

Miles Meise

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\$5,000 WINNER
Walmart Store #2326
Hornell, NY

For the longest time I had trouble feeling “normal” around other people. I felt alone — like I didn’t belong. It goes back to my childhood. My parents were heavily into drugs and alcohol, and they were incarcerated at different times. I am the youngest of three boys, and I never felt secure.

I had no idea how to prepare for adulthood.

I’m 25 and I was having trouble managing my time, my money, and my health. My girlfriend, Ashley, also works at Walmart and we’re happy, for sure, but we were butting heads, because we couldn’t express our feelings. I’d seen posters of Thrive Challenge winners at work, like Kirsten Ohara and Sherin Thomas, and I wanted to be part of this strong community.

I started with a Microstep about connecting with someone in a meaningful way each day.

Usually, when I’m with people who aren’t familiar, I have a hard time talking to them. So I made a point of stepping out of my comfort zone. Now, I’ll politely introduce myself and ask people about their day. An older gentleman came into our store wearing a face mask. He told me he was being cautious because he’d had COVID and had almost lost his life. I’d had COVID too, and we shared our experiences. We talked about the delight of actually being alive and being able to go out shopping.

I had a meaningful connection with a blind customer who often comes to our store.

I heard him ask out loud if anyone could help him, and I said, “Yes.” He was looking for shampoo and I asked him to follow me. I rifled through the shampoos and read out the ingredients so we could find the right one. Helping him out was a really nice feeling — I felt valuable.

After work, I sit in the quiet for a while.

I reflect on my feelings and run through every “scene” of the day, and how I felt. That time I give myself helps me to acknowledge and understand my feelings.

To relax, I’m listening to instrumental music.

I tune my thoughts to the rhythm of the music. It’s a form of meditation for me. I like electronic soundscapes — hip-hop without lyrics. The repetitive rhythm allows me to decompress.

I started a daily journal.

I sit down with a composition notebook and I’ll fill a whole page, writing about how I’m feeling. I used to keep a journal in high school and I’ve always loved writing. I’m brutally honest with my words, because if I can’t be honest with myself, how can I be honest with other people?



I’m writing a short story.

At school, English was my strongest subject; I had a solid command of language. So I’ve been throwing out ideas for a story. I’m interested in the Vietnam war and my main character is reliving his experience as a soldier in Vietnam. And there’s a sci-fi element. I’d love to get it published, which would be a great personal accomplishment.

Writing is helping me with my relationships.

I had a pretty serious argument with my brother Zach. We live together and he was frustrated because he thought I wasn’t doing enough chores. In my journal, I wrote about how sad I felt, and I realized that I could actually be doing more to help out around the house. It reminded me that I can learn something every day. It’s all about progress. Now, Zach and I are building a stronger bond. Also, I’ve been estranged from my mother, and I’ve reconnected with her, which is healing.

My relationship with Ashley’s improved.

We’re communicating more and spending time together outside work. We’ll watch movies and go for walks in the park, and we love to go out for dinner. Our relationship is the best it’s ever been.

We’re saving to buy a house.

I’ve cut back on frivolous online shopping and junk food. And I’ve opened up a savings account with Ashley. We’re saving at least \$2,000 a month, which feels liberating.

In the future, Ashley and I want to start a family.

I was surrounded by dysfunction and violence as a child, and I know I won’t perpetuate that. I’ll set a good example to my kids. The Thrive Challenge is a light in the dark for me. I’m happier and more focused, and I’m excited about everything that lies ahead.



THRIVE