

Atomic Habits (Clear, James)

What made him different from previous coaches was his relentless commitment to a strategy that he referred to as “the aggregation of marginal gains,” which was the philosophy of searching for a tiny margin of improvement in everything you do.

Too often, we convince ourselves that massive success requires massive action.

Meanwhile, improving by 1 percent isn’t particularly notable—sometimes it isn’t even noticeable—but it can be far more meaningful, especially in the long run.

We make a few changes, but the results never seem to come quickly and so we slide back into our previous

Success is the product of daily habits—not once-in-a-lifetime transformations.

But in order to make a meaningful difference, habits need to persist long enough to break through this plateau—what I call the Plateau of Latent Potential

Mastery requires patience. The San Antonio Spurs, one of the most successful teams in NBA history, have a quote from social reformer Jacob Riis hanging in their locker room: “When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonemason hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that last blow that did it—but all that had gone before.”

Problem #1: Winners and losers have the same goals.

Achieving a goal only changes your life for the moment.

We think we need to change our results, but the results are not the problem. What we really need to change are the systems that cause those results.

Problem #3: Goals restrict your happiness.

The implicit assumption behind any goal is this: “Once I reach my goal, then I’ll be happy.” The problem with a goals-first mentality is that you’re continually putting happiness off until the next milestone.

Furthermore, goals create an “either-or” conflict: either you achieve your goal and are successful or you fail and you are a disappointment. You mentally box yourself into a narrow version of happiness.

When you fall in love with the process rather than the product, you don’t have to wait to give yourself permission to be happy. You can be satisfied anytime your system is running.

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

Many runners work hard for months, but as soon as they cross the finish line, they stop training. The race is no longer there to motivate them. When all of your hard work is focused on a particular goal, what is left to push you forward after you achieve it? This is why many people find themselves reverting to their old habits after accomplishing a goal.

Ultimately, it is your commitment to the process that will determine your progress.

Small changes often appear to make no difference until you cross a critical threshold. The most powerful outcomes of any compounding process are delayed. You need to be patient.

They set goals and determine the actions they should take to achieve those goals without considering the beliefs that drive their actions. They never shift the way they look at themselves, and they don’t realize that their old identity can sabotage their new plans for change.

You may want better health, but if you continue to prioritize comfort over accomplishment, you’ll be drawn to relaxing rather than training.

Behavior that is incongruent with the self will not last.

It's hard to change your habits if you never change the underlying beliefs that led to your past behavior. You have a new goal and a new plan, but you haven't changed who you are.

The ultimate form of intrinsic motivation is when a habit becomes part of your identity. It's one thing to say I'm the type of person who wants this. It's something very different to say I'm the type of person who is this.

True behavior change is identity change. You might start a habit because of motivation, but the only reason you'll stick with one is that it becomes part of your identity.

Improvements are only 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 to become a runner.

Similarly, the person who incorporates exercise into their identity doesn't have to convince themselves to train. Doing the right thing is easy. After all, when your behavior and your identity are fully aligned, you are no longer pursuing behavior change. You are simply acting like the type of person you already believe yourself to be.

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. In time, you begin to resist certain actions because "that's not who I am." There is internal pressure to maintain your self-image and behave in a way that is consistent with your beliefs. You find whatever way you can to avoid contradicting yourself.

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Becoming the best version of yourself requires you to continuously edit your beliefs, and to upgrade and expand your identity.

If you go to the 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.

Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become.

No single instance will transform your beliefs, but as the votes build up, so does the evidence of your new identity.

Small habits can make a meaningful difference by providing evidence of a new identity.

The most practical way to change who you are is to change what you do.

Each time you start a workout, you are an athlete. Each time you encourage your employees, you are a leader.

Of course, it works the opposite way, too. Every time you choose to perform a bad habit, it's a vote for that identity.

It doesn't matter if you cast a few votes for a bad behavior or an unproductive habit. Your goal is simply to win the majority of the time.

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Decide the type of person you want to be. Prove it to yourself with small wins.

Start there and work backward from the results you want to the type of person who could get those results.

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The focus should always be on becoming that type of person, not getting a particular outcome.

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.

Laws of Behavior Change apply to nearly every field, from sports to politics, art to medicine, comedy to management. These laws can be used no matter what challenge you are facing. There is no need for completely different strategies for each habit. Whenever

Whenever you want to change your behavior, you can simply ask yourself: How can I make it obvious? How can I make it attractive? How can I make it easy? How can I make it satisfying?

The sentence they filled out is what researchers refer to as an implementation intention, which is a plan you make beforehand about when and where to act. That is, how you intend to implement a particular habit.

Broadly speaking, the format for creating an implementation intention is: “When situation X arises, I will perform response Y.”

The punch line is clear: people who make a specific plan for when and where they will perform a new habit are more likely to follow through.

Too many people try to change their habits without these basic details figured out. We tell ourselves, “I’m going to eat healthier” or “I’m going to write more,” but we never say when and where these habits are going to happen.

An implementation intention sweeps away foggy notions like “I want to work out more” or “I want to be more productive” or “I should vote” and transforms them into a concrete plan of action.

When your dreams are vague, it’s easy to rationalize little exceptions all day long and never get around to the specific things you need to do to succeed.

You want to remember to send more thank-you notes, keep a stack of stationery on your desk.

If you want to make a habit a big part of your life, make the cue a big part of your environment

Once a soldier returned to the United States, though, he found himself in an environment devoid of those triggers. When the context changed, so did the habit. Compare this situation to that of a typical drug user. Someone becomes addicted at home or with friends, goes to a clinic to get clean—which is devoid of all the environmental stimuli that prompt their habit—then returns to their old neighborhood with all of their previous cues that caused them to get addicted in the first place.

Typically, 90 percent of heroin users become re-addicted once they return home from rehab.

Recent research, however, shows something different. When scientists analyze people who appear to have tremendous self-control, it turns out those individuals aren't all that different from those who are struggling. Instead, "disciplined" people are better at structuring their lives in a way that does not require heroic willpower and self-control.

A more reliable approach is to cut bad habits off at the source. One of the most practical ways to eliminate a bad habit is to 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. Instead of summoning a new dose of willpower whenever you want to do the right thing, your energy would be better spent optimizing your environment.

The more attractive an opportunity is, the more likely it is to become habit-forming.

If you want to increase the odds that a behavior will occur, then you need to make it attractive

When it comes to habits, the key takeaway is this: dopamine is released not only when you experience pleasure, but also when you anticipate it.

Whenever you predict that an opportunity will be rewarding, your levels of dopamine spike in anticipation. And whenever dopamine rises, so does your motivation to act. It is the anticipation of a reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action.

Temptation bundling works by linking an action you want to do with an action you need to do.

Named after the work of professor David Premack, the principle states that “more probable behaviors will reinforce less probable behaviors.”

As a result, one of the deepest human desires is to belong. And this ancient preference exerts a powerful influence on our modern behavior.

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. New habits seem achievable when you see others doing them every day. If you are surrounded by fit people, you’re more likely to consider working out to be a common habit.

We imitate the habits of three groups in particular: The close. The many. The powerful. Each group offers an opportunity to leverage the 2nd Law of Behavior Change and make our habits more attractive.

Surround yourself with people who have the habits you want to have yourself. You’ll rise together. To make your habits even more attractive, you can take this strategy one step further. Join a culture where (1) your desired behavior is the normal behavior and (2) you already have something in common with

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Nothing sustains motivation better than belonging to the tribe. It transforms a personal quest into a shared one. Previously, you were on your own. Your identity was singular. You are a reader. You are a musician. You are an athlete. When you join a book club or a band or a cycling group, your identity becomes linked to those around you.

The shared identity begins to reinforce your personal identity. This is why remaining part of a group after achieving a goal is crucial to maintaining your habits. It's friendship and community that embed a new identity and help behaviors last over the long run.

Humans are similar. There is tremendous internal pressure to comply with the norms of the group. The reward of being accepted is often greater than the reward of winning an argument, looking smart, or finding truth. Most days, we'd rather be wrong with the crowd than be right by ourselves.

Running against the grain of your culture requires extra effort.

When changing your habits means challenging the tribe, change is unattractive. When changing your habits means fitting in with the tribe, change is very attractive.

Once we fit in, we start looking for ways to stand out.

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 people we admire.

Whenever a habit successfully addresses a motive, you develop a craving to do it again.

Habits are attractive when we associate them with positive feelings, and we can use this insight to our advantage rather than to our detriment.

Now, imagine changing just one word: You don't "have" to. You "get" to. You get to wake up early for work. You get to make another sales call for your business. You get to cook dinner for your family. 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.

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."

It is easy to get bogged down trying to find the optimal plan for change: the fastest way to lose weight, the best program to build muscle, the perfect idea for a side hustle. We are so focused on figuring out the best approach that we never get around to taking action.

Only the action of working out will get the result you're looking to achieve.

If motion doesn't lead to results, why do we do it? Sometimes we do it because we actually need to plan or learn more. But more often than not, we do it

because motion allows us to feel like we're making progress without running the risk of failure.

Motion makes you feel like you're getting things done. But really, you're just preparing to get something done. When preparation becomes a form of procrastination, you need to change something. You don't want to merely be planning. You want to be practicing.

If you want to master a habit, the key is to start with repetition, not perfection.

Habit formation is the process by which a behavior becomes progressively more automatic through repetition. The more you repeat an activity, the more the structure of your brain changes to become efficient at that activity. Neuroscientists call this long-term potentiation, which refers to the strengthening of connections between neurons in the brain based on recent patterns of activity. With each repetition, cell-to-cell signaling improves and the neural connections tighten.

Both common sense and scientific evidence agree: repetition is a form of change.

This means that simply putting in your reps is one of the most critical steps you can take to encoding a new habit.

One of the most common questions I hear is, "How long does it take to build a new habit?" But what people really should be asking is, "How many does it take to form a new habit?" That is, 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 the actions you need to take to make progress. Whether an action is fully automatic is of less importance.

Out of all the possible actions we could take, the one that is realized is the one that delivers the most value for the least effort. We are motivated to do what is easy.

And the less energy a habit requires, the more likely it is to occur.

and watching television steal so much of our time because they can be performed almost without effort. They are remarkably convenient.

This is why it is crucial to make your habits so easy that you'll do them even when you don't feel like it.

If you can make your good habits more convenient, you'll be more likely to follow through on them.

Certainly, you are capable of doing very hard things. The problem is that some days you feel like doing the hard work and some days you feel like giving in. On the tough days, it's 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 behind make it easy is not to only do easy things. The idea is to make it as easy as possible in the moment to do things that payoff in the long run.

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 because stopping doesn't add much friction to your lifestyle. By comparison, if the gym is off the path of your normal commute—even by just a few blocks—now you're going “out of your way” to get there. Perhaps even more effective is reducing the friction within

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I like to refer to this strategy as addition by subtraction.* The Japanese companies looked for every point of friction in the manufacturing process and eliminated it.

Similarly, when we remove the points of friction that sap our time and energy, we can achieve more with less effort.

Like a Japanese television manufacturer redesigning their workspace to reduce wasted motion, successful companies design their products to automate, eliminate, or simplify as many steps as possible.

Whenever you organize a space for its intended purpose, you are priming it to make the next action easy.

A new habit should not feel like a challenge.

Two-Minute Rule, which states, “When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.”

What you want is a “gateway habit” that naturally leads you down a more productive path.

People often think it’s weird to get hyped about reading one page or meditating for one minute or making one sales call. 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.

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.

By doing the same warm-up before every workout, you make it easier to get into a state of peak performance. By following the same creative ritual, you make it easier to get into the hard work of creating.

If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it’s just for two minutes—you are casting votes for your new identity. You’re not worried about getting in shape. You’re focused on becoming the type of person who doesn’t miss workouts. You’re taking the smallest action that confirms the type of person you want to be.

The average person spends over two hours per day on social media. What could you do with an extra six hundred hours per year?)

Our preference for instant gratification reveals an important truth about success: because of how we are wired, most people will spend all day chasing quick hits of satisfaction. The road less traveled is the road of delayed gratification. If you’re

willing to wait for the rewards, you'll face less competition and often get a bigger payoff. As the saying goes, the last mile is always the least crowded.

Thankfully, it's possible to train yourself to delay gratification—but you need to work with the grain of human nature, not against it. The best way to do this is to add a little bit of immediate pleasure to the habits that pay off in the long-run and a little bit of immediate pain to ones that don't.

The feeling of success is a signal that your habit paid off and that the work was worth the effort.

In the beginning, you need a reason to stay on track. This is why immediate rewards are essential. They keep you excited while the delayed rewards accumulate in the background.

The ending of any experience 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.

Eventually, as intrinsic rewards like a better mood, more energy, and reduced stress kick in, you'll become less concerned with chasing the secondary reward. The identity itself becomes the reinforcer.

You do it because it's who you are and it feels good to be you. The more a habit becomes part of your life, the less you need outside encouragement to follow through.

Incentives can start a habit. Identity sustains a habit.

Immediate reinforcement helps maintain motivation in the short term while you're waiting for the long-term rewards to arrive.

As a result, they reinforce your behavior and add a little bit of immediate satisfaction to any activity. Visual measurement comes in many forms: food journals, workout logs, loyalty punch cards, the progress bar on a software download, even the page numbers in a book.

The mere act of tracking a behavior can spark the urge to change it.

When you look at the calendar and see your streak, you'll be reminded to act again.

Research has shown that people who track their progress on goals like losing weight, quitting smoking, and lowering blood pressure are all more likely to improve than those who don't.

Measurement offers one way to overcome our blindness to our own behavior and notice what's really going on each day.

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

This is the most crucial benefit of all. Tracking can become its own form of reward. It is satisfying to cross an item off your to-do list, to complete an entry in your workout log, or to mark an X on the calendar.

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

In summary, habit tracking (1) creates a visual cue that can remind you to act, (2) is inherently motivating because you see the progress you are making and don't want to lose it, and (3) feels satisfying whenever you record another successful instance of your habit.

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

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

Missing one workout happens, but I'm not going to miss two in a row.

I can't be perfect, but I can avoid a second lapse. As soon as one streak ends, I get started on the next one. The first mistake is never the one that ruins you. It is the spiral of repeated mistakes that follows. Missing once is an accident. Missing twice is the start of a new habit. This is a distinguishing feature between winners and losers. Anyone can have a bad performance, a bad workout, or a bad day at work. But when successful

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I think this principle is so important that I'll stick to it even if I can't do a habit as well or as completely as I would like. Too often, we fall into an all-or-nothing cycle with our habits. The problem is not slipping up; the problem is thinking that if you can't do something perfectly, then you shouldn't do it at all.

Lost days hurt you more than successful days help you.

You don't realize how valuable it is to just show up on your bad (or busy) days.

This is why the "bad" workouts are often the most important ones. Sluggish days and bad workouts maintain the compound gains you accrued from previous good days. Simply doing something—ten squats, five sprints, a push-up, anything really—is huge. Don't put up a zero. Don't let losses eat into your compounding.

Furthermore, it's not always about what happens during the workout. It's about being the type of person who doesn't miss workouts.

Going to the gym for five minutes may not improve your performance, but it reaffirms your identity.

This pitfall is evident in many areas of life. We focus on working long hours instead of getting meaningful work done. We care more about getting ten

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

Each number is simply one piece of feedback in the overall system.

All of this to say, it's crucial to keep habit tracking in its proper place. It can feel satisfying to record a habit and track your progress, but the measurement is not the only thing that matters.

Pain is an effective teacher. If a failure is painful, it gets fixed. If a failure is relatively painless, it gets ignored. The more immediate and more costly a mistake is, the faster you will learn from 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. When are you enjoying yourself while other people are complaining? The work that hurts you less than it hurts others is the work you were made to do. What makes me lose track of time? Flow is the mental state you enter when you are so focused on the task at hand that the rest of the world fades away. This blend of happiness and peak performance is what athletes and performers experience when they are "in the zone." It is nearly impossible to experience a flow state and not find the task satisfying at least to some degree. Where do I get greater returns than the average person? We are continually comparing ourselves to those around us, and a behavior is more likely to be satisfying when the comparison is in our favor. When I started writing at jamesclear.com, my email list grew very quickly. I wasn't quite sure what I was doing well, but I knew that results seemed to be coming faster for me than for some of my colleagues, which motivated me to keep writing.

People get so caught up in the fact that they have limits that they rarely exert the effort required to get close to them.

Until you work as hard as those you admire, don't explain away their success as luck.

He mentioned the factors you might expect: genetics, luck, talent. But then he said something I wasn't expecting: "At some point it comes down to who can handle the boredom of training every day, doing the same lifts over and over and over." His answer surprised me because it's a different way of thinking about work ethic. People talk about getting "amped up" to work on their goals. Whether it's business or sports or art, you hear people say things like, "It all comes down to passion." Or, "You have to really want it."

The difference is that they still find a way to show up despite the feelings of boredom.

The greatest threat to success is not failure but boredom.

As soon as we experience the slightest dip in motivation, we begin seeking a new strategy—even if the old one was still working.

Perhaps this is why many of the most habit-forming products are those that provide continuous forms of novelty. Video games provide visual novelty.

The sweet spot of desire occurs at a 50/50 split between success and failure. Half of the time you get what you want. Half of the time you don't. You need just enough "winning" to experience satisfaction and just enough "wanting" to experience desire. This is one of the benefits of following the Goldilocks Rule. If you're already interested in a habit, working on challenges of just manageable difficulty is a good way to keep things interesting

Professionals stick to the 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.

Professionals take action even when the mood isn't right. They might not enjoy it, but they find a way to put the reps in.

I've never regretted doing the workout.

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

Each chunk of information that is memorized opens up the mental space for more effortful thinking.

One solution is to avoid making any single aspect of your identity an overwhelming portion of who you are.

The more you let a single belief define you, the less capable you are of adapting when life challenges you.

Men are born soft and supple; dead, they are stiff and hard. Plants are born tender and pliant; dead, they are brittle and dry. Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death.

Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life. The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail.