The Restart Card

The day after you miss.

The thing that ends most plans is the story a person tells about the day they missed.

The missed day is one day, and the story is what turns one blank square into proof that you are the kind of person who stops.

So work down this card in order, tick each step as you finish it, and you will be back at it inside ten minutes.

DEAL WITH THE STORY FIRST

☐ **Step 1: Write down the date.**

Write the date of the missed day and nothing else on that line. A reason gives your mind something to argue with, and the argument ends in a verdict on you. A date is a fact.

DATE OF THE MISSED DAY _____

☐ **Step 2: Say it once and mean it.**

Say this out loud, or write it under the date: "That was a missed day, and I am not spending today on it." Say it once, because it is a decision about today and it leaves tomorrow alone.

MAKE THE NEXT ATTEMPT EASIER

☐ **Step 3: Cut it in half.**

Cut the thing to half its size, or smaller. If it was the whole route, walk one stop further than usual and get on the bus there, because the whole route needs a good day. One stop further is a real start, and you can take it this afternoon.

THE SMALLER VERSION _____

☐ **Step 4: Write the plan for the next one.**

Write one line that carries both halves, the when and where and the thing you will do: "When I finish my coffee on Tuesday morning, I will put my shoes on and walk to the second bus stop." A line with one half missing is a wish.

WHEN AND WHERE, AND WHAT I WILL DO _____

_____

☐ **Step 5: Set aside one spare day and tell one person**

Pick one day in the next two weeks and decide now that it does not count. Write it in your calendar by name, because a day set aside in advance is a planned day off. Then tell one person what you are doing and the date you will report back, and send it on that date, even if it is one line.

SPARE DAY, IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS _____ I WILL TELL _____ REPORT BACK _____

If this is not your first miss: Go back to step three and cut the next attempt smaller again. The size of the step is the part worth changing, and it is the part you can change today.

KEEP THE WAY BACK OPEN

Why this works: The guilt about a miss is what turns one missed day into a full stop. People who forgive themselves for a miss come back sooner and miss less the next time.

Keep this card where you will see it the next time you miss, so it is in your hand before the story starts.

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SOURCES: Marlatt and Gordon on the abstinence violation effect. Wohl, Pychyl and Bennett (2010) on self-forgiveness and procrastination. Sheeran, Listrom and Gollwitzer (2025) on if-then plans. Sharif and Shu on spare days. Matthews on written goals and a weekly report.