

Beyond the Finish Line

Separating What You Wanted From Who You Are

Answer these as specifically as you can. A vague answer is usually the part of you that doesn't want to look too closely, and that's exactly the part worth examining.

1 Name the Goal

What did you actually set out to achieve, and what actually happened to it? State it plainly, without the story you've been telling yourself about what it means.

2 Find the Ends Value

Underneath that goal, what were you actually chasing? Try the Five Whys. Write down why the goal mattered to you, then ask "why" to that answer, and keep going, four or five times, until you hit something foundational rather than practical — something that would still matter to you even if this specific goal had never existed.

A note on what you might find: sometimes this exercise reveals that the value underneath a goal isn't really yours. It's borrowed from a parent, a mentor, or an old version of you that no longer fits. If your five whys keep leading back to someone else's definition of success rather than something you actually care about, name that here too. An inherited goal that dies doesn't call for grief. It calls for relief — and for the chance to build a goal that's actually yours.

3 Audit Your Means: Where You Compromised

Did you compromise anything you actually believe in while chasing this outcome? Name it specifically, and what it cost you to do it.

4 Audit Your Means: Where You Held the Line

Where did you hold onto your values even when it would have been easier, faster, or more likely to succeed if you hadn't? Name that too.

5 Check for False Failure

Be honest about what was actually yours to control and what wasn't. What part of this outcome do you genuinely own? What part belonged to circumstances, other people, or decisions made without you?

6 Your Worth

Describe how your choices and actions allow you to maintain, or even increase, your worth in spite of being unable to achieve your goal.

7 Find the Next Vehicle

Was this goal the only possible way to deliver the value you named in question two, or just one way among several? Name another path, however unlikely it feels right now, that could deliver that same underlying value. Or, if question two revealed this was never really your value to begin with, name what you'd replace it with instead.
