

# Book Digest

## Atomic Habits

### 2nd law: Make it ATTRACTIVE

#### How to make a habit irresistible

**Our reward systems** are **wired** to be tricked and drawn to **exaggerated versions of reality**.

James Clear takes the example of food and how our brains have evolved to place high value on salt, sugar, and fat because they were rare and energizing for our ancestors who survived by hunting and foraging for food in the wild during long winters. Our brains continue to crave those foods as if they were scarce even though they're now abundant, and the food industry tends to build on that at the expense of our health. A tremendous amount of research has also been made to make food as attractive as possible, by optimizing for instance with how a product feels in our mouth. Adding lots of contrast to our food experience encourages us to eat more and more. The author then quotes a neuroscientist called Stephan Guyenet: *"we've gotten too good at pushing our own buttons."* Pleasure packed experiences are hard to resist and the more attractive an opportunity is, the more habit-forming it is, for better and for worse. As James Clear mentions, we have the brains of our ancestors, but with temptations they never had to face. And this is why it is so important to be aware of the dopamine-driven feedback loop. Neuroscientists James Olds and Peter Milner were pioneers in understanding the importance of dopamine when they were studying the processes behind craving and desire. They showed that **in the absence of dopamine, pleasure remains but desire disappears and therefore action stops**. They also observed that **the speed at which actions were performed increased with the quantity of dopamine**. Our most basic habitual behaviors are associated with higher levels of dopamine. It includes eating, drinking water, having sex, and social interactions. **Interestingly dopamine is not only released when we experience pleasure, but also when we anticipate it. Dopamine therefore plays a key role in motivation, learning and memory, punishment and aversion, voluntary movements and many other neurological processes**. Of note, our brains have more neural circuitry allocated for wanting rewards than for liking them. **It is the expectation of a reward which drives our behaviors, not the reward itself**. This is why it matters so much to make our habits ATTRACTIVE.

**Temptation bundling**: We can give ourselves conditions to give into our guilty pleasures and use them as a reward by deciding that we will only do what we want once we've done what we need. Ex: I will only check social media once I've done some stretching in the morning. We can again use the concept of habit stacking in addition to temptation bundling. Here's the author's formula: **"after I [current habit], I will [habit I need] and after the [habit I need], I will do [activity I want]**. This tool can be used to make nearly ANY habit attractive, no matter how "unattractive" they are in and of themselves.

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### How to make a habit irresistible

#### Our favorite quotes for this part

"Habits are a  
dopamine-driven feedback loop."

"It is the anticipation of a reward  
-not the fulfillment of it-  
that gets us into action."

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#### The seductive pull of social norms

We humans are herd animals.

We look for **confirmation that we belong**, as it feels linked to our survival. And this drives us to follow the unspoken rules modeled to us by our family, peers, local community, and society at large. We tend to unconsciously live in a way we have never thought through or questioned, and given our need for belonging, it mostly feels normal to us.

**Behaviors which help us to fit in are attractive to us and we tend to imitate the habits of three highlighted groups by the author: the close, the many, the powerful.** The closer people are, the more likely they are to share habits; and there is an invisible peer pressure which pulls us in the direction of our family and friends. **We absorb the qualities and practices of those around us.** And linking our behaviors to our sense of belonging helps transform a personal goal into a shared one, which is a great and sustainable source of motivation.

We are wired to choose ways which allow us to get along with others. We can override our default mode of focus on other people's approval, but it takes work. And we can use this as an advantage by surrounding ourselves with people we admire. Striving to be like them will get us closer to our goals.

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#### The seductive pull of social norms

#### Our favorite quotes for this part

"We don't choose our earliest habits, we imitate them."

"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."

"Your culture sets your expectation for what is 'normal.'"

"Surround yourself with people who have the habits you want to have yourself."

"The normal behavior of the tribe often overpowers the desired behavior of the individual."

"Most days, we'd rather be wrong with the crowd than be right by ourselves."

"Many of our daily habits are imitations of people we admire."

"The culture we live in determines which behaviors are attractive to us."

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#### To find and fix the causes of our bad habits

Where **cravings** come from:

It's important to understand that **there is a surface level craving driving our behaviors and a deeper underlying motive which the craving represents**. We think we want ice cream, but what we want is comfort. We think we want a glass of wine, but what we want is relaxation. And **once we realize that, we also can choose a different and more constructive way to meet our needs**. We get our ability to choose back, and we can decide to associate a new response (and habit) to the problem we regularly encounter.

**Our every action are preceded by a prediction**, based on our past and what we believe will work best to get us out of the specific situation we want to exit. Our habits are caused by our predictions and **we can re-train ourselves to associate a good habit—instead of a bad one—with any given cue**. Our thoughts (or predictions) create our feelings which drive our behavior. **We always act out of a desire to change our internal state**. We can use this by associating the habits we wish to create with positive feelings and outcomes: by making them attractive.

How to **reprogram** our brains to ENJOY hard habits:

By **turning what we see as burdens into perceived opportunities!** For instance, shifting from telling ourselves that we HAVE to do something, to “I *get* to do this” is **just as true**, but **way more empowering**.

A powerful and easy skill is to learn how to focus on the benefits of the habit we want to create and not on the associated drawbacks! It's the best way to make them attractive. And we can also **create a motivation ritual** by always doing something that truly makes us happy right before the habit we're building.

The key to eradicate our so-called bad habits is to reframe the associations we have about them. And by reprogramming our predictions we can turn what felt like a hard habit to adopt into a very attractive one.

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To find and fix the causes of our bad habits

### Our favorite quotes for this part

"Your current habits are not necessarily the best way to solve the problems you face; they are just the methods you learned to use."

"Life feels reactive, but it is actually predictive."

"Our behavior is heavily dependent on how we interpret the events that happen to us, not necessarily the objective reality of the events themselves."

"Even the tiniest action is tinged with the motivation to feel differently than you do in the moment."

"Sometimes all you need is a small mindset shift."

"You don't HAVE to. You get to".

"We can find evidence for whatever mindset we choose"

"You can reframe 'I am nervous' to 'I am excited and I'm getting an adrenaline rush to help me concentrate.'"