

THE POWER OF HABIT-CHARLES DUHIGG

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.

Chapter 1: The Habit Loop-How Habits Work

Cue-Routine-Reward

Cue: Visual Trigger, time of day, an emotion, a sequence of thoughts, or company of particular people.

Routines: Simple or complex.

Rewards: Food or drugs, emotional payoffs (feeling of pride after praise or self congratulation)

Habits are powerful, but delicate. They can emerge outside of our consciousness, or can be deliberately designed. They often occur without permission, but can be reshaped by fiddling with parts. They shape our lives far more than we realize-they are strong, in fact they cause our brains to cling to them defying common sense.

Even small shifts in habits can end the pattern. By learning to observe the cues and rewards, though, we can change routines.

Chapter 2: The Craving Brain-How to Create New Habits

Why People Habitually Exercise: It is because of a specific reward they started to crave. In one study, 92% people said that they exercised because it made them “feel good”. 67% said it gave them a sense of accomplishments- a sense of triumph from tracking their performances.

If you want to start running every morning, it is essential that you choose a simple cue(like always lacing up sneakers before breakfast or leaving your running clothes next to your bed) and a clear reward(midday treat, sense of accomplishment from recording your miles, or feel good factor). However, this routine can only sustain when a craving for the reward emerges.

Chapter 3: The Golden Rule of Habit Change-Why Transformation Occurs

Tony Dungy Football Coach: Champions don't do extraordinary things. They do ordinary things, but do them without thinking, too fast for other team to react. They follow the habits they have learned.

Dungy decided to change the Routine part of the habit loop for the players.

Bill Wilson became severe alcoholic, and his health deteriorated to a serious level requiring painful treatment. One night the pain became so intense and unbearable that although he was an atheist, he yelled, “If there is God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything. Anything!” At that very moment, he had a divine experience which cured him permanently. He founded Alcoholics Anonymous, the largest, most well known and successful habit changing organization in the world.

Their success surprised the world, because it had almost no grounding on science. Their method attacks the habits that surround alcohol use. He wrote the famous 12 steps. The program has intense focus on spirituality. They have to attend 90 meetings in 90 days. The meetings don't have a prescribed schedule. They begin by a member telling his story, after which others participate.

They have to make a detailed list of all triggers for alcoholic urges (“searching and fearless inventory of ourselves”, and admit “to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”). They are also asked to search for the cravings which makes them drink.

AA has substituted drinking by meetings and companionships. There is a sponsor for each member who offers the distraction instead of the bar.

The alcoholics believed that some higher power had entered their lives which helped them remain sober during stressful periods. It was not God that mattered. The belief itself made the difference. Once people started to believe in something, that skill started spilling over to other parts of their lives, until they started believing they could change. Belief was the ingredient that reworked habit loop into a permanent behaviour. You don't have to believe in God, but you do need the capacity to believe that things will get better.

By putting alcoholics in meetings where belief is given, AA trains people in how to believe in something until they believe in the program and themselves. It lets people practice believing that things will eventually get better, until things actually do. At some point, people in AA look around the room and think, if it worked for that guy, I guess it can work for me. Researchers found that there is something really powerful about groups and shared experiences. People might be sceptical about their ability to change if they are by themselves, but a group will convince them to suspend disbelief. A community creates belief.

When you start doing something that isn't about you, it starts you on a different path.

Change seems real when you see it in the eyes of others.

People must believe that change is feasible. Belief is easier when it occurs within a community.

Part II: The Habits of Successful Organizations

Chapter 4: keystone Habits

Some habits have the power to start a chain reaction. These are keystone habits. It means that success doesn't depend on getting everything right, but instead relies on identifying a few key priorities and fashioning them into powerful levers.

Alcoa CEO started on working on a list of biggest priorities if he accepted the post. He always had lists with bullet points that got a problem solved. He surprisingly made Safety his top priority in turning around the organization.

Michael Phelps, the most famous swimming champion had Bowman as a coach who made him that successful. He would ask Phelps to watch a video tape before sleeping, and after waking up. It was not a real tape, just mental visualization of a perfect race. He saw complete details of the pool, his strokes, everything, including what he would do after winning the race. During practice, Bowman would shout to him "Put in the video tape" to make him swim at race speed.

Small wins are part of keystone habits which create widespread changes. Small wins are a steady application of a small advantage. Once a small win is accomplished, forces are set in motion that favour another small win. Small wins fuel transformative changes by leveraging tiny advantages into patterns that convince people that bigger achievements are within reach.

Chapter 5: Starbucks and The Habit of Success

Howard Schulz, the owner of Starbucks had a very poor and troubled childhood. **His mother would ask him little questions like “How are you going to study tonight? What are you going to do tomorrow? How do you know you are ready for the test? It trained him to set goals.**

Schulz says that he has been lucky. **He believes that if you tell people that they have what it takes to succeed, they will prove you right.**

In one psychological experiment, one group was simply ordered not to eat fresh cookies kept in front of them. The other group was also told to do the same thing, but were explained the purpose of the experiment, was asked to cooperate and give suggestions for improvement. After 15 minutes of this exercise, they were given concentration test. **Those who were treated well did very well, and the other group did very bad. Their willpower muscles had been fatigued by the brusque instructions.**

When people are asked to do something that takes self control, if they think that they are doing it for personal reasons-if they feel like it’s a choice or something they enjoy because it helps someone else-it’s much less taxing. If they feel that they have no autonomy, if they are just following orders, their willpower muscles get tired much faster.

A feeling that they are in control, that they have genuine decision making authority-can radically increase how much energy and focus they bring to jobs. People want to be in control of their lives.

Chapter 9 : Neurology of Free Will

Habits are not destiny. We can choose our habits, once we know how. Any of them can be changed, if you understand how they function.

However, to modify a habit, you must decide to change it. You must consciously accept the hard work of identifying cues and rewards that drive the habit’s routines, and find alternatives. You must know you have control and be self conscious enough to use it.

William James: All our life, so far as it has a definite form, is but a mass of habits-practical, emotional, and intellectual-systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be.

James was from an accomplished family. In his thirties, he was the only unaccomplished one in the family. He was sick as a child. Tried hard at many weird things and quit. One day he wrote in his diary, “Today, I about touched bottom, and perceive plainly that I must face choice with open eyes. Shall I frankly throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes?”

Two months later, James made a decision. Before attempting anything rash, he would conduct a yearlong experiment. He would spend twelve months believing that he had control over himself and his destiny, that he could become better, that he had the free will to change. There was no proof that it was true. But he would free himself to believe, all evidence to the contrary, that change was possible. He wrote in his diary, “I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life.” Regarding his ability to change, “I will assume for the present-until next year-that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will.”

Over the next year, he practiced every day. In his diary, he wrote as if his control over himself and his choices was never in question. He got married, and he spent time with successful people in different walks of life. Two years later, he wrote to Charles Renouvier, the philosopher, who expounded at length on free will. “I must not lose this opportunity of telling you of the admiration and gratitude which have

been excited in me by reading your Essais. Thanks to you I possess for the first time an intelligible and reasonable conception of freedom... I can say that through that philosophy I am beginning to experience a rebirth of the moral life; and I can assure you, sir, that this is no small thing.”

Later, he would famously write that the will to believe is the most important ingredient in creating belief in change. And that one of the most important methods for creating that belief was habits. Habits, he noted, are what allow us to “do a thing with difficulty the first time, but soon do it more and more easily, and finally, with sufficient practice, do it semi-mechanically, or with hardly any consciousness at all.” Once we choose who we want to be, people grow “to the way in which they have been exercised, just as a sheet of paper or a coat, once creased or folded, tends to fall forever afterward into the same identical folds.”

If you believe you can change-if you make it a habit- the change becomes real. This is the real power of habit: the insight that your habits are what you choose them to be. Once that choice occurs-and becomes automatic-it’s not only real, it starts to seem inevitable, the thing, as James wrote, that bears “us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be.”

The way we habitually think of our surroundings and ourselves create the worlds that each of us inhabit.

Habits are the unthinking choices and invisible decisions that surround us every day- and which, just by looking at them, become visible again.

William James wrote about habits and their central role in creating happiness and success. He added a special chapter on this in his masterpiece *The Principles of Psychology*.

Change may not be fast and it isn’t always easy. But with time and effort, almost any habit can be reshaped.

The Framework:

- Identify the routine
- Experiment with the rewards
- Isolate the cue
- Have a plan