

## Resources

### **Books**

- [Atomic Habits](#): An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones by James Clear
- [Tiny Habits](#): The Small Changes That Change Everything by BJ Fogg
- [Good Habits, Bad Habits](#): The Science of Making Positive Changes That Stick by Wendy Wood
- [The Power of Habit](#): Why We Do What We Do In Life and Business by Charles Duhigg
- [Making Habits, Breaking Habits](#): Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick by Jeremy Dean

### **Podcasts**

- **The Habit Coach** by IVM Podcasts with host Ashdin Doctor

## Key Takeaways

- Motivation and will-power never win in the long run. Motivation and will-power fade. We need to create the context and mental state that facilitate behavior change.
- For any big change, take it in baby steps. Start by making one small habit change, then over time, increase the frequency or complexity of the habit.
  - *Example: Instead of becoming vegan overnight, first increase the amount of vegetables at each meal. Then, eliminate red meat. Then eliminate all animals except fish. Then increase the vegan proteins in your diet. Then eliminate fish. Then eliminate eggs. Then eliminate dairy and other animal products. Now you're a vegan but it happened over the course of a few weeks/months.*
- The starting point often feels like it matters a lot, but it doesn't. It dictates what your first steps will be, but what's more important is the goal because that sets the direction.
  - *Example: It will be easier for a vegetarian to become a vegan than for a carnivore. But that doesn't mean either person will be more successful at achieving the goal. It just means it may take more/less time and involve more/fewer steps.*
- Rewire your brain for positive rewards and thinking. Associate the new behavior with feeling good so that you'll want to do it again in the future. Congratulate yourself, smile, check it off your habit tracker - anything that will reinforce positive feelings with the habit.
- It's about self identity, not the habit or goal. Instead of focusing on the goal, focus on who you need to be in order for the goal to be realized.
  - *Example: Instead of - my goal is to run a marathon and therefore I need to run 3 x per week. Say - I'm a runner. I'm the kind of person who runs 3 x per week.*
- Tricks for adopting new habits:
  - Make it obvious.

- Make it attractive.
- Make it easy.
- Make it satisfying.
- Tricks for breaking a bad habit:
  - Make it invisible.
  - Make it unattractive.
  - Make it difficult.
  - Make it unsatisfying.
- Other habit tricks:
  - Habit stacking: Attach a habit to an existing behavior - do the new habit right before/after/at the same time as something you're already doing. To find the optimal combination, consider the location, frequency, and theme of the existing action and how that will match the desired action.
    - *Example: Right after I set my coffee pot to brew, I'll say three things I'm grateful for this morning. (frequency - I want to do each of these once per day in the morning)*
  - Give your habit a time and place - do the new habit at a specific time and/or location instead of leaving it to happen whenever or wherever you remember/fit it in.
    - *Example: I'll meditate for 10 minutes every morning at 6:30am.*
  - Habit bundling: Bundle the new habit with something you enjoy - increase the desirability of the new habit by rewarding yourself for doing the habit.
    - *Example: I'll only watch Netflix while walking on the treadmill.*
  - External accountability - Knowing that someone else is watching you can be a powerful motivator.
  - Whenever possible, make a one-time choice that locks in (or out) the habit you want.
    - *Example: Don't buy candy to keep at home. This makes it impossible for you to snack on candy while watching Netflix even if you wanted to.*
  - Gateway habit: Look for the starting habit - the first domino that sets the others in motion and is so easy to do it's a no-brainer. Commit to the starting habit that then allows the other behaviors to "just happen" rather than convincing yourself to do all the behaviors.
    - *Example: Put soap on your hands (starting habit). Once you do this, you have to wash it off and dry your hands (following behaviors).*
- Things that feel good in the moment are often bad for us in the long term and vice versa. This puts our long term goals in conflict with our short term desires, making it hard to stick with new healthy habits.
- The environmental design is extremely powerful. The environment can facilitate / make a good habit easy or inhibit / make a bad habit hard.
  - Environment facilitates a behavior by making the habit visible / obvious, easy to do, accessible.
    - *Example: Want to drink more water? Use a 32oz water bottle instead of a 10oz glass.*

- Environment inhibits a behavior by increasing the friction to complete the habit, making it invisible/not obvious, taking extra work/steps, costing more.
  - *Example: Want to stay focused during meetings and stop checking your phone? Put the device in a drawer across the room during meetings.*
- Habits are routines we do subconsciously so they don't take up brain power. We rely on habits so we can focus our conscious thought on more important things.
- Behavior is a response to an unfulfilled desire. Willpower doesn't eliminate the desire, it puts it aside and hopes the desire will fade over time. Willpower wanes throughout the day. The more we use it, the less of it we have, which is why we often give in to bad habits at the end of a long day.
- We build new habits intentionally until they become embedded. Every time we repeat a habit it gets reinforced. There is no special number of times we need to do something before it officially becomes a habit.
- It's better to do some of the habit than none of it. This is because just doing it at all keeps us on track for the new behavior. Plus, the more we do a habit, even if only partially, the more ingrained it becomes.
  - *Example: If you intended to write for 10 minutes each day but didn't write at all today, it's better to write for 1 minute than not at all.*
- Occasionally you should break a streak because it's not about the streak, it's about the habit and who you are. If you are tracking how many days in a row, eventually, if you miss a day, it can feel deflating to start over at 1. Use tracking as a way to get started, but don't let the tracking become the measure of success.
- Make a plan for the obstacles you might face when building a new habit. The more prepared you are to deal with obstacles, the more likely you'll stick with the habit.
  - *Example: I want to write a daily to-do list first thing every morning. I anticipate one obstacle will be when my day starts with a morning meeting so I don't have time at my desk before my workday begins. When this happens, I'll make my to-do list the day before.*

## **Book Notes**

### NOTES FROM ATOMIC HABITS

- Small changes add up to big changes over time. Often we don't see/feel the change at first which can be frustrating. The impact compounds over time.
- Think of change in three levels:
  - The first layer is changing your outcomes. This level is concerned with changing your results: losing weight, publishing a book, winning a championship.
  - The second layer is changing your process. This level is concerned with changing your habits and systems: implementing a new routine at the gym, decluttering your desk for better workflow, developing a meditation practice.

- The third and deepest layer is changing your identity. This level is concerned with changing your beliefs: your worldview, your self-image, your judgments about yourself and others.
- Identity-based habits are more powerful than outcome-based habits. Behavior that is incongruent with your identity won't last. Behavior that is associated with a goal can fade when the goal has been reached. It's hard to change your habits if you never change the underlying beliefs that led to your past behavior. You may have a new goal and a new plan, but you haven't changed who you are.
- The process of building a habit can be divided into four simple steps: cue, craving, response, and reward.
  - The cue triggers your brain to initiate a behavior. It is a bit of information that predicts a reward. Cues are meaningless until they are interpreted. The thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the observer are what transform a cue into a craving.
  - Cravings are the second step, and they are the motivational force behind every habit. Without some level of motivation or desire—without craving a change—we have no reason to act. What you crave is not the habit itself but the change in state it delivers.
  - The response is the actual habit you perform, which can take the form of a thought or an action. Whether a response occurs depends on how motivated you are and how much friction is associated with the behavior. If a particular action requires more physical or mental effort than you are willing to expend, then you won't do it. Your response also depends on your ability. It sounds simple, but a habit can occur only if you are capable of doing it.
  - The response delivers a reward. Rewards are the end goal of every habit. The cue is about noticing the reward. The craving is about wanting the reward. The response is about obtaining the reward. We chase rewards because they serve two purposes: (1) they satisfy us and (2) they teach us.
- How to Create a Good Habit The 1st law (Cue): Make it obvious. The 2nd law (Craving): Make it attractive. The 3rd law (Response): Make it easy. The 4th law (Reward): Make it satisfying. We can invert these laws to learn how to break a bad habit. How to Break a Bad Habit Inversion of the 1st law (Cue): Make it invisible. Inversion of the 2nd law (Craving): Make it unattractive. Inversion of the 3rd law (Response): Make it difficult. Inversion of the 4th law (Reward): Make it unsatisfying.
- Write a habit statement to clarify what you'll do and when. Generic desires do not provide enough guidance to form a habit. Instead of "I'll read more", write: "When situation X arises, I will perform response Y." OR "After I do X, I'll do Y."
- Habit stacking is a special form of an implementation intention. Rather than pairing your new habit with a particular time and location, you pair it with a current habit.
- Environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior. Despite our unique personalities, certain behaviors tend to arise again and again under certain environmental conditions.
- If you want to make a habit a big part of your life, make the cue a big part of your environment. To eliminate a bad habit, reduce exposure to the cue that causes it.

- Self-control is a short-term strategy, not a long-term one. You may be able to resist temptation once or twice, but it's unlikely you can muster the willpower to override your desires every time.
- Changing habits as part of a group is much easier than on your own. The pressure we feel to conform is very strong. The group identity and comradery support your individual identity and commitment to the change.
- Reprogram your mind from the habit to the benefit. Instead of "I need to write a to-do list" try "It's time to get organized and stay focused."
- Energy is precious, and the brain is wired to conserve it whenever possible. It is human nature to follow the Law of Least Effort, which states that when deciding between two similar options, people will naturally gravitate toward the option that requires the least amount of work. This is why the environment matters so much.
- Make your habits so easy they take less than 2 minutes to do. To do this, figure out the gateway habits that will lead to your desired outcome by mapping out your goals on a scale from "very easy" to "very hard." For instance, running a marathon is very hard. Running a 5K is hard. Walking ten thousand steps is moderately difficult. Walking ten minutes is easy. And putting on your running shoes is very easy. Your goal might be to run a marathon, but your gateway habit is to put on your running shoes.
- 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. If you can't learn the basic skill of showing up, then you have little hope of mastering the finer details. Instead of trying to engineer a perfect habit from the start, do the easy thing on a more consistent basis. You have to standardize before you can optimize.
- Whenever possible, make a one-time choice that locks in (or out) the habit you want. For example, if you want to eat less, buy smaller dinner plates. Similarly, there are a handful of moments every day that deliver an outsized impact. These choices are a fork in the road - for example, starting to work on a presentation or grabbing your phone to scroll through social media.
- With our bad habits, the immediate outcome usually feels good, but the ultimate outcome feels bad. With good habits, it is the reverse: the immediate outcome is unenjoyable, but the ultimate outcome feels good.
- 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 and reflection leads to unhelpful habits.

## NOTES FROM THE POWER OF HABIT

- "Chunking" is the process of stringing together a series of actions into a routine. It allows the brain to save energy and perform common tasks efficiently
- 3-part habit loop: Cue (internal or external signal) - Routine (series of behaviors) - Reward (feeling positive)

- Habits are incredibly resilient - they live in the basal ganglia, set of subcortical nuclei in the cerebrum, deep in the brain. The basal ganglia can function normally even if the brain is damaged in other areas.
- Habits stick because they create craving. Breaking a habit is difficult because the brain wants the expected reward that comes from the behavior. Not getting that reward leaves an open loop that is unsatisfied. Not getting the reward can leave us feeling grumpy or frustrated.
- To change a habit, try substituting the routine rather than resisting it. Redirect the cue towards a new routine that provides a similar reward. Consider what the reward actually is and then find other ways to trigger that reward.
- You need to believe you can change. If you don't truly buy into the idea of your ability to adopt/remove a habit, any efforts will inevitably fail.
- Not all habits are created equal. Keystone habits are more important because they create momentum that impacts other areas / habits. By changing keystone habits, you can change other habits more easily. Keystone habits are often small and easy to complete, but they have big impact.
- Habits exist at the individual and group level.
- Willpower is a keystone habit but it's highly inconsistent - it's like a muscle that gets tired the more we use it, hence why we are more likely to give in at the end of a long day rather than first thing in the morning.
- You can strengthen willpower / reduce the amount of willpower needed by preparing for the situations where willpower will be needed.
- Crises create an opportunity to revamp habits at both the individual and organizational level. Changing organizational habits is supported by having people with 'strong ties' and many 'weak ties' within the community. Strong ties start the influence and weak ties spread it.
- The more people who are doing a habit in a community, the more pressure people feel to comply and do the habit too.
- Once we are aware of our habits, it's our responsibility to change them.

#### NOTES FROM GOOD HABITS, BAD HABITS

- As much as 43% of our lives are driven by habits. We do actions without conscious decision or thought.
- Habits exist below the level of conscious thought. Habits influence us more strongly than our conscious thoughts.
- Self discipline or self control can help us more quickly develop new habits. It's not a good long-term strategy as a way to change deeply ingrained habits, but the more disciplined we are about a habit, the faster it will be formed.
- Your environment helps shape your habits. Human behavior is driven by internal desires and the world around us. Driving forces support or facilitate a behavior. Restrictive forces act as a deterrent that inhibits a behavior. Make your environment one that enables the behaviors you desire.

- There is no magic number of days or times an action needs to be done before it becomes a habit. It depends on the person, the difficulty of the habit, the frequency, etc. The more a behavior is done, the faster it becomes a habit.
- When you experience a reward, dopamine is released in the brain, which solidifies the reward in your memory. Without a reward, the habit has a harder time being solidified.
- Uncertain/inconsistent rewards are actually better than consistent/regular rewards. Its a form of gamification - the chance of getting the reward is attractive on its own.
- The reward should follow the action as quickly as possible. An external reward can help you to act but if you have to wait for it, it won't release the dopamine and form the memory. Intrinsic rewards to the action are better than added rewards.
- Stress interferes with our executive functioning areas of the brain. This means we naturally rely on habits when the brain is tired or stressed. It doesn't matter whether the habit is healthy or unhealthy - stress increases those habits regardless.
- Take advantage of disruptions to change habits. When our everyday life is in flux, it shakes up the brain and allows us to try new habits more easily.

## NOTES FROM MAKING HABITS, BREAKING HABITS

- Some of the most dangerous habits we have are the invisible ones - our habits of thought.
- Habits have automaticity and lack emotion - we do them without thinking and they don't trigger any emotional experience.
- Habits can be formed with or without intention. Often we justify or explain habits that otherwise don't have obvious origins or whose origins no longer make sense.
- At least  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our life is driven by habits.
- Habits exist throughout our life including what we say, think, and do. They happen at home, at work, socially, etc.
- Rumination is the habit of thinking about something over and over again.
- How we perceive ourselves will have a significant impact on our thought patterns and therefore how we experience a situation.
- To build a new habit, determine these 4 things:
  - Wish - the ultimate desire or goal (e.g. to be more productive)
  - Outcome - best possible outcome (e.g. stopping work at 6pm for the day)
  - Obstacle - likely obstacles you'll face (e.g. getting pulled into an urgent meeting)
  - Plan - the plan for implementation and how to overcome those obstacles (e.g. I'll make a prioritized daily to-do list.) Write if-then statements to overcome obstacles (e.g. If I get pulled into a meeting, re-organize my to-do list so anything that can wait until tomorrow will be moved off the list.)
- To break bad habits, recognize the consequences of the habit - start associating the bad habit with the negative impact it's having on you.
- Cultivate mindfulness to become more aware of your behaviors, including those which you do automatically. This helps you recognize when you're doing a habit so you can consciously change it.

## NOTES FROM TINY HABITS

- We often set goals that are too big so we don't feel successful. Break down goals into manageable and attainable goals that we can see ourselves making progress towards.
- Stop blaming yourself for past habit changing failures. It's not you - it's that most of us haven't had the right instructions for how to sustain change.
- A tiny habit is something you can start doing right now and that takes less than 1 minute to complete, and that you have complete control over. This enables you to do it without any excuses.
- Three key drivers for behavior are motivation, ability and prompts. If you only have one, it may be enough to do something once, but it's not sustainable. When the three combine, sustained action becomes very easy.
  - Motivation - desire to do something
  - Ability - capacity to do something
  - Prompts - stimuli that trigger you to do something
- For any new habit or behavior, consider each of the three factors and design the habit to make each of them strong. For example, to do 10 push-ups a day - it only takes a minute, it will help me get in shape, I can do it right after I brush my teeth. But, if I can't even do 1 push-up now, doing 10 feels overwhelming. Adjusting the habit to be 5 knee push-ups instead will make it more likely to complete.
- Design prompts to trigger the desired behaviors. These can be reminders in your calendar, how your body feels (hungry, tired) or something else. Action prompts use existing behaviors as prompts for new behaviors. Consider location, frequency and theme (e.g. do self care activities together).
- Behavior is the bridge between our current reality and our desired future state. It's almost impossible to create the desired future state immediately. But it's easy to create the desired future state by making a small change that accumulates over time. For example, you can't lose 10lbs in 1 day but you can lose 10lbs in a year by reducing the number of desserts you eat each week.
- The best way to change is to make the behaviors as small as possible and build on them over time. This way you can stick with the habit (no excuses) until it becomes embedded and then 'up it' to the next level in a way that feels extremely easy.