# Setting Your Mind to Success: Overcome Fears to Achieve Your Goals

**Introduction**

In 2014, after years of false starts and failed attempts, I finally reached my goal of starting a video game business and releasing my first game.  I achieved this goal while working a full-time job, all within 3 months.

The hardest part was facing my fears and negative thoughts about not being able to accomplish what I set out to do.  Of course, there were things I know I could have done better, in hindsight.  But instead of waiting until I gathered all the answers and then not having anything to show for it, I am a business owner and professional game developer, and there's always time to learn from my initial mistakes.

I am going to share with you my strategies for overcoming fear of failure, regret over past mistakes, and so many other negative mindsets that held me back for years.  If you are trying to start a business, or achieve any goal, but are feeling hopeless and stuck, I hope that my experience can help you on your way to success.

Since this is my experience, I will be basing it mostly on game development, but the information is applicable even if you are not interested in making games.

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**Background**

A little about myself…I am a software engineer and software quality assurance engineer by profession.  I have a joint bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies and Computer Science, and a second bachelor's degree in Game and Simulation Programming.  In accordance with my profession and education, most of my experience is skewed towards game programming and design.  However, what I'm sharing here  is not specific to any skill set.  You don't have to have degrees and programming skills to start your business or release a game.  You can always find help with the specific skills you might lack.

The most important factor is desire, drive and enthusiasm.  The more significant moments of my game development experience started before I even began preschool, when I played my older cousin's video games…Atari, Nintendo (the original NES console), and a table-top system called Vectrex.  I absolutely loved playing those games…*Super Mario Brothers*, *Contra*, *Metroid*, *Double Dragon*, you name it, I loved it.  We got an NES at our house when I was in pre-kindergarten, and my parents almost had to surgically remove the controller from my hands, I played it so much.  Even if I wasn't playing, I would take the instruction manuals everywhere with me and read them (nowadays, most games don't come with a paper manual anymore, the manual is usually available online or in the game as a help menu…it saddens

me a bit, because poring through the bestiaries and maps in an instruction booklet was one of the most exciting parts of getting a new game, to me). I even made up my own little games…they never actually made it to a computer, but I would make my own instruction manuals. If I wasn't playing *Super Mario Brothers*, I was rearranging furniture and toys, trying to make an obstacle course that I could hop through, like it was my own little Mushroom Kingdom (and don't forget, the floor is lava!).

When I got older, I started playing more role-playing and adventure games. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and *Final Fantasy 6* are two of my favorite games ever. I thought it would be cool to be able to create such immersive worlds and stories as those I experienced in those games. I also started reading fantasy novels such as *Lord of the Rings* and the *Dragonlance* series. My childhood love for dinosaurs evolved into a fascination with dragons, and the game stories I created in my head and wrote on paper followed that path.

I am still working towards making that huge immersive game full of swords, sorcery and dragonfire, but the point is, I've loved games practically all of my life, and now I know how to pluck ideas out of my head and onto a computer screen. I can't see myself NOT being involved with games somehow, either creating them, or playing them all day. That's the kind of drive that will help you to overcome obstacles to create your dream company. You might not have the same background as me, you may have a completely different experience or goal, but please don't let lack of formal education or any particular skillset stop you from realizing your dream, too.

**Cultivating the Proper Mindset**

Getting into the proper frame of mind is arguably the most important first step in starting any type of venture. Starting a business and creating a game are both challenging goals. When you encounter setbacks, knowing your motivation, staying positive, and understanding how to face your fears will be the keys that help you to persevere.

*Your Motivation*

Why do you want to start a business and develop games? Are you hoping to have more control over your time and financial future? Is this something you want to do for fun?

Knowing what drives you will help to keep you positive and inspired, especially when you run into difficulty. When you have a purpose that is your own (and not just something that someone else thinks that you should be striving towards), you have an inherent stimulation to achieve your goals.

For me, I'm motivated by my lifelong love for games, the fun I get in challenging myself and learning (especially about computer science), and the chance to better the world through games, whether it's in education, providing fun for others, or presenting players with a thought-provoking experience.

*Your Goals*

What exactly are you hoping to accomplish? Do you just want to release a game that expresses your creative vision, even if it's not a blockbuster? Are you looking for financial freedom by owning a

company?  You need to have a good idea of what you actually want.  Here are some questions to ask yourself.

- How big do I want my company to be?  Just me, maybe a few partners, or a large corporation (eventually)?
- Do I want this company to be my main source of income, or am I content to keep it as a side gig or hobby?  Am I more interested in making my games a labor of love, a source of revenue, or some combination?
- Do I even need/want to create a company, or can I just release games without one?
- How often do I want to work?  What kind of schedule/lifestyle am I hoping to achieve?
- Where do I want to work?  What kind of environment?
- How long do I want to pursue this goal?  Is this pursuit just a fleeting hobby, or is it something that I want to build for years to come?
- Do I have a timeline for my goals?  When do I want to have my first game released?

*Your Current Situation*

You should also do an inventory of your current life situation, which will help to shape your goals and expectations.  You might have a variety of obligations, such as family, a job, bills, and other considerations, all of which will impact your available time and resources.  You should plan a course of action that realistically addresses your current obligations and limitations.

Here are some common factors that you will want to consider:

- Family
- Job
- School and Continuing Education
- Financial Obligations
- Health
- Down-time
- Friends

Consider my situation as an example.  While working on my company and game, I also worked a full-time job as a software engineer.  In addition to the regular 9 to 5 hours, I had to consider time for daily commute, on-call duty, and odd hours that might have been required.  Sometimes I had to work late to finish up a project, or to respond to whatever IT crisis popped up that day.

I also was working towards a professional certification, trying to comply with company goals and educational requirements.  I wanted to work on foreign language study course outside of work, for my own interest, but I realized that extra work would take away from my business, so I put the language goals on hold.

I also needed to ensure time to take care of myself properly.  I had been suffering from long-term career burnout, from years of trying to do too many things with too little time.  I was neglecting my needs, not

taking the time to get the best foods, or even eat sometimes, staying up late trying to balance all of my career goals and responsibilities, not allowing myself time to pursue hobbies and recharge myself. I hardly spent any time with my family, and if I wasn't working, I was either worrying about not working enough, or trying to catch up on sleep, but never quite getting back in balance.

I lived this life for five years. I always had plans for the wonderful, immersive, sprawling games I would create…adventure games, strategy games, role-playing games, all intricate genres that take even professional game studios years to make. Yet, I was expecting to create these games, on my own, while working a regular job, and usually in anticipation of some game competition deadline a few months down the line. Can you see how my expectations were unrealistic?

So now, every time I would work on a game, something would go wrong. I would pay someone to make art and music and then not receive it on a timely basis, I would get involved with a career goal at work, always something. I would inevitably miss whatever game competition deadline I had been working towards, and then I would just lose steam and put the project aside. Several times, I did try other game ideas that seemed simpler, but I still did not choose goals that were manageable within my current guidelines.

I was setting myself up for failure and frustration, trying to do too much and not doing well at most of it. I always did well at my regular job as a priority, but every other aspect of my life seemed to be starts and stops. You might recognize yourself in this story. If so, you might also understand that lots of pride was at stake. I felt I "should" have been able to balance all my responsibilities, and create the next awesome *Zelda* clone or *Final Fantasy* killer. If it takes Nintendo and Square-Enix (the respective developers for these excellent games) years to come out with their own games, how could I possibly have done the same with my current limitations?

After a long game development hiatus, and a job change, I finally broke the depressing cycle when I decided I no longer wanted to keep putting my game dreams on the shelf, and then chose to work on a much smaller casual arcade-style game, based on a prototype I'd made years ago in college in a week. I won't go into specific game details here, but the key point is that by swallowing my pride and starting with a smaller goal, I ensured I had enough momentum to finish my first game within a few months. Now I can say that I have an established game company with one title under my belt, whereas five years ago I had no idea how I would ever complete a project.

*Your Fears and Limiting Beliefs*

You might have fears and limiting beliefs that are keeping you back from achieving your game development or business goals. It would be best to confront these beliefs as soon as possible, to get off to a good start. They might, and likely will, pop back up as you work through the game development/business process, but at least you'll be more prepared to face them.

It might sound strange, but one of the best ways I've found to identify beliefs is by paying attention to my dreams when I sleep. For example, for years I've had a recurring dream in which I am enrolled in a class, but I completely forget about it and never attend until right around exam time. At that point, I

realize that I am so far behind, and I can't even drop the course, so I try to frantically formulate some study plan for the weekend. I never actually take the exam in the dream, but the panic and anxiety feels very real. I'm sure this is a common dream that many others have experienced.

I asked myself what that dream means to me. I did have times in college when I felt anxious while studying for finals, but I realized that the dream situation really mirrored how I felt about trying to balance all of my obligations and goals. It was about the anxiety and hopelessness I experienced when I let some area of my life fall to the wayside, and then scrambled to get back on track with a particular goal. I felt like I was failing, I felt overwhelmed, I felt like I did not have the ability or resources to accomplish my goals.

Sometimes dreams help to point out fears or issues that you might be suppressing or even unaware of during consciousness. You might find it useful to examine yours, if you can remember them.

With that being said, let's discuss some common fears and beliefs.

Fear of Failure

This fear is probably familiar to many readers. Simply put, for many people, it hurts to fail, so they don't try, or they give up quickly.

**A Note on Past Failures:** If you're like most people, including me, you have experienced failure. If the failure stung enough, or if you've racked up so many, you may feel that your fear is justified. You might even not recognize that you have the fear; you start pursuing a goal, and for some reason, you feel extreme anxiety or panic, or you just cannot get moving.

Please believe that I know how crippling and disheartening this fear can be. I even felt it while working on a recent book project…I've written professional technical papers, design documents, creative short stories, and all sorts of academic papers and essays, but this whole idea of writing a book is outside my comfort zone, and that's when the fear kicks in for me. I'm working through it, and here are some suggestions I can offer:

- First off, fear of any kind is just plain exhausting. Anxiety and fear weighing on your mind can sap your physical and mental strength. Make sure you get enough rest and adequate nutrition to stay energized. It's a lot easier to face any problem when you give your body the right resources.
- Remember and write down times when you felt successful. Really focus on reliving and relishing that feeling of success. For me, most of my time in school before college was very academically successful. I was a high achiever, and learning, school, and work was just FUN for me (that might be why I was such an achiever). Things got harder in college, and I don't think I had really learned how to deal with not being the highest achiever. I recognize the stark difference between feeling successful and really enjoying my work, versus feeling hopeless and ineffective. The good thing is that, when I see myself starting to feel that fear and anxiety, I know now that my next step is to take a moment and relive those moments and those mindsets. You might feel

that you have trouble feeling the success.  If so, try focusing on the excitement you felt about tackling the challenge, even before you got to the end result.  Make a conscious effort to focus on that mindset, say it out loud, even.

- Learn from your past failures.  Take an honest look at what went wrong.  What could you have done differently?  A failure is always a lesson, and once you learn that lesson, you will achieve even more.
- If you don't have successful past experiences that make you feel good, create some.  Choose a small, simple task that lies just outside your comfort zone.  It does not even have to be related to your game and business goal.  Most likely you have some skill or area in which you feel more comfortable and able to stretch your limits, even if it's something like learning a new word every day for a week.  Achieve that task, and celebrate it.  Make note of it, and file it in your track record of successes.
- Give yourself credit!  You probably have more successes than you realize, but instead you focus on your failures.  You're more capable than you know!
- DON'T TIE FAILURES TO YOUR SELF-WORTH.  Yes, I put that in all-caps, because I think it's a serious problem for a lot of people, including me.  Being a high achiever, getting good grades and being the "smart kid" felt like my identity.  If I didn't have that distinction, then I felt like nothing.  Your shortcomings are NOT you.  It's more painful if you feel that mistakes define your worth, versus being able to separate your missteps from yourself and learn from them.  EVERYONE fails at something at some point, even the person you might look at who seems to have it all together.  Let your mistakes shape you into a stronger, wiser person.
- Beware of perfectionism.  If you are a perfectionist, you set unreasonable standards for yourself, and you're never quite satisfied with your results.  While it's always good to strive for your best work and find ways to improve, if you are too hard on yourself, you'll never actually finish anything.  You'll probably find yourself procrastinating, not even able to get started on your goals.  After all, there's no way you can meet your target, right?  Because you don't take action, you avoid the perceived failure, while still leaving the hope that if you really got started on it, you could definitely achieve it.  In the end, however, you're not really letting yourself of the hook.  You're just not "failing," but you're not succeeding either.
- Plan wisely.  In many cases, you can avoid failures with proper preparation and approach.  Take a look at the tips for fear of lack and feeling overwhelmed.  Having a good plan of what you need to do can take a serious bite out of failure fears.

Fear of Success

This fear might sound odd, because who doesn't want to be successful, right?  But think…do you feel that success comes with a price?  A successful business might mean more work, without the safety of an external boss to make decisions for you.  You might feel that you'll have less time.  If you do have great success, you may feel pressured to continue living up to that standard, always trying to outdo yourself.  Being a successful business owner might not be something to which your friends or peers relate, so it may seem that you're drifting away from them.

The biggest suggestion I can make here, is to look at what success means to you, and if it's worth it. Yes, there are responsibilities and changes that come with success, but is dealing with them worth the benefits that you envision when you set your goals? Some people would rather be in control of a business than work on a schedule dictated by someone else. Others might just be content with having a small side-business, or doing game development solely as a hobby. Either way is fine; that's a decision you will have to make for yourself.

If the success is something you do want, understand that things will likely change for you in life whether you pursue your goals or not. You'll probably always have some sort of responsibility, friends and peers come and go, and so on. Sometimes having an honest discussion with those around you can mitigate some of the fears…your friends might be more understanding than you think, for instance. In other cases, you have to weigh the costs versus the benefits, and also, make sure that the fear of success is not related to some of the other fears mentioned here. For example, if success means more responsibility, you might have an underlying fear of feeling overwhelmed, which we will also discuss.

Fear of Lack

You might fear that you don't have the resources you need to meet your goal. These resources can be anything, including time, money, support, and skills.

It's always good to be realistic about your resources, but you can work to make sure that lack does not stop you from achieving your goals. To address this fear, I suggest the following:

- Make a list of what you feel is lacking and holding you back.
- For each item on the list, determine whether you have the resources, but they are allocated elsewhere, or if you don't have the resources at all. For example, if you feel that you don't have enough time to work on a game or setting up a company, ask yourself if there are activities that you can cut back on to give you more time. Can you wake up a little earlier, or will your job let you work from home, so that you don't have to waste time on a commute?
- Decide if you can make do without some of the resources. Ok, so you might not have the time and skill level to make a 70-hour adventure game. Many people don't, at first. Are there simpler game ideas you can work on that are a better fit for your time commitments and abilities? If you're not an artist, can you design a game that uses very simple or minimal art?
- If you do need the resource, identify people and assets that can help you to get the resource. For instance, most people don't have a good idea of what steps to take when starting a business; they lack that skill. There are books, experts, and organizations online and in person that can help fill in these knowledge gaps. Identifying a few of these assets can put you on the right track to addressing your needs.
- For each resource, list one or two next steps that will put you closer to addressing the need. Going back to our example about how to start a business, your next step might be to check your local government website to see if there are any workshops about how to obtain a business license in your area, and then attend. You can even take another step of preparing a list of questions so that you can get the most out of the workshop.

For everything you may lack, there is usually a way to address the need.  The biggest step is to plan to help mitigate the fear.

Feeling Overwhelmed

If you feel overwhelmed, you are probably trying to take on too much all at once.  You might be trying to accomplish too much in an unrealistic time frame, like in our previous discussions about choosing smaller, simpler games to start your development career.

Another alternative might be that the scope of the end goal is suitable, but you're not breaking the bigger goal into small enough chunks.  For example, creating an entire game might seem like a daunting task, even if the game is relatively simple, and especially if it's your first game.  Try focusing on the game's different components, one step at a time.

An approach I like is to do a screen-by-screen game flow analysis.  What will the user see on the very first game screen?  What functionality is available on that screen?  The introduction screen might have the game title, a splash background, and a list of actions such as "Start a New Game," "Game Options," and "Level Select."  You can do this exercise for each screen, one at a time, and then you can break the results down even further.  Continuing with our introduction screen example, you might then list smaller sub-tasks for yourself such as designing the background image, creating buttons for each of the actions, and identifying what exactly should happen when you press each button.  I like to keep a running task list as I do this process, and once I'm ready to develop the game, I can pick items from the list and feel real accomplishment as I finish each one.  Accomplishment and ease is the opposite of feeling overwhelmed!

Yes, you do need an overall understanding of the big picture of what you want your game to be, but breaking the big picture into smaller thumbnails helps to make the job manageable, and also helps you to build your confidence with smaller victories along the way.

**Conclusion and More Info**

Hopefully reading through the tips and experiences I've shared has helped you start addressing your mental blocks in reaching your goal, whatever it might be.  As I mentioned earlier, even if you are not trying to make a game, you can apply this advice to pretty much any goal.

If you are interested in learning more about how I set up my game company and released my first game, check out my ebook that goes into more detail about the story behind Cloudy Heaven Games.  For more information, and to sign up for updates, please visit our book page.  You can also follow us on Twitter @CloudyHeavenGms.

If you have any questions or feedback, please email us at contact@cloudyheavengames.com