

Want to Change Your Habits?

Change Your Habits - Change Your Behavior

There's just one way to radically change your behavior: radically change your environment. Most of us would like to think that our habits follow our intentions. The truth is that one of the mind's chief functions is to spot and utilize patterns as shortcuts, in order to process the multitude of information we observe each day.

Using Your Environment to Change Your Behavior

Discipline is built like a muscle and can likewise be worn out - environmental changes can be helpful in getting ourselves to do difficult tasks regularly.

Task association: You can use task association with environments. Your 'office' should be a place where you work; placing too many fun things in this space can decrease productivity. It can be hard to stop playing and start getting things done. Minimize distractions by removing anything unrelated to work.

Reduce or increase friction

Tweak your environment to make specific behaviors easier to do. Tough habits will stick when you simplify the behavior.

Do not focus on the motivation to do a specific behavior but focus on making the specific behavior easier to do. Habits are the brain's way of simplifying the movements required to achieve a given result.

By designing for laziness, you can stop or reduce a behavior. For example, put bad snacks in the garage on a shelf that requires a ladder. Since your willpower is such a fragile thing, instead focus your energies on making undesirable habits harder to perform.

When it comes to reducing friction, the most universal example is to apply the 'hit the ground running' mindset to your toughest habits. I pack my gym clothes in a bag the night before and place them right next to the door. Eliminate all possible excuses by getting things ready when your will power is high.

Use contextual cues

According to research on implementation intentions, it is easier to make a habit consistent if it is built off an existing chain. In other words, a task becomes easier to perform regularly when it is preceded or followed by an event.

Because an event happens at the same time every day, it is easy to build on a second task, because there is a trigger to rely on every single day, without fail.

Try scheduling tasks for consistent parts of your schedule: coming home from work, during/after your lunch break, as soon as you wake up, etc.

Routinize with systems

Few things happen overnight. Success is most often the result of consistent execution of a single habit, so perhaps it is no surprise that research suggests having too many choices is the enemy of long-term goals. In other words, having 'options' makes consistent behavior harder to maintain.

The classic financial example is saving vs. spending: instead of relying on willpower to save money, take away the decision altogether by having automatic withdrawals from your paycheck into an IRA and/or a savings account. This allows you to spend with less worry, since the system has taken care of stability for you, by withdrawing money before you even see it.

That small systematic change can have a measurable impact alone because it will compound (not unlike your savings!) if done over time.

Identify the aspects of your life that you consider mundane, and then 'routinize' those aspects as much as possible. In short, make fewer decisions.