

Habits

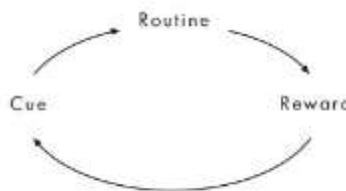
By Christy Bahan, RDLD Updated January 2019

Have you ever wondered: “Why don’t I do what I say I am going to do?”
“Why do I say something is important, but never seem to make time for it?”

CHANGE IS HARD!

To understand why habit change is hard, we need to first understand a few basics:

- **Goals vs Habits:**
Goals tend to be outcome based; Habits focus on the actions that lead to an outcome.
- **What is a Habit? Repeated Actions performed Automatically.**
- **Why do we have habits?** We desire efficiency/automation in decision-making. If we didn’t, we wouldn’t get much done. <https://chopra.com/articles/neuroscience-insight-how-to-break-bad-habits>
- **How they are formed: The Power of Habit** by Charles Duhigg (2/28/12)
The **Framework (cycle): Cue – Routine – Reward**
The idea is that something (a cue) triggers an action (routine) to obtain a reward.



Steps to Making a Change:

1. Identify the **Routine**: it is the most obvious; it’s the behavior you want to change.
2. Experiment with **Rewards**: What are you *REALLY* craving? (i.e. sweets vs socialization)
3. Identify the **Cue**: this is harder to do, but is probably related to (track this):
Location – time – emotional state – other people – immediate preceding action
4. Make a new **Plan**: You don’t have to follow-through every time; just don’t give up!
Over time, the new action becomes automatic!
*Note that the ROUTINE is what changes; the Cue & Reward stay the same!

More information on **Power of Habit** by Charles Duhigg, including his personal example:

Video (3:38 min.) <https://charlesduhigg.com/the-power-of-habit/>

Article: <https://charlesduhigg.com/how-habits-work/>

5 Take-Aways (skip ad, 5:27 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ws2WfeD6d8>

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” – Aristotle

James Clear, author of **Atomic Habits** (10/16/18), builds upon Charles Duhigg’s work in Power of Habit:

Framework (laws): Cue – Craving – Response - Reward

Cue: triggers behavior; predicts reward

Craving: our motivation to do something different than what we are doing right now.

Response: action or thought. It depends on both willingness & ability.

Rewards: they satisfy & provide relief from a craving.

He states there are two phases: the problem (cue/craving) & the solution (response/reward). Without the 1st three parts of the framework, a behavior will not occur. Without all 4 parts, the behavior will not be repeated.

Quick Tips to Create or Break a Habit using/inverting James Clear’s “Laws” of Behavior Change:

Laws	<u>How to Create a Good Habit</u> (find some pleasure in it)	<u>How to Break a Bad Habit</u> (create a little bit of pain with it)
1 st Law: Cue	Make it Obvious	Make it Invisible
2 nd Law: Craving	Make it Attractive	Make it unattractive
3 rd Law: Response	Make it Easy	Make it difficult
4 th Law: Reward	Make it Satisfying	Make it unsatisfying

How to Form a Habit: It takes time, effort, & perseverance.

1. Start Small: Instead of 50 push-ups; try 5.
2. Increase in very small ways: **Be 1% better everyday!** This helps to sustain motivation & drive.
3. Break big habits into smaller chunks.
4. Get back on track: Expect Lapses; have a back-up plan. Create one by using the “if-then” technique: **“If I miss my morning workout, then I will take a walk after dinner.”**
5. Be patient: Strategies should feel relatively easy or they won’t be sustainable.

HOWEVER:

- Don’t wait to start until it feels comfortable.
- To succeed in a habit, you will first have to force yourself to act differently than you feel.
“On the other side of discomfort & doubt is a much stronger version of yourself.” – Adam Rosante

How to Break a Habit: *“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” - Aristotle*

1. Start with Awareness (& track it). To determine the trigger of the behavior, ask yourself:
 - When does your bad habit occur?
 - How many times per day does it occur?
 - Where are you? Who are you with?
2. Choose a Substitute: Habits provide a benefit that needs replaced with a healthier action that addresses the same need.
3. Cut out as many triggers as possible. **Optimize your environment.** We become a product of our environment: <https://jamesclear.com/choice-architecture>
4. Visualize yourself succeeding. Use the word “but” anytime you engage in negative self-talk.
5. Get support! (Professional or peer or both!)
6. Create “Bright Line” rules. These are rules you do not break. (i.e. I will stretch everyday). Why? You won’t argue with yourself about “just this time”. It also flips the script in your head from sacrifice (I “can’t” have) to empowerment (I “don’t” want).

How to make habits stick when life gets crazy: Have you ever had plans fall through?

1. Reduce expectations, but stick to schedule. Effort over quality.
 - “Just because it is not optimal, doesn’t mean it is not beneficial.”
 - Sometimes the consistency is the win: *“When you can’t do it all, do something small.”*
 - Nobody is perfect, but anyone can be consistent!
Video by Simon Sinet: (Watch 1st 2 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TopBJ7fAlGE>
2. Remember your back up plan & your “If-Then” Statements (how to form a habit).

3. Use **Visual Cues!** *“What we measure, we improve”*. *Tracking brings awareness!*
 - Tracking can be tedious for some; visual cues can help you be more consistent!
 - Visual cues take the focus away from individual performances & put them on the process itself – going back to effort over quality. It must be simple enough to sustain.

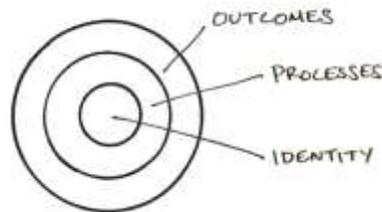
Examples of Visual Cues:

- Paper Clip strategy: <https://jamesclear.com/paper-clips>
- “Don’t Break the Chain (Seinfeld): <https://jamesclear.com/stop-procrastinating-seinfeld-strategy>

A different approach: Identity-Based Habits by James Clear:

The idea is that your current behaviors are a reflection of your current identity. What you do is a “mirror image” of the type of person you believe you are.

3 levels of change:



While all levels are useful, the problem is with the direction of change. I.e. our goals tend to be centered around outcomes, not identity. Instead of focusing on what you want to achieve, focus on who you want to become. <https://jamesclear.com/identity-based-habits>

1. Start with who you want to become.
2. Prove it with small wins.

Summary by James Clear

video (5 min.) <https://lifehacker.com/how-to-start-a-new-habit-and-why-setting-goals-doesnt-1830535655>

article: <https://jamesclear.com/habits>

Additional Tips related to Habits:

- Seek out an immediate benefit: (Scroll to the question about compounding habits) <https://www.gq.com/story/how-to-break-bad-habits>
- Stop relying on **Willpower**. *“What you resist, not only persists, but will grow” – Carl Jung*
Is it a myth? <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2016/11/3/13486940/self-control-psychology-myth>
Or like a muscle? <https://markmanson.net/downloads/habits>
- Per BJ Fogg, Author of Tiny Habits: use a Habit **“Recipe”**: “After I (trigger), I will (Tiny Habit)”. as well as use an **“anchor”** to trigger new habit. An anchor is something you already do: i.e. “I will walk in place while I brush my teeth.”
- Use **“Temptation bundling”** i.e. I will only watch (favorite) tv show while walking on treadmill. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/01/01/the-science-of-keeping-your-new-years-resolution/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b331b4c36de0
- Think of behavior strategies as gaining a **skill**: <https://www.bemidjipioneer.com/lifestyle/4550174-dont-think-it-new-years-resolution-think-it-new-skill>

How long does Habit Change take?

If you are asking: “How long does it take before I can stop working & putting in effort? The honest answer (per James Clear) is forever. If you stop doing it, it’s no longer a habit. It needs to be a lifestyle change, not a finish line to cross. Just like compound interest, the effects of your habits multiply as you repeat them over time.

I know, what you are really asking is: “How long do I have to keep up the mental focus before it becomes automatic?” A 2010 study published in *The European Journal of Social Psychology* found it took an average of **66 days** for a behavior to change (though time varied from **18 to 254 days**).

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/02/how-long-it-takes-to-form-a-new-habit/>

“Success is a few simple disciplines, practiced every day; while failure is simply a few errors in judgment, repeated every day.” – Jim Rohn

References & Recommended Reading:

- <https://charlesduhigg.com/how-habits-work/>
- <https://jamesclear.com/habits>
- <https://jamesclear.com/habit-guide>
- <https://jamesclear.com/three-steps-habit-change>
- <https://jamesclear.com/how-to-break-a-bad-habit>
- <https://jamesclear.com/identity-based-habits>
- <https://jamesclear.com/procrastination>
- <https://jamesclear.com/plan-for-chaos>
- <https://jamesclear.com/get-back-on-track>
- <https://jamesclear.com/measuring>
- <https://jamesclear.com/eat-healthy>
- <https://www.bjfogg.com/>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/05/health/habits-wisdom-project/index.html>
- <https://99u.adobe.com/articles/17123/5-scientific-ways-to-build-habits-that-stick>
- <https://zapier.com/blog/keystone-habits/>
- Habits & Feelings: <https://www.smartrecovery.org/smart-articles/habits-and-feelings/>
- Framing goals as positive: <https://www.lemonade.com/blog/breaking-bad-habits/>