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The PSYCHOLOGY of DAILY ROUTINE

The most successful people in history—the ones many refer to as “geniuses” in their fields, masters of their crafts—had one thing in common, other than talent: Most adhered to rigid (and specific) routines. Routines seem boring, and the antithesis to what you’re told a “good life” is made of.

Happiness, we infer, comes from the perpetual seeking of “more,” regardless what it’s “more” of. Yet what we don’t realize is that having a routine doesn’t mean you sit in the same office every day for the same number of hours. Your routine could be traveling to a different country every month. It could be being routinely un-routine.

The point is not what the routine consists of, but how steady and safe your subconscious mind is made through repetitive motions and expected outcomes. Whatever you want your day-to-day life to consist of doesn’t matter, the point is that you decide and then stick to it. In short, routine is important because habitualness creates mood, and mood creates the “nurture” aspect of your personality, not to mention that letting yourself be jerked around by impulsiveness is a breeding ground for everything you essentially do not want. Most things that bring genuine happiness are not just temporary, immediate gratifications, and those things also come with resistance and require sacrifice.

Yet there is a way to nullify the feeling of “sacrifice” when you integrate a task into the “norm” or push through resistance with regulation. These, and all the other reasons why routine is so important (and happy people tend to follow them more).

01. Your habits create your mood, and your mood is a filter through which you experience your life. It would make sense to assume that moods are created from thoughts or stressors, things that crop up during the day and knock us off-kilter. This isn’t so. Psychologist Robert Thayer argues that moods are created by our habitualness: how much we sleep, how frequently we move, what we think, how often we think it, and so on. The point is that it’s not one thought that throws us into a tizzy: It’s the pattern of continually experiencing that thought that compounds its effect and makes it seem valid.

02. You must learn to let your conscious decisions dictate your day—not your fears or impulses. An untamed mind is a minefield. With no regulation, focus, base or self-control, anything can persuade you into thinking you want something that you don't actually. "I want to go out for drinks tonight, not prepare for that presentation tomorrow" seems valid in the short-term, but in the long-term is disastrous. Going out for drinks one night probably isn't worth bombing a super important meeting. Learning to craft routine is the equivalent of learning to let your conscious choices about what your day will be about guide you, letting all the other, temporary crap fall to the wayside.

03. Happiness is not how many things you do, but how well you do them. More is not better. Happiness is not experiencing something else; it's continually experiencing what you already have in new and different ways. Unfortunately as we're taught that passion should drive our every thought move and decision, we're basically impaled with the fear that we're unhappy because we're not doing "enough."

04. When you regulate your daily actions, you deactivate your "fight or flight" instincts because you're no longer confronting the unknown. This is why people have such a difficult time with change, and why people who are constant in their habits experience so much joy: simply, their fear instincts are turned off long enough for them to actually enjoy something.

05. As children, routine gives us a feeling of safety. As adults, it gives us a feeling of purpose. Interestingly enough, those two feelings are more similar than you'd think (at least, their origin is the same). It's the same thing as the fear of the unknown: As children, we don't know which way is left, let alone why we're alive or whether or not a particular activity we've never done before is going to be scary or harmful. When we're adults engaging with routine-ness, we can comfort ourselves with the simple idea of "I know how to do this, I've done it before."

06. You feel content because routine consistently reaffirms a decision you already made. If said decision is that you want to write a book—and you commit to doing three pages each night for however long it takes to complete it—you affirm not only your choice to begin, but your ability to do it. It's honestly the healthiest way to feel validated.

07. As your body self-regulates, routine becomes the pathway to "flow2 ." "Flow" (in case you don't know—you probably do) is essentially what happens when we

become so completely engaged with what we're doing, all ideas or worries dissolve, and we're just completely present in the task. The more you train your body to respond to different cues: 7 a.m. is when you wake up, 2 p.m. is when you start writing, and so on, you naturally fall into flow with a lot more ease, just out of habit.

08. When we don't settle into routine, we teach ourselves that "fear" is an indicator that we're doing the wrong thing, rather than just being very invested in the outcome. A lack of routine is just a breeding ground for perpetual procrastination. It gives us gaps and spaces in which our subconscious minds can say: "well, you can take a break now," when in fact, you have a deadline. But if you're used to taking a break at that point in time, you'll allow it simply because "you always do."