

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

1st law: Make it OBVIOUS

Habit scorecard

Our brain is a prediction machine scanning our environment for cues which can predict foreseeable outcomes without requiring our conscious attention. This ability to notice cues is the foundation of our every habit.

We are so much more than our conscious self. We don't need to be aware of the cue for the cue to drive our behavior. And **this is why habit sticks, because they serve us, by allowing us to use our conscious attention for what is new and challenging, and not what is part of our routine and expected. This is also why habits are so hard to change.** The more we do one thing, the less we are inclined to question what we're doing and why. With time, **those cues become invisible to us** and we can feel the urge to do something without realizing what prompted our urge to act. **This is why bringing awareness to our daily lives is key** if we want to change the way we live it.

James Clear shares with us a very useful technique called **Pointing-and-Calling**, where by naming what we do, why and when (ex: Listing out loud: *Their creatinine is good, they have no contrast allergy, they signed the consent... they can have their CT-scan*). **By saying out it loud it raises our awareness and shakes us from an unconscious habituated process to a conscious process of analysis and choice.** It also brings positive reinforcement if we like what we're doing and it helps make the consequences appear more real for us, if we don't.

James Clear then urges us to create our Habits Scorecard where we scan an entire day to highlight what we do on auto-pilot (wake up, snooze (or not!), get up, bio break, drink coffee...). **We need to know how we actually spend our days in order to regain the power to redesign them.** We should then score our habits with a "+", a "-" or a "=" to see if they're serving us, working against us or neutral. **The goal is not to judge ourselves! It is to learn about ourselves and refine our ways to reach our full potential.** Asking questions is a great way to help ourselves: "does this behavior help me become the type of person I wish to be? Does this habit cast a vote for or against my desired identity?". Our task here is not to change anything, only to NOTICE. **Get curious about what you're doing.** We're studying, not grading. Once we've acknowledged the need for action, it will be much easier to act.

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Habit scorecard

Our favorite quotes for this part

“We must begin the process of behavior change with awareness”

“Until you make the unconscious conscious,
it will direct your life and you will call it fate
- Carl Jung”

“One of our greatest challenges in changing habits
is maintaining awareness of what we are actually doing.”

“There are no good habits or bad habits.
There are only effective habits.”

“All habits serve you in some way
- even the bad ones-
which is why you repeat them.”

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1st law: Make it **OBVIOUS**

The best way to start a new habit

Implementation intention: Two most common cues are **TIME** and **LOCATION**; we can use them to base our intention for habit implementation on. Create one using this sentence: *“When situation X, I will perform response Y”*.

Making a specific plan makes us far more likely to follow through. Those basic details must be figured out *BEFORE* we can succeed in changing our habits. The implementation intention is the equivalent of a **concrete plan of action**. The goal is to help ourselves help ourselves thanks to clear instructions on what to do and when. When it is time to act, we can then act without having to make any additional decision than to follow our predetermined plan.

James Clear also reminds us that when our dreams are vague, we tend to easily rationalize little exceptions to our schedule, not realizing that they take us away from the specific things we need to do to succeed. **We need to know exactly what needs to be done in order to make sure that they get done.**

Habit stacking: the best way to remember to follow our new habit is to use one we already have as a cue. We pair them together and automatically do the new habit before or after the one which is already automated in our lives.

Tips of the author:

- to start our habit on a “1st” day! Be it of the week, month or year: those are days where we have the more hope to play with, and hope is fuel.
- to consider carefully when we are more likely to succeed when we start planning for our new habit.
- we need to use a cue which can match our habit in frequency.

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The best way to start a new habit

Our favorite quotes for this part

“Many people think
they lack motivation
when what they really lack
is clarity”

“We often say yes to little requests
because we are not clear enough
about what we need to be doing instead.”

“Give your habits
a time and space
to live in the world”

Atomic Habits

1st law: Make it **OBVIOUS**

Environment matters most than motivation

Without realizing it, we often **choose products because of WHERE they are** (and *not what they are*). This fact is used by most grocery stores.

The author shares an equation made by psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1936. "**Behavior is a function of the Person in their Environment, $B=f(P,E)$** . The more obviously available a product or service is, the more likely we are to try it.

Visual cues are particularly effective because **we depend on our vision more than on any other sense**. This is why we must strive to make our environments filled with productive cues and devoid of unproductive ones, as it relates to our specific dreams and goals.

We also make our cues as obvious as possible to be sure to notice them.

And we can use more than one cue! **We need to make the choice we want to make at a specific time and in a specific place the most OBVIOUS one.**

We can train ourselves to link a particular habit with a particular context.

It can be easier to change an old habit in a new environment and to associate a new habit with a new place or context.

And whenever possible we should try to not mix the context of one habit with another, the risk is to make it confusing and then only the easiest of the two habits will take over. James Clear takes the example of our phones which can be used for nearly anything and therefore can lure us back into work on weekends (it is easier to appease our anxiety than to transcend it) or drive us away from a work challenge during the day (it is easier to get lost in scrolling than facing our perfectionist self-talk).

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1st law: Make it OBVIOUS

Environment matters most than motivation

Our favorite quotes for this part

“Environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior.”

“We like to think that we are in control. (...) The truth, however, is, that many of the actions we take each day are shaped not by purposeful drive and choice but by the most obvious option.”

“A small change in what you see can lead to a big shift in what you do”

“You don’t have to be the victim of your environment. You can also be the architect of it.”

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

“Every habit should have a home”

“If you want behaviors that are stable and predictable, you need an environment that is stable and predictable.”

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1st law: Make it OBVIOUS

The secret to self-control

The key to self-discipline is not to rely on self-control; **the key is to design an environment where we do not require heroic willpower and self-control to do what want to do and not be tempted to do what we don't.**

As James Clear puts it, *"yes, perseverance, grit and willpower are essential to success, but the way to improve these qualities is not by wishing you were a more disciplined person, but by creating a more disciplined environment."*

Our goal is to encode an habit and allow for the urge to act to follow whenever the environmental cue appears.

We also need to be mindful that it is possible to break a habit but very unlikely we'll ever completely forget it. This is why **resisting temptation is an ineffective strategy: it's not sustainable.** The solution is to work on removing the cues which lead us into this habit in the first place (ex: leave your phone in another room when you want to work... or sleep).

The goal is to use the first law... in reverse! We make it INVISIBLE.

To create a new habit

- Cue: MAKE IT OBVIOUS
- Craving: MAKE IT ATTRACTIVE
- Response: MAKE IT EASY
- Reward: MAKE IT SATISFYING

To break an old habit

- Cue: MAKE IT INVISIBLE
- Craving: MAKE IT UNATTRACTIVE
- Response: MAKE IT DIFFICULT
- Reward: MAKE IT UNSATISFYING

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The secret to self-control

Our favorite quotes for this part

“If you’re not careful about cues,
you can cause the very behavior you want to stop.”

“In the long run, we become a product of the environment that we live in.”

“Self-control is a short term strategy, not a long term one.”

“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.”

“This is the secret to self-control.
Make the cues of your good habits obvious
and the cues of your bad habits invisible”.