



TO HOLD IN THE HAND

a guide to maintaining

by Kate Henry, PhD

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kate & the tending year

My name is Dr. Kate Henry and I am a Productivity Coach who specializes in sustainable and well-being-oriented productivity. I hold an MFA in Creative Writing and a MA and PhD in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. As a Productivity Coach, I guide academics and creative thinkers to develop actionable and achievable productivity and time management practices so they can achieve short-term and long-term goals without feeling overwhelmed. In addition to my work as a Productivity Coach, I am an independent researcher and author of *Tend to It: A Holistic Guide to Intentional Productivity.*

To access more free resources similar to this guide, visit my blog, The Tending Year, at www.TheTendingYear.com/blog

To learn more about my individual coaching and group programs, visit www.KateHenry.com/work-with-me/



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I wrote this guide in 2018 because I was struggling

Namely, I couldn't seem to keep up my physical practice of stretching & retraining my muscles as a way to manage chronic pain. Because my pain had improved over the last year and a half, I fell into what I call the "antibiotic" trap—I felt better, so I stopped stretching.

This guide documents my process of reconceptualizing and reincorporating maintenance into my life by connecting it to my long- and short-term goals for self development. There is a corresponding blog post (which includes my own answers to the guide's questions) online at www.TheTendingYear.com/blog (year 1, week 43).

I was inspired to make a print zine version of my blog post by Cody Cook-Parrott's zines [1] and by the pieces produced by the artist's union Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts [2]. I wanted to make a guide that you could hold in your hands, read on the bus, write in, dog ear, read in the bath, photo copy, share with your friends, and adapt to your own uses. In 2021, I updated the guide so you can type your answers in a fillable PDF. If you take only one thing away from this guide, I hope it is this:

**YOUR PURPOSES ARE
WORTH MAINTAINING**

maintain is a verb

The verb *maintain* is defined by the the OED [3] as:

- 1) Make something continue at the same level, standard, etc.;
- 2) Keep a building, a machine, etc. in good condition by checking or repairing it regularly;
- 3) Support somebody/something over a long period of time by giving money, paying for food, etc.

The latin root of the word is *manu tenere*, which means **“to hold in the hand”** [4].

When I hear the verb *maintain*, I usually think of the *thing* that is being maintained: a decision, a direction, a state of being, an opinion, etc. I view it as something that continually occurs/has already occurred. But spending the last week practicing maintaining taught me this:

MAINTENANCE IS AN
ACTIVE EXPERIENCE
THAT REQUESTS
OUR PRESENCE
AND CELEBRATES
OUR PURPOSE

maintain via habit

Gretchen Rubin writes in the “A Note to the Reader” section of her book on habit formation, *Better than Before*, that “Habits are the invisible architecture of daily life. We repeat about 40% of our behavior almost daily, so if we change our habits, we change our lives” [5]. And habit researcher Charles Duhigg [6] breaks down habit formation to this formula:

CUE → ROUTINE → REWARD

I spent a whole month of *The Tending Year* researching and practicing habit formation (weeks 15–18 in year 1). The Cue → Routine → Reward thing *really does work*, but you have to work it to fit your own life, preferences, goals, etc.

Here's an example that I used when I was experimenting with waking up earlier: if my **cue** is my alarm, and my **routine** is to snooze many times, my **reward** is more time in my cozy bed. While sleeping in isn't necessarily bad in itself, I experienced *negative* results: hurrying to get ready for work every morning and hoping I won't snooze *too* long. I got fed up with worrying I'd be late to work, so I changed my habit as follows: same **cue** (alarm, but now set for 6:52am), *new routine* of *snoozing only once* (which did require "WAKE UP" post its on my phone at first), *new reward*: I woke up at 7am and took my time getting ready in the morning. I became so motivated by the reward that I stopped snoozing more than once.

The remainder of this guide asks questions to help you:

- personally connect to the act of maintaining
- identify what you'd like to maintain
- and why you'd like to maintain it
- narrow to just one goal
- and really identify the reason why *that* one
- decide what actions you will take
- root them in purpose
- and hold your actions in your present, celebratory hand

write or type your answers directly in this guide or in a notebook

what do I already maintain?

what would I like to maintain?

list multiple things

why do I want to maintain
those things?*

*if you answer "because I should," ask "why" until you reach an answer that is rooted in personal growth vs. external pressure. Check out @bunnymichael's Instagram for great examples of shifting perspective from a place of fear/scarcity/negative self talk to one of personal growth and acceptance.

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choose one thing from your list that
you'd like to actively maintain

Write it here.

root that maintaining in
PURPOSE

I choose to

because

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CUE

when will I maintain?

Time of day + session length + how often. Why then?

where will I maintain?

Same place every time, or varies? Why there?

will I do it alone/with others?

Why?

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routine

what will I hold in my hand?

Imagine the actions & process. List the steps you will take.

how did writing that list make me feel?

Take a breath. Scale down if necessary.
Remember that your goal is to stay present in your practice.

reward

Although your maintaining will likely provide long-term results, my hope is that you will also source reward through the *action* of maintaining. That may feel new to you. Many people (particularly those of us with complex traumas) have internalized a message that focusing on personal growth or healing is frivolous. And we may feel nervous to intentionally connect to being present.

I promise you that you deserve to hold your personal growth in your hand. You deserve to heal, write, learn, strengthen, create, notice, slow down, have fun, be vulnerable, set boundaries, feel like a boss, not always be the strong one, question, love, make mistakes, and thus...

**you deserve to cherish the
practice as much as the result.**

below, write an inspirational phrase mantra to repeat while you maintain (it can be similar to the one from p. 7 if you like)

want more prompts?

Order a copy of *Tend to It: A Holistic Guide to Intentional Productivity*.

In *Tend to It: A Holistic Guide to Intentional Productivity*, Dr. Kate Henry teaches her favorite tools, practices, and approaches for accomplishing personal and professional goals without sacrificing rest, hobbies, and relationships. Through step-by-step instructions and 21 guided exercises, Dr. Henry teaches readers how to improve their habits, goals, focus, and boundaries around work and technology. No matter where you are right now on your journey—if you feel overwhelmed and stuck, or if you feel curious and energized (or some combination of both)—this book will help you accomplish your goals with intention.

You can order a copy of *Tend to It* via KateHenry.com/tend-to-it/

SOURCES

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6. Charles Duhigg: <https://CharlesDuhigg.com/how-habits-work/>