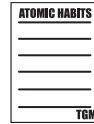
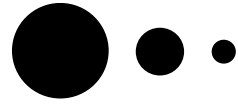


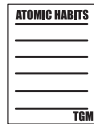
THE GROWTH MARATHON

— One Stride At a Time —



ATOMIC HABITS

FULL SUMMARY



● ● ● **THE GROWTH MARATHON** ● ● ●
————— **One Stride At a Time** —————

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The surprising power of atomic habits	2
Overview	2
Detailed overview	2
Chapter 2: How your habits shape your identity (and vice versa)	3
Overview	3
Detailed overview	4
Chapter 3: How to build habits in 4 simple steps	5
Overview	5
Detailed overview	5
Chapter 4: The man who didn't look right	7
Overview	7
Detailed overview	7
Chapter 5: The best way to start a new habit	8
Overview	8
Detailed overview	8
Chapter 6: Motivation is overrated, environment often matters more	9
Overview	9
Detailed overview	9
Chapter 7: The secret to self-control	10
Overview	10
Detailed overview	10
Chapter 8: How to make a habit irresistible	11
Overview	11
Detailed overview	11
Chapter 9: The role of family and friends in shaping your habits	12
Overview	12
Detailed overview	12
Chapter 10: How to find and fix the causes of your bad habits	13

Overview	13
Detailed overview.....	13
Chapter 11: Walk slowly, but never backwards	15
Overview	15
Detailed overview.....	15
Chapter 12: The law of least effort.....	16
Overview	16
Detailed overview.....	16
Chapter 13: How to stop procrastinating by using the 2-minute rule.....	16
Overview	16
Detailed overview.....	16
Chapter 14: How to make good habits inevitable and bad habits impossible....	17
Overview	17
Detailed overview.....	18
Chapter 15: The cardinal rule of behavior change	20
Overview	20
Detailed overview.....	20
Chapter 16: How to stick with good habits everyday	21
Overview	21
Detailed overview.....	21
Chapter 17: How an accountability partner can change everything	22
Overview	22
Detailed overview.....	22
Chapter 18: The truth about talent, when genes matter and when they don't..	23
Overview	23
Detailed overview.....	23
Chapter 19: The Goldilocks rule, how to stay motivated in life and work.....	23
Overview	23
Detailed overview.....	23
Chapter 20: The downside of creating good habits.....	24
Overview	24
Detailed overview.....	24
Conclusion	25

Introduction

This is my final article on [Atomic Habits](#) by James Clear. I hope you have enjoyed the series of [articles](#). This article is a full summary of the book. I briefly touch on what James covers in each chapter. This is by no means a comprehensive summary, and it should be read in conjunction with the other articles if you want to get theoretical and practical knowledge from the book.

If you sign up for my newsletter you can get a free copy of the summary in your inbox (with the practical knowledge included). I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, and I hope you enjoy this summary and get some value out of it. Let's get into it.

The book is broken down into six parts as shown below:

The Fundamentals are covered in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

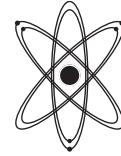
The First Law is covered in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

The Second Law is covered in chapters 8, 9 and 10.

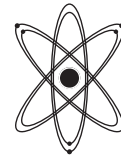
The Third Law is covered in chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14.

The Fourth Law is covered in chapters 15, 16 and 17.

The Advanced Tactics (how to go from being merely good to being truly great) are covered in Chapters 18, 19 and 20.



THE FUNDAMENTALS



Chapter 1: The surprising power of atomic habits

Overview

The chapter touches on the long-term benefits of habits, and how establishing systems is crucial in achieving long-lasting habits.

Detailed overview

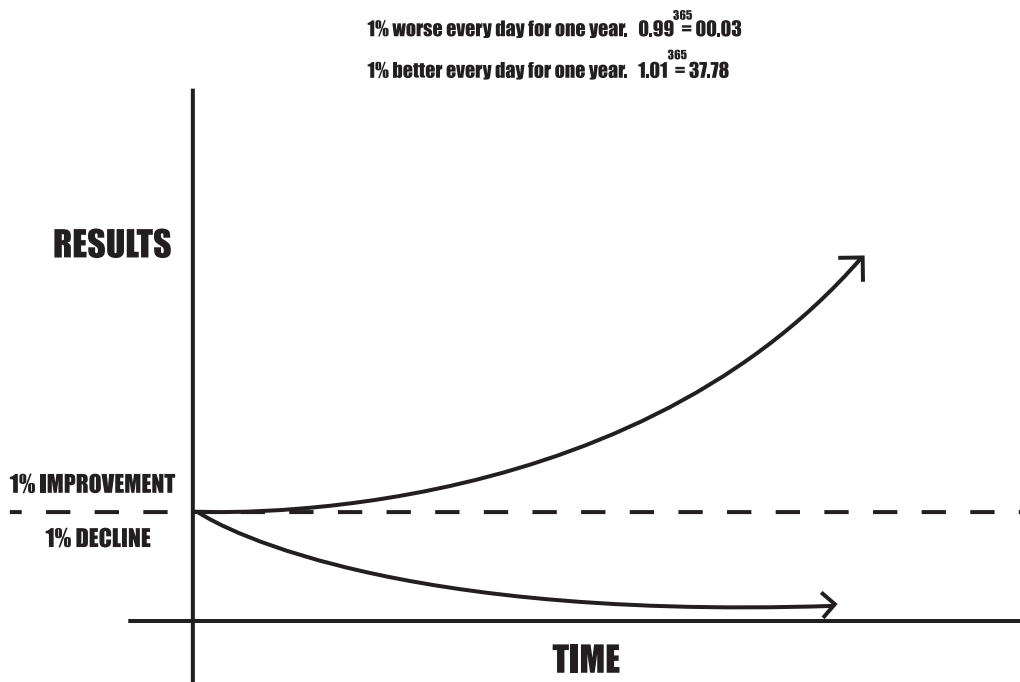


Figure 1: 1% Better Every Day (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

The benefits of habits compound over time. It is difficult to appreciate the effects of habits in our day-to-day life, but their results in the long run can be quite amazing. James provides a visual depiction of such benefits over time:

The longer it takes to see the results you want to see, the easier it is for you to quit. In the case of habits, James indicates that the work we repeatedly put in is not wasted but rather stored. If you stick to your habits, you eventually start seeing exponential growth.

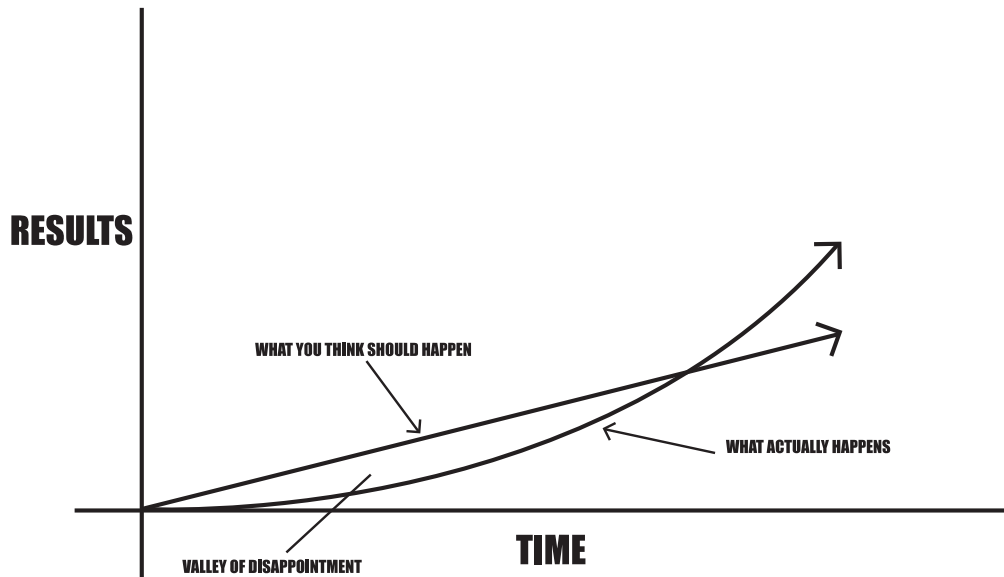


Figure 2: Plateau of Latent Potential (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

An interesting question one might ask is “What makes people stick to habits longer than others?”. Goals are the norm in this day and age, you want to achieve X, set a goal and do it. There is nothing wrong with that, but it’s just the first step. Goals are about the results you want to achieve. They are momentary changes. If your unique objective is to have a momentary change then goals are just fine. If you want a more long-lasting change, you might want to start looking into systems. Systems are the processes that lead to results. According to James, we don’t rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the level of our systems. Systems are responsible for long-lasting habits, and systems are based on identity.

Chapter 2: How your habits shape your identity (and vice versa)

Overview

To ensure your habits are long-lasting, they should align with your identity. This chapter provides the difference between identity-based and outcome-based habits.

Detailed overview

Habits associated with identity typically last longer than any other form of habit. James introduces the layers of behavior change in this chapter, and the direction of change determines if a habit will last or not.



Figure 3: Layers of Behavior Change (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

Outcomes are about what you get, processes are about what you do, and identity is about what you believe. If you change your identity, then your processes and finally your outcome, you have an **identity-based habit**, such habits last longer because of the change in your belief system. If you rather start at the outcome moving in, you have an **outcome-based habit**. My take on this is as follows; to change your identity, you need to repeat actions several times to believe. It looks like an outcome-based habit, but in this case, the outcome is the identity. For example, let's say you want to run a marathon, that's your outcome. You first need to start believing that you are an athlete (believing that you are an athlete becomes the bigger outcome), and to do that, you need to walk and run constantly for long enough. Once that belief is set, you can now start changing your processes to achieve the outcome of running the marathon.

Your habits are how you embody your identity. The more evidence you have of a belief (i.e., the more you repeat an action), the more strongly you will believe in it. Hence, things you believe are part of your identity are just so because you have evidence of doing them for a long period. From this, we can see that your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits.

Chapter 3: How to build habits in 4 simple steps

Overview

This chapter provides the purpose of habits as well as some definitions around habits. It touches on the four stages of habits which occur in the following order: Cue → Craving → Response → Reward. The main takeaways from this chapter are the four laws of behavior change (to create new habits) and the inverse of these laws (to break bad habits).

Detailed overview

Habit definition

A habit is a behavior that has been repeated enough times to become automatic (mental shortcuts learned from experience). James indicates that we can also see habits as reliable solutions to recurring problems in our environments (If you are bored you can read a book, or scroll on social media, if you are hungry, you can cook or order food etc.).

Purpose of habits

The main purpose of habits proposed in this chapter is as follows;

They help in reducing the brainpower required to solve a particular problem (as the actions become automatic). This in turn frees up mental capacity so you can allocate your attention to other tasks.

Habits and freedom go hand in hand, as you create adequate habits, you free up enough cognitive capacity to think about other things.

Four stages of habits

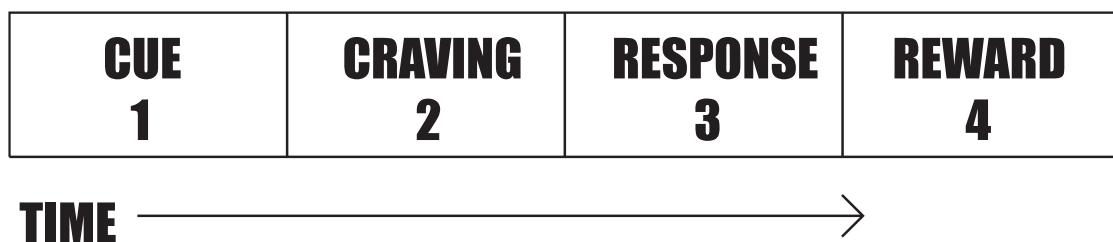


Figure 4: Four Stages of Habits (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

Figure 4 shows the four stages of habit. They are as follows:

- **Cue:** The cue triggers your brain to initiate a behavior. Cues are meaningless unless they are interpreted (for example, the sight of a cigarette is meaningless to a non-smoker, and hence cannot push them to crave smoking at that moment).
- **Craving:** This is the motivational force behind every habit. What you crave is the change in state the habit delivers, not the habit itself (for example, you don't crave to watch TV, but rather to be entertained).

- **Response:** This is the actual thought or physical action done.
- **Reward:** This is the end goal of every habit. Rewards satisfy us and teach us which habits to pursue.

The cue is about noticing the reward, the craving is about wanting the reward and the response is about obtaining the reward.

The habit loop

The four stages described above occur in a loop. Without the first 3 steps, a behavior will not occur, without the 4th, a behavior will not be repeated.

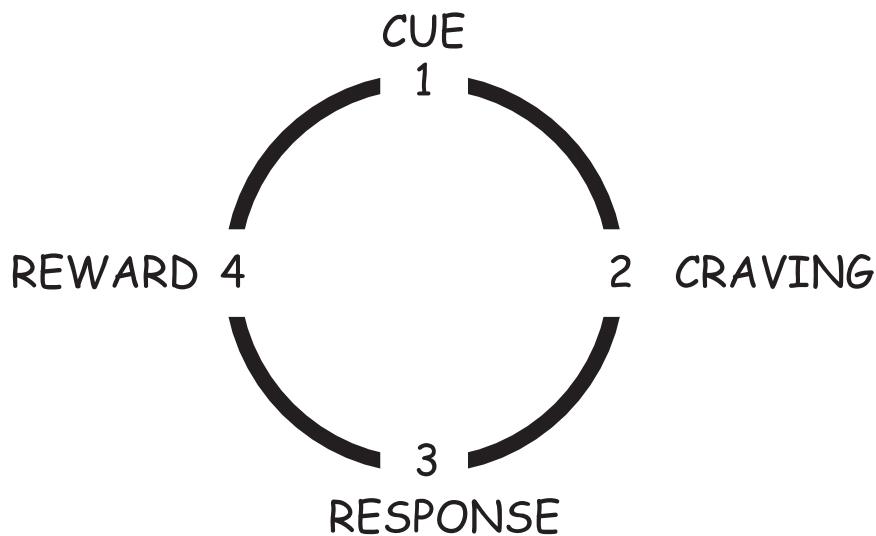


Figure 5: The Habit Loop (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

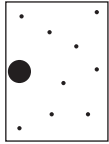
The four laws of behavior change

This is a framework created by James that can be used to either develop new “good” habits or break “bad” ones. The laws can be seen as levers, if they are well aligned you can create good habits, if they aren’t then you can’t. The laws are as follows:

- Cue, the first law, make it obvious.
- Craving, the second law, make it attractive.
- Response, the third law, make it easy.
- Reward, the fourth law, make it satisfying.

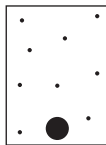
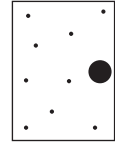
To break a bad habit, use the inverse of the above laws.

- Cue, inversion of the first law, make it invisible.
- Craving, inversion of the second law, make it unattractive.
- Response, inversion of the third law, make it difficult.
- Reward, inversion of the fourth law, make it unsatisfying.



THE FIRST LAW

MAKE IT OBVIOUS



Chapter 4: The man who didn't look right

Overview

This chapter touches on ways to become more aware of the habits we currently have, as it's important to know them before building new ones.

Detailed overview

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate". James presents two tools that can help one in becoming more aware of their habits (I cover these tools in more detail [here](#)):

- **Pointing and Calling:** This exercise originates from a Japanese practice to help reduce mistakes and accidents. It raises the level of awareness to a conscious level. To perform this, simply point and call out what you are about to do before doing it. For example, if you want to order fast food, tell yourself audibly that you are about to order fast food, to ensure you are fully aware of your decision.
- **Habits Scorecard:** This is a sheet on which you write down your daily habits and classify them as positive, negative, or neutral. This is a simple exercise you can use to be more aware of your habits.

- **Habit Stacking:** One way to build a new habit is to identify an old habit you already have and stack the new habit on top of that. No behavior acts in isolation, one always leads to the next. This technique works best when the cue (old habit) is highly noticeable and tightly bound to the new habit. The formula for habit stacking is as follows:

“After [Current Habit], I will [New Habit]”

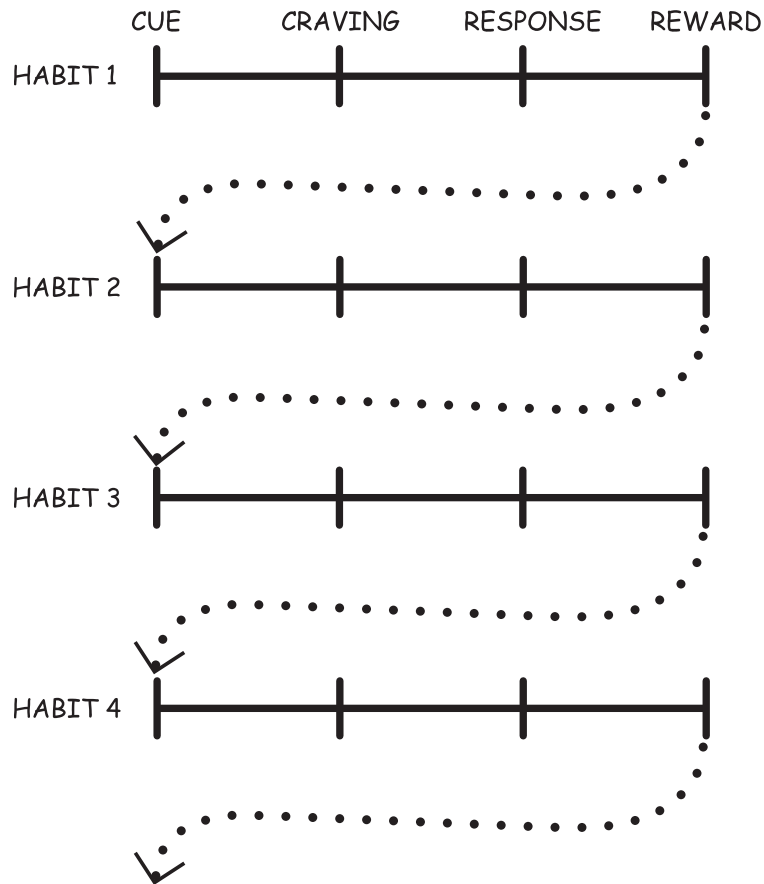


Figure 7: Habit Stacking (Source: Atomic Habits by James Clear)

Chapter 6: Motivation is overrated, environment often matters more

Overview

In this chapter, James points out how important our environment is when it comes to successfully creating habits.

Detailed overview

We are more dependent on vision than any other sense, hence if our environment can visually indicate that we need to perform a certain action, we are more likely to do it compared to when it can't. Simply put, to ensure you perform a habit, make the cues that spark it as visible as possible (for example, want to drink more water? Always keep a bottle of water on your desk). If those cues are hidden or are subtle, it's quite easy to ignore them.

An interesting concept James touches on in this chapter is the idea that the context is the cue. We have different relationships with various objects in our environment, hence different habits are associated with each object. These are contexts. Your sofa might be associated with watching TV, hence when you are on your sofa, the easiest thing to do is watch TV. You can adjust such contexts either by redesigning your environment or by overriding the habit associated with these existing contexts (you can deliberately read when you are on your sofa for a prolonged amount of time, for example, to make it the easiest thing to do when you are on the sofa). It is typically easier to develop new habits in new contexts because you are not fighting old cues. Hence, if you are trying to develop a new habit, find an object in your environment that does not have a context attached to it, and create a new context around it associated with your new habit.

Chapter 7: The secret to self-control

Overview

This chapter touches on how to use your environment to ensure better self-control.

Detailed overview

Disciplined people typically structure their lives to have fewer temptations. The people with the best self-control are usually those who have to use it the least. They do this simply by creating a more disciplined environment (i.e., reducing distractions). James suggests the key to self-control is as follows; **Make the cues of your good habits obvious and the cues of your bad habits invisible.**

An important point equally touched on in this chapter is as follows; the habit cycle for a bad habit is not forgotten by your brain. If the cue is presented, you will have the craving.

Summary of First Law of behavior change: Make the cue obvious

- Application 1.1: Fill out the habit scorecard and write out your current habits to be more aware of them.
- Application 1.2: Use implementation intentions.
- Application 1.3: Use habit stacking.
- Application 1.4: Design your environment. Make the cues for good habits obvious and visible.

How to break a bad habit with the inversion of the First Law: Make the cue invisible

- Application 1.5: Reduce exposure, remove the cues of your bad habits from your environment.

You can download a printable version of the above in James' [habit cheat sheet](#).

“After [Current Habit], I will [New Habit], after [New Habit], I will [What I want].”

Chapter 9: The role of family and friends in shaping your habits

Overview

This chapter shows how our social environment has an impact on how attractive a habit is. If a habit you wish to follow is viewed as normal by a group of individuals (in your entourage), it is more attractive for you to stick to that habit.

We tend to follow habits from 3 groups, The Close (family and friends), The Many (we want to be part of the tribe) and The Powerful (we want to acquire the habits that gave them such social status and the benefits from that social status).

Detailed overview

Whatever habits are normal in your culture are amongst the most attractive behaviors you will find. Hence, being around people who have and cherish the habits you want to develop can be of tremendous help. James uses the case of the Polgar sisters as a good example.

This is a brilliant story of parents who engineered the success of their three daughters (in chess) because they believed hard work trumps all. They home-schooled their daughters from a very young age, resulting in them becoming extremely talented chess players. The youngest of the three became the youngest grandmaster at 15 years old and is considered the best female chess player of all time. James points out that a major factor in this success was their environment. They grew up in an environment that prioritized chess above all, praised them for it and rewarded them for it.

Most of the habits we grow up having are copied from groups we frequent (sports groups, academic groups, religious groups etc.). It is therefore important to find groups that share the habits you want to develop and join them. Having that habit you are looking for should be a social norm in such groups. We typically imitate the habits of one of the following three groups:

- The **Close**: New habits seem achievable when you see them done every day. Belonging to the tribe transforms a personal quest into a group one.
- The **Many**: Whenever we are unsure how to act, we look to the group to guide our behavior. Even though imitating the group can be sometimes beneficial, there can be a downside; the normal behavior of the tribe often overpowers the desired behavior of the individual.
- The **Powerful**: We are typically drawn to behaviors that earn us respect, approval, admiration, and status. Hence, it is quite logical for most to

want to imitate the habits of successful and effective people, to also stand out in life.

Chapter 10: How to find and fix the causes of your bad habits

Overview

To fix bad habits, it's fundamental to understand their root causes. This chapter covers where cravings come from and ways to reprogram your brain to enjoy hard habits.

Detailed overview

On cravings

Every behavior has a surface-level craving and a deeper, underlying motive. Examples of underlying motives are; conservation of energy, obtaining food and water, reproduction, winning social acceptance, etc. Habits can be seen as solutions to these problems (underlying motives).

You can think of a craving as the sense that something is missing, it is the desire to change our internal state. As mentioned in Chapter 8, cravings are a result of anticipation. If it's cold, you crave warmth, because you anticipate that warmth will create an environment you are comfortable in. This is quite interesting because it implies that a lot of our actions in life are predictive, hence the more variety you add to your life, the better the predictions you can make.

On reprogramming your brain

To reprogram your brain to enjoy hard habits, there are three steps James recommends you follow:

- **Change your mindset:** It is possible to make hard habits more attractive if you associate them with a positive experience. An example can be changing a task to an opportunity (From "I have to work out today" to "I get to work out today").
- **Reframe your habits:** Highlight their benefits instead of their drawbacks, this will help in making them more attractive.
- **Motivational rituals:** You can create such rituals to help with your habits. This is basically turning something you enjoy doing into a cue before a difficult habit. For example, if you put on your headphones and listen to some type of music before doing focused work, after some sessions, the act of putting your headphones on can switch your mental state to focused mode.

Summary of Second Law of behavior change: Make it attractive

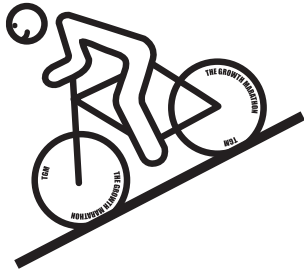
- **Application 2.1:** Use temptation bundling by pairing an action you want to do with one you need to do.

- Application 2.2: Join a culture where the desired behavior is the normal behavior.
- Application 2.3: Create a motivational ritual, by doing something you enjoy immediately before a difficult habit.

How to break a bad habit with the inversion of the Second Law: Make it unattractive

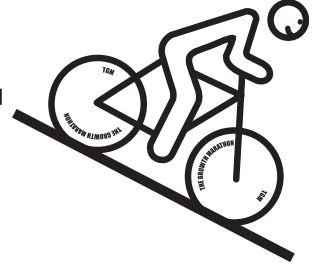
- Application 2.4: Reframe your mindset, highlight the benefits of avoiding your bad habits.

You can download a printable version of the above in James' [habit cheat sheet](#).



THE THIRD LAW

MAKE IT EASY



Chapter 11: Walk slowly, but never backwards

Overview

This chapter points out that the most important way to start a habit is with repetition, and also touches on how repeating an action creates actual physical changes in the brain.

Detailed overview

Motion vs Action

It is easy to get bogged down looking for the best approach for change (the fastest way to lose weight, the perfect idea for a side hustle) hence we don't take action. This state is what James refers to as **Being in Motion** (Planning, strategizing, learning). It results in no concrete outcome. The state that delivers an outcome is **Taking Action**. For example, figuring out 20 articles to write on is motion, writing them is action. Only action leads to results. Motion is good, but most of the time we stick to that because it makes us feel like we are doing something (without the risk of failure). We like delaying failure. To develop habits, you don't want to be merely planning, you want to be practicing. To master a habit, the key is to **start with repetition**, not perfection. Initially, you just need to get your reps in.

Automacity

Automacity is the process of performing a behavior without constantly thinking about each step, this occurs when the non-conscious mind takes over. To get there, all habits follow a similar trajectory, from effortful practice to automatic behavior. Repeating a habit leads to clear physical changes in the brain. For example, cerebellum in musicians, grey matter in mathematicians, hippocampus in taxi drivers etc. all change as they perform their tasks over time. According to Hebb's law, the more you repeat an action, the easier it becomes because of an increase in synaptic efficacy (quicker communication between neurons).

Chapter 12: The law of least effort

Overview

Human beings are programmed to save energy whenever possible, hence convenience and laziness are part of who we are. This chapter explains how priming your environment can help make a habit easy.

Detailed overview

It is human nature to follow the **law of least effort** which states that: *“When deciding between 2 similar options, people will naturally gravitate towards the option that required the least amount of work”*. Out of all the possible actions we can take, the one that is realized is the one that delivers the most value for the least effort.

How to achieve more with less effort

Rather than trying to overcome the friction in your life preventing you to do habits, reduce it. You can reduce the friction by practicing environment design. The more friction points you can remove from your environment, the more you can achieve with less effort.

Prime your environment for future use. This is done by organizing your space for its next intended purpose when you complete an action. For example, if you want to draw tomorrow morning, just keep your drawing equipment on your table before sleeping, basically, preparing your environment for the next action the moment you complete the current action.

You can equally use this concept to add friction and make bad habits difficult to achieve. James uses an example of how to add friction to make watching TV a bit more difficult. You can just unplug the TV after you are done watching or go further and remove the batteries from the remote or go even further and force yourself to say out loud what you’ll watch before watching the TV. You add as many friction layers as you want to make a behavior difficult to repeat.

Chapter 13: How to stop procrastinating by using the 2-minute rule

Overview

James introduces the 2-minute rule in this chapter. This rule helps in breaking down habits into their simple forms to facilitate the start of the habit. He then introduces habit shaping that scales up the 2-minute habits to your ultimate goal.

Detailed overview

Research shows that 40%-50% of our daily actions are done out of habit (that’s quite a large proportion of our day). In addition to that, habits are automatic

choices that influence the conscious decisions that follow after the habit. Hence choosing good habits has a tremendous impact on your day.

How do we ensure we stick to our good habits/create new ones? James indicates that the routine/behavior should start with a ritual. An action that is extremely easy to perform but sets the tone for the action that will follow. This ritual should be the same whenever you want to start that routine, eventually becoming the cue for the routine to start. I do run quite often, and my ritual is simply wearing my running shoes. If I wear my shoes I will run, there is no doubt about it. Wearing my shoes is very easy, what might follow might be a gruesome run, but the ritual is easy. Decisive moments are the moments just before your rituals, the moment you decide whether you'll perform that ritual or not, and that affects actions throughout your day. The moment you decide to order fast food instead of cooking or to drive instead of riding your bicycle, it's a short moment, but with a big impact on your day.

The 2-minute Rule

We typically procrastinate because a task seems daunting. You want to start running and you jump in directly with 5km daily runs, obviously your willpower will get depleted after a short duration and you won't continue with your runs. James suggests that if you start a habit, just make it 2 minutes initially.

Most habits can be scaled down to a 2-minute version (2 minutes are not enough for me, I typically start with 10-15 minutes). These are called gateway habits. Read before bed each night becomes read one page before sleeping, run 5kms becomes walk around the block etc. The idea is to make habits as easy as possible to start. This is powerful because once you have started doing it and cast votes, it is easier to continue thanks to momentum.

Gateway habits can be progressively scaled till you reach your goal. The 2-minute rule is meant to help you master the habit of showing up. Repetition is key at the start of a habit. *You have to standardize before you can optimize.* As you master the initial first 2-minutes, they become your ritual, and you can start scaling your habit up towards your ultimate goal (This is called Habit Shaping). Let's take running, assuming your goal is to be able to run a 10km race. You can start with wearing your shoes and warming up for 5 minutes every day for 2 weeks, then once that's mastered, you scale it to warming up and walking for 10 minutes. Once that is mastered, you move up to running 1.5km, and so on.

Chapter 14: How to make good habits inevitable and bad habits impossible

Overview

The key to making a good habit inevitable is by making it difficult to avoid it. Commitment devices and technology are two tools James suggests to ensure this.

Detailed overview

Commitment device

A commitment device is a choice you make in the present that controls your actions in the future. It is an action that locks you into a future behavior. An example is Victor Hugo. To complete the Haunch back of Notre Dame, he gave out all his clothes to his assistant (except an overall I believe) to make sure he could not go out, forcing him to work on his book.

There are numerous ways to create a commitment device. You can pack lighter meals in advance to ensure you eat healthy, you can book meetings in advance to make them slightly more difficult to cancel, you can even have an accountability partner. Commitment devices are useful because they enable you to take advantage of your good intentions before you can fall victim to temptation.

Technology

Automation is easily done with technology. Technology can be of tremendous help because we can pass on some tasks that will be repeated and free ourselves some time to do things technology cannot do for us yet. For example, we can use technology to block our social media access, or to continuously send money into investment portfolios or to remind us of tasks to be done a month or so from now etc. But technology is a double-edged sword. Bad habits are easy to form with technology because nearly no effort is required for most of them. For example, it is more difficult to stop bingeing (take Netflix for example, episodes load one after the other, all you need to do is chill), YouTube, Instagram etc. have nearly infinite content, scrolling requires no effort at all etc. Hence, use technology cautiously.

Summary of Third Law of behavior change: Make it easy

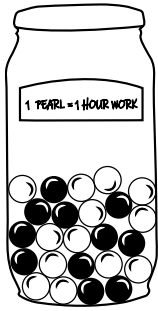
- Application 3.1: Reduce friction. Decrease the number of steps between you and your good habits.
- Application 3.2: Prime the environment. Prepare your environment to make future actions easier.
- Application 3.3: Master the decisive moment. Optimize the small choices that deliver outsized impact.
- Application 3.4: Use the Two-Minute Rule. Downscale your habits until they can be done in two minutes or less.
- Application 3.5: Automate your habits. Invest in technology and one-time purchases that lock in future behavior.

How to break a bad habit with the inversion of the Third Law: Make it difficult

- Application 3.6: Increase friction. Increase the number of steps between you and your bad habits.

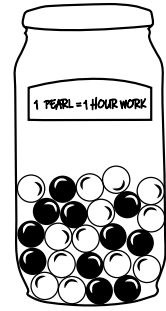
- Application 3.7: Use a commitment device. Restrict your future choices to the ones that benefit you.

You can download a printable version of the above in James' [habit cheat sheet](#).



THE FOURTH LAW

MAKE IT SATISFYING



Chapter 15: The cardinal rule of behavior change

Overview

Align how you reward yourself when accomplishing your goals to how your brain wants to be rewarded (instant gratification). Add a bit of pleasure to the habits that pay off in the long run and a bit of immediate pain to the ones that don't.

Detailed overview

This chapter explains the nature of the human brain and how it is inclined to immediate gratification (rather than delayed gratification), as this is the system that was and is still being used in the animal kingdom. Society evolved at a rapid pace, changing its reward system to one with delayed gratification, and our brains did not keep up. This explains why we like instant gratification so much. It's part of who we are.

We can use this knowledge to our advantage. In the early stages of our habit creation process, short-term rewards can be used to stay on track. Once we have cast enough votes and have embodied the habit we want, we'll need less motivation (reinforcement). At this stage, our identity will keep us on track (incentives can start a habit, but identity sustains a habit).

James' cardinal rule of behavior change states that "*What is immediately rewarded is repeated, what is immediately punished is avoided*".

A technique called **Reinforcement** is introduced in this chapter. It is a technique that links the end of a habit to an immediate reward. It is especially good to stop bad habits. We usually don't add some form of punishment after a bad habit, hence nothing happens, but if we do, it becomes easier to stop a bad habit, as we don't like being punished.

Chapter 16: How to stick with good habits every day

Overview

In this chapter, James touches on the importance of habit tracking when trying to stick with good habits every day.

Detailed overview

Habit tracking

Habit tracking is powerful because it leverages multiple laws of behavior change. It simultaneously makes a behavior obvious, attractive, and satisfying. The visual cue it creates can remind you to act. Habit tracking is inherently motivating because you see the progress you are making and you don't want to lose it, it feels satisfying whenever you record another successful instance of your habit.

You can use automation to make tracking a bit easier, and you only need to track the most important habits. After tracking your habits for a couple of weeks, you can have a look at your tracker and get some insights that can guide your future decisions.

What you track/measure is of great significance. *"We optimize for what we measure, and when we measure the wrong thing, we get the wrong behavior"*. The human brain typically wants to win every game it plays, if your goal is to achieve 80% in a test, you can achieve it by cramming, the end result is that you achieved it. But cramming is useless because you end up forgetting, hence in this case, you need to shift what you measure to the actual purpose. You want to learn and understand, give that to your brain and it will achieve it. Another example, your goal should not be to lose weight (this can be achieved in rather unhealthy ways), but rather to become healthier (this will eventually lead to weight loss).

You can find James' habit tracker [here](#).

How to recover quickly when your habits break down

Sickness, emergencies etc. can make us skip a day or more. It is inevitable to fall off track once in a while. The key is to bounce back immediately. As soon as you are physically/mentally capable, get back to your habit routine. A lot of times we fall into the all-or-nothing mentality, "If I cannot perform the habit perfectly, I'd rather not do it". This is the wrong approach, even if you can only spend a limited time on that habit, still do it. The benefits from habits compound over time, as Charlie Munger says, the first rule of compounding is; **Never interrupt it unnecessarily**. That's why bad workouts are usually more important than good ones because they maintain the compound interest you have accrued from the previous days.

Chapter 17: How an accountability partner can change everything

Overview

This chapter is on the inverse of the Fourth Law: Make it Unsatisfying. By adding punishment at the end of a bad behavior, you progressively ensure that bad behavior is not repeated.

Detailed overview

This section touches on the effect of pain on our behaviors. If we do an action and the action is punished immediately after it is done, our brain learns from it and tries to avoid being punished in the future (The more immediate and costly a mistake is, the faster you'll learn from it). What is important is that the punishment must be clear, no obfuscation. It must be tangible, specific, and immediate. The cost of not doing a habit should be higher than the cost/pain of doing it (in case it is difficult).

Habit contract

A [habit contract](#) is a good way to add an immediate cost to any habit. It can be verbal or written. This is an agreement in which you state your commitment to a habit and the punishment associated if you don't follow through. You can have one or two accountability partners to ensure you stick to the terms of the contract.

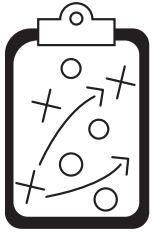
Summary of the Fourth Law of behavior change: Make it satisfying

- Application 4.1: Use reinforcement, give yourself an immediate reward when you complete your habit.
- Application 4.2: Make "doing nothing" enjoyable. When avoiding a bad habit, design a way to see the benefits.
- Application 4.3: Use a Habit Tracker. Keep track of your habit streak and "don't break the chain".
- Application 4.4: Never miss twice. When you forget to do a habit, make sure you get back on track immediately.

How to break a bad habit with the inversion of the Fourth Law: Make it unsatisfying

- Application 4.5: Get an accountability partner. Ask someone to watch your behavior.
- Application 4.6: Create a habit contract. Make the costs of your bad habits public and painful.

You can download a printable version of the above in James' [habit cheat sheet](#).



ADVANCED TACTICS

GOOD TO GREAT



Chapter 18: The truth about talent, when genes matter and when they don't

Overview

This chapter touches on the impact of genes on our success and indicates how to maximize your odds of success.

Detailed overview

A lot of what we do is influenced by our genes. Our genes predispose us to be good at some things and not so much at other things. Our genes make it easy to stick to some habits and not so much other habits (Genes determine your field of opportunity). It is imperative to figure out how to align your ambitions to your abilities. The first way to do that is by figuring out your personality. There are [5 main personality traits](#) that are on a spectrum, determining where you are is a good start.

Those at the top of any competitive field are not only well trained, but they are also well suited to the task. And this is why, to be truly great, selecting the right place to focus is crucial. But how do you figure out the right place to focus (i.e., where the odds are in your favor)?

To figure out in which games the odds are in your favor, you need to [explore and exploit](#). It's an interesting tool that helps you discover a lot and dive in where you can see you'll be good at it. A few interesting articles on this tool can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Chapter 19: The Goldilocks rule, how to stay motivated in life and work

Overview

Differentiate yourself from the pack by being able to handle and embrace boredom.

Detailed overview

The Goldilocks Rule states that: *"Humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities"*. Not too hard, not too easy, just right. Hence, once a habit has been established, it is important to progressively improve it. Without a bit of variety and challenge, we

get bored, and that is a problem in our quest for self-improvement. Success is usually thwarted or marred by boredom, not failure. Hence it is imperative for us to be able to handle and embrace boredom. We need to be able to stick to our habits regardless of our mood. *“Professionals stick to the schedule, amateurs let life get in the way”*.

Chapter 20: The downside of creating good habits

Overview

This chapter touches on how to achieve mastery and some pitfalls you can experience once you have developed good habits.

Detailed overview

It is crucial to continuously improve your habits once they are established. Once a habit is good enough on autopilot, it is typical to stop paying attention to little errors. To achieve mastery, it is important to constantly improve on our established habits. To do that we need to add deliberate practice to the equation.

Habits + Deliberate Practice = Mastery

Each habit becomes the base for the next habit, hence unlocking the next level of performance. It is an endless cycle. To remain conscious of your performance over time (so that you can continue to refine and improve your habits), you need to establish a system of **reflection and review**. Pat Riley used the [Career Best Effort Program](#) with the 1986 Lakers, to bring them to success. This program helped the players get feedback on their output and find places for improvement. Without reflection, we can easily lie to ourselves, we have no process of determining if we are doing better or worse compared to yesterday.

James himself uses two modes of review. Every December he reflects on the year that just ended by tallying how many articles he published, how many workouts he put out, how many places he visited etc. You can find some of his annual reviews [here](#). Every half a year he does an integrity report. These reports allow him to revisit his core values.

Conclusion

This summary can be read in conjunction with my other articles, especially [Practical tools from Atomic Habits](#). I believe you'll get some value out of these two articles. If you enjoyed the articles on Atomic Habits, I encourage you to visit James' website and get yourself a copy of Atomic Habits. The complete list of my articles on Atomic Habits can be found below:

- [Six Concepts from Atomic Habits](#)
- [Four Laws of Behavior Change](#)
- [Practical Tools from Atomic Habits](#)
- [Atomic Habits Additional Exercises](#)
- [Inspirational One-liners from Atomic Habits](#)