

## 8

# Habits

## *The Key to a Sustainable System of Deliberate Practice*

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*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*

—WILL DURANT, *THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY*

### DECISION POINT

Begin here if you have read the book *Better Results (BR)* and

- are routinely measuring your performance *and*
- have collected sufficient data to establish a reliable, evidence-based profile of your therapeutic effectiveness *and*
- have completed the Taxonomy of Deliberate Practice Activities in Psychotherapy *and*
- have identified an individualized learning objective with the greatest chance of improving your effectiveness *and*
- need help developing consistent deliberate practice routines.

The previous chapters have summarized key factors worthy of deliberate practice (DP) and offered concrete exercises to support the development of related skills. It is hoped the information presented thus far serves to support a decision to employ DP and provide clear direction on what to do. If this has happened, there is some important news: Deciding to engage in DP is half the

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*The Field Guide to Better Results: Evidence-Based Exercises to Improve Therapeutic Effectiveness*, S. D. Miller, D. Chow, S. Malins, and M. A. Hubble (Editors)

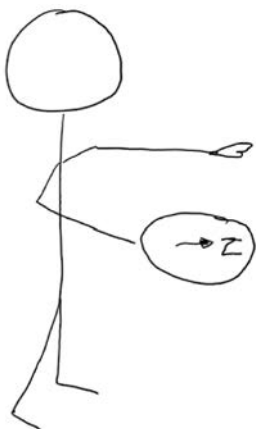
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battle in becoming more effective. Establishing a system to support implementation and make it a routine is the next step in ensuring DP has a lasting impact (Carden & Wood, 2018).

As has been said before, DP is a long game. Frequently, gains are not noticeable in the short term (Ericsson, 2009; Ericsson et al., 1993). For this reason, reliance on intention, willpower, or motivation is risky and unlikely to be sufficient to sustain engagement following the burst of activity often associated with interest in a new endeavor (Ajzen et al., 2009). Incidentally, brain systems focused on thinking, decision making, and intentions operate differently from those fueling long-standing behavior patterns, which are much slower to change and require less conscious decision making (Wood & Rünger, 2016). Said another way, force of will may be sufficient to scale a mountain today but not support a daily exercise regimen committed to yesterday. Doing the latter requires establishing a new *habit*—defined as “a settled tendency or usual manner of behavior . . . that has become nearly or completely involuntary” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Thankfully, research provides a clear picture of the process involved.

This chapter will

- briefly summarize the empirical literature on long-term habit formation,
- identify evidence-based principles for making DP a default part of one’s daily routine, and
- provide exercises to support the development of and overcome any barriers to a “DP habit.”



### FIELD GUIDE TIP

Set the *Field Guide* down and reread Chapter 14 in *Better Results*, “Designing a Sustainable System of Deliberate Practice.”

Next, using a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is *high* and 1 *low*), rate how well you have implemented each of the four elements of a successful deliberate practice plan. Known as ARPS, these include (a) automated structure, (b) reference point, (c) playful experimentations, and (d) support persons.

Reading further without first working at improving the implementation of any element scoring 3 or lower risks DP becoming just one more interesting but unused idea a therapist will come across in the course of their professional lifetime (Michie et al., 2009; Webb & Sheeran, 2006).

## REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

A defining characteristic of a habit is that it occurs with little conscious effort or thought (Mazar & Wood, 2018; Verplanken, 2006; Wood & Neal, 2007). Central to its development is “automaticity,” wherein environmental cues trigger the execution of a predictable pattern of behavior outside a person’s intention or awareness (Bargh, 1994). This definition clarifies habit formation is more than repetition (although, as will be seen, doing something over and over again plays a role) or merely the development of a sense of familiarity. Speaking metaphorically, an established habit is like part of the furniture. It exists and is employed effectively, with neither acknowledgment nor attention.

Wood (2019) identified three reliable pathways to habit formation and revision. The first is regular repetition. While it is widely believed habits take 21 days to form, the evidence shows otherwise. It takes much longer. In what is now known as the seminal study on the subject, Lally et al. (2010) asked 96 volunteers to work on developing a new, healthy habit (e.g., eating, drinking, or activity). Data on the frequency of completion and degree of automaticity indicated an average of 66 days were required (with a range from 18 to 254), with more complex changes taking longer. Several other findings from the study are informative. First, missing the occasional opportunity to practice a new behavior resulted in only a negligible drop in the development of automaticity. Clearly, hope for success is not dashed when choice or circumstance results in a “time-out.” Second, context is important (Lally et al., 2011). Practicing in the same location on the same day at the same time is facilitative. Environments with unique or memorable features are also helpful, providing cues for action (e.g., “I do 20 minutes DP every Friday in my office following the team meeting, and that’s also when I have a caramel latte each week”). Third, and finally, the wide range in times reported by Lally and colleagues indicates some habits can form much more quickly. Identifying these and breaking down more complex ones into their smaller constituent parts makes shorter, easier-to-schedule practice periods possible, thereby increasing opportunities for automation to develop more quickly (Kaushal & Rhodes, 2015). While on the subject of time, Fogg (2020), following years of research at the Behavior Design Lab at Stanford, concluded consistency is far more important than amount. Doing a few minutes of a given activity on a regular basis, he reported, yields more dividends than regularly increasing the time allotted to practice. The reason is simple. It is easier to commit to and follow through with small “entry points,” recognizing they can always be extended. By contrast, setting up longer periods and then failing to fill the time with practice can sponsor frustration and disappointment.

The second pathway is rewards. Forming new habits requires persistence despite the pressure of distractions or more desirable pursuits (Andersson & Bergman, 2011). Along the way, rewards can help maintain focus and concentration, with particular types superior to others. Intrinsic rewards (e.g., reminders of internal motivations) tend to be more effective than extrinsic (e.g., money, validation by managers or a supervisor; Lally & Gardner, 2013).

External rewards *can* enhance habit formation, provided they do not become the sole purpose of practicing (Deci et al., 1999). For example, a meta-analysis of 40 years of research conducted by Cerasoli et al. (2014) found extrinsic rewards negatively alter the link between internal motivation and performance outcomes. In particular, when the locus of control shifts to someone or something outside the self, what one once did because it felt right or good becomes a chore.

The last pathway is reducing friction. Consider the following: slightly delaying the time an elevator takes to arrive once the call button is pressed, increasing the distance one must cross to access unhealthy food, and placing recycling bins close to workers. All share a common characteristic. They either increase or decrease the likelihood of a desirable behavior occurring and being repeated: increasing the use of stairs, decreasing the consumption of “junk” food, and separating reusables from trash, respectively (Clohessy et al., 2019; Houten et al., 1981; Ludwig et al., 1998; Rozin et al., 2011; Soler et al., 2010; Wansink et al., 2016). In the literature, such elements or conditions have come to be called “friction” (Wood & Neal, 2016). Common to all work environments and pursuits, they can be modified in the service of promoting habit formation. Reduce the source to increase behavioral options and repetition; increase them, and the opposite occurs.

In their study of highly effective therapists, Miller and Hubble (2011) found those who eventually rise to the top, becoming “supershinks,” do not “exist in a vacuum, bursting suddenly on the scene following years of private toil” (p. 25). Far from it. The best reside in a social context consisting of people—family, partners, colleagues, supervisors, teachers, coaches—who nurture and support habits of excellence. It is familiar to anyone committed to DP: What is required is continuously reaching for performance objectives beyond one’s current ability, adopting an error-centric mindset (i.e., welcoming mistakes as learning opportunities), and being open to feedback.

Greaney et al. (2018) reported on the role of social support in changing risky habits (e.g., smoking, unhealthy eating, sedentary lifestyle). Participants who identified one supportive person were significantly more successful than those who tried to go it alone. “Participants identifying multiple support persons,” the authors found, “had 100% greater reduction” in multiple risky behaviors (p. 198). Thus, when it comes to developing new habits, social support is good, and more is better.

## **EVIDENCE-BASED PRINCIPLES RELATED TO HABIT FORMATION**

No doubt, DP has the potential to help you achieve better results. The same is seen in many domains of human performance. The challenge, once you begin to implement it, is sustainability. Detailed suggestions were provided in Chapter 14 of *Better Results (BR)* (pp. 157–170). If you haven’t already done so and find yourself struggling to be consistent, we recommend returning to that

section first, paying particular attention to the discussion of ARPS (automated structure, reference point, playful experimentations, and support persons). For ease of reference, Table 14.2 from *BR* summarizing the four elements and potential action steps is represented here.

System	Think . . .	Description
Automated structure	Algorithmically	Schedule it Protect the DP environment Create a black box
Reference point	Directionally	Keep one eye on your outcome data Keep the other eye on your current learning objectives (see TDPA)
Playful experimentation	Like a child	Lateral learning Call on your ideal identity The “it’s never too late to have a good session” technique Arrange a surprise party Test to learn, don’t learn for the test
Support	Communally	Form a scenius community Seek out separate coaches for performance and development

The ARPS framework is supported by the research on habit formation reviewed in this chapter. By definition, habits do not require planning or forethought. Transforming new behaviors into habits does, however. You must establish systems (e.g., turning off the phone, email notifications) and structures (e.g., time, place, focus) that make engagement in DP *automatic*, independent of one’s motivational state. Rewards are also important. Here is where having a *reference point* is essential. What better reward for DP exists than comparing your current performance data with your baseline and seeing progress, the results of your hard work? In addition, maintaining a *playful* attitude and spirit of *experimentation*—especially in the face of the setbacks and mistakes that are an integral part of DP—supports the risk-taking necessary for the development of new ways of thinking and behaving (Brown & Vaughan, 2009). Last but not least is social support; its importance cannot be overstated. Friends, colleagues, coaches, and a community greatly increase the chances of successful habit formation.

In addition to ARPS, three principles emerge from the review of the empirical literature.

### Principle 1: Identity Matters

The role therapist identity can play in developing and sustaining DP habits was introduced, along with concrete exercises, in *BR* (Miller et al., 2020,

pp. 123–137, 165). Simply put, our professional identity reflects the values we hold about the world and our work. When consciously and intentionally aligned with our DP objectives, the time and effort we devote to improving our ability to help become intrinsically rewarding, adding meaning and purpose to our engagement in challenging, long-term projects. Such alignment, research further shows, enhances our sense of personal authenticity (Gan & Chen, 2017).

### **Principle 2: Anticipation Is the Best Defense**

Having a clear DP plan helps in habit formation. That said, many are too idealistic in scope, failing to consider the barriers likely encountered along the way (Buehler et al., 2010). When it comes to goal setting, current evidence suggests the combination of two strategies works best: first, visualizing the desired objective (e.g., reviewing outcome data twice a week, spending 20 minutes twice a week at the end of the workday completing one of the many exercises recommended in the *Field Guide*) and, second, connecting it with the key barriers to achievement and concrete plans for addressing such obstacles. Making it easy to anticipate and adapt to problems encountered (i.e., if situation X arises, I will use strategy Y to achieve goal Z) lessens the chance of disrupting automaticity, characteristic of established habits (Gollwitzer, 1999).

### **Principle 3: You Have Done This Before**

More than 40% of what we do on a daily basis is habitual—patterns of thinking and behaving you have already successfully created (Wood, 2019). Whether deemed “good” or “bad,” “healthy,” or “unhealthy,” the same process is involved. In short, you have done this before. Habits may be hard work to establish or change, but doing so is nothing new. Using what you have learned from these experiences will be helpful in developing the habits necessary to sustain your engagement in DP.

## **EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPING THE HABITS SUPPORTING DELIBERATE PRACTICE**

The following exercises are aligned with the principles and aim to help make DP a permanent *and* evolving part of your professional development. Each is to be completed within a specified time—most within 5 minutes. For this reason, it will be helpful to have a timer present. No need for a fancy stopwatch because most mobile phones come with one. Each can be completed alone or together with a colleague or coach. Table 8.1 provides an at-a-glance summary of the principles and their associated exercises. The first four revisit the ARPS framework.

TABLE 8.1. Summary of Principles and Exercises

Principle	Principle summary	Related exercises	Exercise summary
1: Automated structure	Build DP into your existing automated habits.	1: Make it so 2: Make it easy and rewarding	Schedule DP and specify the particular activities for each episode to make them more likely to happen. Incorporate small, but meaningful rewards into DP, ideally linked to its overall purpose.
2: Reference point	Finding a range of ways to track progress toward goals helps when improvement is slow.	3: Where are you now?	Build qualitative and quantitative performance benchmarks into DP alongside regular reviews.
3: Playful experimentation	Approach DP with playfulness to maintain creativity and manage difficulties.	4: Playful progress 5: All change 6: Parallel play	Use comic rewards, light-hearted exercises with friends and family, music or rhyming in DP. Capitalize on current or upcoming changes that disrupt existing habits and may make room for new ones. Try out DP in areas of your life other than psychotherapy, particularly active rest hobbies.
4: Support	Do not approach DP alone; invite and recruit others to support DP.	7: Choosing a coach 8: Building a support network	Identify one or two potential coaches and contact them for an initial conversation. Reach out to a peer or network of peers who are either using DP or you think could benefit from trying it.
5: Identify your identity	Build rewards into DP that remind you of who you are becoming as you practice.	9: The retirement party	Write a speech that includes what you would like to be said about you and your future work at retirement.
6: Forewarned is forearmed	When planning goals, make sure they account for the most important barriers to progress.	10: The premortem	Plan for potential problems with implementing DP by imagining you have already failed and why it happened.
7: You have done this before	Use strategies and knowledge you have gained from building habits previously.	11: This is not your first rodeo	Go through your habit history, identifying factors that helped and hindered you in building habits.

Note. DP = deliberate practice.

**Exercise 1: Make It So (5 minutes)****Principle: The A in ARPS****Purpose**

Busyness is a common barrier to making DP routine. Scheduling ahead of time is the “antidote.” Start small—10 to 20 minutes. Eliminate as much prep work as possible by identifying specific tasks you can begin at the outset of your scheduled time. Small, meaningful, and clearly defined tasks will help you to get going and make the time feel like it was well spent, especially at the start.

**Task**

Make short periods of DP a part of your schedule for the coming month. To ensure success,

- make it obvious in your calendar so it cannot be overwritten and is visible to you and anyone who handles your schedule;
- connect your DP to an established habit in your work routine (e.g., after lunch or a regular meeting that is unlikely to be canceled);
- reward yourself after completing a DP activity;
- include time to rest in the scheduling—DP is effortful, so shorter, intensive periods of DP followed by brief rests is more effective; and
- share what you are doing with others, friends, family, and particularly colleagues who are incorporating DP in their work.

**Exercise 2: Make It Easy and Rewarding (5–15 minutes)****Principle: 1****Purpose**

It is learning theory 101. What you reward increases. Punishment suppresses behavior. Identifying small, meaningful rewards will support your motivation to continue DP, especially at the outset when the most effort is required.

**Task**

Mindful of the research reviewed earlier documenting the potency of intrinsic rewards and the reduction of friction in habit formation, devote time to creating a work environment that makes DP easy, enjoyable, and productive (people, decor, artwork, furniture, natural light, everyday conveniences, and tangible rewards).

- Make a list of your reasons for doing DP. In constructing or organizing your workspace, find ways to remind yourself of your best intentions. It could be a picture, an objet d’art, a poster with an inspirational quote, or an avatar on your social media profile. It could even be a reminder on your phone or computer.



- Spend a few minutes each week for 1 month noting what gets in the way of your DP. It could be clutter, excessive noise, hunger, size of caseload, or anything. The following month, rank order the barriers from most to least disruptive and start addressing them one at a time, starting at the top.
- Make a list of people with whom you will share your successes and struggles, seeking out cheerleaders rather than naysayers, team players rather than competitors.

### Exercise 3: Where Are You Now? (5–15 minutes)

#### Principle: 2

##### Purpose

In a long-term learning project such as DP, having a regular, understandable assessment of key performance indicators helps identify progress where it might not be noticed otherwise.

##### Task

Identify and/or build in key performance reference points of where you are now:

- Find out or calculate your current outcome performance metrics, ideally benchmarked against the performance of other psychotherapists, as discussed in Chapter 1.
- Identify your current individualized learning objective, preferably using recordings of your sessions to help you discover it, coupled with your aggregated outcomes.
- Keep a recording of a recent session that highlighted some current skill deficits you will work on with DP, where you have permission to retain the recording for a few months. Diarize a time to listen back to this session segment after a couple of months of DP.
- Use your current “how I do therapy” blueprint (see Chapter 1 for further explanation) as a qualitative benchmark, redrafting and reviewing it as your practice evolves with DP.

At least once a month, review these way markers as part of your DP to help identify points of change.

### Exercise 4: Playful Progress (5–15 minutes)

#### Principle: 3

##### Purpose

DP can be hard, and the slow progress can be disheartening. Therefore, this exercise aims to help find ways of bringing playfulness to the process, which can maintain a sense of fun, creativity, and lightheartedness.

**Task**

Brainstorm ways to bring playfulness into DP, then try one or two out at your next DP sessions. Some examples of bringing playfulness to DP are

- setting your individualized learning goals to music, such as a jingle on a commercial (alternatively, work out a rhyme that describes your learning objective);
- trying out the therapeutic skills you are developing in DP with friends and family members during casual conversations and seeking their feedback in a lighthearted way; and
- making comic rewards for attempts at improvement (e.g., winning a jelly bean or chocolate, gaining a plastic trophy for a set number of DP hours).

**Exercise 5: All Change (5–15 minutes)****Principle: 3****Purpose**

This exercise aims to help you identify areas of upcoming or existing change that may present a way to playfully introduce new habits that could support DP.

**Task**

Take 2 to 5 minutes to list changes that are going on in your home or work life at the moment or that have occurred recently. Your list can include anything, but the following are some examples to prompt your thinking to include changes you may have badged as positive or negative:

- changing jobs (Yes. Drastic. But some jobs are hazardous to your well-being and are not conducive to your development.)
- moving desks
- working in a new way or system
- having a new supervisor or coach
- getting a new pet, child, or partner

Consider the following:

- How could these changes disrupt the status quo in a way that paves a route to new DP-related habits? Take 2 to 5 minutes to brainstorm ways that changes in your life might facilitate the introduction of DP.
- Take 1 to 5 minutes to consider where you might start with leveraging this change to support DP.

**Exercise 6: Parallel Play (5–10 minutes to start)****Principle: 3****Purpose**

Many high achievers in demanding roles find *active rest*, hobbies that, in some ways, reflect themes of their work but without key drawbacks. A quintessential

example of this is academics who are rock climbers: Climbing takes thought, planning, and a strategy and is time consuming—just like research. However, with rock climbing, you get the exhilaration of success by the end of the day rather than having to wait months or years for the outcome of research (Mitchell, 1983). This exercise aims to identify activities that are outside the realm of psychotherapy DP but might draw on parallel principles.

### Task

Are there any activities you do or used to do that can give a similar sense of achievement or satisfaction as psychotherapy but in a different sphere of life? For example, playing basketball may, at face value, look completely unrelated to psychotherapy, but perhaps there are parallels in the way that you aim to collaborate with players on your team or the way you strategically analyze how to address particularly challenging defenses in a time-out. However, basketball also avoids some of the difficulties of psychotherapy—you get to know how it pans out by the end of the evening rather than working for several weeks, months, or years to see the fruit of your labor.

- Identify an activity or hobby that is like psychotherapy but not psychotherapy, and consider trying DP in this area at the same time as DP in psychotherapy. Continuing our basketball example, rather than just shooting around at random when you are starting to play, work out a short practice that is likely to help you shoot more effectively, even though it may take small incremental gains. A similar approach could be taken to swimming, running, chess, crochet, or any hobby requiring specific trainable skills. Think of a way of doing DP that isn't psychotherapy DP and can be playful or fun.
- If you once found an activity that gave similar satisfaction to psychotherapy, but you no longer do it, now might be a good time to restart this pursuit to provide a release from the efforts of DP for psychotherapy in a different area that could provide a similar sense of reward.

### Exercise 7: Choosing a Coach (5–10 minutes)

#### Principle: 4

#### Purpose

Given the central role of a coach in DP, this exercise aims to help identify someone with the appropriate characteristics.

### Task

Identify one or two potential coaches and contact them one at a time for an initial conversation. Aim high with this choice (see *BR*; Miller et al., 2020, pp. 35–39, 112–113). Aim for someone who you feel

- has authority but is not authoritarian,
- is invested in you finding your best way of doing things rather than replicating their approach,

- is clear about where you want help, and
- has sufficient skill to be able to identify your deficits and offer strategies to remediate them.

### **Exercise 8: Building a Support Network (5–10 minutes)**

#### **Principle: 4**

#### **Purpose**

Given the central role of a coach in DP, this exercise aims to help identify someone with the appropriate characteristics.

#### **Task**

Reach out to a peer or network of peers who are embarking on the use of DP in their practice or people you would like to encourage to do so. You could collaborate with someone who works in your area or reach out beyond. The International Center for Clinical Excellence network might be a useful starting place (see <https://www.iccexcellence.com>).

### **Exercise 9: The Retirement Party (30 minutes)**

#### **Principle: 5**

#### **Purpose**

This is an adaptation of an existing exercise (Harris, 2009) that aims to link personal values with DP and the longer term results of persisting with it.

#### **Task**

Imagine you set up a sustainable system of DP from this day forth. It is now your retirement party, and a close friend who knows you well and cares about you gets up in front of your family, friends, and colleagues to give a speech about how you conducted the remainder of your career. What would you want them to be able to say about you and what was important to you during the rest of your career?

- Take a couple of minutes to picture the scene and imagine what principles or values you would like to hear your friend say that you upheld and stood for through the rest of your career. Write these down (5 minutes).
- Now your friend describes some of the things you did on a regular basis that showed what you valued. What routine practices would you like them to be able to cite? Some might be activities you already do, but some may be activities you aspire to do. List these regular, routine activities (3 minutes).
- Where would DP fit in this speech? What would your friend say about
  - what you did,
  - how you made DP part of your day-to-day life,
  - how you overcame barriers to keep it going throughout your career, and
  - how DP impacted your personal and professional life and those you encountered?

- Spend 3 minutes on each of these areas, writing down what you would like your friend to be able to say at your retirement party.
- Look back over what you have written either alone, with a colleague who has completed the same exercise or with a coach or supervisor. Spend 10 minutes reviewing these questions in reflection on this exercise:
  - What are the central threads running throughout the speech that are components of your identity you would like to nurture and grow?
  - How might DP support this?
  - What does this exercise tell you about how DP might need to look for it to play a consistent role in your career?
  - What does this speech tell you about where to start with implementing DP now?

### Exercise 9: The 5-Minute Version

Imagine a close friend giving a speech about the rest of your career at your retirement party. Spend a minute each on (a) thinking about where DP would fit in this speech, (b) how DP would support the important values you would like to uphold in the rest of your career, and (c) how DP would look and fit in your ideal future career. Now spend 2 minutes reflecting on what this tells you about how you want DP to affect your identity and where it would be best to start with this system.

### Exercise 10: The Premortem (30 minutes)

#### Principle: 6

#### Purpose

Prospective hindsight is a process of imagining a future event has already happened and helps people to be more accurate in predicting how plans will progress (Mitchell et al., 1989). Gary Klein (2007) applied this approach to project planning by asking participants to imagine a project has already failed. This approach helped participants identify weaknesses in the plan and adjustments required to improve it. The premortem approach is applied to DP implementation in this exercise.

#### Task

Imagine you started a system of DP today, and you are looking back a year from now. It has been a complete disaster and has failed miserably.

- Write a detailed description of why it failed so badly and all the reasons that caused the failure. Remember to write in the past tense, looking back a year from now. This helps overcome futuristic optimism and the planning fallacy and gives clarity on potential barriers that may be difficult to call to mind when hopeful about a future plan (10 minutes).
- Create an “if-then” guide for each potential problem your DP system may face. Discuss this with a colleague or a coach or supervisor to help brainstorm

adaptations to your plans that would account for the barriers you are likely to face (15 minutes).

- In case these were not identified in your premortem, some of the most likely barriers are described next. Spend 5 minutes checking whether the plans you have made will address these issues:
  - **The pull to perform:** It is unlikely anyone in your service will be pushing you to make DP happen, but there may well be a pull to get more clients seen more quickly, which could cut into DP time. How would you deal with that?
  - **A hard day's night:** As described earlier, DP is effortful and tiring, so it may not be the most appetizing activity to follow a hard day, week, or therapy session. The mental effort involved in DP could spoil your plans when internal resources are depleted. How could you overcome that?
  - **Resource restriction:** Professional development activities are limited in almost all psychotherapy organizations and are usually focused on attaining competence (or at least familiarity) with new therapeutic techniques. This is unlikely to leave much room for DP, which aims to be an ongoing component of professional development for all therapy techniques. How would you tackle this conundrum?
  - **Softening the blow (maybe too much):** Some supervisors or coaches might feel DP is a way of being excessively self-critical. They may emphasize the complexity of a client's problems, say that your efforts are good enough, or perhaps infer that you are nit-picking by identifying a small unhelpful habit in the grand scheme of things. In general, your support systems may aim to comfort you in a well-meaning manner when you identify microskills for DP. There may be truth in what they say, but how will you manage this dynamic to progress with DP?

### **Exercise 10: The 5-Minute Version**

Spend 2 minutes imagining that your attempt to embed DP fails terribly over the coming months. Spend 1 minute identifying the top three reasons why this happened. Pick the most important of these three reasons and take 2 minutes to make at least one “if–then” plan for how you would tackle it.

### **Exercise 11a: This Is Not Your First Rodeo, Part 1—Your Forgotten Rodeos (15–20 minutes for each part, ideally alone initially, then reflect with a coach, practice partner, or small group)**

#### **Principle: 7**

#### **Purpose**

This series of exercises aims to draw on your previous experience of building sustainable habits (or attempts to do so) and how this can inform your plan for a sustainable DP system.

### Task

Think through times in your personal or professional life when you have felt excited, enthused, determined, or energized to try something new or different, and it has not worked out. Perhaps you started but could not stick with it, or nothing happened at all. With the benefit of hindsight, what got in the way in each of these areas?

- **Existing routine:** Specifically, what daily structures or habits prevented this from becoming part of your normal life?
- **Environment:** What environmental cues (or the absence of such cues) might have made it harder for this habit to form?
- **People:** Which people did you not have on board who might have helped with this (or potentially obstructed habit formation because they were not involved)?
- **Willpower:** How much importance did you place on willpower in making this habit work?

### Exercise 11b: This Is Not Your First Rodeo, Part 2—Your Winning Rodeos (15–20 minutes)

#### Principle: 7

#### Purpose

This part of the exercise aims to make use of helpful strategies established in previous or existing habits that may be applied to DP.

### Task

Think about helpful, healthy, and/or valued activities you do regularly as part of your current routine at work or in your personal life.

- Specifically identify two to five habits or routines that are important to you that support aspects of your work or your life more broadly. These are likely to be habits you take completely for granted and may be so deep in the water that you could easily overlook them. If it is hard to think of these, go through a typical day from waking up, and in 30-minute intervals, identify activities that are helpful for you.
- What helped these habits to form? Again, be aware of the urge just to shrug your shoulders and say, “Well, they just seemed to happen.” If this is your experience, it is just underlining that massive, long-standing bouts of willpower are not the key to long-standing habit formation. This is the beauty of habits: Their ability to continue is barely noticeable in terms of conscious effort, but this makes it difficult to identify their mechanisms. One way to do this is to track back to a time when you were not doing the habit and consider how it started.

- Think through the role played by each of the following areas in forming each habit.
  - **Existing routine:** What aspects of your existing routine (at the time the habit was started) helped the new habit to form? In what way did existing behaviors cue the new habit? What factors were reinforcing, rewarding, reminding, or recognizing occasions of carrying out the habit?
  - **Environment:** What was going on in your environment that cued the new habit—even if in small, seemingly trivial ways, such as objects being close and accessible or far away and inaccessible?
  - **People:** Who was involved in either helping form this habit (maybe you did it with someone or for someone) or supported you in forming this habit? What did they do? How did you get them involved?
  - **Willpower:** In the long term, what role did willpower play in establishing this habit?

**Exercise 11c: This Is Not Your First Rodeo, Part 3—Your Next Rodeo (15–20 minutes)**

**Principle: 7**

**Purpose**

The final part of this exercise uses what was learned in Parts 1 and 2 to distill strategies likely to be helpful in DP, alongside possible barriers and how to manage them.

**Task**

Reflect on the key themes you noticed while completing Parts 1 and 2 with a coach, practice partner, or small group who have also completed the exercise.

- Use your reflections from Parts 1 and 2 to complete Table 8.2.
- Identify what has been helpful and unhelpful from your previous experiences of successful and unsuccessful attempts to integrate new habits into your routine.

**TABLE 8.2. Applying Learning From Previous Habits to a Sustainable System of DP**

Areas for rewards, reinforcers, reminders, and recognition	Unhelpful with habits before	Helpful with habits before	Helpful for DP habits now
Integrating into routine			
Environmental cues			
Involvement of people			
Where willpower fits			



- From these elements, what do you think might help you establish a sustainable system of DP? Pay particular attention to rewards, reinforcers, reminders, and recognition in the way you could
  - integrate DP into your existing routine,
  - shape your environment to encourage DP,
  - helpfully involve other people in your DP habits, and
  - keep willpower in its rightful place.

### Exercise 11: The 5-Minute Version

Spend 2 minutes identifying healthy, helpful, and/or valued activities you carry out on a regular basis. Now spend 2 minutes identifying habits you wanted to form but failed to do so. Take a minute to reflect on the differences between the two and how this informs your approach to embedding DP sustainably.

### SUMMARY

No matter how motivated you feel about DP right now or how strong you perceive your willpower to be, the main message of this chapter is that the structured systems you build around DP hold more sway in keeping you going in the longer term. Specifically, this chapter outlined current evidence on using rewards linked to intrinsic motivators, managing the environment to promote and protect DP, finding appropriate support, and tracking progress. Perhaps most important, this chapter discussed the likelihood of failure and how responses to obstacles can be key in the continuation of a challenging but important activity like DP. Like some sustainable practices in energy use, the activities recommended in this chapter could seem to slow immediate progress and feel costly, but in the long run, aim to generate their own energy, requiring less motivation-related resources over time for sustaining DP.

### FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

This chapter reviewed the available research, identified evidence-based principles, and suggested a DP practice plan. Additional research and recommendations can be found in the following:

Clear, J. (2018). *Atomic habits: An easy and proven way to build good habits and break bad ones*. Random House.

This book offers a simple and practical explanation of how habits are formed and how the mechanisms for habit formation can be harnessed strategically.

Ericsson, K. A., & Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the science of expertise*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

A summary of the evidence on DP and its processes and outcomes, alongside the experience of using it.

- Gardner, B., Abraham, C., Lally, P., & de Bruijn, G. J. (2012). Towards parsimony in habit measurement: Testing the convergent and predictive validity of an automaticity subscale of the Self-Report Habit Index. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-9-102>.  
A brief self-report assessment of whether automaticity has been achieved.
- Miller, S. D., Hubble, M. A., & Chow, D. (2020). *Better results: Using deliberate practice to improve therapeutic effectiveness*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000191-000>  
An explanation of how DP can be applied to psychotherapy to improve outcomes.
- Pang, A. S. K. (2016). *Rest: Why you get more done when you work less*. Basic Books.  
A deep dive into case studies and more generalizable evidence on the value of rest for effective and mentally taxing work.
- Wood, W. (2019). *Good habits, bad habits: The science of making positive changes that stick*. Macmillan.  
An explanation of the science behind habit formation from a leading researcher in the field.

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