

SUCCESS

What *Achievers* Read



We're ruled by habits. We do things the same old way because it's comfortable. But the risk in staying firmly inside our comfort zones is that it creates psychological barriers that can lead to real limitations, says author and speaker [Denis Waitley](#), who has advised Olympic athletes on how to gain a mental edge. Because we haven't done anything dynamic in a long time, we begin to think we can't, he explains.

But, hey: It's the new year. Fifty-two weeks stretch out ahead of us, offering plenty of opportunity to pencil into the calendar new ways to grow and test ourselves, to try

something big or [start](#) small.

Below are 52-plus ideas that will help boost creativity, add zest to life and amp up your brainpower. After all, says William J. Hall, M.D., director of The Center for Healthy Aging at University of Rochester Medical Center, "When you start something new, particularly in the creative area, it's just like a whack on the side of the head to your brain."

1. Go from fearful... to stunt pilot. Shy and fearful as a kid, Cecilia Aragon was 11 when she learned to bicycle, and when she climbed a ladder, her fear of heights made her break into a sweat. "What I kind of realized was that if I was going to do anything, I had to expand my comfort zone pretty dramatically. I started doing that," says Aragon, whose fear-smashing breakthrough came as a grad student when she rode in a four-seater Piper Archer plane and a friend handed her the controls. She marveled as she steered the plane (with the friend's help) over the Golden Gate Bridge and California coast—and upon their landing, she signed up for pilot [classes](#). "I was in heaven."

Despite her 5-foot-2 frame requiring a [booster seat](#) in typical planes, she became an aerobatic pilot so good at low-altitude loops and spins that she won trophies and competed in the World Aerobatic Championships. "I feel the fear; it's just that I use it. I use it to make my flying sharper rather than paralyze me."

A bonus side effect: Completing her doctorate and applying for a university [academic](#) position didn't seem scary compared to flying headlong toward the ground and potentially ending up in a fireball. She went on to work for NASA and heads the Scientific Collaboration and Creativity Lab at the University of Washington.

2. Read a book a month; consider *Moonwalking with Einstein*, which follows author Joshua Foer's quest to improve his memory for the U.S. Memory Championship. Reading will increase your vocabulary, help you express goals, open your mind to new ideas and perspectives, and studies show lifelong brain-stimulating activities like reading could help stave off Alzheimer's disease.

3. Unplug tech gadgets for No-Tech Sundays. Digital life columnist Monica Guzman found it difficult. "I can behave like quite the tech addict," admits Guzman, who writes for *Geekwire* and *The Seattle Times*. Practically speaking, "shutting everything off—the phone, the laptop, the iPad—when the familiar cycle of questions still ran in my head: What's in my email? What's going on on Twitter and Facebook?—was excruciating. Emotionally, it was easy. A part of me had wanted, for months, to get really, truly disconnected, even if just for a while."

Guzman recommends the practice, "though it may not be as refreshing and important for others as it was for me. I think it depends on how sucked in you feel to your digital life, and how confident you are that you have control over it."

4-6. Not a techie? Download an app or learn a new computer program that has you daunted. Try it. You may surprise yourself. If you're always using PowerPoint, find an alternate program to use instead. ([See "Punch Up Your Presentations"](#))

7-11. Find a new hobby associated with physical movement, such as painting, dancing, learning a musical instrument, perfecting your voice or learning to type. Neurons that fire together grow together; there seems to be some kind of connection between thinking great thoughts and doing something with your feet, mouth or body, Hall says. These types of things have a real blunting effect on more serious disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease, the physician adds.

12. Learn to tango. "I would think that everyone in Argentina ought to live to 1,000," Hall jokes, thanks to the physical movement, creativity and degree of learning involved.

13. Find a role model who overcame big hurdles to do what you want to do. A 70-year-old woman once told stunt pilot Aragon that she'd love to learn to fly, but thought she was too old. Aragon replied: "There's an 85-year-old aerobatic pilot having a great time of it and she learned when she was older than you." The point: Getting out of your comfort zone is easier if you know of someone who has paved the way.

14-15. Create a major concrete goal requiring many incremental ones, such as running your first marathon while training to climb Denali (Alaska's Mount McKinley). Witness what San Francisco-based venture capital investor and triathlete Gordon Ritter is doing. By getting out of his comfort zone, he clears his mind of the details of everyday life, fostering new ideas and "aha" moments. "We sort of trip through life doing what's right in front of us," says Ritter, a cloud investor, entrepreneur and founder/general partner of Emergence Capital who previously rowed crew while at Princeton and summited Aconcagua in the Andes.

"Most people look at mountains and think: There's no way I can do that. These mountains are so ominous," but he says climbing drives home the lesson that a mountain is one big slope that requires putting one foot in front of another—just like accomplishing big goals in business can be, metaphorically speaking.

Ritter's training regimen also includes strapping on a backpack and getting on the Stairmaster set for high resistance for an hour and a half. He also plans to tie a tractor tire to his waist and drag it around. "I continue to find ways to get out of my comfort zone," he says. If you go too long without pushing boundaries, "you do get stale."

16. Brush your teeth while standing on one leg. "It gets you to balance," says *SUCCESS* contributing editor [Mike Roizen](#), M.D., who is the Cleveland Clinic's chief wellness officer and co-author with Mehmet Oz, M.D., of the best-selling *YOU* series of books. Make sure to do it in a safe environment where you won't fall (not on a slippery tile floor).

17. Get intentionally lost and try to find your way back using maps. "Do it when you've got some extra time," Roizen says. He avoids using a GPS as a matter of routine. "The only time I really turn that on is when I'm totally lost."

18-19. Get creative: Try a new recipe. Take an art class. When confronted with a problem, don't stress out; think creatively about how to solve it. There isn't just one specific type of creative person, says researcher Nicholas Turiano, and you can become more creative just by trying new things. "Keeping the brain healthy may be one of the most important aspects of aging successfully—a fact shown by creative persons living longer in our study," says Turiano, who is a National Research Service Award postdoctoral fellow at the University of Rochester Medical Center's psychiatry department. His study, published in June in the *Journal of Aging and Health*, found a link between a longer life and creative thinking and openness. "It is likely that those individuals high in creativity maintain the integrity of their neural networks even into old age. And since the brain is the powerhouse or

command center for all functions in the body, there is definitely an advantage to continually exercise the brain—which is a hallmark of those high in creativity.”

20-23. “Live in prime time rather than watching in prime time,” says Waitley, who limits his TV viewing to an hour daily. Look at how you spend your time: Wasting time and procrastination practically define the comfort zone—you really don’t want to get out of the easy chair because it feels good, Waitley says, and television provides a fantasy escape. Instead, search out ethnic restaurants, tackle a do-it-yourself home improvement project or reconnect with an old friend by phone.

24. Write a book with the time saved by not watching TV. So advises Waitley, author of 16 books: “I’ve written them while most people are watching television.” Try to schedule uninterrupted blocks of time to do your best work. Don’t just write 20 words a week, or it’ll never get done. Act as if it’s a term paper or an exam. “You must treat it like that if you’re ever going to get it done.”

25-26. Get close. We love our families, but it’s easy to let day-to-day busy-ness come between us. Your teens may even prefer it that way. Schedule time for activities that would foster conversation—take a hike, build something together. And make sure to schedule a date night with your spouse.

27. Train for a triathlon even if you never were a swimmer. Ten years ago, if someone told Heath Eskalyo he’d one day compete in the Ironman triathlon, “I’d look at them like they were crazy.” Never a swimmer (his mom was too nervous), he got a coach who worked with him, and over the past several years he has built his way up from shorter-distance triathlons to the Ironman, which requires a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and running a 26.2-mile marathon with no break in between. The main event starts with some 1,500 people jumping into the ocean at the same time. “It’s a washing machine. You’re going to be kicked, punched, elbowed,” says Eskalyo, 44, a trial lawyer and shareholder with Kelley Kronenberg in Fort Lauderdale. Finishing the event requires endurance and willpower—and brings Eskalyo a rare sense of accomplishment that drives him to go after bigger goals.

28-29. Change up your daily routines, like reading the paper and checking email and Facebook in the morning, says Waitley, who saves those activities for the evening and instead launches into the day’s most important tasks. “I’m basically a morning person, so I try to jump into what I really love in the mornings and sort of ease down and in the evenings relax,” he says. “Most people waste the first few hours of the day.”

30-31. Take an improv class or ceramics class. Philadelphia-based career strategy consultant Cathy Goodwin started both classes to learn new skills, “not realizing how hard they would be.” But she says the experiences have been great—just make sure to seek out supportive instructors or colleagues. “Realize that while you’re learning, your confidence will be lower. If you just don’t have talent for something, you can be frustrated for a very long time,” she says. “I’ve never been good with my hands and my ceramic objects still look like something most people could do in third grade.” Her ceramic sneakers, however, were “a huge breakthrough.”

32. Watch a TV show in another language. Don’t do it when you’re stressed, but when you have the time to enjoy the brain-building it will foster, Roizen says.

33. Get over your intimidation and hang with people more successful than you. Ditto for playing with tougher golfers, bowlers or tennis players. If we only golf with high scorers and bowl with low-scoring friends, we’re destined to remain mediocre, Waitley says.

34. Hate eating fish as a kid? Try it again. Or try another new healthy food to broaden your diet. “I never used to love fish,” says Roizen, who acquired a taste in his 30s and now regularly eats salmon and trout.

35. Take a trapeze class. Somewhat fearful of heights, Kathy Kesner never pictured herself buying a Groupon for a trapeze class. But the Seattle woman was in the mood for a challenge, and began her new hobby by climbing a wobbly, skinny trapeze ladder. She was so scared the first time that she couldn't even hear the commands of her Emerald City Trapeze Art instructor. But soon she was amazing herself by following instructions such as "ready" (bend your knees), "hep" (let go and jump), and mastering her first trick: the knee hang.

Trapeze classes help the mind and muscles; by turning around and doing quick maneuvers, it builds memory, Roizen says.

"It's really uplifting just to get over that fear a little bit," says Kesner, who works in the pre-press industry. "It's a buzz, a real adrenaline rush. Everyone should give it a try."

36. Make friends with people outside your industry. Hanging out with someone whose work is completely different from yours offers a great opportunity to learn about new things, get a different perspective and increase your circle of influence.

37. Power nap. Napping may seem outside the comfort zone if no one else at work does it, but it brings dividends: 20 minutes boosts alertness, 30 minutes helps you feel physically recovered and 50 minutes heightens creativity, says Michael Breus, Ph.D., sleep expert and author of *The Sleep Doctor's Diet Plan*.

38. Talk on the phone while walking on a treadmill. "When talking on the phone like this, I can go 3.3 mph at two degrees," Roizen says. He can write while walking at about 1.7 mph, and he can read at about 1.9.

39-43. Give! Volunteer at a local school or nonprofit or do other good deeds. Share a batch of brownies with your neighbors. Hold the door for someone, let another driver proceed ahead of you, make bouquets from your garden for co-workers. Giving induces feel-good endorphins.

44. Try karate. Lee Lasris normally goes for low-risk, low-impact sports such as tennis, golf and bowling, but, at age 60, he wanted more excitement and switched to GoJu Karate. A surgeon friend was taking a class and had dropped weight and looked great. "I said, 'That's for me,'" says Lasris, a lawyer in Davie, Fla. He's suffered a broken rib and broken toe (twice). But he looks forward to the twice-a-week class, which starts with calisthenics and involves putting on gloves to spar. "I feel like I'm in better shape today than 10 years ago," says Lasris, who is now 62 and hopes to get his black belt by age 70. "We're having a great deal of fun. I love the confidence it gives me."

45-49. Climb a mountain. Steven McCraney lives almost at sea level in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., but the real estate developer is on a quest to climb The Seven Summits, the highest peaks of seven continents. He already scaled Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro and recently trudged to the top of Aconcagua in Argentina, the Western Hemisphere's highest mountain at nearly 23,000 feet. Forty-two people started the 24-day trek, but near-hurricane-force winds and temperatures of 30 degrees below zero near the top proved too much for many. Just three guides and three climbers reached the peak, including McCraney, 52, a climber for only five years. "You feel pretty humbled and small when you look around and you're at the highest point in the Andes. It was just a great life experience," he says.

His training routine generally included a one-hour spinning class four days a week and an hour of running before or afterward, plus swimming laps as his departure neared. He also trained with a team of guys who met a couple of times a week to climb the steps of his 20-story office building—adding a backpack and 10 additional pounds each week until each eventually carried 50 to 60 pounds. McCraney hopes he's inspiring his three daughters to explore life to the fullest. "I think it's important to show them that not only are some things possible but everything's possible."

50. Try “The Nap-a-Latte.” Drained by a 60-hour-plus workweek? Sleep expert Breus often recommends this: Drink quickly a small cold cup of drip coffee (it’s high in caffeine), then nap for 20 to 25 minutes. You’ll get enough ZZZs to lower your sleep drive before the caffeine kicks in. “You are good for about four hours,” Breus says. (Don’t do it within eight hours of bedtime, or you could have trouble sleeping.)

51. Become a mentor. An executive can mentor a mid-level businessperson, but a college freshman also can mentor a seasoned professional. Everyone has something to offer—and to learn. Stunt pilot Aragon says mentoring gives you confidence, makes you feel good and puts you in contact with other people who can become your mentors. “It’s what I call organic networking,” she says.

52. Hate to give presentations? Join Toastmasters.

In the end, remember: Keep your mind open to change all of the time, Dale Carnegie [advises](#). “Welcome it. Court it. It is only by examining and re-examining your opinions and ideas that you can progress.”