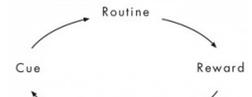


The Power Of Habit
by Charles Duhigg

<p>Definition of habit</p>	<p>An acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary</p> <p>A recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition</p> <p>Habits, scientists say, emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Without habit loops, our brains would shut down, overwhelmed by the minutiae of daily life.</p> <p>This process within our brains is a three-step loop. First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is the routine, which can be physical or mental or emotional. Finally, there is a reward, which helps your brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future. Over time, this loop—cue, routine, reward; cue, routine, reward—becomes more and more automatic. The cue and reward become intertwined until a powerful sense of anticipation and craving emerges. Eventually, whether in a chilly MIT laboratory or your driveway, a habit is born.</p> <p>But since we often don't recognize these habit loops as they grow, we are blind to our ability to control them. By learning to observe the cues and rewards, though, we can change the routines.</p>
<p>How Habits Work</p>	 <p>Want to exercise more? Choose a cue, such as going to the gym as soon as you wake up, and a reward, such as a smoothie after each workout. Then think about that smoothie, or about the endorphin rush you'll feel. Allow yourself to anticipate the reward. Eventually, that craving will make it easier to push through the gym doors every day.</p> <p>Cravings are what drive habits. And figuring out how to spark a craving makes creating a new habit easier. It's as true now as it was almost a century ago. Every night, millions of people scrub their teeth in order to get a tingling feeling; every morning, millions put on their jogging shoes to capture an endorphin rush they've learned to crave.</p>
<p>How to Create New Habits</p>	<p>THE FRAMEWORK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the routine Experiment with rewards Isolate the cue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> location, time, emotional state, other people, and immediately preceding action. Have a plan <p>If you use the same cue, and provide the same reward, you can shift the routine and change the habit. Almost any behavior can be transformed if the cue and reward stay the same.</p> <p>Say you want to stop snacking at work. Is the reward you're seeking to satisfy your hunger? Or is it to interrupt boredom? If you snack for a brief release, you can easily find another routine—such as taking a quick walk, or giving yourself three minutes on the Internet—that provides the same interruption without adding to your waistline.</p> <p>If you want to stop smoking, ask yourself, do you do it because you love nicotine, or because it provides a burst of stimulation, a structure to your day, a way to socialize? If you smoke because you need stimulation, studies indicate that some caffeine in the afternoon can increase the odds you'll quit. More than three dozen studies of former smokers have found that identifying the cues and rewards they associate with cigarettes, and then choosing new routines that provide similar payoffs—a piece of Nicorette, a quick series of push-ups, or simply taking a few minutes to stretch and relax—makes it more likely they will quit.</p>
<p>Why Transformation Occurs</p>	<p>However, those alcoholics who believed, like John in Brooklyn, that some higher power had entered their lives were more likely to make it through the stressful periods with their sobriety intact.</p> <p>It wasn't God that mattered, the researchers figured out. It was belief itself that made a difference. Once people learned how to believe in something, that skill started spilling over to other parts of their lives, until they started believing they could change. Belief was the ingredient that made a reworked habit loop into a permanent behavior.</p> <p>But we do know that for habits to permanently change, people must believe that change is feasible. The same process that makes AA so effective—the power of a group to teach individuals how to believe—happens whenever people come together to help one another change. Belief is easier when it occurs within a community.</p> <p>How do habits change?</p> <p>There is, unfortunately, no specific set of steps guaranteed to work for every person. We know that a habit cannot be eradicated—it must, instead, be replaced. And we know that habits are most malleable when the Golden Rule of habit change is applied: If we keep the same cue and the same reward, a new routine can be inserted.</p> <p>But that's not enough. For a habit to stay changed, people must believe change is possible. And most often, that belief only emerges with the help of a group.</p>
<p>Which Habits Matter Most</p>	<p>If you focus on changing or cultivating keystone habits, you can cause widespread shifts.</p>
<p>Keystone habits</p>	<p>Studies from the past decade examining the impacts of exercise on daily routines. When people start habitually exercising, even as infrequently as once a week, they start changing other, unresisted patterns in their lives, often unknowingly. Typically, people who exercise start eating better and becoming more productive at work. They smoke less and show more patience with colleagues and family. They use their credit cards less frequently and say they feel less stressed. It's not completely clear why. But for many people, exercise is a keystone habit that triggers widespread change.</p> <p>Studies have documented that families who habitually eat dinner together seem to raise children with better homework skills, higher grades, greater emotional control, and more confidence.</p> <p>Making your bed every morning is correlated with better productivity, a greater sense of well-being, and stronger skills at sticking with a budget.</p>
<p>Small wins</p>	<p>Small wins are exactly what they sound like, and are part of how keystone habits create widespread changes. A huge body of research has shown that small wins have enormous power, an influence disproportionate to the accomplishments of the victories themselves.</p> <p>Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that favors another small win.</p> <p>Small wins fuel transformative changes by leveraging tiny advantages into patterns that convince people that bigger achievements are within reach.</p>
<p>Willpower</p>	<p>When you learn to force yourself to go to the gym or start your homework or eat a salad instead of a hamburger, part of what's happening is that you're changing how you think," said Todd Heatherton, a researcher at Dartmouth who has worked on willpower studies. "People get better at regulating their impulses. They learn how to distract themselves from temptations. And once you've gotten into that willpower groove, your brain is practiced at helping you focus on a goal."</p> <p>"That's why signing kids up for piano lessons or sports is so important. It has nothing to do with creating a good musician or a five-year-old soccer star," said Heatherton. "When you learn to force yourself to practice for an hour or run fifteen laps, you start building self-regulatory strength. A five-year-old who can follow the ball for ten minutes becomes a sixth grader who can start his homework on time."</p> <p>This is how willpower becomes a habit: by choosing a certain behavior ahead of time, and then following that routine when an inflection point arrives</p>
<p>Organizations</p>	<p>Organizational habits offer a basic promise: If you follow the established patterns and abide by the truce, then rivalries won't destroy the company, the profits will roll in, and, eventually, everyone will get rich.</p> <p>Routines reduce uncertainty</p> <p>"Consumers sometimes act like creatures of habit, automatically repeating past behavior with little regard to current goals," two psychologists at the University of Southern California wrote in 2009</p> <p>Chances are, the first things you see upon entering your grocery store are fruits and vegetables arranged in attractive, beautiful piles. If you think about it, positioning produce at the front of a store doesn't make much sense, because fruits and vegetables bruise easily at the bottom of a shopping cart; logically, they should be situated by the registers, so they come at the end of a trip. But as marketers and psychologists figured out long ago, if we start our shopping spree by loading up on healthy stuff, we're much more likely to buy Doritos, Oreo's, and frozen pizza when we encounter them later on. The burst of subconscious virtuousness that comes from first buying butternut squash makes it easier to put a pint of ice cream in the cart later.</p>