

ATOMIC HABITS-JAMES CLEAR

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

Tiny Changes Remarkable Results

My story: I had a freak, life threatening accident in school. I took one year to recover. However, reaching back to the pre-accident level of fitness was very difficult. So I focused on getting my life in order. While my peers stayed up late and played video games, I built good sleep habits, and went to bed early each night. In a messy world of a college dorm, I made it a point to keep my room neat and tidy. These improvements were minor, but they gave me a sense of control over my life. I started to feel confident again. And this growing belief in myself rippled into the classroom as I improved my study habits and managed to earn A's during first year.

How this book will benefit you

To write a great book, you must first become the book. Naval Ravikant Entrepreneur and investor

In the book I will share a step-by-step plan for building better habits-not for days or weeks, but for a lifetime. While science supports everything I have written, this book is not an academic research paper; it's an operating manual.

What I offer you is a synthesis of the best ideas smart people figured out a long time ago as well as the most compelling discoveries scientists have made recently. My contribution, I hope is to find ideas that matter most and connect them in a way that is highly actionable. Anything wise in these pages you should credit to many experts who preceded me. Anything foolish, assume it my error.

Human behavior is continuously changing. But this book is about what doesn't change. It's about the fundamentals of human behavior useful in business, family and life in general.

The Fundamentals: Why Tiny Changes Make a Big Difference

Chapter 1: The surprising power of atomic habits

British cycling teams for 100 years were mediocre, not winning any medals anywhere. Brailsford was hired as coach. He put them on a strategy "the aggregation of marginal gains" which was the philosophy of searching for tiny margin of improvement in everything you do. When you break down everything you do and then improve it by 1 % you will get significant when you put them all together.

Just five years after new coach, British cycling team dominated Olympic Games, and many other world titles.

Too often, we convince ourselves that massive success requires massive action. Improving 1 % isn't particularly notable or noticeable in the long run. If you get 1 % better each day for 1 year, you'll end up 37 times better at the end of the year.

Habits are compound interest of self improvement. It has similar impact to that of shifting the route of an airplane by just a few degrees. In a flight from LA to New York, you may reach Washington D.C instead.

What matters most is whether habits are putting you on a path toward success. You should be far more concerned with your trajectory than your current results.

If you want to predict where you will end up in life, all you have to do is to follow the curve of tiny gains and tiny losses, and see how your daily choices will compound to 10-20 years down the line.

Time magnifies the margin between success and failure. It will multiply whatever you feed it.

What progress is like?

Habits appear to make no difference until you cross a critical threshold and unlock a new level of performance. This is called The Plateau of Latent potential. It is like geological pressure causing earthquakes.

When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the 101st blow it will split into two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it-but all that had gone before.

Forget about Goals, Focus on Systems instead

I began to realize that my results had very little to do with the goals I set and nearly everything to do with the systems I followed. Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results.

If you completely ignored goals and focused only on your system, would you still succeed? I think you would. The only way to win is to get better every day. The score takes care of itself. It is ridiculous to keep looking at the scoreboard all the time.

Goals are important in setting a direction, but systems are best for making progress.

Problem 1: Winners and losers have the same goals

Problem 2: Achieving goal is only a momentary change.

Problem 3: Goals restrict your happiness.

Problem 4: Goals are at odds with long-term progress.

Chapter 2: How Your Habits Shape Your Identity (Vice Versa)

Changing habits is challenging for two reasons. 1. We try to change the wrong thing. 2. We try to change our habits the wrong way.

Three layers of behavior change

The first and outermost layer is outcomes/results.

The second one is changing your process. In this we change habits and systems

The third and innermost one is changing your identity. Here we change beliefs: world view, self-image.

Imagine two smokers trying to quit smoking. When offered a cigarette, one person says “No thanks, I’m trying to quit.” He believes that he is a smoker who is trying something else. The other smoker’s response is “No thanks, I’m not a smoker.” This person has changed identity from a smoker to a non smoker.

Behind every system of actions are a system of beliefs. This applies to individuals, organizations and societies.

Behavior that is not congruent with the self will not last. You may want money, but if you identify with someone who consumes more than he creates, then you will suffer. You may have a new goal, but you haven’t changed who you are.

The more pride you have in a particular aspect of your identity, the more motivated you will be to maintain the habits associated with it. If you are proud of your body, you will exercise.

True behavior change is identity change. Improvements are temporary until they become part of who you are.

The goal is not to read a book, the goal is to become a reader.

The goal is not to run a marathon, the goal is be a runner.

The goal is not to learn an instrument, the goal is to become a musician.

You are simply acting like the type of person you already believe yourself to be. It is a double edged sword.

When you have repeated a story to yourself for years, it is easy to slide into these mental grooves and accept them as a fact.

The biggest barrier to positive change is identity conflict. Good habits can make rational sense, but if they conflict with your identity, you will fail to put them into action.

Over the long run, however, the real reason you fail to stick with habits is that your self-image gets in the way. Progress requires unlearning. Becoming the best version of yourself requires you to continuously edit your beliefs, and to upgrade and expand your identity.

Where do the beliefs come from?

The two step process to changing your identity

Your identity emerges out of your habits. Every belief is learned and conditioned through experience.

The more you repeat a behavior, the more you reinforce the identity associated with that behavior.

Whatever your identity, you only believe it because you have proof of it. If you study regularly, you have evidence that you are studious. If you go to gym even when it's snowing, you have evidence that you are committed to fitness. The more evidence you have for a belief, the more strongly you will believe it.

I didn't start out as a writer. I became one through my habits.

Habits by virtue of their frequency are the most important in shaping your identity. This is gradual evolution. We are continually undergoing microevolution of the self. Each habit is a suggestion.

Each habit not only gets results but also teaches you something far more important: to trust yourself.

New identities require new evidence. If nothing changes, nothing is going to change.

Two-step Process: Decide the person you want to be. Prove it to yourself through small wins.

Ask yourself, "Who is the type of person that could get the outcome I want?" For example, a reliable and consistent person could write a book. So focus shifts from writing a book to becoming a person who is consistent and reliable.

I am a kind of teacher who stands up for my students.

Habits shape identity, and identity shapes your habits. It's a feedback loop, and a two-way-street.

Chapter 3: How to Build Habits in 4 Simple Steps

Behaviors followed by satisfying consequences tend to be repeated and vice versa. Thorndike

Whenever you encounter a new situation in life, your brain has to make a decision. How do I respond to this? You are not sure how to solve it, you are just trying out things that works.

Neurological activity is high during this period. You are carefully analyzing the situation and making conscious decisions about how to act. You are taking tons of new information and trying to make sense of it all. The brain is learning the most effective course of action.

After you stumble upon an unexpected reward, you alter your strategy for next time. Wait a minute-that felt good. What did I do right before that?

This is the feedback loop of all human behavior. Habits are, simply, reliable solutions to recurring problems in our environment.

As habits are created, the brain activity reduces. Your brain skips the process of trial and error and creates a mental rule: if this, then that.

Habits are mental shortcuts learned from experience.

Habits do not restrict freedom. They create it. Without good financial habits, you will always struggle for the next extra dollar. Without, good health habits, you will always be short of on energy. Without good learning habits, you will always feel like you're behind the curve. If you're forced to make simple decisions about simple tasks, then you would have less time for freedom.

The Science of How Habits Work

The process of building a habit can be divided into four simple steps: cue, craving, response, and reward.

Cue is the first indication that we are close to the reward. Cravings are the second step, and they are the motivational force behind every habit. Every craving is designed to change your internal state.

Cues are meaningless until they are interpreted. The thoughts, feelings, and emotions transform a cue into a craving.

The response is the actual habit that you perform, which can take the form of a thought or an action. If a particular action requires more mental effort than you are willing to expend, then you won't do it. Your response also depends on your ability.

Rewards are the end goal of every habit. We chase rewards because they satisfy us and they teach us. The immediate benefit is that rewards satisfy your craving to eat or gain status or to win approval. At least for a moment, rewards deliver contentment and relief from craving. They also teach us about actions worth remembering for future. Your brain is a reward detector. As you go through life, your sensory nervous system is continuously monitoring which actions satisfy your desires and deliver pleasure.

There are two phases of habit, the problem phase (cue and craving), and the solution phase (response and reward).

All behavior is driven by the desire to solve a problem. Something good you want to get and something bad you want to avoid.

Examples:

Cue: wake up, Craving: want to feel alert, response: drink coffee, reward: feel alert

Cue: you hit a stumbling block in project, craving: want relief from frustration, response: check phone for social media, reward: feel better.

How to create a good habit: make cue obvious, make craving attractive, make response easy, make reward satisfying. Reverse is true for breaking a bad habit.

The 1st Law: Make It Obvious

Chapter 4: The Man Who Didn't Look Right

The human brain is a prediction machine.

Many of our body functions are automatic: Heart pumping blood, lungs breathe. Appetite and hunger are governed nonconsciously.

If a habit remains mindless, you can't expect to improve it.

The Habits Scorecard

Japanese Railway safety system: Pointing and calling. Looks at signal and says signal is green. Looks at a speedometer and calls out speed he wants. When time to leave, he points out to timetable and state the time. Reduced errors by 85 % and accidents by 30 %.

Pointing and calling is so effective because it raises the level of awareness from a nonconscious habit to a more conscious level. Operators are expected to use eyes, ears, hands, mouth. Hence they can notice problems before something goes wrong.

My wife does something similar with a check list reading out before walking out of door for a trip.

One of the greatest challenges in changing habits is maintaining awareness of what we are actually doing.

There are no good/bad habits. There are only effective habits. Even bad habits serve you that's why you repeat them. However, for rating a habit, you may ask: Does this behavior help me become the type of person I wish to be?

In the first step, the goal is simply to notice what is actually going on. Don't judge.

Hear your bad habits spoken aloud makes the consequences seem more real.

Chapter 5: The best way to start a new habit

Research was conducted on 4 groups about exercise habits. 1st group was simply asked how often they exercised. The 2nd one was asked to track their workout and also read some material on benefits of the exercise. The researchers also explained how exercise could reduce risk of coronary heart disease and improve heart health. The 3rd group was asked to do the same as the 2nd group. However, they were also asked to formulate a plan for when and where they would exercise the following week. Specifically, each member was asked to complete the following sentence. "During the next week, I will partake in at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on [Day], [Time], [Place]." Findings had shown that 1st and 2nd groups had 35 and 38 % persons who exercised at least one week. But 91 % of people in the 3rd group exercised at least once per week.

The sentence that they filled out is known as an Implementation Intention. That is, how you intend to implement a particular habit.

Cues can come in various forms. But the most common ones are time and location. The implementation intention leverages both.

Broadly speaking, implementation intention takes a form: "When situation X arises, I will perform response Y."

Hundreds of studies show that these are effective in sticking to our goals. Just having foggy goals is not enough.

Many people think that they lack motivation when what they actually lack is clarity.

I will [Behavior] at [Time] in [Location].

If you aren't sure when to start a habit, try the 1st day of the week, month, or a year when hope is high. A fresh start feels motivating.

Implementation intention also helps in saying 'No' to distractions. We often say yes to little requests when we are not clear enough about what we need to do instead.

The goal is to make the time and location so obvious that, with enough repetition, you get an urge to do the right thing at the right time.

Habit Stacking: A Simple Plan To Overhaul Your Habits

Habit stacking is a special form of implementation intention. The formula is:

“After[Current Habit], I will [New Habit].”

After I drink coffee in the morning, I will meditate for one minute. After I sit for dinner, I will say one thing I'm grateful for that happened today. After I close the door, I will text a family member where I am going and when I will return.

The key is to tie your behavior to something you already do each day. You can also create larger stack by chaining many small habits together. This allows us to take advantage of the natural momentum of completing one habit.

You can even place a new habit anywhere in a stack of habits. For example, if you want to start habit of reading before bed time. You can do this in the morning routine: Wake up, make bed, place a book on my pillow, take shower.

Exercise: When I see a set of stairs, I will take them instead of an elevator.

Mood: When the phone rings, I will take one deep breath and smile before answering.

Consider when you are likely to be more successful to stack a new habit. The frequency of the old and new habit to be stacked must be same.

To find a right trigger, brainstorm your current habits.

Habit stacking works best when the cue is highly specific and actionable.

The more tightly bound your new habit to a specific cue, the better the odds that you will notice when it is time to act.

Chapter 6: Motivation is Overrated: Environment Often Matters More

People often choose products not because of what they are, but because of where they are. Your habits change depending on the room you are in and the cues in front of you. We are changed by the environment around us. Every habit is context dependent.

Suggestive buying: Customers buy product not because they need them, but because how it is presented to them. Items at the eye level are purchased more than that at other levels. That is why expensive items are stacked at that level. Similar thing happens at the end of aisles.

We perceive the world through sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste. Most powerful one is vision. Experts say that 50 % of brains resources are used by vision sensing.

Thankfully, you can also be the architect of your environment.

How to Design Your Environment for Success

Studies have shown that when you see the electric meter frequently at an easy location, you use less electricity. It's not easy to use a guitar if it is in a closet. You can't read a book if the bookshelf is inaccessible. It's not easy to take vitamins if they are out of sight.

If you want to remember to take a medicine regularly, place it next to the faucet in a bathroom counter. If you want to drink more water, keep water easily accessible. If you want to send more thank-you notes, keep a stack of stationery on the desk.

By sprinkling triggers throughout your surroundings, you increase the odds that you will think about your habit throughout the day.

The Context Is the Cue

People drink more in social situations than they would ever drink alone. Seeing friends order drinks, hearing the music, seeing beers on tap create that context.

We mentally assign our habits to the locations in which they occur: the home, the office. Each location develops a connection to a certain habits and routines. You establish a particular relationship with the objects on your desk, the things in the bedroom.

Our behavior is not determined by the objects in the environment but by our relationship to them. Stop thinking about your environment as filled with objects. Start thinking about it as filled with your relationships. Think in terms of how you interact with spaces around you. One person uses couch for reading, other uses it for watching a TV and eating ice cream after work.

Want to think more creatively? Move to a bigger room, rooftop or a building with more expansive architecture. Take a break from your daily work, which is also linked to your current thought patterns.

When you can't manage to get an entirely new environment, redefine or rearrange your current one. Create a separate space for work, study, exercise, entertainment. One space, one use mantra.

It was easier for me to turn off the professional side of my brain when there was a clear dividing line between work life and home life.

If your space is not enough, divide your room into activity zones: a chair for reading, a desk for writing, a table for eating. You can do the same thing with digital spaces: a computer for writing, tablet for reading, and phone for social media and texting. Every habit should have a home.

Chapter 7: The Secret of Self-Control

Addictions could spontaneously dissolve if there is a radical change in the environment.

A drug user is addicted with friends at home. When he goes to a clinic, the cues are absent and it is easier to quit the habit. But once you come back home, the cues are again there to return to addiction.

Disciplined people are better at structuring their life in a way that does not require heroic willpower and self-control. In other words, they spend less time in tempting situations.

The people with the best self-control are typically the ones who need to use the least. Create a more disciplined environment.

Bad habits feed themselves. It's cue induced wanting.

You can break a bad habit, but you're unlikely to forget it. Simply resisting temptation is an ineffective strategy because it takes too much energy. I have never seen someone consistently stick to positive habits in a negative environment.

A more reliable approach is to cut off the habits at the source by reducing exposure to the cue that causes it.

If you can't seem to get any work done, leave your phone in another room for a few hours.

If you continually feel you are not good enough, stop following social media accounts that trigger jealousy and envy.

If you are wasting too much time on TV, move it out of the bedroom.

If you are playing too much video games, unplug console and put it in a closet after each use.

This practice is inversion of the law of behavior change. Rather than make it obvious, you can make it invisible.

Self control is a short-term strategy, not a long term one.

The 2nd Law: Make It Attractive

Chapter 8: How to Make a Habit Irresistible

It's like the brain of each animal is preloaded with certain rules for behavior. We also have supernormal stimuli-heightened version of reality.

After spending thousands of years hunting and foraging for food in the wild, the human brain has evolved to place a high value on salt, sugar, and fat.

Scientists have found bliss points of products- the precise combination of salt, sugar, fat that excites the brain and keeps you coming back for more.

If history serves any guide, the opportunities in future will be more attractive than those of today. The trend is for rewards to become more concentrated and stimuli to become more enticing. Compared to nature, these pleasure-packed experiences are hard to resist.

We begin by examining a biological signature of all habits share-the dopamine spike.

The Dopamine-Driven Feedback Loop

Every habit-taking drugs, eating junk food, playing video games, browsing social media-is associated with higher levels of dopamine.

Dopamine is not just all about pleasure, but also motivation, learning and memory, punishment and aversion, and voluntary movement.

Dopamine is released not only by the experience of pleasure, but also when you anticipate it. Gambling addicts have a dopamine spike right before they place a bet, not after they win. Cocaine addicts get a surge of dopamine when they see the powder, not after they take it.

It is anticipation of the reward-not the fulfillment of it-that gets us to take action.

As a child, thinking about Christmas morning can be better than opening the gifts. Daydreaming about an upcoming vacation can be more enjoyable than actually being on vacation.

The brain has far more neural circuitry allocated for wanting rewards than liking them.

Desire is the engine that drives behavior. It is craving that leads to the response.

Temptation bundling works by linking an action you want to do with an action you need to do. The brilliance is associating the thing they needed to do with what they wanted do.

Even if you don't want to do some work, you will become conditioned to do it if it means you get to do something you really want to do along the way.

The habit stacking + temptation bundling formula is:

1. After [Current habit], I will [Habit I need].
2. After [Habit I need], I will {Habit I want}.

If you want to read news, but you need to express more gratitude:

1. After I get my morning coffee, I will say one thing I'm grateful for that happened yesterday (need).
2. 2. After I say one thing I'm grateful for, I will read the news.

If you want to check Facebook, but you need to exercise more:

1. After I pull out my phone, I will do ten burpress (need).

2. After I do ten burpress, I will check Facebook (want)

Habits Chapter 9: The Role of Family and Friends in Shaping Your Habits

The lone wolf dies, but the pack survives.

Charles Darwin: In the long history of humankind, those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.

We don't choose our earliest habits, we imitate them.

Often, you follow the habits of your culture without thinking, without questioning, and sometimes without remembering.

We imitate habits of 1. The close, 2. The many, 3. The powerful

1. Imitating the Close

Proximity has a powerful effect on our behavior. We copy the way our parents handle arguments, the way our peers flirt with one another, the way coworker gets results.

In conversation, I'll automatically assume body posture of the other person. In college, I talk like my roommates. When traveling to other countries, I unconsciously imitate the local accent despite reminding myself to stop.

As a general rule, the closer we are to someone, the more likely we are to imitate their habits.

One study found that the higher your best friends IQ at age 11-12, the higher your IQ would be at age 15.

One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior. If you are surrounded by fit people, you're more likely to consider working out to be a common habit.

Join a culture where 1. Your desired behavior is the normal behavior and 2. You already have something in common with the group.

When you join a book club or a cycling group, your identity becomes linked to those around you.

2. Imitating the Many

The normal behavior of the tribe often overpowers the desired behavior of the individual.

The human mind wants to get along with each others. It wants to get along with others. Running against the grain of your culture requires effort.

3. Imitating the Powerful

Humans everywhere pursue power, prestige, and status.

We are drawn to behaviors that earn us respect, approval, admiration and status. This is one reason we care so much about the habits of highly effective people. We try to copy the behavior

of successful people because we desire success ourselves. Many of our daily habits are imitations of the people we admire.

High-status people enjoy approval, respect, and praise from others. And that means if a behavior can get us approval, respect and praise, we find it attractive.

We are also motivated to avoid behaviors that lower our status. When our mother comes to visit, we clean up the house because we don't want to be judged. We are continually wondering "What will others think of me."

Chapter 10: How to Find and Fix the Causes of Your Bad Habits

Habit like smoking always starts with your friends. One friend smokes, then you try it.

Allen Car's book "Allen Car's Easy Way to Stop Smoking" frees you from the mental burden of smoking. It tells you: 'Stop lying to yourself. You know you don't actually want to smoke. You know you really don't enjoy this.' It makes you feel you are not a victim anymore. You start to realize that you don't need to smoke anymore.

I had never tried a cigarette, but took a look at the book out of curiosity. The author employs an interesting strategy to help smokers eliminate their cravings. He systematically reframes each cue associated with smoking and gives it a new meaning.

He says things like:

You think you are quitting something, but you're not quitting anything because cigarettes do nothing for you.

You think smoking is something you need to do to be social, but it's not. You can be social without smoking at all.

You think smoking is about relieving stress, but it's not. Smoking does not relieve your nerves, it destroys them.

"Get it clearly into your mind," he says. "You are losing nothing and you are making marvelous positive gains not only in health, energy and money but also in confidence, self-respect, freedom and, most important of all, in the length and quality of your life.

This is an inversion of the 2nd law of behavior change: make it unattractive.

Where Cravings Come From

Every behavior has a surface level craving and a deeper, underlying motive. At a deep level, you simply want to reduce uncertainty and relieve anxiety, to win social acceptance and approval, or to achieve status.

Following are the motives of some of our habits.

Browsing facebook= Connect and bond with others.

Posting on instagram= Win social acceptance and approval.

Searching on Google= Reduce uncertainty

Playing video games=Achieve status and prestige.

Your habits are modern-day solutions to ancient desires.

Here's the powerful part: there are many different ways to address the same underlying motive. One person might learn to reduce stress by smoking a cigarette. Another person learns to ease his anxiety by going for a run. Your current habits are not necessarily the best ways to solve the problems you face; they are the methods you learned to use.

Habits are all about associations. Every action is preceded by a prediction. Life feels reactive, but it actually is predictive. Put in another way, our behavior is heavily dependent on how we interpret the events that happen to us, not necessarily the objective reality of the events themselves. Two people look at a cigarette, and one person feels the urge to smoke while the other is repulsed by the smell. The same cue can spark a good or a bad habit depending on your prediction.

These predictions lead to feelings, which is how we typically describe a craving—a feeling, a desire, an urge.

A craving is a sense that something is missing. It is a desire to change your internal state. The gap between your current state and the desired state provides reason to act. Even the tiniest action is tinged with the motivation to feel differently than you do in the moment. Whether it is potato chips, cigarettes or a bunch of likes, what you want to do is feel different.

Neuroscientist explains, “It is emotion that allows you to mark things as good, bad, or indifferent.”

Checking social media will help you feel loved or that watching YouTube will allow you to forget your fears. Habits are attractive when we associate them with positive feelings, and we can use this insight to our advantage rather than to our detriment.

How to Reprogram Your Brain to Enjoy Hard Habits

You can make hard habits more attractive if you learn to associate them with a positive experience. Sometimes, all you need is a slight mind-set shift. For instance, we often talk about everything we have to do in a given day.

Now imagine changing just one word: You don't “have” to. You “get” to. You get to wake up early for work. By simply changing one word, you shift the way you view each event. You transition from seeing these behaviors as burdens and turn them into opportunities.

The key point is that both the versions of reality are true. We can find evidence for whatever mind-set we choose.

I asked a man using a wheelchair whether it was difficult being confined, he responded, “I'm not confined to my wheelchair—I'm liberated by it.

Reframing your habits to highlight their benefits rather than their drawbacks is a fast and lightweight way to reprogram your mind and make a habit seem more attractive.

Exercise. Many people associate exercise with being a challenging task that drains energy and wears you down. You can just as easily view it as a way to develop skills and build you up. Instead of telling yourself “I need to go run in the morning,” say “It’s time to build endurance and get fast.”

Finance. Saving money is often associated with sacrifice. However, you can associate it with freedom rather than limitation if you realize one simple truth: living below your current means increases your future means. The money you save this month increases your purchasing power next month.

Meditation. Anyone who has tried meditation for more than 3 seconds knows how frustrating it can be when the next distraction inevitably pops up in your mind. You can transform frustration into delight when you realize that each interruption gives you a chance to practice returning to your breath.

Pregame jitters. Many people feel anxious before delivering a big presentation or competing in an important event. They experience faster breathing, faster heart rate. If we interpret these things negatively, then we feel threatened and tense up. If we interpret these feelings positively, then we can respond with fluidity and grace. You can reframe “I’m nervous” to “I’m excited and I’m getting an adrenaline rush to help me concentrate.

If you want to take it a step further, you can create a motivation ritual. You simply practice associating your habits with something you enjoy, then you use that cue whenever you need a bit of motivation.

A boxer and writer says, “My focus and concentration goes up by just putting my headphones on while writing. I don’t even have to play music.

Athletes use similar strategies to get themselves in the mind-set to perform. It not only physically warms me up, but more importantly, it puts me in the right mental state feeling competitive and focused.

You can adapt this strategy for nearly any purpose. Say you want to feel happier in general. Find something that makes you truly happy-and then create a short routine that you perform every time you do the thing you love. Maybe you take three deep breaths and smile. Repeat.

Eventually, you will begin to associate this breath-and smile routine with being in a good mood. It becomes a cue that means feeling happy. Once established, you can break it out anytime you need to change your emotional state. Stressed at work? Take 3 breaths and smile. Sad about life? Take 3 breaths and smile. Once a habit has been built, the cue can prompt a craving, even if has little to do with the original situation.

The 3rd Law: Make It Easy

Chapter 11: Walk Slowly, but Never Backward

In a research, students were divided into two groups, a “quantity” group which would solely be judged based on the amount of work they produced. The second group was told that they would be judged based on the excellence of their single work (a near perfect one). At the end of the semester it was found that surprisingly, the “quantity” group produced best results compared to the “quality” group. This was because the 1st group were busy experimenting with various things to produce quantity, learning from mistakes and honing their skills. The quality group sat around speculating about how to produce just single, perfect job. In the process, they did not produce much output, and the final result was mediocre.

It is easy to get bogged down trying to find out the optimal plan for doing something. Voltaire said: “The best is the enemy of the good.”

Planning, strategizing, and learning are good things but they do not produce results, only action does.

If you want to master a habit, the key is to start with repetition, not perfection. You don’t need to map out every feature of a new habit. You need to get practice it.

How Long Does It Actually Take To Form a New Habit?

With each repetition, cell to cell signaling improves and the neural connections tighten. Hebb’s law: Neurons that fire together wire together.

Repeating the habit leads to clear physical changes in the brain. Mathematicians have increased gray matter in the inferior parietal lobule, which plays a key role in computation and calculation.

In learning to speak a new language, to play on a musical instrument, great difficulty is felt, because the channels through which each sensation has to pass have not become established; but no sooner has frequent repetition cut a pathway, then this difficulty vanishes; the actions become so automatic that they can be performed while the mind is engaged. Both common sense and scientific evidence agree: repetition is a form of change.

All habits follow a similar trajectory from effortful practice to automatic behavior, a process known as automaticity.

Scientists have learned that for behavior change: habits form based on frequency, not time (of an activity). Instead of asking, how long does it take to build a new habit? We should ask, how many repetitions are required to make a habit automatic.

In practice, it doesn’t really matter how long it takes for a habit to become automatic. What matters is that you take actions you need to make progress. Whether an action is fully automatic is of less importance.

Chapter 12: The Law of Least Effort

The truth is, our real motivation is to be lazy and to do what is convenient. Energy is precious, and the brain is wired to conserve it whenever possible.

If your goal is to do 100 push-ups per day, that’s a lot of energy! Sticking to the habit of doing one push-up per day requires almost no energy to get started. And the less energy a habit requires, the more likely it is to occur.

Habits like scrolling on phones, checking email, watching TV steal so much of your time because they can be performed almost without effort.

You don’t actually want the habit itself, but the outcome it delivers. If you make your good habits more convenient, you’ll be more likely to follow them through on them.

On the tough days, it is crucial to have as many things working in your favor as possible so that you can overcome the challenges life naturally throws your way. The idea is to make it as easy as possible in the moment to do things that payoff in the long run.

How to Achieve More With Less Effort

One of the most effective ways to reduce the friction associated with your habits is to practice environment design. Habits are easier to build when they fit into the flow of your life. You are more likely to go to the gym if it is on your way to work.

Japanese industries relentlessly looked for ways to remove waste of all kinds from the production process, by redesigning work places.

Prime the Environment For Future Use

The purpose of resetting each room is to prepare it for the next action.

Want to draw more? Put your pencils, pens, notebooks, and drawing tools on top of your desk, within easy reach.

Want to do exercise? Set out your work clothes, shoes, gym bag, and water bottle ahead of time.

To avoid watching TV, unplug the TV and take batteries out of the remote after each use, so it takes an extra ten seconds to turn it back on. Or, take the TV out of your living room.

Whenever possible, I leave my phone in a different room until lunch. When it is next to me, I'll check it all morning for no reason at all. Otherwise, ask your friend or a family member to hide it from you for a few hours.

Minute Chapter 13: How to Stop Procrastinating by Using the Two

40-50 % of our daily actions are done out of habit.

You check your phone for “just a second” and soon you have spent 20 minutes staring at the screen.

Every day, there are a handful moments that deliver an outsized impact. I refer to these little choices as decisive moments. The moment you decide between driving your car or riding your bike. The moment you decide between starting your homework or grabbing the video game controller. These choices are like forks in the road.

Decisive moments set the options available for your future self. The difference between a good/bad day is often a few productive and healthy choices made at decisive moments. Each one is like a fork in the road, and these choices stack up throughout the day and can ultimately lead to very different outcomes.

For example, walking into a restaurant decides what you will eat for your lunch, because you can order only things available on the menu.

Habits are the entry point, not the end point.

The Two-Minute Rule

When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.

Read before bed each night- becomes “Read one page.”

Do thirty minutes of Yoga becomes-Take your yoga mat.

Study for class becomes-Open my notes

Run three miles becomes-Tie my running shoes.

The idea is to make your habits as easy as possible to start. Anyone can meditate for one minute, read one page. This is a powerful strategy because once you’ve started doing the right thing, it is much easier to continue doing it. A new habit should not feel like a challenge. The actions that follow can be challenging, but the first two minutes should be easy.

Very Easy	Easy	Very Hard
Put on running shoes	Walk ten minutes	Run a marathon
Write one sentence	Write one paragraph	Write a book
Open your notes	Study for 10 minutes	Get straight A’s

People think it’s weird to get hyped about reading one page or meditating for one minute. But the point is not to do one thing. The point is to master the habit of showing up. The truth is, a habit must be established before it can be improved.

Make it easy to start and the rest will follow.

Go for a run and stop after two minutes. Start meditating, but stop after two minutes. You can’t.

Journaling is another example. Everyone can benefit from getting their thoughts out of their head and onto paper, but most people give up after a few days because journaling feels like a chore. The secret is to always stay below the point where it feels like work.

Strategies like this work for another reason, too: they reinforce the identity you want to build.

We rarely think about change this way because everyone is consumed by the end goal. But one push-up is better than not exercising. One minute guitar practice is better than none at all. One minute of reading is better than not picking up a book. It’s better to do less than you hoped than to do nothing at all.

Chapter 14: How to Make Good Habits Inevitable and bad Habits Impossible

Sometimes success is less about making good habits easy and more about making bad habits hard. This is the inversion of the 3rd law of behavior change: make it difficult

A commitment device is a choice you make in the present that controls your actions in the future. It is a way to lock in future behavior, bind your good habits, and restrict your bad ones.

Leave your wallet at home to prevent temptation of buying.

Increase the friction until you don't even have the option to act.

Put technology to work for you. Automate as much as possible.

Technology can work against us as well. An average person spends over two hours on social media.

During the 1st year of writing this book, I experimented with a new time management strategy. Every Monday, my assistant would reset the passwords on all my social media accounts, which logged me out on each device. All week I worked without distraction. On Friday, she would send me new passwords. I had the entire weekend to enjoy social media.

The 4th Law: Make It Satisfying

Chapter 15: The Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change

It is not the knowledge of benefits of good habits but the consistency which is important.

People know washing hands is important, but making them like it smell of soap helped. Toothpaste, and chewing gum sales increased by adding ingredients which improved taste.

What is rewarded is repeated, what is punished is avoided.

But there is a trick. We are looking for immediate satisfaction.

The Mismatch between Immediate and Delayed Rewards

You live in what scientists call an immediate-return environment because your actions instantly deliver clear and immediate outcomes.

If you save money now, maybe you'll have enough for retirement decades from now. You live in delayed-return environment.

The human brain did not evolve for a life in a delayed-return environment. You are walking around with the same hardware as your Paleolithic ancestors.

Every habit produces multiple outcomes across time. Unfortunately, these outcomes are often misaligned. With our bad habits, the immediate outcome usually feels good, but the ultimate outcome is bad. With good habits, it is the reverse: the immediate outcome is unenjoyable, but the ultimate outcome feels good.

The brain's tendency to prioritize the present moment means you can't rely on good intentions. We all want better lives for our future selves. However, when the moment of decision arrives, instant gratification usually wins. You are choosing for the present you, who wants to be full, pampered and entertained. As a general rule, the more immediate pleasure you get from an action, the more strongly you should question whether it aligns with your long-term goals.

What is immediately rewarded is repeated. What is immediately punished is avoided.

People who are better at delaying gratification have higher SAT scores, lower substance abuse, lower obesity, better response to stress, and superior social skills.

How to turn instant Gratification to Your Advantage

The vital thing in getting a habit to stick is to feel successful-even if it's in a small way. Immediate rewards are essential. They keep you excited while delayed rewards accumulate in the background.

What we are talking here is the ending of a behavior which is vital because we tend to remember it more than other phases. You want the ending of your habit to be satisfying. The best approach is to use reinforcement, which refers to the process of using an immediate reward to increase the rate of a behavior. It ties your habit to an immediate reward.

Label a savings account "a leather Jacket" or "A trip to Europe."

Chapter 16: How to Stick With Good Habits Every Day

A young stock broker made tremendous progress by following a simple strategy. Every morning I would start with 120 paper clips in one jar and would keep dialing a phone until I had moved them all to the second jar.

One woman shifted a hairpin from one container to another whenever she wrote a page of her book. Another man moved a marble from one bin to the next after each set of push-ups.

Making progress is satisfying, and visual measures provide a clear evidence of your progress. As a result, they reinforce your behavior and add a little bit of immediate satisfaction to any activity. Visual measurements come in various forms. But perhaps the best way to measure your progress is with a habit tracker.

How to Keep Your Habits on Track

A habit tracker is a simple way to measure whether you did a habit. The most basic format is to get a calendar and cross off each day you stick with your routine. As the time goes by, the calendar becomes a record of your habit streak.

Benjamin Franklin, at the age of 20, carried a small booklet everywhere he went and used it to track 13 personal virtues. The list included goals like "Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful" and "Avoid trifling conversation." At the end of each day, Franklin would open his booklet and record his progress.

A comedian had a goal of "never breaking the chain" of writing jokes every day. He was not focused on how good or bad a particular joke was or how inspired he felt. He simply focused on showing up and adding to his streak.

"Don't break a chain" is a powerful mantra. Don't break the chain of workouts and you'll get fit faster than you'd expect. Don't break the chain of creating every day and you will end up with an impressive portfolio. Habit tracking makes a behavior obvious, attractive, and satisfying.

Benefit 1: Habit tracking is obvious

Recording your last action creates a trigger that can initiate your next one. Habit tracking also keeps you honest. We think we act better than we do. Measurement offers one way to overcome our blindness to our own behavior and notice what's really going on each day.

Benefit 2: Habit tracking is attractive

The most effective form of motivation is progress. When we get a signal that we are moving forward, we become motivated to continue down on that path. In this way, habit tracking can have an addictive effect on motivation. Each small win fuels your desire.

This is particularly useful on a bad day. When you're feeling down, it's easy to forget the progress you have already made. Habit tracking provides visual proof of your hard work-a subtle reminder of how far you've come.

Benefit 3: Habit tracking is satisfying

This is the most crucial benefit of all. Tracking can become its own form of reward. It feels good to watch your results grow.

Habit tracking also allows keep your eye on the ball: you're focused on the process rather than the result.

Wherever possible, measurement should be automated. Manual tracking should be limited to your most important habits.

Finally, record each measurement immediately after the habit occurs. The completion of the behavior is the cue to write it down.

You'll find a few weeks of measurements to be insightful. It's always interesting to see how you've actually been spending your time.

How to recover quickly when your habits break down

Whenever this happens to me, I try to remind myself of a simple rule: never miss twice.

The 1st mistake is never the one that ruins you. It is a spiral of repeated mistakes that follows. Missing once is an accident. Missing twice is the start of a new habit.

The problem is not slipping; the problem is thinking that if you can't do something perfectly, then you shouldn't do it at all.

The first rule of compounding: Never interrupt unnecessarily.

This is why the "bad" workouts are often the most important ones. Simply doing something-ten squats, five sprints, a push-up, anything really-is huge. Don't put up a zero.

It's not always about what happens during the workout. It's about being the type of person who doesn't miss workouts. It's easy to train when you feel good, but it's crucial to show up when you don't feel like it-even if you do less than you hope. Going to gym for 5 minutes may not improve your performance, but it reaffirms your identity.

Knowing When (and when not) to track a habit

The dark side of tracking a particular behavior is that we become driven by the number rather than the purpose behind it. The human mind wants to “win” whatever game is played.

Goodhart’s law: Whenever a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.

We care about getting 1000 steps than being healthy. We teach for standardized tests instead of emphasizing learning, curiosity, and critical thinking. In short, we optimize what we measure. When we choose the wrong measurement, we get the wrong behavior.

Just because you measure something doesn’t mean it’s the most important thing. And just because you can’t measure something doesn’t mean it’s not important at all.

Chapter 17 : How an Accountability Partner Can Change Everything

The best way to avoid bad habit is to increase the speed of punishment associated with the behavior. Customers pay bills on time when they are charged a fee. Students show up to class when their grade is linked to attendance.

To be proactive, the cost of procrastination must be greater than the cost of action. To be healthy, the cost of laziness must be greater than the cost of exercise.

The Habit Contract

You can create a habit contract to hold yourself accountable. It is a verbal or written agreement in which you state your commitment to a particular habit and the punishment that will occur if you don’t follow through. Then you find one or two people to act as your accountability partners and sign off on the contract with you. The signing of the contract brings seriousness.

Even if you don’t have a contract, having an accountability partner is useful. Knowing that someone is watching can be a powerful motivator.

You can even automate this process.

ADVANCED TACTICS: How to go from merely good to Being Truly Great

Chapter 18: The Truth about Talent (When Genes Matter and When They Don’t)

The secret to maximizing your odds of success is to choose the right field of competition. Habits are easier to perform, and more satisfying to stick with, when they align with your natural inclinations and abilities.

Accept the simple truth that people are born with different abilities. Competence is highly context dependent.

Genes do not determine your destiny. They determine your areas of opportunity. The key is to direct your effort toward areas that both excite you and match your natural skills, to align your ambition with your ability.

“How do I identify the opportunities and habits that are right for me?” The first place we look for an answer is by understanding your personality.

How to Find a Game Where the Odds Are in Your Favor

In the beginning of a new activity, there should be a period of exploration. The goal is to try out new possibilities, research a broad range of ideas, and cast a wide net.

After this initial period of exploration, shift your focus to the best solution you’ve found-but keep experimenting occasionally. The proper balance depends on whether you’re winning or losing. If you are currently winning, you exploit, exploit, exploit. If you are currently losing, you continue to explore, explore, explore.

In the long-run, it is probably most effective to work on the strategy that seems to deliver the best results about 80-90 % of the time and keep exploring with the remaining 10-20 %

The optimal approach depends on how much time you have. In the beginning of your career, it makes more sense to explore because once you find the right thing, you still have a good amount of time to exploit it.

What feels like fun to me, but work to others? The mark of whether you are made for a task is not whether you love it but whether you can handle the pain of the task easier than most people.

What makes me lose track of time/ Flow is a mental state you enter when you are so focused on the task at hand that the rest of the world fades away.

Where do I get greater returns than the average person? We are constantly comparing ourselves to those around us, and the behavior is more likely to be satisfying when the comparison is in our favor.

What comes naturally to me? Look inside yourself and ask, “What feels natural to me? When I felt alive?” No internal judgments or people-pleasing. No self-criticism.

To be honest, some of the process is just luck.

Everyone has at least a few areas in which they could be in top 25% with some effort.

When you can’t win by being better, you can win by being different. By combining your skills, you reduce the level of your competition, which makes it easier to stand out.

In college, I designed my own major, biomechanics, which was a combination of physics, chemistry, biology and autonomy. I wasn’t smart enough to stand out among the top physics or biology majors, so I created my own game. And because it suited me-I was only taking the courses I was interested in-studying felt less of a chore. It was also easier to avoid the trap of comparing myself to everyone else.

Specialization is a powerful way to overcome the “accident” of bad genetics.

Our genes do not eliminate the need for hard work. They clarify it.

Chapter 19: The Goldilocks Rule: How to Stay Motivated in Life and Work

The way to maintain motivation and achieve peak levels of desire is to work on tasks of “just manageable difficulty.”

The human being loves a challenge, but only if it is within an optimal zone of difficulty.

The Goldilocks rule states that humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities. Not too hard, not too easy, just right. There are enough victories to keep motivated and enough mistakes to keep working hard.

Once a habit has been established, it's important to continue to advance in small ways. These little improvements and new challenges keep you engaged. And if you hit the Goldilocks zone just right, you can achieve a flow state.

A flow state is the experience of being “in the zone” and fully immersed in the activity. Scientists have found out that to achieve a state of flow, a task must be roughly 4 % beyond your current ability.

Behaviors need to remain novel in order for them to stay attractive and satisfying. Without variety, we get bored. And boredom is perhaps the greatest villain on the quest for self-improvement.

How to Stay Focused When You Get Bored Working on Your Goals

What do the really successful people do that most don't? At some point it comes down to who can handle the boredom of training every day, doing the same work over, and over, and over.

Whether it's business or sports or art, “it all comes down to passion.” Or, “You have to really want it.”

Successful people feel the same lack of motivation as everyone else. The difference is that they still find a way to show up despite the feelings of boredom.

Mastery requires practice. But the more you practice something, the more boring and routine it becomes.

The greatest threat to success is not failure but boredom. As soon as we experience dip in motivation, we begin seeking a new strategy-even if the old one is still working. As Machiavelli noted, “Men desire novelty to such an extent that those who are doing well wish for a change as much as those who are doing badly.”

Perhaps that is why many of the most habit forming products are those that provide continuous forms of novelty. In Psychology, this is known as a variable reward.

Variable rewards don't create a craving, but they are a powerful way to amplify the cravings we already experience because they reduce boredom.

Variable rewards or not, no habit will stay interesting forever. You have to fall in love with boredom.

With any habit, there will be days when you feel like quitting. But stepping up when it's annoying or painful or draining to do so, that's what makes the difference between a professional and an amateur.

Professionals stick to a schedule; amateurs let life get in the way. Professionals know what is important to them and work toward it with purpose; amateurs get pulled off course by the urgencies of life.

David Cain, an author and meditation teacher, encourages his students to avoid being “fair-weather meditators.” When a habit is truly important to you, you have to be willing to stick to it in any mood. Professionals take action even when the mood isn’t right.

Chapter 20: The Downside of Creating Good Habits

Habits create the foundation for mastery. In chess, it is only after the basic movements of the pieces have become automatic that the player can focus on the next level of the game.

Benefits of habits come at a cost. At first, each repetition develops fluency, speed, and skill. But then, as a habit becomes automatic, you become less sensitive to feedback. You fall into mindless repetition. It becomes easier to let mistakes slide. When you can do it “good enough” on autopilot, you stop thinking how to do it better.

Once a skill is mastered there is usually a slight decline in performance over time. It is not a cause of worry for trivial habits like brushing teeth. The less energy you spend on trivial choices, the more you can spend on what really matters.

However, when you want to maximize your potential and achieve elite levels of performance, you need a more nuanced approach. What you need is a combination of automatic habits and deliberate practice.

Habits + deliberate practice = Mastery

Mastery is the process of narrowing your focus to a tiny element of success, repeating it until you have internalized the skill, and then using this new habit as the foundation to advance to the next frontier of development. Each habit unlocks the next level of performance. It’s an endless cycle.

What you need is a way to remain conscious of your performance over time, so you can continue to refine and improve.

The solution? Establish a system of reflection and review.

How to Review Your Habits and Make adjustments

Improve your output by 1 % over a given period. It is not about just points, give your best effort spiritually, mentally and physically.

Sustaining an effort is the most important thing for any enterprise. The way to be successful is to learn how to do things right, then do the same way every time.

Reflection and review enables the long-term improvement of all habits because it makes you aware of your mistakes and helps you consider possible paths for improvement.

Top performers take notes after every practice and searches for areas for improvement. A swimmer gold medalist records her wellness on a scale of 1-10 and includes notes on nutrition and how well she slept.

Executives and investors keep a “decision journal” in which they record the major decisions they make each week, why they made them, and what they expect the outcome to be. They review their choices at the end of each month or year to see where they were correct and where they went wrong.

Improvement is not just about learning habits, it’s about fine-tuning them. Reflection and review help you in this.

Personally, I employ two primary modes of reflection and review. Each December, I perform an Annual Review. I reflect on the progress by asking three questions.

1. What went well this year?
2. What didn’t go so well this year?
3. What did I learn?

Six months later, I conduct an Integrity Report in which I answer three questions.

1. What are the core values that drive my life and work?
2. How I am living and working with integrity right now?
3. How can I set higher standard in the future?

These two reports don’t take very long-just a few hours per year- but they are crucial periods of refinement.

Reflection also brings a sense of perspective.

How to Break Beliefs That Hold You Back

In the beginning, repeating a habit is essential to build up evidence of your desired identity. The more sacred an idea is to us-that is, the more deeply it is tied to our identity-the more strongly we will defend it against criticism.

Avoid making any single aspect of your identity an overwhelming portion of who you are. Keep your identity small. The more you let a single belief define you, the less capable you are of adapting when life challenges you. Loss of a single facet of your life can wreck you.

If your identity is wrapped up in a belief like “I’m a great soldier,” what happens when your period of service ends? Same thing with “I’m the CEO” or “I’m the founder.”

The key to mitigating these losses of identity is to redefine yourself such that you get to keep important aspects of your identity even if your particular role changes.

- “I’m an athlete” becomes “I’m the type of person who is mentally tough and loves a physical challenge.”
- “I’m a great soldier” transforms into “I’m the type of person who is disciplined, reliable, and great on a team.”
- “I’m the CEO” translates to “I’m the type of person who builds and creates things.”

Your identity works with the changing circumstances rather than against them.

Everything is impermanent, Life is constantly changing, so you need to periodically check in to see if your old habits and beliefs are still serving you.

A lack of self-awareness is a poison. Reflection and review is the antidote.

Conclusion

The wholly grail of habit change is not a single 1 % improvement, but a thousand of them.

Success is not a goal to reach a finish line to cross. It is a system to improve, an endless process to refine.

This is a continuous process. There is no finish line. There is no permanent solution. Whenever you're looking to improve, you can rotate through the 4 laws of behavior change until you find the next bottleneck. Make it obvious. Make it attractive. Make it easy. Make it satisfying. Always looking for the next way to get 1 % better.

The secret to getting results that last is to never stop making improvements. It's remarkable what you can build if you just don't stop. True for business, body building, knowledge, fortune, and friendships. Small habits don't add up. They compound.