

**A Life-Changing Tool That Millions of
People Can't Stop Talking About**

**THE
LET
THEM
THEORY**

Mel Robbins

New York Times Bestselling Author



**THE
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THEORY**

Also by Mel Robbins

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For my daughter Sawyer,
who co-wrote this book with me.

I have loved sharing this experience with you,
even though there were times you wanted to kill me.

As they say, *Let Them*.

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INTRODUCTION

My Story

At the age of 41, I found myself \$800,000 in debt, unemployed, and watching my husband's restaurant business crumble. It felt like we had failed at life with no hope of ever escaping the debt.

I enviously watched as my friends found success after success in their careers while we struggled to get groceries on the table. I had just been laid off and had no idea what to do with my life: I'd already tried being a public defender for the Legal Aid Society in New York City, being a lawyer in a large firm in Boston, working for a few start-ups, doing business development at an advertising agency, becoming a life coach, hosting a call-in radio show, and even opening a small paint-your-own-pottery-studio. I felt completely lost, like nothing I did would ever be enough to dig us out of the hole we were in.

To deal with the anxiety and self-doubt, my main strategy became avoidance. Avoid getting up by hitting the snooze button. Avoid the pain with alcohol. Avoid responsibility by blaming my husband. Avoid looking for a job by procrastinating however I could.

If you've ever been in this situation, you understand how monumental even the simplest tasks seem: getting out of bed, opening your bills, being fully present with your family, cooking a nice meal, applying for a job, going for a walk, canceling that subscription, or even just being honest about the extent to which you're struggling. . . Everything feels impossible. Every

morning when I woke up, the anxiety was coursing through my veins, and I thought, *Is this really what it's going to look like for the rest of my life?*

But you want to know the funny thing about being stuck? I knew exactly what I needed to do: get up, tackle the dreaded pile of bills, get the kids ready for school, make myself go on walks, reach out to my friends for support, make a budget, find a job. And yet, I couldn't seem to do any of it.

How I Changed My Life

I'll never forget the morning when everything changed for me. The alarm went off, and there I was, lying in bed, completely overwhelmed by our problems. Like so many of us, I was paralyzed by my own thoughts, and the last thing I wanted to do was get up and face another day.

But then, something strange happened. A thought popped into my head that would ultimately change my life. It was so simple, almost silly. I remembered watching a rocket launch and the way NASA counted down to blast off: 5-4-3-2-1. I thought, *What if I just counted backward like that and launched myself out of bed?*

It seemed ridiculous, but I was desperate, so I gave it a shot. I counted backward: 5-4-3-2-1—and I got out of bed. Just like that. I didn't think about how tired I was or how much I didn't want to face my problems. I simply moved before my brain had the chance to talk me out of it. It's like launching a rocket: Once you start the countdown, 5-4-3-2-1, there's no turning back.

At that point in my life, I was so used to letting my thoughts paralyze me and fear and stress consume me that the concept felt completely foreign. I remember what a revelation it was when I thought to myself, *Wait a minute, I can feel horrible and still do what I need to do? Yes, Mel, you can.* And it worked.

In those five seconds, I had interrupted the cycle of overthinking. It felt like a small victory, but it was also a revelation. If I could push through those

five seconds of fear, maybe I could push through anything.

So, I started using this countdown everywhere in my life.

5-4-3-2-1 Get up when the alarm rings.

5-4-3-2-1 Pick up the phone and start networking to find a job.

5-4-3-2-1 Open the bills that had been piling up on the counter for months.

I started calling this the “5 Second Rule.” One 5-second move at a time, I forced myself to put one foot in front of the other and slowly step back into my life. I won’t lie to you. It wasn’t easy. The next couple of years were among the hardest of my life.

It’s not easy to claw your way out of debt or face the painful issues in your marriage. It’s not easy to quiet the anxiety or push through the self-doubt. It’s hard to update your résumé and look for a job when you question the value you bring. It’s a grind to force yourself to get back in shape and create healthier habits after you’ve let yourself go.

And it’s definitely not glamorous to work all day, then come home, take care of three kids, spend a few minutes with my husband, and then stay up late every night, trying to figure out ways I can make more money.

But that’s what I did.

The 5 Second Rule taught me that action is the answer. Thinking about your problems will never solve them. Waiting around to feel like doing something means you’ll never do it. It taught me that no one is coming to save you. You must save yourself from yourself. You have to force yourself to make little moves forward, all day, every day, especially when you don’t feel like it.

Using *5-4-3-2-1*, I pushed through the excuses, the anxiety, the overwhelm, and the fear. And step by step, day by day, week by week, I slowly took the actions that put my life and career back on track. My husband started using it to push himself to face the issues in his business head-on, and it worked for him too. But it would be another three years before I told anyone else about the 5 Second Rule. I had been reluctant to

share it with anyone because, first, I didn't know why it worked. And second, I didn't feel like I was in a position to give anybody advice.

But that all changed one fateful day when an old roommate recommended me as the “perfect person” to give advice on career change at a small event. I suppose she thought of me because I had changed my career so many times, even I had lost count. The event offered to fly me and my husband to San Francisco and put us up in a hotel. When you're struggling financially, that sounds like a free vacation, so I said yes. This was the first time I had ever given a speech on a stage at an event. The only public-speaking class I had ever taken was in high school, and as soon as I boarded the plane, that's when the panic started to sink in: *What on earth have I gotten myself into?*

When I walked on stage and saw 700 people in the audience staring back at me, my mind went blank, and I could feel my chest and neck turning red.

I then proceeded to have a 21-minute-long anxiety attack onstage. About 19 minutes in, I forgot how to end my talk on career change, so I blurted out the 5 Second Rule and how I use it, because I couldn't think of anything else to say. I must have blacked out, because I also don't remember the part where I gave everyone in the audience my email address. And as I walked off that stage, I thought that was the worst experience of my life. Thank God it's over.

It turns out that small event was one of the first TEDx conferences ever held. They filmed it, and a year later, posted the video online. Not only did it go viral—it's become one of the most watched TEDx talks of all time. The 5 Second Rule and its *5-4-3-2-1* countdown spread by word of mouth around the world. As it spread, people started to write to me at that email address, sharing stories about how the Rule was changing their lives. I was so moved by people's stories that I would sit up late at night, after I had put our three kids to bed, answering their emails one by one.

When I had been drowning in my problems, I felt like I was the only one who had trouble doing the things I needed to do. It's not true. We all struggle with motivation. It's a universal problem, and the 5 Second Rule seems to be

a solution that not only works for me but also works for people all over the world.

The stories were amazing: People had used *5-4-3-2-1* to push through fear, procrastination, and excuses to change jobs; lose 100 pounds; get sober; launch and sell businesses; improve their health and marriages. The medical and clinical uses blew me away. Doctors and psychologists were using it to treat PTSD, OCD, and depression. Even as I'm writing this Introduction, we have heard from over a thousand people who have used the 5 Second Rule to stop themselves from attempting suicide and to ask for help.

As that TEDx talk became more and more popular online, I started getting invited to speak at other small events. I remember being asked to talk to a group of Realtors at a bar. It was embarrassing standing there with a beer in my hand, trying to talk over the music and people gabbing in the next room. But I survived. I spoke in church basements, a high school classroom, then a friend's brown-bag lunch at work, and it just grew from there.

I would break out in hives as I held the microphone, and I wasn't getting paid. But the more I talked about the Rule and saw how powerful it was for everyone who tried it, the more I became obsessed with understanding why such a simple hack could lead to such profound results.

So, I put my lawyer hat on and started researching habits, human behavior, and the science of motivation. I needed to make a case: Why does counting *5-4-3-2-1* work? I gathered evidence from the experiences of ordinary people who had been using it. I found compelling precedent from the accounts of therapists, addiction specialists, and medical doctors who had begun recommending it to their patients, and all the evidence pointed to a simple explanation:

Small, Consistent Action Changes Everything

Meanwhile, my friends and extended family had no idea what I was doing because I was too scared to tell them. Mel? Giving advice? Give me a break. She nearly destroyed her own life.

At this point in my story, my husband had left the restaurant business and was struggling with depression. We were still drowning in debt, so I was working a full-time job trying to keep our family of five afloat while dedicating nights and weekends to speaking at small events and basically writing a dissertation on the science of motivation on the side.

I knew I wanted to teach the 5 Second Rule full-time and somehow make this my career, but I didn't know how. Looking back, I can see how paralyzed I was with imposter syndrome. What right did I have to call myself an expert in anything? I suppose I was just waiting for some kind of permission to put myself out there.

Maybe you're doing that right now. Waiting for the right time. Waiting to feel ready or a little less afraid. Waiting for someone to come along and tell you that today is the day to start. The problem with waiting is no one is coming. The only permission you need is your own.

Deciding to get serious about trying to make money as a motivational speaker was one of the best decisions I have made in my life. I'll share more with you about what led to this breakthrough in the pages of this book.

Once I started getting paid, I put every dollar toward chipping away at our debt. That first year I gave 17 paid speeches. The next year, it was 47, and I was able to quit my day job. I couldn't believe what was happening. By the third year, it was 99 speeches plus a 24-city tour with JPMorganChase. I had become the most-booked female speaker in the world. I was being hired by companies I admired.

How did this happen? By forcing myself out of bed on those mornings I didn't feel like it. Learning how to push yourself to take action when you are afraid or full of self-doubt or overwhelmed with excuses is a life skill you can learn. Once you master it, you'll understand that you can achieve anything through small, consistent moves forward.

I found myself on the road 150 days a year, standing on stages teaching the 5 Second Rule and the science of motivation while my husband stayed home and took care of our three kids. Word about the Rule and my skill onstage grew and grew. One event had 27,000 people in the audience. CEOs from the world's top brands, professional athletes, medical doctors, neuroscientists, and bestselling authors had begun recommending my work to others. I started a newsletter because I no longer had time to respond to people's emails personally. I eventually wrote to the team at TEDx and asked if they could remove my email from the video online.

When people would ask if I had a Ph.D. or if I was a therapist, I would say, "No, I learned everything the hard way—by screwing up my own life and then having to fix it."

Armed with years of experience, evidence, testimony, and research, I was finally ready to make my case in the form of a book. In 2017, I self-published *The 5 Second Rule*.

The 5 Second Rule went on to become the most successful self-published audiobook in history, and the sixth most read book of the year on Amazon. That book has now been read by millions of people and translated into 41 languages.

Over the years of traveling across the country speaking on stages, I learned three important things: First, most of us are just trying to do our best to get ahead, pay our bills, raise a family, fall in love, have more fun, and reach the potential of our lives. We're just looking for simple ways to be a little happier and make our lives a little better. And we're not only looking for those resources for ourselves—we are looking for the people in our lives who need them too.

Second, I've been told over and over again that I have this amazing ability to distill complex ideas and scientific research into simple, actionable advice that anyone can use to improve their life.

And third, nothing brings me more joy than sharing what I am learning with people like you.

So I have made it my mission to find and share many simple tools to help anyone create a better life. And the “simple” part is key, because if you remember it, you’ll use it. For example, did you know that high-fiving yourself in the mirror is one of the fastest ways to rewire your mindset for self-confidence? Me either, and once I learned about it, I dug into the research and it became the topic of my *New York Times* bestselling book *The High 5 Habit*.

The more results people achieved using the 5 Second Rule and the High 5 Habit, the more organizations, media companies, and corporate brands asked me to create programming for their teams and audiences.

So I launched 143 Studios, a Boston-based production company that produces award-winning content, events, audio series, online courses, journals, books, and professional development education for partners like Starbucks, Audible, Ulta Beauty, JPMorganChase, LinkedIn, and Headspace.

In 2022, we launched and started producing *The Mel Robbins Podcast*, which airs in 194 countries and is one of the top-ranked podcasts in the entire world. We’ve created free online courses that more than a million students have completed. And that little newsletter I created way back when is now read twice a week by a million and a half people. You can learn more about my media production company, the podcast, my newsletter, and our courses at www.melrobbins.com.

For everything I have accomplished, I had no prior experience or the “proper” credentials to pursue. I just made myself do it.

I was 41 when I had that anxiety attack on the TEDx stage. I was 46 when I got my first speaking paycheck. I was 49 when I self-published my first book. I was 50 when I started my production company. And I was 54 when I launched one of the fastest-growing podcasts in the world.

My life didn’t change because of one thing that I did; it changed because of the thousands of mornings where I woke up and didn’t feel like getting out of bed, but I 5-4-3-2-1 made myself do it.

Changing My Life Wasn't Glamorous; It Was Grueling.

I didn't achieve success or financial freedom because of some secret. I did it because I was willing to do what most people won't: I woke up every day, and regardless of how I felt, I kept slowly chipping away at my goals for over a decade, a painstakingly slow process.

Some days, all I focused on was just trying to be a little better than I was the day before. Often that's all you need to do. I am not special, or different, or gifted, or lucky; I just found the tools that worked for me and I used them. Today, my entire career and life's purpose is sharing those tools with you.

I don't say any of this to brag. I say this to tell you that you have no idea what you're capable of, and neither did I. Through action, I have achieved some extraordinary things, and so can you.

You'll never feel ready to change your life. One day, you just get tired of your own excuses and force yourself to do it. You're never going to feel like going to the gym. One day you just make yourself go. You're never going to feel like having that hard conversation. One day you just get sick of avoiding it, and you force yourself to start it. You'll never feel like looking for a better job. One day you just push yourself to start looking.

5-4-3-2-1 will help you push through your own internal obstacles and take action when you don't feel motivated to do so. And if you use it for long enough, you'll be shocked by what you can achieve.

The 5 Second Rule works because it helps you win the internal battle you have with yourself. But here's what it can't do: It can't remove the external battles you have to fight every day. No matter how many times you count *5-4-3-2-1*, it won't stop the traffic jams, or inconsiderate strangers, or a micromanaging boss, or your family's endless judgment, guilt trips, passive comments, and demands. And one thing I know for sure, the more you say *5-4-3-2-1* and push yourself to change, the more you'll wish other people would change too.