

Using Habits for self improvement

A topic covered in cognitive science is the Habit System. This is an important topic to understand for everybody as 40 percent of what you do in a given day is based around the habit system. The habits a person builds can have a profound impact on their life. Which is why it is important to build good habits and remove bad habits from our life.

Habitual actions are tasks you do when you're not thinking about it. Consider a scenario where an individual first starts driving a car or riding a bike. He or she might have trouble doing this action and it can take a lot of focus to do it right. But overtime, it becomes easier. At some point, you will be able to do this action instinctively while doing other things. For example, talking to your friends while riding your bike. This is known as a habitual action, because now you can ride your bike without thinking about it.

In this course we talk about the cognitive science part of the Habit System. But being able to implement this knowledge into your own life can help you tremendously. The book *Being the person your dog thinks you are: The Science of a Better You* by Jim Davies talks about how habits can influence your life, how to implement desirable habits and remove undesirable habits.

The author discusses the importance of habits and how they can play a significant role in our daily lives. Habits have the ability to bypass normal decision making and become deeply ingrained into our memory. They have the power of influencing an individual's behavior without them realizing it. For instance, imagine a scenario where a person is watching a movie while eating chips. Initially, that person might think, "I will only eat half the bag of chips". But as that individual becomes focused on the screen, they will eat the chips mindlessly. In this case, the habit of snacking while watching a movie has taken over, bypassing his conscious decision making. This example shows how habits can operate in the background and steer our behavior. Furthermore, a direct example from the book describes the long term durability of habits. The author describes Eugene, who has a hard time making memories. Despite this, Eugene is still able to perform routine tasks such as his daily walk as it has become a habit for him. This shows how habits can endure long periods of time, even while a person may be cognitively impaired. To conclude, habits are powerful as they can influence our behavior and work in the background. Through these examples, a person can understand why good habits are important and how bad habits can cause us long term problems.

Knowing this information, how can a person create desirable habits to improve their lives. The book talks about certain techniques which can help implement habits, which include starting small, being consistent and holding oneself accountable. For example, let's say a person wants to get into the habit of exercising regularly. In that case, an optimal option would be to start with a 10 minute walk and gradually increase the duration and intensity of your workout over time. Starting small helps build momentum and a sense of accomplishment

associated with that said habit, making it easier to stick to the routine. However, it is also important to be consistent with this new habit. Consistency helps to establish and reinforce that habit, making it more automatic over time. With exercise, you can create a routine to follow, which will help you not miss workouts. Lastly, it is essential to hold yourself accountable to ensure you stick to the habit. This can include setting goals and tracking your progress, which will make it easier to measure your success and stay motivated. By following these techniques, you can implement the habits which you desire in the long run.

In addition to creating desirable habits, it is important to remove the bad habits. Some techniques discussed in the book include trying to replace habits, identifying triggers and having a support system in place. Let's say a person has the urge to eat candy when stressed. You can try walking. Doing this will create a positive association with stress, and make it easier to stick to the new behavior overtime. Another technique would be to identify the trigger to a bad habit and avoid it altogether. For example, maybe you spend too much money while shopping online. In this case consider removing your saved credit card or reducing time browsed online. This will reduce the accessibility and ease of online purchases. Having a support system in place, such as friends or family can also help remove bad habits as they can help you stay accountable and provide encouragement. It makes the process of breaking bad habits feel less isolating and intimidating. On top of all this, the book also mentions the fact that you need to be able to forgive yourself. Breaking a bad habit takes time and effort, so it's important to stay patient and to not get discouraged when things don't work out. By staying resilient and taking small steps towards a positive change, you can break even the worst habits.

In conclusion, the Habit System plays a crucial role in our daily lives. It has the ability to influence our behavior and can have a long lasting impact in our lives. This is why it is essential to build desirable habits and remove bad habits from our lives. The book *Being the person your dog thinks you are: The Science of a Better You* by Jim Davies helps the reader understand how habits can influence an individual's life, and provides the reader with techniques to build good habits and remove bad habits. By following the practices provided in the book we can make habits work to our advantage and help us become better versions of ourselves.

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