

## 7 Ways to Set the World on Fire (and Not Burn Out Doing It)

From [Victoria Moran, MainStreetVegan.net](http://VictoriaMoran.MainStreetVegan.net)

January 2022



*St. Ignatius*

I love the admonition from St. Ignatius, pictured here: “Go forth and set the world on fire.” It floods me with enthusiasm in the morning when everything is before me to accomplish. And by about 2:30, I’m often so bogged down by email...and PayPal wants me to send them documents that will have to be scanned...and my web guy is telling me we have to talk *today* or some truly awful cyber mishap will occur...that setting the world on fire is profoundly bumped off the priority list.

And yet, if I fail to take the action that’s mine to take, and get reconfirmation that my work is part of a bigger work that’s great and grand and good, life ceases to be in color, and comes instead in the more somber shades of gray. You may well relate.

Unfortunately, burnout is real, and the more committed we are to a goal or a purpose or to simply doing our best work, the more likely it is to strike. When we’re striving to bring about a vegan world or promote some aspect of animal rights, its onset is even more likely, as it teams with “compassion fatigue” to place us on the energy spectrum somewhere between slightly off our game and downright catatonic. I asked vegan psychotherapist [April Lang, LCSW SEP](#), what triggers it. “It comes when we have depleted our emotional resources and feel we have nothing left to give. It’s a red flag that we need to immediately make some changes in our lives or seek professional help.”

She offers the first of the 7 ways to accomplish what we set out to achieve, and protect our psyches in the meantime:

1. **Take care of your mind and body.** “Healthy eating and some type of physical activity are essential,” says Lang, author of *Animal Persuasion: A Guide for Ethical Vegans and Animal Advocates in Managing Life’s Emotional Challenges*.” So is knowing and utilizing what helps us relax. Incorporating some breathing exercises into our daily routine can be a great way to settle

our nervous system.” *Activity: Take a yoga class on Zoom, even if your inbox isn’t empty.*

2. **Do what is yours to do.** If you took that yoga class, you might have heard the word *dharma*. “It loosely translates into ‘What is the right thing to do?’ and it deals with the choices that humans make at every moment in life,” says Sailesh Rao, PhD, director of [ClimateHealers.org](https://ClimateHealers.org) and subject of the documentary, *Countdown to Year Zero*. “Burnout occurs when we misidentify that we are the actor. When we realize that we are part of an intelligence far greater than ourselves, then we will see our actions as part of a much larger cosmic undertaking.” *Activity: Affirm “I commit to doing what I’m called to do, and letting the rest go.”*



*Sailesh Rao, PhD*

3. **Respect recreation.** You’ve probably heard — or even said — “I feel guilty having fun because the animals are suffering.” Indeed they are. If by never having any fun we could relieve that suffering, then we should go on a fun fast starting right this minute. But it wouldn’t help. In fact, getting together with friends, watching a comedic movie, or playing with your dog can fuel your activism or your vegan business like nothing else. A little fun translates into a lot of energy. *Activity: Put something fun on the calendar and prioritize it like a business meeting.*
4. **Don’t go it alone.** Humans are a gregarious and even this time of social distancing, we do better when surrounded and supported by others. Vegan culinary instructor and cookbook author [JL Fields](#) found this out, working at home before COVID. “I discovered that I needed to be around people, so I joined a coworking space. I went from working in yoga pants while covered in cats (which was lovely and still is) to getting up with purpose, going to an ‘office,’ and being surrounded by others who were as excited about their own personal endeavors as I am about furthering my vegan activism.” When the pandemic hit, the author of *Vegan Pressure Cooking* and *Vegan Baking for Beginners* pivoted: “We were soon having Zoom happy hours and later socially distanced outdoor lunch meetups. The leaders even rented out an entire movie theatre so that 20 people could work, socially distanced, and have that feeling of connection.”



*JL Fields, MVLCE, cookbook author and force of nature*

5. **Find places to recognize yourself.** A wise counselor said this to me over 20 years ago. It became a chapter in my book, *Creating a Charmed Life*, and one of my core values. Whether it's being alone the woods or in the center of London or Shanghai or Dubai, you know where you recognize yourself. If you can't be in a perfectly "you" space, imprint the space where you are with objects, images or pastimes that let you recognize yourself. *Activity: Think about where you're most at home, where you get your brilliant hunches. Go there, or recreate that feeling wherever you find yourself.*
6. **Give yourself credit.** You may not think you're doing so hot, but if you got up this morning and started again, you're right on time, doing fine. And if you're working in animal rights, you've taken on the most challenging social justice issue in history, the only one in which not a single member of the oppressed group can speak out for liberation. This is tough. Every accomplishment is huge. Take some credit. *Activity: Give yourself 10 minutes to think about — even write down — what you've accomplished. If it's hard to complement yourself, look at the annual report of Peta or some other organization that's getting things done, and remind yourself that you're part of this effort.*
7. **Keep your expectations reasonable.** We started by staying that we're going to set the world on fire. In reality, what we'll more likely do, as an individual, is hold a candle, but we need to do that proudly, consistently, and tirelessly. According to April Lang, "It is vitally important that all of us develop more realistic expectations of what we'll be able to accomplish each day or week so that we can feel satisfied rather than frustrated." *Activity: Cut your to-do list in half. See how empowering it feels when your check-off ratio starts looking really good.*



*April Lang, LCSW, SEP*

And feeling satisfied means we can feel good about what we're doing, meet our needs as mortals (even though we wish we had superpowers), and look an animal in the eye and say, "I'm not doing all I want to, but I'm doing all I can, and there's an army of us on your side."

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