

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

How long does it take to form a new habit

James Clear reminds us of the important **distinction between being in *motion* and taking ACTION.**

When we're **in motion**, we're planning, strategizing and learning. **Our actions** on the other end are the behaviors which will deliver an outcome.

Motion can be useful but is never enough. It's seductive because it makes us feel like we're making progress without exposing us to the risk of failure. It allows us to avoid any chance of criticism. **Preparation can then become a subtle form of procrastination.** The goal is not to perfect the habit before we start, *the goal is to start practicing the habit now.*

Habit formation is the process of making them **automatic through repetition.** Our brains adapt to what we do in order to become more efficient at any activity we repeat. This is called **long-term potentiation** and underlies the neuropsychologist Donald Hebb's law: "*Neurons that fire together fire together.*" Physical changes have indeed been found in the brain of musicians or mathematicians respectively in their cerebellum (key regulator of movements) and parietal gray matter (in parts driving computation).

Automaticity describes our ability to perform through our nonconscious mind and therefore without having to think about every step.

James Clear teaches us that habits form through frequency, *NOT time.* Hence, **the question is not to know how long it takes to create a habit, but how many times it takes.**

And it doesn't matter either if our action becomes fully automatic as long as we get into the habit of starting it.

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

How long does it take to form a new habit

Our favorite quotes for this part

“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.”

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

“Hebb’s law: ‘Neurons that fire together fire together.’”

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

“To build a habit, you need to practice it.”

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

The law of least effort

Our motivation is always to do what is convenient and to choose the path of least resistance. Not because we're lazy, *because we're smart.*

Our energy is our most important currency and our brains are set on protecting it and sparing it as much as possible. We will therefore default to the action which requires the least amount of energy. And therefore the less energy a habit requires, the more likely we are to show up for it.

When we examine our own lives, we see that the behaviors which fill up most of our lives can be performed with very low levels of motivation.

Let's remember that **our goal is never the habit itself, but the outcome we get out of it.** *The habit is therefore a sort of obstacle between where we are and where we want to be.* This is why we must make the obstacle as small as possible to overcome our resistance to tackle it, especially on those unavoidable days when we don't "feel like it." Of course, we can do hard things! AND it's much easier to keep on doing the easy ones, given how challenging our daily lives tend to be.

We want to help ourselves make, *in the moment,* the choice which will pay off *in the long run.*

Environment design: The best way to reduce the friction associated with our habits is to prime our environment to make them as easy as possible. **We want to set ourselves up for success in regards to the habits we aim to create, and for failure with the habits we want to erase,** by REIMAGINING our place in a very intentional way.

It requires very little friction to discourage us from starting something, and that's very good news when we want to stop doing it. If the sugary snacks are in the upper cupboard and the apples on the counter, it is much easier to choose a healthy option when hunger strikes. **If the option we want to learn to favor is the easy one, it will be much easier to stay on track.** And it's also very helpful to **prepare our environment so that everything is ready in advance for what we want to do:** when comes the time to start, we'll just have to start - not prep.

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

The law of least effort

Our favorite quotes for this part

“Habits are easier to build when they fit into the flow of your life.”

“We can remove the points of friction that hold us back.”

“The central idea is to create an environment
where doing the right thing is
as easy as possible.”

“How can we design a world
where it’s easy to do what’s right?”

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

The two minute rule

Interestingly, even if a habit takes only a few seconds to perform, it can set us up for hours afterwards. If you have the habit of putting on your workout clothes the minute you come home, you're much more likely to then work out than to crash on the couch and order take out (as illustrated by the author's real life example). **Habits are automatic choices who have the power to influence all the conscious choices we'll make right after.** It's always easier to keep on doing what we're doing than to shift gears. Therefore the habits only needs to put us in the right position; we'll then do organically what we were consciously hoping earlier on we would choose to do -consciously or not- in the now.

James Clear brings our attention to what he calls **the defining moments of our days**. Those seconds where a *tiny choice* will set our *entire day* in one direction or its opposite.

He uses the example of choosing a restaurant: of course you still have some freedom with what you'll order, but you've restricted your options to the menu of this very place. Your options are shaped by the first choice you made meal-wise!

Our habits are the first step of our life design because *they determine everything else*.

All those little choices stack up and each of them will influence how we spend the next chunk of time until the all day has gone by.

And since our habits are the foundations of our lives, it's even more important to make the ones we want easy to gain and keep.

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

The two minute rule

This is why the author recommends **starting with a two minute MAXIMUM habit**.

It feels counter-intuitive given our cultural habit of always bargaining with ourselves in a “*at least x minutes, times, pages...*” kind of way, yet James Clear urges us to do the opposite! A new habit should take LESS than two minutes to do.

It should NOT feel like a challenge. **It should feel EASY** (that’s the all point of this law after all).

He recommends mapping out our goal from very hard (where our perfectionistic brain wants us to...start) to very easy (where it is actually clever to begin). And to *then* start building our habits through the smallest step possible and by making sure it doesn’t last more than two minutes.

The goal is to standardize FIRST, and then to optimize. If we make it easy to start, all the rest will follow.

And another bonus is that the more we ritualize the beginning of a process, the more likely we are to fall in a state of deep focus – the kind required to do great things.

So let’s take our attention away from the end goal; it’s not what will help us build the identity we need to take for the end goal to be reached. It traps us in an all or nothing way of thinking which disempowers us. **In the end, it’s better to do something than nothing.** It’s better to start small than to *not* “start big.”

Once we’ve mastered the first two minutes of our behavior, it’ll be easy to improve, one intermediate step at a time, towards our desired finish line.

If you’re struggling to start a new habit: try it out. We all have two minutes to lose if it doesn’t work...and there’s a lot to gain if it does!

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

The two minute rule

Our favorite quotes for this part

"The habits you make without thinking often determines the choices you make when you are thinking."

"The difference between a good day and a bad day is often a few productive and healthy choices made at decisive moments."

"We are limited by where our habits lead us."

"Habits are the entry point, not the end point."

"The point is to master the habit of showing up. (...) a habit must be established before it can be improved."

"You have to standardize before you can optimize."

"It's better to do less than you hoped for than to do nothing at all."

"Habits can be completed in a few seconds but continue to impact your behavior for minutes or hours afterward."

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

3rd law: Make it EASY

Automation

Commitment device: The idea here is to **make a choice now which will determine what we do in the future.** They enable us to act on our good intentions before we can fall victim to temptation! It allows you to ensure that it will be harder to get out of the good habit than to start it. **This way we can make our good habits inevitable and our bad habits unachievable.**

The author takes the drastic example of Victor Hugo who once gave up all his clothes to be able to stop partying and concentrate on a book deadline in 1831. A modern version would be to pay for a non-refundable coaching session ahead of time to make sure you stay committed to your self-improvement.

As usual, any proactive tip to build a habit can be used in reverse to erase the habits to which we want to say goodbye. The goal here is to **increase the friction around the habit we want to edit out, until it's so impractical to do it that we simply choose not to.**

We need to use technology to our advantage to automate as much as possible everything habit we want to rely on (ex: automatic wage reduction on our paychecks) and to stay mindful of the risk of automation around everything we do not want (ex: Netflix's automatic loading of the next episode which makes it even harder to stop after one episode of our favorite show).

"Sometimes success is less about making good habits easy and more about making bad habits hard."

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