

\$5,000 WINNER

Nathaniel Fernandez

**Return Center #9153
Waco, TX**
Connection**Microstep**

Finding time to do something just for myself.

**Outcome**

"I'm bonding with my family"

As a teenager I was very active and I loved boxing. But lately, I wasn't making time for my hobby or any exercise because I was feeling depressed. My fiancée, Heather, and I have two kids, 8-month-old Noah and Heather's 4-year-old son, E.J., my stepson. They mean everything to me. I'm 22, and as a young dad I really want to be present in my kids' lives, but I wasn't spending enough time with them. As well as working for Walmart, I have a second job at my dad's electrical company, and I was feeling tired and unmotivated. Heather and I are getting married soon and I wanted to make some changes.

My manager, Shelly, told me about the Thrive Challenge and I got started.

I began with a Microstep: moving my body every day. I realized there's always time for a short walk. It felt so good to be outdoors instead of sitting in front of the T.V. eating chips. We began going for family walks on the trails near our home. We love seeing bunnies, squirrels, and turtles. Sometimes E.J. rides his bike, and Noah will be smiling in his stroller. Seeing my kids happy makes me happy!

By prioritizing better, I've found time to be present with the kids every day.

I started coaching E.J.'s soccer team, teaching them about passing and teamwork. Sometimes they listen and sometimes they do their own thing instead of what I ask them to do, but it's a lot of fun. On my days off we're scheduling family activities, like going to the lake or the water park. I'm teaching E.J. to swim, and having that time together helps me feel more positive. I love my time with the baby. I'll get on the floor with him and we'll play ball and peekaboo. He's a really funny baby and loves to laugh.

One Microstep I'm taking is finding time to do something just for myself.

Once I became a dad, I thought I didn't have time for boxing. Then one day my boxing friend, Slim, suggested that I get back on the team. So I went to the gym and stepping back into the ring felt amazing. Boxing is my passion and now I go four times a week. My teammates and I motivate each other; we're like family. We do weight training, we jog, and we spar. I love getting stronger. I feel accomplished. I think that boxing is helping me be an active, engaged dad, and I'm setting a good example to my kids.

Heather and I are supporting each other and giving each other solo time.

She encourages me to go boxing, and I take care of the kids when she wants to go out with her friends. We're working as a team. We have dinner-and-a-movie date nights twice a month when my sister or Heather's mom takes care of the kids. We just saw Dune: Part 2, which we loved.

As a family we're giving back to our church.

Now that I'm feeling less overwhelmed, I have more energy to volunteer. Heather and I clean the church after everyone's left on Sunday, and sometimes we bake bread for the service. My faith gives me strength and I'm focusing on gratitude. I'm writing what I'm grateful for in a journal, like what an amazing blessing it is to see my kids grow.

I'm grateful for my job at Walmart and I do my best every day.

My goal is to be Employee of the Month. I think I've got a good chance. I have a great attitude and get along with my team.

Heather and I are planning our wedding for October.

The venue will be a barn, out in nature with both our families. There'll be great food, great country and hip hop music, and lots of dancing. I feel like a lucky man and I'm excited about the future.