up and listen to it each day—whatever works for you! But for many of us, the more we see something, the more likely we are to remember it.

Set a reminder to check in on (and check off) your current intention each day. I like to do this in the morning, reviewing the intention (to keep it firmly in my mind) and then marking the previous day's progress.

Set reminders to make sure you complete your intention.

Depending on the intention you choose, this could look like:

- Set a reminder for about an hour before bed, in case you haven't yet completed your intention. Even if you end up not doing your intention that day, you've at least made a choice. This works well for intentions like *Meditate daily* or *Take vitamins* that only need to be once a day and aren't time-dependent.
- Set a reminder for the time you want to complete your intention. This works well for intentions like *Take five deep breaths before I eat lunch*, which have to be completed during a certain part of the day.
- Set a few reminders throughout the day. This works well for intentions like *Pause before I respond or react*—things you want to do throughout the day rather than one time.

Find accountability! I mentioned this in the previous step, but I think it bears repeating. Knowing you'll report to someone can make a big difference in whether you follow through.

If you come up with other ways to keep up with your intention, I'd love to hear! (erica@ericamidkiff.com)

And remember, don't get discouraged. This is about long-term growth, not just the short-term win of checking something off a list! When you have an off day or two, look back at all the wins you've had and remind yourself that change takes time.

If you're negative to yourself, there's a greater chance you'll quit altogether. You'll get a lot further by being kind!

Definitely take time to think about how the past month went. Reflection is key when working on making change!

6. REVIEW AND SET YOUR NEXT INTENTION!

Toward the end of the month, take a few minutes to review how things went. This doesn't have to take long; there's a spot on your worksheet to jot down a few notes, or you can even do this process in your head as you wash dishes or take a walk. Just think about the past month—what went well and why, what didn't go well and why, and what you might do differently given the chance.

Then go back to the beginning and start again with step one, setting an intention for the month to come and moving forward! A quick hint here: If you want to keep focusing on the same intention, go for it! Sometimes you'll want to refine something you've already tried, or you may find a new way to go for the same goal (maybe you try intentional writing instead of meditation, with the goal of creating space in your day). This is truly about what works for you!

THE WORKSHEETS + A FINAL SEND-OFF

THE WORKSHEETS

In the following pages, you'll find the two worksheets I mentioned (if you haven't already found and printed them!). I created these to go along with the process I've outlined. But if these don't work for you, or you've found another way to set your intentions and map your progress, that's wonderful! The worksheets are simply here in case you need them.

A FINAL SEND-OFF

The intentions you set each month don't go away. My hope is that they become more a part of your everyday life!

Before I go, I want to make one final note: The intentions you set each month don't go away. My hope is that they become more a part of your everyday life!

I'm still working on my very first intention, *Pause before reacting or responding*. It's not a need that's gone away, but it's much easier for me after having spent a month focusing intently on changing my own response patterns.

I hope you'll find that this guide helps you move forward with greater ease and intention. Change is essential to life, and it's hard, but I don't think it needs to feel totally impossible.

I'd love to hear your thoughts, feedback, and wins as you use this guide! Reach out any time: erica@ericamidkiff.com.

Until then,
With much love,
Erica

SMBM: CHOOSE AN INTENTION

What changes have you been wanting to make?

This could be in life, work, or both. Write about what's been on your mind.

What do you want more of? What do you want less of?

Think about things that have made you happy recently, and then things that have made you unhappy or frustrated.

Where do you want to be a month from now? What could help you get there?

Is this a physical action you could take? Or a mindset shift?

Which of the things you listed above would make the *biggest* impact on you in the next month?

If this feels hard, try listing a couple of favorites below, and eliminate ideas one by one until you narrow it to a smaller list. Then if you're still not sure, flip a coin or draw one out of a hat and commit to that one first. You can always choose another next month! (I've intentionally only left room for four items here. Don't make this too hard on yourself!)

How can you frame this into a simple daily intention?

Keep it short and doable, like: Meditate once a day. Eat three servings of veggies a day. Reverse negative thoughts at least twice a day. The simpler your intention, the more likely you are to follow through.

SMBM: CARRY OUT YOUR INTENTION

month _____ intention _____

____ DAY 1

____ DAY 2

____ DAY 3

____ DAY 4

____ DAY 5

____ DAY 6

____ DAY 7

____ DAY 8

____ DAY 9

____ DAY 10

____ DAY 11

____ DAY 12

____ DAY 13

____ DAY 14

____ DAY 15

____ DAY 16

____ DAY 17

____ DAY 18

____ DAY 19

____ DAY 20

____ DAY 21

month _____ intention _____

____ DAY 22

____ DAY 23

____ DAY 24

____ DAY 25

____ DAY 26

____ DAY 27

____ DAY 28

____ DAY 29

____ DAY 30

____ DAY 31

MONTHLY REFLECTION

What went well and why? What didn't go well and why? What would you have done differently, given the chance?
