

Book Digest

Atomic Habits

Advanced tactics

The truth about talent

Our genes will both determine where we can more easily thrive and where it will be harder for us to make a difference.

Indeed, our environment determines the suitability of our genes and whether or not our natural talents will appear useful. The qualities of success in a specific environment are influenced by the environment itself. **Competence** is therefore **highly dependent on context**. People at the top of any field are not only well trained, they also have the required prerequisite to succeed. James Clear takes the example of body types which can be a great advantage or a hindrance to mastering one sport or another. **To achieve greatness, we must play with our strength and choose the right point of focus to begin with.**

"Genes can predispose, but they don't predetermine - Gabor Mate"

The sweet spot is found when we choose an area that matches our natural skills and excites us at the same time, we can then **match our abilities and ambition**.

Our genes also influence our personality. The author reports about **five spectrums of behavior known to best reflect our personality traits** and which all have **biological underpinnings**: *openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism*.

Logically this will influence our deeply-seated preferences and make some behaviors easier for us to take on or avoid. The goal here is not to judge ourselves, there's no good or bad way of being, but there is our way and we must work with it. *We can choose to exercise in a way that pleases us. We can read what fascinates us.* As James Clear puts it: **"there's a version of every habit that can bring you joy and satisfaction. FIND IT."**

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FIND A GAME WHERE THE ODDS ARE IN YOUR FAVOR

This helps us to both sustain motivation and create success. **We can enjoy anything in theory, but it's much easier to enjoy things which come easily to us.** The author recommends relying on the **explore/exploit trade-off**.

Exploration is an important part of any new adventure. By casting a wide net, we can explore many possibilities and a broad range of ideas. But after a while it's time to shift our focus and zoom in on what works while experimenting occasionally.

To find the balance we should look at what works and what doesn't. We exploit what gets us a win, and we explore when facing a loss. We can also adapt to how much time we have. We can explore until the deadline is in sight... then it's better to exploit the best solution we've found so far and deliver.

James Clear offers us **some questions to help us guide ourselves:**

- *What feels like fun to me, but work to others?*
- *What makes me lose track of time?* The famous Flow state where happiness meets peak performance
- *Where do I get greater returns than the average person?*
- *What comes naturally to me?* Let's ignore what we've been taught and get clear on what makes US come alive.

Finally one powerful example: *Boiling water softens a potato and boils an egg. We can't choose which we are, but we can choose the game best served by who we are.*

Understanding our unique set of strengths is the best way to know where to spend our time and energy with the best return on investment possible.

Our habits have a far better chance to remain satisfying in the long run if we build them in alignment with our personality and skills.

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The truth about talent

Our favorite quotes for this part

“Genes do not determine your destiny.
They determine your area of opportunity.”

“You don’t have to build the habits everyone tells you to build.
Choose the habit that best suits you, not the one that is most popular.”

“Pick the right habit and progress is easy.
Pick the wrong habit and life is a struggle.”

“Whenever you feel authentic and genuine,
you are headed in the right direction.”

“When you can’t win by being better,
you can win by being different.”

“People get so caught up in the fact that they HAVE limits
that they rarely exert the effort required to get close to them.”

“Work hard on the things that come EASY.”

“

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The GOLDILOCKS Rule & the case for BOREDOM

Our brains love challenges...but only if they fall **within an optimal zone of difficulty!** Right between our comfort zone and where it starts taking a lot of effort to succeed.

James Clear hence introduces us to the **GOLDILOCKS rule** which states that **human will experience peak motivation when working on tasks right at the edge of their current abilities.** This way it's neither too hard nor too easy! It is both fun and challenging. And this is where we have *our best chance to reach a flow state.*

We both need to be meeting our edge to keep things interesting and to make enough progress to stay motivated: that's the **delicate balance involved for continuous improvements.**

It's also important to remember that **really successful people have days with no motivation** too. The trick is to show up despite the feelings of **boredom** that are bound to happen, not to find a way around ever getting bored. The latter is impossible.

Mastery REQUIRES practice! And practice at some point will become routine, which can be boring. The author hypothesizes that this is why the most habit-forming products tend to provide continuous forms of novelty. One way to do that is to provide variable rewards where we know we're going to win at some points but not exactly when (ex: at a slot machine). There's a sweet spot here again: *you need to win often enough to stay motivated and lose often enough for winning to still feel meaningful.* We want a mix of satisfaction (winning) and desire (wanting).

No habit will stay interesting forever though, whatever we do...so falling in love with boredom is a REQUIREMENT for self-improvement. As James Clear puts it: **"the only way to become excellent is to be endlessly fascinated by doing the same thing over and over."**

Our favorite quotes for this part

"The greatest threat to success is not failure, but boredom"

"Professionals stick to the schedule, amateurs let life get in the way."

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Habits review

Habits are great but there's a downside we must not forget: at some point they become mindless. *Yes, that was the point AND* that's the danger too. We can easily start letting mistakes slide...and we tend to stop improving because improvement requires intention.

Habits serve us very well for a lot of what our daily life requires from us; however, if we want to maximize our potential and achieve elite performances, they're not enough. Habits are necessary, yes, but not sufficient.

Mastery requires **habits** AND *deliberate practice*.

We use our habits to master a tiny element of success and until we've internalized the skill. But our work is not done yet. THEN we need to use this new habit as a **FOUNDATION to reach the next frontier of our development**. That's how *we grow our comfort zone and abilities*. Each habit UNLOCKS the next level at which we want to start performing.

And it's crucial to stay on top of **how our performance evolves over time** to continually *refine* and *improve*. This is where the concept of **HABIT REVIEWS** enters. We need to check if our habit is serving us and if it's effective or not. James Clear models doing this twice a year. He reviews in December how his habits of the year served him and how well he served them in return. He reflects in June on his behaviors and how they align with his sense of integrity. This way he can check every year who he wants to become going forward and if he's doing what it takes.

Once again it's important to find the **sweet spot between too much feedback and not enough**. We want to look often enough to make sure we're heading in the direction but not so often that we lose sight of the big picture.

One final word of advice: **Our sense of identity can motivate us, we've learned that they drive behavioral changes. But our sense of identity can also end up preventing us from acknowledging our weak spots and from truly growing.** It can feel very threatening to acknowledge that we're not living up to our own expectations. So **we need to remain flexible** and open to redefine ourselves regularly. Everything is constantly changing...so must we! Which means checking periodically if our current habits and beliefs are still serving us (and the world).

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Our favorite quotes for this part

“The less energy you spend on trivial choices,
the more you can spend it on what really matters.”

“Improvement is not just about learning habits,
it’s also about fine-tuning them.”

“The more you let a single belief define you,
the less capable you are of adapting when life challenges you.”.

“When you cling too tightly to one identity, you become brittle.
Lose that one thing and you lose YOURSELF.”

“Men are born soft and supple:
Dead they are stiff and hard.
Plants are born tender and pliant:
Dead, they are brittle and dry.
Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible
Is a disciple of death.
Whoever is soft and yielding
Is a disciple of life.
The hard and stiff will be broken.
The soft and supple will prevail”
TAC TE CHING – Lao Tzu

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CONCLUSION

James Clear reminds us once again that **"the holy grail of change is not a single 1 percent improvement, but a thousand of them. It's a bunch of atomic habits stacking up, each one a fundamental unit of the overall system."**

Small improvements can seem meaningless at first but we shouldn't discount them. **"If we continue to layer small changes on top of one another, the scales of life start to move".**

"Success is not a goal to reach or a finish line to cross.

It is a system to improve, an endless process to refine."

"It's remarkable what you can build if you just don't stop."

"SMALL HABITS DON'T ADD UP. THEY COMPOUND."

"Tiny changes...Remarkable results."

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