

UNHOOKED:

HOW TO BREAK BAD
HABITS AND FORM
GOOD ONES THAT
STICK

[SECOND EDITION]

SAM THOMAS DAVIES

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WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Unhooked: How to Break Bad Habits (and Form Good Ones That Stick) is a free book written by Sam Thomas Davies. You are welcome to share it with anyone you think it might benefit.

For more strategies on how to improve habits, add new skills and sustain excellence, visit his website [here](#) or join his free weekly newsletter [here](#).

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS BOOK

1. Why habits emerge, how they change, and the science behind their mechanics.
2. How to break habits into parts and rebuild them to your specifications.
3. How to eat less, exercise more, work more efficiently, and live a healthier life.
4. How to improve your performance, grow your career and gain a competitive edge in work.
5. How to focus your strength, resist temptation and redirect your life.
6. How to redesign your environment and nudge yourself towards the best decisions.
7. The common mistakes in behaviour change and how to avoid them.

8. How to remove obstacles to progress.

9. How to overcome resistance and commit to long-term change.

10. How to minimise feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed.

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CHAPTER 1

YOU DON'T SET OUT TO BUILD A WALL. YOU DO THIS INSTEAD.

IN THE SUMMER of 1980, a 12 year-old Willard Carroll Smith Jr. and his brother Harry stared incredulously at what stood before them...

There was a gaping hole – approximately 30 feet wide and 16 feet high – where the front of their father's bakery used to be.

For one reason or another, their *father* had torn it down and now; he wanted *them* to rebuild it – by hand.

So that's what they did, and every day, after school, Willard and his brother rebuilt their dad's wall.

They started by laying one brick, *perfectly*. Then they laid another, and another, and another, ensuring each brick was laid as perfectly as the one that preceded it.

They laid bricks every day – for 18 months.

In hindsight, Willard would describe building that wall as an “impossible task”, but despite its difficulty, he and his brother persevered and a year and a half later, they laid their final brick.

Finally, after months of laboring, the Smith brothers had a wall, *their* wall.

As they gazed in astonishment at their “masterpiece”, their father walked over, knelt down and said something neither of them would ever forget...

“Don't you ever tell me there's something you can't do”.

START LAYING BRICKS

In life and work, we all have a “wall”; a habit we want to form, a behaviour we want to change, a goal we want to achieve, etc.

But in order to build that wall, we must lay “bricks”, in other words, perform reps and repetitions and focus on our next brick, our “next play”.

In an interview, 22 years later, Willard Carroll Smith Jr. said:

You don't set out to build a wall. You don't say 'I'm going to build the biggest, baddest, greatest wall that's ever been built.' You don't start there. You say, 'I'm going to lay this brick as perfectly as a brick can be laid. You do that every single day. And soon you have a wall.

[1]

Saying no to an aggressive boss. Eating one portion of fruits and vegetables. Running to the next lamppost. Buying a web domain. Emailing a prospect. Scheduling what to do and when to do it.

This is how you build a wall. You count the right things. You count how many bricks you can lay as *perfectly* as a brick can be laid.

And while perfection is impossible, striving for it isn't.

Your wall might feel insurmountable, but it's not.

You only need to lay one brick to start building a wall.

OH, AND ONE MORE THING...

Willard Carroll Smith Jr.? You might know him better as Academy Award-winning actor Will Smith.

CHAPTER 2

HOW TO GET MOTIVATED WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN THE MOOD

WE ALL KNOW that in order to develop good habits, we need motivation to start.

This is why, in the beginning, we “chunk” habits down so they’re super simple to do (think Mini Habits).

Simple: The less activation energy a habit needs, the easier it is to do.

And, most importantly, the less it relies on motivation.

But what about goals with deadlines? If you have 14 days to write a 2000-word report and seven days to write

it (because you procrastinated on it), you can't chunk writing down to, say, writing 100 hundred words a day. You would never finish it on time.

So, what do you do?

You plan for a lack of motivation...

THE PROBLEM WITH MOTIVATION

The fact is motivation is an emotion. And like any emotion it ebbs and flows, it's unpredictable and you can't rely on it when you need it.

The irony is when we *do* feel motivated; we never consider that we might feel demotivated tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.

But we probably will.

And worse, when we do feel demotivated, we seldom know how to reenergise ourselves.

So we excuse ourselves from doing what we need to do and hope that our motivation will return when we need it.

But what if instead we wrote ourselves a “walk-through”, a step-by-step for what we need to do to achieve our goal.

In order to explain this, I need to tell you a story...

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

Last week, I felt the most demotivated I have done all year. I had no motivation to do my work, I questioned my “why” and I felt like I had fallen out of love with the process.

I was bored.

But it happens to everyone, and I knew how I felt in that moment was *not* a reflection of how I felt, period.

I knew my behaviour was a result of my state and if I wanted to change my behaviour, I needed to change my focus.

So I opened a note in Evernote – one I had written to myself when I *had* felt motivated the week before – and read.

Here's what I had written to myself...

Hi Sam. If you're reading this, it's because you don't feel like doing your work. I understand, it happens sometimes. Do this now...

1. Stand up. If you're in public, look out the window and people watch. If you're at home, walk around the block.

2. Read your Kindle highlights from Notes From a Friend by Anthony Robbins. This is a shortcut in Evernote.

3. Read your affirmations and monthly goals. If you're at home, read them out loud.

4. Set a timer on your phone for five minutes. Close your eyes and visualise the pain you're moving away from and the pleasure you're moving towards by doing your work.

5. Return to your work. Repeat Steps 1-4 if necessary.

That was it. I closed Evernote and returned to my work.

This works because in order to feel an emotion (like motivation), several things need to happen and in a certain order. Once you know what that order is, you can repeat it again and again.

Let's look at how you can apply this yourself.

HOW TO GET MOTIVATED

How you feel today, this week, this month, this year is *not* a reflection of how you're going to feel forever. If you want to change how you feel, you have to understand your psychology. And the best way to learn

how to “run” your brain, is to map out, step-by-step, what YOU need to do and in what order.

Here’s how you do it...

Step 1. Remember a specific time when you felt motivated. Go back to it strongly. See what you saw then. Hear what you heard.

Step 2. Ask yourself, “What was I doing?” “Who was I with?” “What activities was I engaged in?” “What was most important to me?” Answer in detail.

Step 3. Write a note for yourself explaining, step-by-step, what you need to do to get motivated again. The more specific you are, the better. Read it back. If it doesn’t motivate you, rearrange the order. Rinse, wash, and repeat until you feel motivated.

CONCLUSION

There are multiple ways to get motivated, but none are more powerful than writing your own strategy guide.

After all, no one knows you better than you know yourself. Use it to your advantage.

Getting motivated isn't hard; you just need to remember to read the instructions.

CHAPTER 3

FORGET BIG LEAPS. START WITH MINI-HABITS INSTEAD

ONE OF THE most common problems we face when developing good habits is being *consistent*.

We need consistency to create lasting change. Simple: If you show up and “do the work” *consistently*, you produce extraordinary results. This is what Stephen Pressfield calls, “Turning Pro”.

But the key to creating lasting change isn’t in big leaps; it’s in baby steps.

How do you take baby steps?

You create “Mini Habits”.

Let’s look at how we can do that.

AN INTRODUCTION TO MINI HABITS

In his book *Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results*, Stephen Guise writes:

The Mini Habits strategy is forcing yourself to take 1-4 “stupid small” strategic actions every day. These actions are too small to fail, and too small to skip for special occasions. [2]

Guise’s system (similar to B.J. Fogg’s Tiny Habits method) invites you to *simplify* the desired behaviour so it’s easy to do.

By doing so, you minimise willpower failure (a common problem for many people), aggregate what I call “Tiny Gains” and build forward momentum.

This makes building good habits a lot easier.

Let’s look at how we can form Mini Habits, step-by-step.

8 STEPS TO FORMING A MINI HABIT

1. Choose Your Mini Habit and Habit Plan.

Do you want to eat five portions of fruits and vegetables a day? Exercise three days a week? Read four books a month? Write and publish two blog posts a week?

Choose ONE to begin with and commit to it for seven days. Consider any obstacles you might encounter along the way and how you can overcome them.

2. Use The Why Drill On Each Mini Habit.

Do you *really* want to form this habit or do you *think* you want to? You need to identify your why, your reason for doing the behaviour.

You achieve this by “drilling” down to find your core motivation. Ask yourself why you want it. Then ask why again, and again, and again ... and again.

3. Define Your Habit Cues.

At the core of every habit is the same neurological loop called “The Habit Loop”. This is a three-step loop that includes a cue, a routine and a reward. The cue is the trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. [3]

The two most common cues are time of day and immediately preceding action. I prefer the latter because you can use existing habits as cues. This is known as “Habit Stacking”.

For example, if you wanted to read more, you could write, “*After* I turn on my coffee machine, I will *immediately* read my book”. (See Step 6. for specificity).

4. Create Your Reward Plan.

You need to reward yourself for doing your Mini Habit. This is for two reasons: (1) to motivate yourself to do the behaviour and (2) so your brain can encode the behaviour, if it’s a repeated behaviour (you do want this to be a repeated behaviour, right?)

Remember, you must celebrate your tiny successes. You can do this either while you're doing the Mini Habit or immediately after completing it. This can be doing a physical movement, saying a word or phrase, singing a song out loud, etc. [4]

5. Write Everything Down.

“Writing something down instantly elevates it above all of your other thoughts”, writes Guise. And he's right: when we don't commit to *something*, we're distracted by *everything*.

Track your progress online using Coach.me or offline using a workbook. Have fun and build a streak (but NEVER break it).

6. Think Small.

You want to “chunk down” the habit so it's “stupidly small”. “If you start out exceedingly small, you won't say no”, writes Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, “you'll feel crazy if you don't do it. And so you'll actually do it!” [5]

You could do one push-up, eat one portion of fruit, send one gratitude email, write one sentence, etc. Don't cheat yourself by secretly expecting more from yourself, especially in the beginning. Remember, simplicity changes behaviour.

7. Meet Your Schedule and Drop High Expectations.

How do you rewire your brain so you *believe* you're the kind of person who can change when change is hard? Simple: You lower your expectation, not in what you can achieve (you can achieve *extraordinary* things), but in what you can expect from yourself in the *beginning*.

Give yourself permission to “fail” (and by “fail”, I mean learn). You turn pro by showing up and learning from the work you do; not the work you *say* you're going to do.

8. Watch for Signs of Habit, But Be Careful Not to Jump the Gun.

You know a behaviour has become a habit when it no longer requires a decision from you. You simply do it.

There is no resistance and you associate that behaviour to your identity. “I am a writer and writers write”.

CONCLUSION

You can start building Mini Habits, today. As Jayson Gaignard says, “We overestimate what we can accomplish in a day, but underestimate what we can accomplish in a year”.

Invest in Mini Habits like others would invest in a business; the return on investment is far greater.

CHAPTER 4

HOW TO BUILD A MORNING ROUTINE BY HABIT STACKING

AS YOU HAVE probably noticed building a morning routine can be a trying experience.

Think about all that can go wrong: You can oversleep, you can lose your keys, you can forget to do your most important task, and so on.

The reality is having a morning routine is the best approach to developing good habits, as Hal Elrod writes in *The Miracle Morning*:

How you wake up each day and your morning routine (or lack thereof) dramatically affects your levels of success in every single area of your life.

[6]

But building a morning routine isn't hard, once you understand the power of habit stacking...

WHAT IS HABIT STACKING?

In his book, *Habit Stacking: 97 Small Life Changes That Take Five Minutes or Less*, Steve Scott writes:

The essence of habit stacking is to take a series of small changes (like eating that piece of fruit) and build a ritual you follow on a daily basis. [7]

In our “bigger is better” culture, where most of us instinctively seek big breakthroughs, it's hard to believe that small changes can produce extraordinary results. But the wonderful reality is they can, because small

changes inspire small wins, and small wins inspire us to persevere when we feel like quitting.

But how do you build a ritual you can follow on a daily basis?

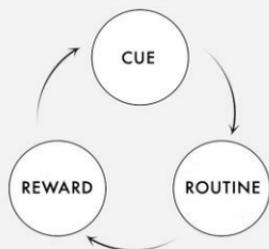
Simple: You use an *existing* habit as a trigger.

INTRODUCING: THE HABIT STAIRCASE

Let's revise what we already know about how habits work.

At the core of every habit is a simple neurological loop, a loop that consists of three parts, called The Habit Loop. [8]

THE HABIT LOOP



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The cue tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. In my experience, the most reliable cues are *immediately preceding actions*. These are behaviours you *already* do.

Let's use waking up as an example.

This is an example of an existing habit; it's a behaviour you do every day without fail. But what do you do immediately *after*?

Every weekday, I wake up, turn on my coffee machine and whilst my coffee is percolating, I write down three

things I'm grateful for and my five most important tasks of the day. I pour myself a cup of coffee, open Evernote and do one of my most important tasks.

You'll notice that each habit is triggered by the completion of the one that preceded it. I call this The Habit Staircase. I can't motivate myself to wake up and immediately do my work, but I can *after* I've built forward momentum from doing a series of small and achievable steps.



The higher you climb the staircase, the more momentum you have behind you, and the less you need to rely on motivation.

Let's look at how you can use habit stacking in your own morning routine.

HOW TO CREATE A MORNING ROUTINE

First, choose the habit you want. Second, use what's called an implementation intention. This is when you specify which habit you're going to use as a trigger for your new habit.

Complete the following sentence:

IMPLEMENTATION INTENTION

AFTER I [EXISTING HABIT], I WILL [NEW HABIT].

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Consider the following examples:

- *After I wake up, I will say one thing I'm grateful for.*
- *After I turn on my coffee machine, I will do one push up.*
- *After I put in my contact lenses, I will meditate for one minute.*

Don't forget to write down your answer and put it somewhere you'll see it every morning. Think of it as an

instruction to follow. Remember: if you don't commit to something, you'll be distracted by everything.

CONCLUSION

There's no *right* way to build a morning routine. Do what works for you. Experiment. But the governing principle is: if you want to change your morning routine effectively, change one thing at a time.

Choose the habit you want, make it super simple to do and make it automatic by practicing every day. Repeat this process over and over again until you have a string of habits.

Steve Scott is right: "Little hinges swing big doors".

CHAPTER 5

4 RESEARCH-BASED WAYS TO MAKE NEW HABITS STICK

WE ALL KNOW change is hard.

If you want to achieve your goals, you have to learn how to delay gratification, step out of your comfort zone and overcome resistance to change.

But what's harder is making change stick.

Ignoring *that* website. Keeping the pounds off. Saying no to a cigarette. That's the *real* challenge.

Or is it?

BEHAVIOUR BY DESIGN

If you're a regular reader, you'll know I write a lot about behaviour change, but the question is, how do you make change stick?

Simple: You make your habits *super simple* to do.

In one study, university students only got vaccinated *after* they had been given a map to the campus' health centre. That one "little thing" made a big difference in their behaviour; it was their Tipping Point.

There are four "little things" that can make a big difference when making new habits stick.

These are how you *prime* yourself to act differently, the *defaults* you set up, the *commitments* you make, and the *norms* of those you surround yourself with. [9]

Let's discuss each in detail.

1. PRIMING

Our habits are often influenced by unconscious cues. If there's a candy bar in plain sight in your refrigerator, you're primed to eat it.

Companies are constantly nudging and priming us into buying their goods and services.

In one study, supermarket customers had their selections influenced by stereotypical French and German music. When French music was played, French wine outsold German wine, and when German music was played, sales reversed. [10]

You can prime behaviours you want by redesigning your environment. If you become a Choice Architect, you can make desired behaviours super simple to do by decreasing the number of required steps and undesired behaviours hard to do.

Example: If you want to stay hydrated, leave bottles of water around your house.

2. DEFAULTS

We tend to be pretty lazy when it comes to decision-making and usually contend to do whatever is the present option.

Given a choice between ordering a take away and preparing a healthy meal, fast food trumps fresh salad because it's *easier*.

A lot of us “go with the flow” because the easier the choice, the easier it becomes our default.

Defaults are used for organ donations. When countries use “opt out” systems, organ donor rates increase. [11]

“Defaults are passive commitments”, writes Paul Dolan, author of *Happiness by Design*, “you rarely notice them”. This is because seldom do we consciously decide what our defaults are going to be. [12]

To make new habits stick, you need to make small adjustments to your life so “going with the flow” is consistent with your new behaviour.

Example: Sick of social media? Un-tick the “Remember my password” box on your browser.

3. COMMITMENTS

Good follow through depends on more than the right intentions; it depends on the right incentives.

And nothing incentivises us like public accountability.

Like the Hawthorne employees, when observed, we work harder to achieve our goals.

You want to be consistent with your public promise, right?

Then get accountable.

Set a goal where you have some degree of control over the outcome, such as your physical health or running a half marathon, and commit to ONE change.

Remember: Baby steps are more effective than big leaps and they become a lot easier with practice.

Example: If you want to lose 14 pounds, commit to ONE push-up, every day, for the next 30 days and ask a friend to hold you accountable.

4. SOCIAL NORMS

Jim Rohn once said, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with”.

Whether we like to admit it or not, we are strongly influenced by what others do.

This is understandable: we learn from the experiences of other people and trust their judgements because they have information about experiences we don't.

However, what is important is *whom* we choose to spend our time with.

Going against the grain is hard, but it's even harder when we're going against it alone.

So to make change stick, associate with people who support your goal and are rooting for you.

Example: If you want to learn how to improve your culinary skills, join a cooking class.

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS

If you want to change effectively, you need to apply all of them. Let's look at how we can do that using a popular example: Exercising regularly.

Priming: Pack your gym bag and leave it where you'll see it every day.

Defaults: Have scheduled days for when you exercise so you don't have to plan when to "fit it in".

Commitments: Find an accountability partner and introduce stakes in the event you miss a workout.

Social Norms: Go with a friend who has the same goal as you and go on the default days you decided on.

A FINAL WORD

By using priming, defaults, commitments, and norms, you can design new habits and commit to them without actually having to think about them.

You can then save your attentional energy for where you really need to pay attention, like overcoming obstacles and changing other behaviours.

CHAPTER 6

THIS SIMPLE EQUATION REVEALS HOW TO BREAK BAD HABITS

FROM NAIL BITING to oversleeping: we all have bad habits.

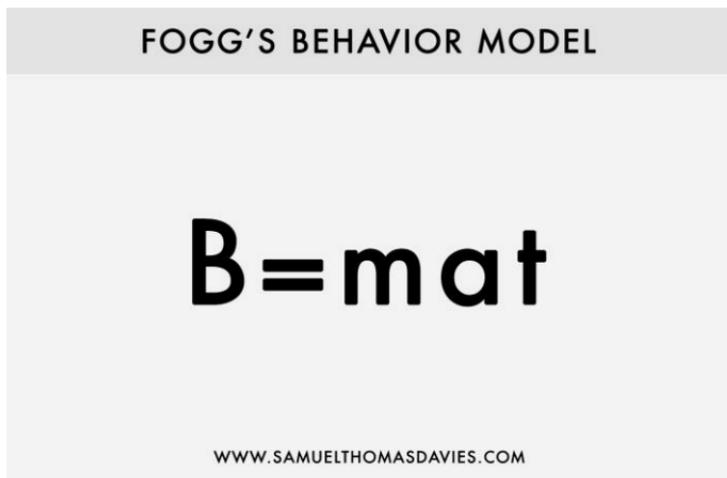
And while some people seem to kick their bad habits overnight, many of us give up at the first sign of setback.

The fact is breaking bad habits isn't necessarily easy or quick, but it is possible – once you understand how behaviors work...

FOGG'S BEHAVIOR MODEL

In 2009, Dr. BJ Fogg, a psychologist at Stanford University, published a paper that presented a new

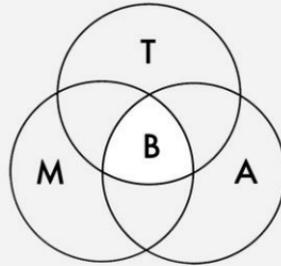
model for understanding human behavior: Fogg's Behavior Model. [13]



According to Fogg, in order for a behavior to occur, three elements have to converge at the same time:

1. Motivation
2. Ability
3. Trigger

FOGG'S BEHAVIOR MODEL



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Let's use checking Facebook as an example. First, there's a cue that *triggers* the behavior (e.g. you receive a notification). Second, you have a *motivation* to view it (e.g. there's a need to close the curiosity gap, "What could this be?"). And finally, if you are available (e.g. you're not driving), you have an *ability* to view it. Your craving is satisfied and you complete The Habit Loop. [14]

But here's where it gets interesting: If you remove your *ability* to do a bad habit, the behavior doesn't occur. You

can be motivated to binge eat, procrastinate, surf online, watch television etc. as much as you want, but if you are *unable* to do the habit, there's an opportunity to replace it with a better one.

Let's look at how we apply this to the habits of our everyday lives.

ENVIRONMENT SHAPES BEHAVIOR

“Decision makers do not make choices in a vacuum”, writes Richard Thaler in his book *Nudge*, “They make them in an environment where many features, noticed and unnoticed, can influence their decisions”. [15]

The reality is **we can be greatly influenced by small changes in the environment**, and it's our responsibility to redesign our environment in such a way that is removes our *ability* to do bad habits.

Consider the following examples:

- **Binge eating.** Stop buying foods you like to binge on. If you *must* have it (e.g. you have

children) put it on the highest shelf in your house (hat tip to BJ Fogg).

- **Oversleeping.** Buy an analogue alarm clock (one without a snooze function) and make your bed *immediately* after getting up.
- **Overspending.** Leave your card at home and switch to a cash-only envelope budgeting system.
- **Procrastination.** Install a plugin for your web browser like StayFocused or Self-Control.
- **Smoking.** Throw away all of your cigarettes, lighters, ashtrays, and matches.

Granted, you'll still have triggers and you'll still have motivation – and if you really, *really* want to do it, you will – but most of the time, a replacement routine (like a Mini-Habit) will suffice. You will, in essence, be “designing for inconvenience”.

CONCLUSION

The governing principle is this: increase the number of steps needed to do bad habits, decrease the number of steps needed to do good habits. “Simplicity changes behavior” says Fogg, so make your replacement routine as easy to do as possible.

You don’t need to get motivated; you just need to commit to what you want.

CHAPTER 7

HOW TO CHANGE UNDESIRED BEHAVIORS USING FEEDBACK LOOPS

SPEEDING IS THE greatest cause of death and injuries on our roads.

For years, drivers in San Diego ignored the speed signs that told them to slow down.

As they transitioned from 65 mph on the San Diego Freeway to 45 mph on the main commercial streets and 30 mph in school zones and residential neighbourhoods, they held their speed.

“Nothing worked to decrease their speeding”, writes Marshall Goldsmith, author of *Triggers: Sparking*

Positive Change and Making It Last, “not even a greater police ticketing presence”. [16]

That is until officials installed radar speed displays (RSDs): a speed limit sign posted above a digital readout measuring, “Your speed”.

Radar speed displays – also known as driver feedback systems – work because they harness a well-established concept in behaviour change: *feedback loops*.

RSDs measure a driver’s action (that is, speeding) and relay the information back to the driver in real time, causing the driver to react.

This is a loop of action, information and reaction.

When the reaction is measured, a new loop begins, and so on and so on.

Studies have found that speed limit compliance increases between 30 and 60 percent with RSDs, and the effect lasts with drivers for several miles beyond the RSD...

San Diego was no exception.

Let's look at how feedback loops work and how we can use them to change undesired behaviors.

HOW FEEDBACK LOOPS WORK

“Feedback”, writes Goldsmith, “is our first step in becoming smarter and more mindful about the connection between our environment and our behaviour”.

A feedback loop comprises four stages:

1. Evidence
2. Relevance
3. Consequence
4. Action

Once you recognise this, it's easy to see why the radar speed display's use of the loop works so well.

Here's how it works:

Evidence: A driver receives information about their speed in real time.

Relevance: The information rivets their attention because it's combined with the signed speed limit and informs them of whether they're obeying or disobeying the law.

Consequence: Aware that they're speeding, they fear getting a speeding ticket or hurting someone.

Action: They slow down.

The reality is feedback loops are *immensely* useful in helping us change unwanted behaviours, once we understand how we can apply them...

HOW YOU CAN USE FEEDBACK LOOPS

Sometimes we have difficulty closing loops. An obese person *knows* they're overweight and the evidence is more than relevant.

But until they know what will happen if they *don't* change – say, lose a limb from diabetes (consequence) – they won't do something about it (action).

Here are a few more examples:

Entrepreneurship: Your business is not generating revenue (evidence). Your accountant (relevance) informs you that if you don't make time and get the right things done, you'll go bankrupt (consequence). You delegate the unessential (action).

Studying: You get an F on a paper (evidence). Your professor (relevance) warns you that if you get one more F, you'll fail her class (consequence). You study harder (action).

Relationships: You lose your temper with your wife (evidence). Your spouse (relevance) informs you that it's one time too many and if it happens again, she'll file for divorce (consequence). You attend an anger management class (action).

Once you understand your loop, you can run it again and again. The previous action will lead to a new action and so on until you nudge yourself closer towards your goal.

CONCLUSION

By deconstructing feedback into its four stages of evidence, relevance, consequence and action, we can trigger positive behaviours and more importantly – make them last.

CHAPTER 8

THE EASY THING VS. THE RIGHT THING: WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?

ONE OF THE most common, yet highly unrecognised sticking points in behaviour change is *isolating incidents*.

In his book, *The Miracle Morning: The Not-So-Obvious Secret Guaranteed to Transform Your Life (Before 8AM)*, Hal Elrod writes,

We mistakenly assume that each choice we make, and each individual action we make, is only affecting that particular moment, or circumstance. [17]

But it isn't. The workout we skip. The project we procrastinate on. The meeting we cancel. They're all *marginal losses*. They compound, and while they're imperceptible and inconsequential to us today, one day, we'll have no choice but to take notice.

The choice to say yes to comfort and no to stretching yourself affects more than one incident: it becomes a cause set in motion, a reason to perpetuate unwanted behaviour again and again.

Ultimately, you have a choice between...

THE EASY THING AND THE RIGHT THING

“Every time you choose to do the easy thing, instead of the right thing, you are shaping your identity”, writes Elrod, “[you’re] becoming the type of person who does what’s easy, rather than what’s right”.

If you want to move towards where you want to be, you need to do what’s right. This is how self-discipline is

built. You make time and lay one brick at a time – especially when you don't feel like it.

Take waking up for example. When the alarm clock goes off, you have a choice: you can either hit the snooze button and go back to sleep (the easy thing) or you can do something different. You can get out of bed and achieve your goals, exercise, meditate, read, etc. (the right thing).

HOW TO MINIMISE ISOLATING INCIDENTS

To stop isolating incidents, we must look beyond immediate gratification and see the big picture.

Remember: everything we do today affects who we become tomorrow.

This is what directly determines the quality of our lives.

Here's how you can minimise isolating incidents...

1. Have a “To Stop” list. In his book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, Marshall Goldsmith recommends replacing a traditional “To Do” list with a “To Stop” list. Identify what behaviour you want to stop and commit to doing the right thing instead.

2. Decide the type of person you want to be. Do you want to be the type of person who sets and achieves goals? Builds discipline? Says no to the unessential? When you know the type of person you want to become, you don't take isolating incidents lightly. Yes, you still feel tempted to binge eat, surf online and bite your fingernails, but you don't yield to them. You remind yourself they're not the behaviours of the type of person you're becoming.

3. Identify your Why. But it isn't as simple as deciding the type of person you want to become, is it? That's why you must identify your Why. Why do you want to lose 14 pounds? Run a half marathon? Start a business? You want to do it because of how it will make you feel. Know your why and the how will follow.

Don't do the easy thing; do the right thing.

CHAPTER 9

THE DAILY QUESTIONS: HOW TO GET AHEAD IN LIFE AND WORK

ASKING ACTIVE QUESTIONS changes everything.

Simple, yet misunderstood, active questions can change our behaviour because they reveal where we are succeeding and where we need further improvement.

And in doing so, they redirect our focus on what we can actually change.

THE DAILY QUESTIONS

In his book, *Triggers: Sparking Positive Change and Making It Last*, Marshall Goldsmith outlines six active

questions that fully engage us in life and work. He calls these, “The Daily Questions”.

There are six daily questions in total. Let’s look at each in detail.

1. Did I Do My Best to Set Clear Goals Today?

Concrete goals help us specify *precisely* what we’re moving toward.

As Goldsmith writes,

If you don’t have clear goals and ask yourself, ‘Am I fully engaged?’ the obvious follow-up is, ‘Engaged to do what?’ [18]

If you don’t commit to *something*, you’ll be distracted by *everything*. Are you doing the easy thing or the right thing?

2. Did I Do My Best to Make Progress Toward My Goals Today?

In her book, *The Progress Principle*, Teresa Amabile writes,

Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. [19]

Setting big, hairy, audacious goals isn't enough: we need to see ourselves moving from where we are to where we want to be as well.

Focus on your Next Play and remember: success is a process, not a destination.

3. Did I Do My Best to Find Meaning Today?

Finding meaning and purpose improves our lives. And it's up to us, not anyone or anything else, to provide meaning.

You can find meaning in *anything* you're doing. Yes, even doing the dishes: it's an opportunity to build self-discipline.

4. Did I Do My Best to Be Happy Today?

If your work is meaningful but you're still unhappy in other areas of your life, you're going to feel unfulfilled.

And although we're able to forecast our future emotional states (i.e. what we *think* will make us happy), we're unable to estimate them *correctly*. [20]

Remember: happiness is a *choice*. And it's your responsibly to *choose* what makes you happy. You don't need to wait; you can *decide* to be happy, now.

5. Did I Do My Best to Build Positive Relationships Today?

Relationships need nurturing. Not only online, but in person, so when we're in good company, we must be actively engaged.

Jim Rohn once said, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with”. Are you spending your time with the right people?

If not, reconsider your social circle. Brainstorm positive people in your life, in person or online, and contact them. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

6. Did I Do My Best to Be Fully Engaged Today?

To increase our level of engagement, we must ask ourselves if we’re doing our best to be engaged.

You’ll be more engaged at work and with your children/friends/spouse if you *consciously* try to be more engaged and count the right things.

Actively listening to your friend instead of checking your mobile phone, reading to your children without thinking about the email you haven’t replied to, asking your spouse how her day was instead of assuming, etc. These are the things we must concern ourselves with.

IN PRACTICE

The Daily Questions are immensely useful for three reasons:

1. They help us identify what we really want, not what we *think* we want.
2. They motivate us in areas where we need it, not where we don't.
3. They shrink our goals into manageable and achievable “chunks”.

I journal my answers every evening before bed, but you can combine yours with an existing habit like brushing your teeth or flossing.

They're easy to do and take less than 30 seconds to answer – so make time for them. You'll be amazed what you learn from your answers.

By asking The Daily Questions, we remind ourselves we're not victims of circumstance after all: we are in control of our lives.

CHAPTER 10

THE MYTH OF THE FINISH LINE (OR WHY YOU SHOULD TAKE OFF YOUR WATCH)

A COMMON QUESTION I'm asked is, "How long does it take to form a new habit?"

And while research shows it takes on average 66 days to successfully form a new habit, there's no conclusive answer. [21]

But instead of asking, "How long?" perhaps we should be asking, "How long *before*?"

How long *before* we stop counting?

“TAKE OFF YOUR WATCH”

There’s an old saying that goes, “You are what you count”.

The question is: are you counting the *right* things?

Your answer will depend on what you believe, but if you’re like most people, you’ll believe counting days is important.

How many days you’ve abstained from a temptation.
How many days you’ve shown up and done the work.
How many days you have left. And so on.

“If I commit to reading for 21 days, then it’ll become a habit”.

Not necessarily.

Contrary to popular belief, achieving a 21, 28 or 30-day goal will *not* strengthen a habit or encourage you to continue in the long-term, in fact, it will *deter* you.

In her new book, *Better Than Before: Mastering the*

Habits of Our Everyday Lives, Gretchen Rubin writes:

Setting a finish line does indeed help people reach a specific, one-time goal, but although it's widely assumed to help habit formation, the reward of hitting a finish line can actually *undermine* habits. [22]

This is because crossing a finish line marks *the end*.

And once we stop, we must start over, and *starting over is harder than continuing*.

“The more dramatic the goal, the more decisive the end”, writes Rubin, “and the more effort required to start over”.

Once we achieve our goal, we can sometimes stop moving forward. As Andy Grove, once said, “Success breeds complacency”.

The real challenge, therefore, is *after* we succeed.

This is the myth of the finish line: in behaviour change,

there is no finish line.

Changing our habits in the long-term is more than refraining from a guilty pleasure or putting in the hours for an arbitrary number of days. The aim is to adopt a habit *forever*.

If you know someone who has successfully mastered a habit, you can be certain it's because they *took off their watch*. They didn't "clock out"; they decided they were in it for the long haul.

In other words, *they stopped counting*.

REACHES AND REPETITIONS

Transforming our habits is a skill.

And, like any skill, we must practice if we are to improve.

But practice doesn't make perfect; *deep* practice does.

"Deep practice is not measured in minutes or hours, but in the number of high-quality reaches and repetitions

you make”, writes Daniel Coyle in *The Little Book of Talent*, “basically, how many new connections you form in your brain”. [23]

If you must count *something*, count the *right* things.

Instead of counting days or weeks, count *reaches and reps*.

Reaching is when you stretch yourself slightly beyond your current ability and spend time in the zone of difficulty called *the sweet spot*.

Coyle writes,

[Reaching] means embracing the power of repetition, so the action becomes fast and automatic. It means creating a practice space that enables you to reach and repeat, stay engaged, and improve your skills over time.

Examples...

- Instead of saying, “I’m going to meditate for

21-days” tell yourself, “I’m going to meditate for one *uninterrupted* minute.”

- Instead of planning to write a blog post every day for a month, plan to write twenty-five quality sentences.
- Instead of studying a language for an hour, make flash cards and grade yourself on your efforts.

Ignore the calendar and focus on the details, even if it’s only for a few minutes, and measure your progress by what counts: reaches and reps.

Take off your watch and start counting the *right* things.

CHAPTER 11

THE NEXT PLAY: HOW TO FOCUS ON THE PROCESS INSTEAD OF THE OUTCOME

ON MARCH 4, 2006, with back-to-back conference losses against Florida State and North Carolina, the Duke Blue Devils had just come off two of the worst weeks of basketball that they had played all year.

The Devils were distracted and coach Mike Krzyzewski and his staff needed to find an impactful way to emphasize their collective need to move on.

They needed to know their “next play”.

THE NEXT PLAY

In basketball and life, Mike Krzyzewski has always maintained the philosophy of next play.

In *Beyond Basketball: Coach K's Keywords for Success*, Krzyzewski writes, “Essentially, what it means is that whatever you have just done is not nearly as important as what you are doing right now”. [24]

Krzyzewski explains:

It is not about the turnover I committed last time down the court, it's not even about the three-pointer I hit to tie the game, it is about what's next.

The players who ruminate a mistake or celebrate a success aren't present. They are ill-prepared and can't overcome their next obstacle because their attention is elsewhere.

To be fully engaged, then, is to concern yourself with the next play, as Krzyzewski writes:

If we work together to focus on this next play, we will all feel good that we have addressed the problem and not merely bemoaned what we should or could have done in the past.

And “work together”, is exactly what Krzyzewski and his players did.

THE COMEBACK

The first part of their plan to bounce back was to change venues, to get out of the locker room and the gym, and meet somewhere comfortable, intimate, and, more importantly, different.

They scheduled their team meal and meeting in one of the banquet rooms at the nearby Washington Duke Inn and after their meal, they conducted a thorough analysis of the tape of their last game against North Carolina.

They got out a chalkboard and created two columns: good plays and bad plays. The motivation behind this

was that they needed to get a really good look at who they were as a team at that particular time.

Once they finished reviewing the tape, Krzyzewski brought in two large cardboard boxes, one labelled “Preseason NIT”, and the other “Regular Season”.

He told his team that they were going to fill the boxes with everything that had come before that moment in time.

At the beginning of the season, their team had won the NIT championship. So in that box they put the trophy from that tournament, all tournament team and MVP plaques of their individual players, and the tapes of the games.

In the “Regular Season” box, they did the same, filling it with scouting reports and games tapes from their regular season games.

Coach K then asked each member of the team to write down on a piece of paper anything that they wanted to include: memories and frustrations from the season to

that point, individual honours they had received and anything else that they felt should be included relating to their personal experiences of the season.

The personal statements were sealed in envelopes marked with each player's name and placed in the box.

Krzyzewski addressed his players:

Okay, when we close these boxes, we are 0-0. We have had a great season to this point and have many things to be proud of. But that is not for right now. At the end of our season, we will open these boxes, return your envelopes to each of you, and collectively remember and recognise all that we have done together. But for right now, it's on to the next play.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT PLAY?

Everyone has done things they're ashamed of, embarrassed about and haunted by. These are things we "should have" or "should not have" done. Things like:

- "I should have listened".
- "I should have called her when I had a chance".
- "I should have known better".
- "I should not have eaten that meal".
- "I should not have done that".
- "I should not have argued with him".

Retrospection is a valuable tool; if we learn from our wrongdoings, we're unlikely to repeat them and by doing so, safeguard our future. But if we repeatedly chastise ourselves for what we did or did not do, we miss the next opportunity, the next play.

The next play reminds us to focus on the process, the journey, what's most important, now. Not the outcome.

Consider the following:

Dieting: If you cheated on your diet plan, forgive yourself, brainstorm why you “failed” and learn from it by having an instructional plan. The next play is your next meal.

Creativity: Don’t worry about your book not selling. If you build it, they *might* come – if you build a platform and commit to regularly “showing up”. The next play is your next book.

Entrepreneurship: So your business “failed”. So what. Businesses fail. That doesn’t mean you failed and you are a failure. Successful businesses don’t solve any old problem; they solve the *right* problem. Find the right problem and solve it like Jeff Weiner did. The next play is your next business.

THE RESULT

On March 23, 2006, the Duke Blue Devils defeated the Louisiana State University Tigers and won the ACC tournament.

This was a ground-breaking accomplishment, especially considering, at the time, only five teams in the past twenty years had won both the regular season championship and the ACC Tournament championship.

The past does not equal the future. Your details create success.

“Next play”.

CHAPTER 12

HABITS AREN'T ENOUGH. YOU NEED THIS AS WELL

JIM ROHN ONCE said, “Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going”.

And while habit is what keeps you going, it isn't always enough to keep you going *indefinitely*.

Allow me explain.

THE SEQUENCE OF A NEW BEHAVIOUR

You have a goal. You want to lose 14 pounds. Run a marathon. Write a non-fiction book. Start a business. Etc. And in order to achieve that goal, you need *motivation*. Without it, you can't start.

But motivation is not reliable; it ebbs and flows depending on your emotional state and if you're "not in the mood", you can excuse yourself from doing what you need to do.

So perhaps you incentivise yourself to do your new behaviour instead, which, in turn, motivates you again and again. "If I do X, I receive Y".

This is understandable: in the beginning, it's painful and *not* doing it is easier. You have to buffer resistance by rewarding yourself for taking action, especially when you don't want to.

If you're *really* committed, you'll study the science of behaviour change, in particular, habit formation, and identify a cue to trigger your new behaviour.

You make your desired behaviour a *habit*.

To achieve a goal, you need to build a system; one you constantly and never-endingly improve. If you "systemise" behaviours like dieting, writing and prospecting as habitual behaviours – in other words,

make them automatic – you’re going to slim down, finish your manuscript and have clients.

But only for so long...

THE POWER OF HABIT

Books like Charles Duhigg’s *The Power of Habit* and Jeremy Dean’s *Making Habits, Breaking Habits* have popularised behaviour change. They motivate us because they have introduced us to research-based strategies that work. We can implement these strategies immediately and see the results for ourselves. Granted, change is hard, but it’s never been easier to flip the switch.

The problem, however, is we have become hooked on habits. Yes, habituating behaviours is easier and doing so helps us achieve our goals. I for one have written about them at length and I certainly owe a lot of my success to changing my habits.

But what I’ve come to realise is we can become dependent on them. We believe, like an operator, we can

turn our autopilot on, sit back and relax, and be left to our own devices.

The reality is we can't; even though behaviours become automatic, that doesn't mean they no longer require conscious thought. You still need to be engaged while you're doing them.

So here's the rub: motivation is what gets you started and habit is what keeps you going, but *discipline* is what takes you above and beyond.

THE PROBLEM WITH HABIT

As we have learned in previous chapters, at the core of every habit is the same neurological loop called The Habit Loop.

There's a cue: a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. There's a routine, which is the behaviour itself. This can be an emotional, mental or physical behaviour. And there's a reward: the reason you're motivated to do the behaviour

and also, a way your brain can encode the behaviour in your neurology if it's a repeated behaviour. [25]

However, when we become dependent on cues – and especially ones that are outside our control – we risk forgoing behaviours that are essential in helping us achieving our goals.

Discipline, however, become a behaviour you *must* do; cues or no cues, you do it.

Consider the following examples:

Example 1. The habit is waking up at 06:00 every weekday. Your alarm clock sounds [CUE] and you wake up [ROUTINE]. The discipline is not pressing the snooze button, regardless of how groggy you are.

Example 2. The habit is writing 750 words every day. You open your laptop [CUE] and you write [ROUTINE]. But you receive a phone call from a friend asking you for a favour: he needs you to pick him up from the airport. The discipline is writing as soon as you return home. No excuses.

Example 3. The habit is eating healthily. You're at a restaurant and you're asked to place your order [CUE], your meal arrives and you eat [ROUTINE]. But one day you're in company and everyone orders dessert. The discipline is saying no, regardless of pressure from your peers to say yes.

To be disciplined, you must essentialise your ONE Habit. You don't rely on habitual cues. You do it because you choose to; your "shoulds" become "musts". You have emotional clarity. You think rationally about your impulses, rather than respond to them irrationally and emotionally.

If we are to change our behaviours, indefinitely, we need discipline.

The question is: why is discipline so hard to practice in the first place?

SELF-CRITICISM VS. SELF-COMPASSION

The word discipline has a negative denotation. Have you ever looked it up? Here's a definition:

The practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using *punishment* to correct disobedience (italics added for emphasis). [26]

If we train ourselves to obey rules or a code of behaviour – say, running every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday – do we need to punish ourselves to correct disobedience?

Absolutely not, in fact, research in self-compassion studies – including one published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* – found people who self-criticise and self-punish were *less* motivated to change. [27]

Kristin Neff, a pioneer in the field, said:

“I found in my research that the biggest reason people aren’t more self-compassionate is that they are afraid they’ll become self-indulgent. They believe self-criticism is what keeps them in line. Most people have gotten it wrong because our culture says being hard on yourself is the way to be.” [28]

Our culture is wrong.

Discipline isn’t something we should be afraid of; it’s something we should strive for. As Stephen R. Covey said, “The undisciplined are slaves to moods, appetites and passions”.

So, with that said, let’s break the chains that bind.

Let’s get disciplined.

HOW TO GET DISCIPLINED

To become disciplined, we must delay gratification. Understand: pain is unavoidable. You have a choice: either you can experience short-term pain and long-term pleasure from delaying gratification, or short-term pleasure and long-term pain from experiencing immediate gratification.

A lot of people err on the side of immediate gratification. Don't be one of them.

There are lots of ways to build discipline. Here are three of my favourite ways. You can start, now.

1. Self-Assessment. You must identify where you need discipline and perhaps more importantly, why. To quote Nietzsche, "He who has a strong enough why can bear almost any how". The Focusing Question and essentializing your ONE Thing will help you achieve this. Learn what's causing you resistance and buffer it, immediately.

2. Self-Awareness. Understand *why* you fail. The blame isn't on you; it's on your strategy. Do you know why we fail to break bad habits? Simple: we overestimate our ability to control our impulsive behaviours and say no. Change your strategy. Become a Choice Architect and eliminate anything that will distract you. Remember: "Out of sight, out of mind".

3. Self-Celebration. A minor tweak in an old institutional habit was a small-win for the LGBT Community – but it changed *everything*. Celebrate your small-wins every day. Congratulate yourself for not pressing the snooze button, for saying no to dessert and for not checking your Facebook before studying. And, while you're at it, celebrate your failures as well. Congratulations: you now have a learning opportunity. Remember: asserting discipline is hard, so reward your efforts.

In closing, when you feel weak – and it will happen – do something different; anything that will change your behaviour. Focus on your breathing. Do one pushup.

Stand on one leg. Do *something*.

A FINAL WORD

If you want to change a behaviour in the long-term, you need motivation to start. And, as Leo Babauta says, “You need to make it so easy you can’t say no”. With regularity, it will become a habit, but, with consistency, it will become a *discipline*. An example of who you are, not what you do. The responsibility no longer falls on environmental cues; it falls on you. You do it because you must. You do it because you’re disciplined.

Rohn also said, “Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment”. Laziness burns that bridge. Discipline is always less painful than regret. You can do it. You can do it now.

CHAPTER 13

THIS IS NOT THE END

IF YOU ARE reading this, congratulations! You're one of the few who finishes book versus the many who don't.

We've discussed a lot of strategies in this book so before we wrap up, let's review.

You've learned how to get motivated when you're not in the mood, how habits work, and how to build a morning routine by habit stacking.

You've learned how to break bad habits by removing your ability to do them, how to fully engage yourself in life and work by asking yourself The Daily Questions, and how to focus on the process instead of the outcome.

You've been presented with a lot of information here but the truth is information does not lead to action.

Knowledge is not power; knowledge *and* application is. I invite you to put at least ONE of these strategies into practice and pay attention to what happens. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

If you've enjoyed my book, you'll love my weekly newsletter. Every Monday and Thursday, I email readers a new article on how to improve habits, add new skills and sustain excellence.

If you'd like to become a part of our community, click [here](#).

The ideas I've introduced you to in *Unhooked* have radically changed my life.

I hope they can change yours too.

LIKE WHAT YOU READ?

I GIVE 90 percent of my work away for free (i.e. this book, my weekly articles, and so on).

The other 10 percent of my work is focused on creating products that are practical and enlightening. The first product you should know about is called The Habit Masterclass.

The Habit Masterclass is my best-selling online class on how to develop good habits, overcome procrastination and make change stick. You'll learn how to bend habits to your will, overcome obstacles, maintain progress, and much more.

[Click here to learn more about The Habit Masterclass.](#)

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