



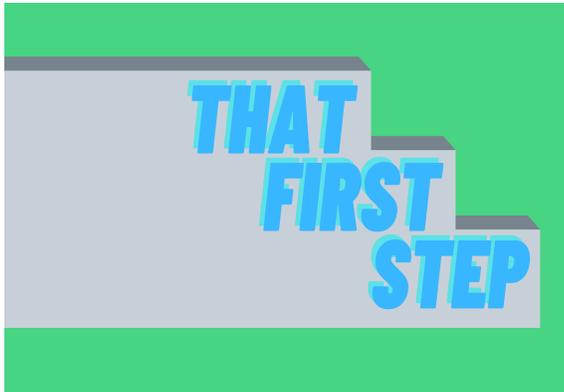
## That First Step: 1st Installment

Harrison Mark has been one of my best friends for the past eight years now. It all started in Mixed Chorus in freshman year of high school. We sat next to each other for two weeks without hardly saying a word, until one day I finally said, "You're quiet. You know that?" And from there, a friendship was born, whether he wanted it or not. Over our time in high school, I have so much I can say about Harrison. I saw him blossom into a charismatic, talented, and ambitious young man. I saw these things from the get-go with him, but I was so happy to see him show it off to the world. Together, Harrison and I were involved in things like the all male a cappella group, All The President's

Men, and the theatre department. Honestly, one of my greatest memories of high school had to have been when we hosted the FDR Talent Show together for two years in a row. Harrison and I worked and built off each other, and had a good work ethic and shared a creative cohesiveness. To this day, we still sync up so well, and despite going to different colleges and not seeing each other through most of the year these days, we always managed to stay in touch, and find the ways to come back. That being said, when Harrison reached out to me the other day about his latest concept, which is probably the most ambitious shared project we have done so far, I was all in. What makes this so ambitious exactly? It's all about inner growth, persistence, accountability, and self-awareness.



Harrison said to me we would choose something from our bucket lists. Not like going to any place or event we can't do because of Covid-19 restrictions, but more like a skill that we have to work toward. He suggested that we make a blog where we alternate writing articles about our progress. Harrison was very committed to the idea of building ourselves up, and hopefully in the process, we inspire others to find their thing, and give them the strength and ability to take their first steps. Obviously, this is much different than our other creative endeavors from the past, but it felt important to us nonetheless. Regardless of if anyone follows our stories, we are working for ourselves. How often have you tried to start something, and struggled to be consistent or get going at all? Even if it is something you would love to do, and want to be dedicated to, there are variables in our lives which make things difficult, and it would feel easier pushing to the side. That is why Harrison and I are using one another to maintain that accountability. We will be checking in each day or so seeing how we are, encouraging each other to meet our goals, and keep ourselves on track. In the back of our minds, we will be thinking, "Conor/Harrison is doing his thing, I need to be doing mine."



So, that is why Harrison and I are proud to say we are starting “That First Step,” a six-month challenge to better and enlighten ourselves in our own individual ways. Harrison and I both set individual goals for ourselves, and we will be using each other to stay on track. Besides that, we will be sharing our experiences for you to read, along with sharing resources, and revelations we make along the way. So, hopefully by the end of our six-month challenge, we will come out of this stronger and more resilient, along with meeting our goals.

So, what am I striving to do for this challenge? In short, I will be working towards achieving mindfulness and improving my physical health.

All my life, I had played sports. Before entering high school, I took part in soccer, basketball, baseball, and taekwondo. By the time I got to high school, I continued with soccer and CYO basketball, and picked up lacrosse. Despite being an athletic person on paper, I was pretty average in whatever I did. In my youth, I struggled with weight issues. Everytime I went to the doctor, I dreaded hearing him tell me I am so many pounds overweight compared to where I should be. As a kid, it felt really crushing being told things like this, and I was pretty self-conscious about it. Looking back, in reality, I don't think I was even that big or overweight. Not much more than most kids prior to puberty. But as I said, I was well-aware I could not run as fast or as far as long as some of my teammates and school mates. I knew I wasn't the strongest, and I was always the one to wear a shirt while swimming. To be honest, to this day, I still see myself as the pudgy fourth grader.

By about 6th grade, I had my growth spurt and slimmed down; however, I still wasn't the most athletic by any means. Where I lacked in skill and athleticism, I made up with spirit and heart, and that carried me through much of what I did. Other than the little gym time we had to do for lacrosse, I was pretty much a stranger to the gym. With all my other projects in music, theatre, volunteering, and just trying to keep up with school, I never had the time, nor devoted the passion to it. I really didn't discover the gym until I was in college, and I fell in love. I got a rush from how my workouts made me feel. I would focus on a lot of cardio and aerobic exercises to improve my stamina and breath control as a singer. Besides that, I never did crazy weight lifting, but I learned how to use many of the resistance machines to tone up. As the semesters went on; though, I found myself getting overworked and busy, and gym time would fall to the wayside. I would try to go with friends or girlfriends, but I would always fall out of it.

Right before Covid, I was actually back into it, to a degree. So when things closed due to Covid, I continued finding ways to work out, finding fitness apps, going for runs, and doing workouts at the local playground. It was one of the few escapes I had during the early days of quarantine, and I was able to keep up because in March and April, there wasn't much else I was doing yet. Then, another old friend of mine, Matt Follis, suggested we run together in the mornings. So, on a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule, Matt, our friend Zach, and I would go running in the

mornings until late August when Matt went back to school. During this time, I was also experimenting with new at-home workouts I could try, and was learning more about my physical health. I have suffered from bad knees and lower back pain for years, and have been looking into ways to help that.

By the time September rolled around, I was busy with moving my grandparents into an assisted living facility, and there was a lot to finish up. I fell out of my workouts. Also, I spent the later half of August and all of September trying to wean alcohol out of my diet because I found myself drinking too much. So where I cut back on alcohol, I found myself stress eating instead. And by not keeping up with my workouts, I felt the pounds adding up. I normally maintain a weight of 165 pounds, but now I was finding myself pushing 190. And I definitely do not want to hit 200. No thank you. So, when Harrison hit me up about this challenge to work on personal goals, I knew this was my opportunity to really focus on my health.

As I touched on, during 2020, I struggled with over drinking and overeating. Frankly, I have always struggled with managing stress, anxiety, and time management, and this year gave me a lot of time to reflect on many of my bad habits. And the reason I keep stepping away from my workout routines and focusing on these bad habits come from my mental state and mindfulness. It is all about building that resiliency and being accountable for our actions (and the things we do not act on). Naturally, 2020 has not been kind to anyone's mindset, but I found myself embracing many bad mental habits, and my thoughts running wild. There would be times I would refuse to have the proper communication with myself to workout important issues. So, I started turning towards forms of meditation to increase my awareness and mindfulness to center myself to try to fix those aspects. And just like exercise, meditation can be a strain and hard to keep up with. Just like physical exercise, meditation is a mental and spiritual exercise that is important to be consistent with in order to be maintained.

So, in short, here are my goals for this six-month challenge:

- To meditate at least 4-5 days a week each week throughout the period, and improve my mindfulness
- Improve back and knee pain
- Fix my sleep schedule and wake up early consistently
- Target weight: 165 pounds
  - Weight as of the beginning of this challenge: 187 pounds

Obviously, there is a lot more that I am trying to target during this period, and I have a lot of ways I plan on trying to accomplish these goals, but this is what it boils down to. And each week, I will be going into specifics on how I am reaching these goals, sharing techniques I have researched, share my experience with them, and hopefully create a dialogue with anyone interested in offering or looking for assistance. I think I said enough this time around. I have much more to go into, and keep checking in for more! Plus, don't forget to check out Harrison's segments, as well, and tune in "Walsh Wednesday: The Reflective Series," as I plan to have Harrison on as a recurring guest as we discuss our journeys towards making our first steps.

