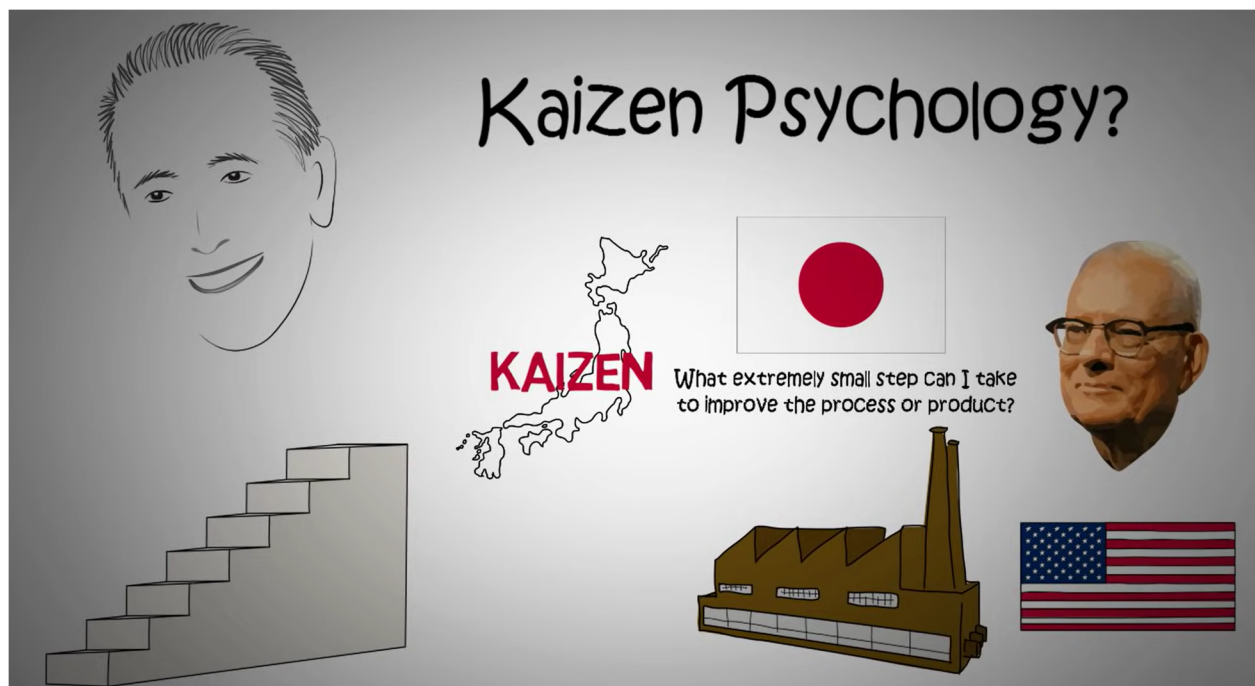


The Kaizen Way: One Small Step Can Change Your Life by Robert Maurer

Transcript

I recently read the book "One Small Step Can Change Your Life by Robert Maurer." One day, author Robert Maurer saw an ad for a Lexus automobile. It detailed the numerous quality awards it had won over the past decade. It got him thinking, how is this Japanese car manufacturer able to produce such high-quality products so consistently? To find the answer, he had to go back to the late 1940s. A few years after World War II ended, an American named Edward Deming came to Japan to help the Japanese rebuild their manufacturing facilities. Dr. Deming was largely responsible for the improvements in American manufacturing during World War II, so the Japanese were eager to hear what he had to say. Deming told the Japanese factory workers that if they wanted to produce great products, they had to just ask themselves one thing every day: What extremely small step can I take to improve the process or product? The Japanese bought into Deming's philosophy and they even gave it a name, Kaizen. Through the application of Kaizen, Japan would rise up from the rubble of World War II and become a manufacturing superpower by the end of the 20th century. Author Robert Maurer is a clinical psychologist at UCLA, and he wondered if Kaizen could be as effective in transforming people's lives as it had been in transforming the Japanese manufacturing industry.



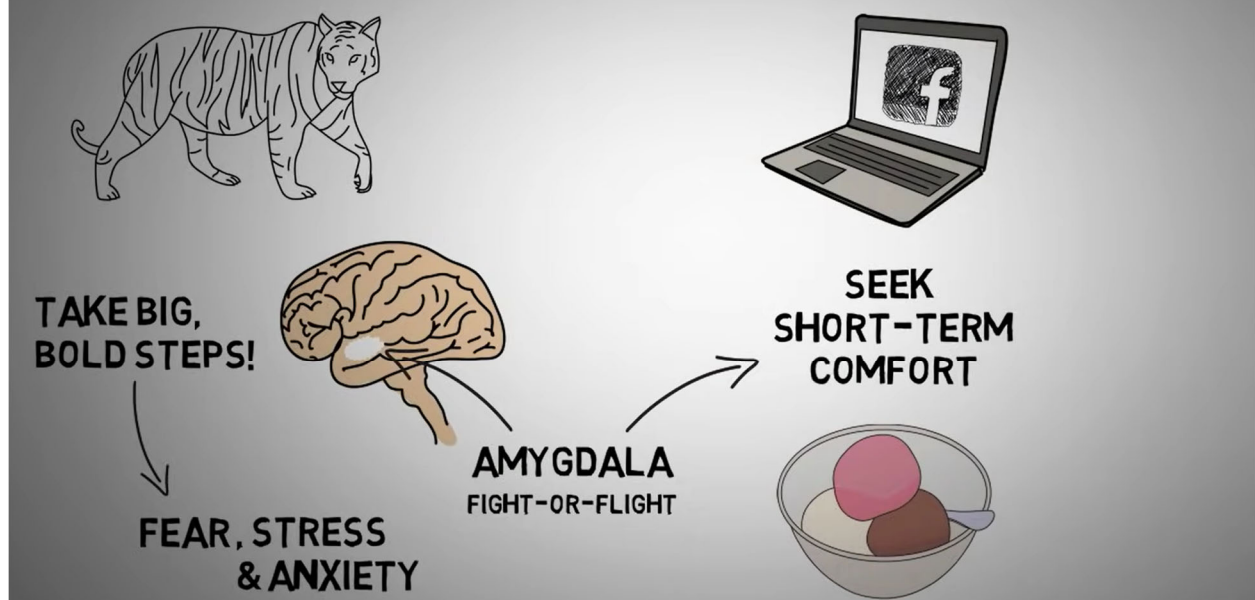
To test his hypothesis, he started asking his patients to take really small steps towards a significant change they wanted to make, steps that seemed embarrassing. Instead of encouraging a client to leave an unsatisfying career, he would get them to spend a few seconds each day imagining the details of a dream job. Instead of telling a client to go to the gym and exercise for 30 minutes, he would tell them to march in front of the TV during a commercial for one minute. If a patient wanted to cut out caffeine

from their diet, he would have them take one less sip a day. His patients couldn't find an excuse to not take the steps because they required hardly no effort at all. Over time, he saw that these small steps led to shockingly big changes. His patients were in careers they loved, they exercised regularly, and they cut out addictive foods from their diet.



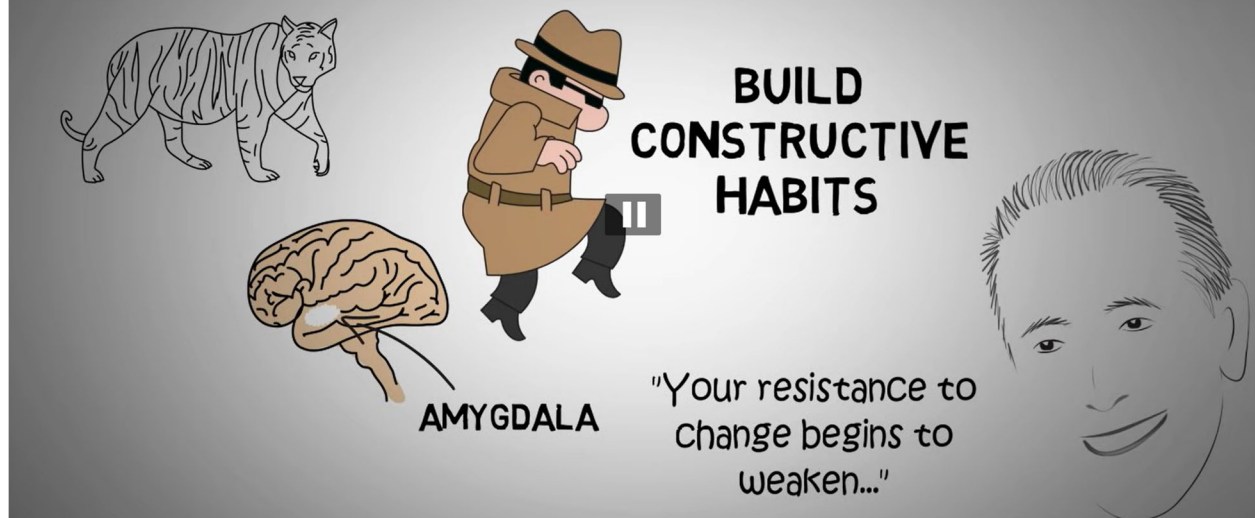
Robert's prescription for small changes is the exact opposite of what we hear from almost every motivational YouTube video or motivational speaker. Most inspirational talks proclaim that if we want to achieve great things, we have to take big, bold steps. But taking big steps often backfires because although it may seem exciting in the moment, that excitement quickly wears off and we're just left with fear, a fear of uncertainty and a fear of failure. If we drop out of college to start a business, we quickly realize how much work it is to start a business; and fear, stress, and anxiety set in. When our brains detect these emotions, a region of the brain called the amygdala activates our fight or flight response. When our fight or flight response is activated, we stop thinking rationally about long-term goals and look for the quickest way to relieve the feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear. Thousands of years ago, that meant running away from a tiger. But today, it usually means distracting ourselves with comfort, coping activities. We can avoid the fear of having people reject our next business product by procrastinating and endlessly checking Facebook. We can avoid the fear of going to the gym and looking inferior to everyone else by curling up on the couch with a bowl of ice cream and watch TV.

WHY KAIZEN?

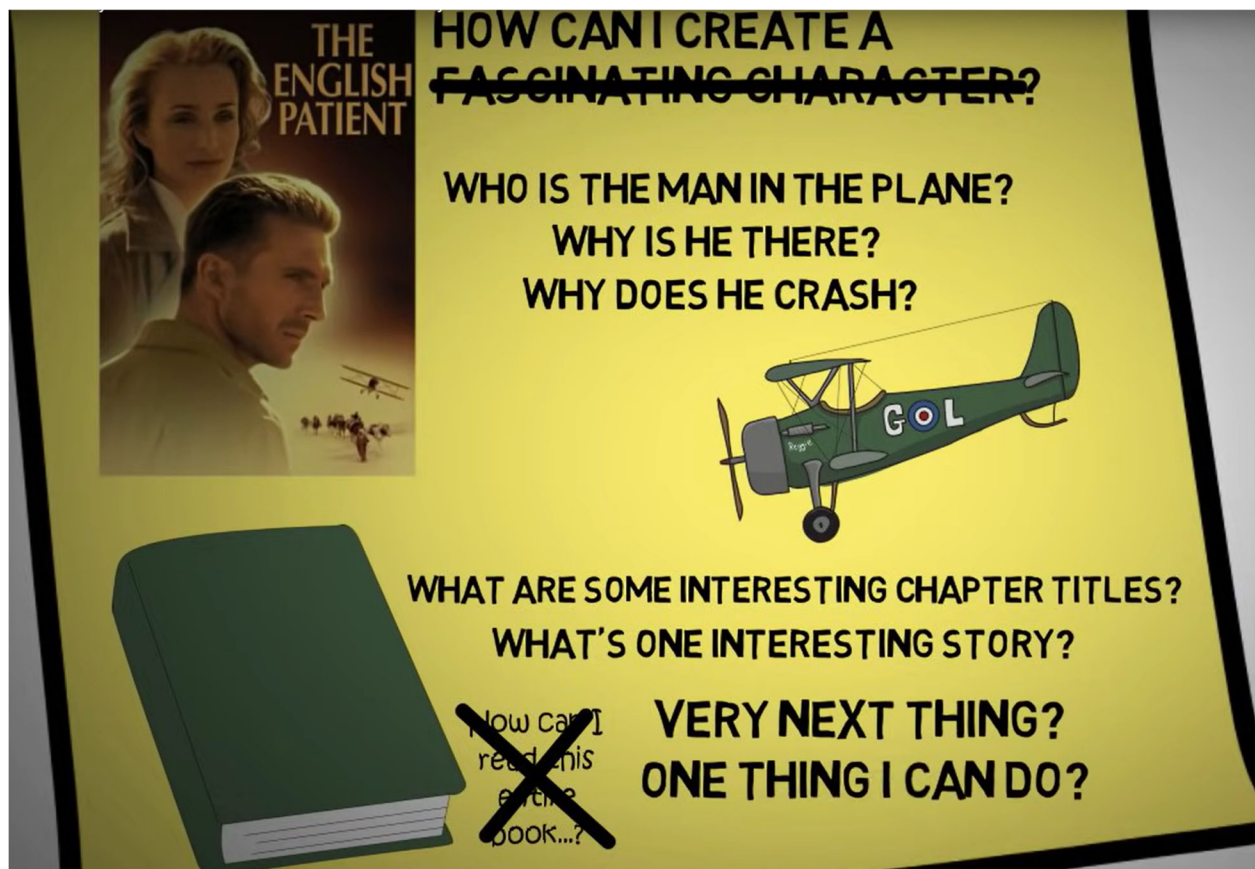


So why is Kaizen such an effective strategy for change? Well, when we use Kaizen, when we take embarrassingly small steps towards a goal, we tippy-toe past the amygdala's fear detection system and avoid activating our fight or flight response. This removes the urge to distract ourselves and allows us to take action without the fear of failure. The more action we take, the quicker we lay the foundation for new positive habits. Robert says that with Kaizen, your resistance to change begins to weaken. Where once you may have been daunted by change, your new mental software will have you moving towards your ultimate goal at a pace that may well exceed your expectations.

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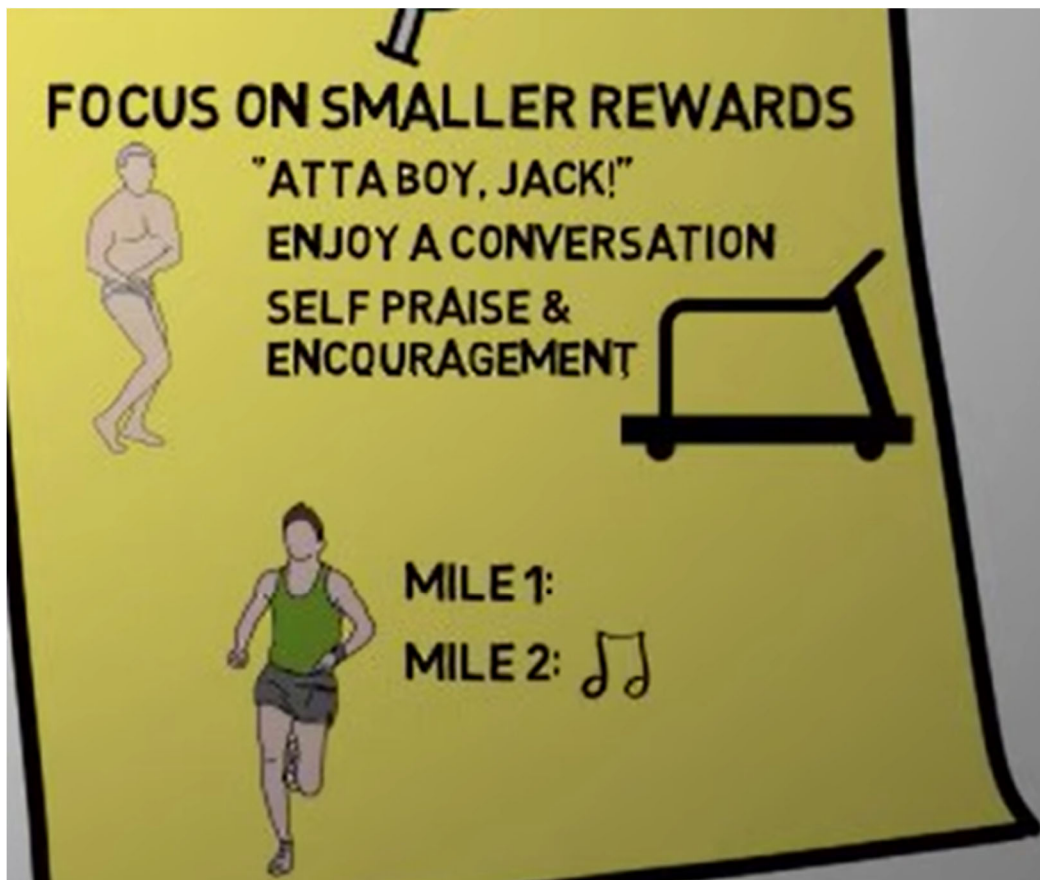


If you would like to experience the extraordinary power of Kaizen, here are two counter-intuitive ways to get started. First, start by asking smaller questions. When Michael Ondaatje, award-winning author of "The English Patient," wants to create a compelling character for his new book, he doesn't think, "How can I create a fascinating character that my readers will love?" He simply thinks of a scene, like a plane crash, and asks himself, a few small and specific questions like: "Who is the man in the plane? Why is he there? Why does he crash?" These questions are small and playful. The mind has fun coming up with answers to these types of questions. When I want to read a new book in hopes of learning something to improve my life, I start by asking myself, "What are some interesting chapter titles in this book?" After opening the book and finding one interesting chapter title, I ask myself, "What's one interesting story or example in this chapter?" Soon, I find a story, and that leads to more questions. Eventually I get through an entire book, but rarely in a sequential order. Notice how this is different than if I asked myself, "How can I read this entire book and improve my life?" It would seem like a big undertaking, and I would put it off until I had more time or I felt like doing it. So the next time you find yourself asking big questions and feeling anxious, shrink the question. Ask questions like, What's the very next thing? Or, "What's just one thing I can do to get started?" T



he second way to start adopting a Kaizen mindset is to start focusing on smaller rewards. In the book, Robert talks about a businessman named Jack Stupp who had developed severe rheumatoid arthritis and was hospitalized with over 20 swollen joints. His doctors advised him to avoid exercise at all times. But Jack was stubborn, and he started taking small steps by giving himself small rewards along the way. Every morning he told himself that all he had to do with get out of bed. When he got out of bed and stood upright, he would give himself a short and sincere compliment like, "Atta boy, Jack." Then he'd

walk down the street to the gym by focusing on having an enjoyable conversation with the staff there. Once on the treadmill, Jack started by walking for just two minutes and rewarded himself with more praise and encouragement. Robert says that by the time he met Jack, he was in his 70s, and he had won the Mr. World bodybuilding contest for his age division. I've learned that using small rewards works very well by running a marathon. Instead of focusing on the satisfaction of finishing a marathon, I focus on a small reward every mile, like getting to listen to one of my favorite songs. By asking small questions and using small rewards that seem silly in the moment, you're actually implementing a brilliant strategy to achieve large goals.



That was the core message that I gathered from Robert's book. Robert provides many more Kaizen strategies that you can use to make change in your life. I highly recommend reading it.