

can't learn the basic skill of showing up, then you have little hope of mastering the finer details. Instead of trying to engineer a perfect habit from the start, do the easy thing on a more consistent basis. You have to standardize before you can optimize.

As you master the art of showing up, the first two minutes simply become a ritual at the beginning of a larger routine. This is not merely a hack to make habits easier but actually the ideal way to master a difficult skill. The more you ritualize the beginning of a process, the more likely it becomes that you can slip into the state of deep focus that is required to do great things. By doing the same warm-up before every workout, you make it easier to get into a state of peak performance. By following the same creative ritual, you make it easier to get into the hard work of creating. By developing a consistent power-down habit, you make it easier to get to bed at a reasonable time each night. You may not be able to automate the whole process, but you can make the first action mindless. Make it easy to start and the rest will follow.

The Two-Minute Rule can seem like a trick to some people. You know that the *real* goal is to do more than just two minutes, so it may feel like you're trying to fool yourself. Nobody is actually aspiring to read one page or do one push-up or open their notes. And if you know it's a mental trick, why would you fall for it?

If the Two-Minute Rule feels forced, try this: do it for two minutes and then stop. Go for a run, but you *must* stop after two minutes. Start meditating, but you *must* stop after two minutes. Study Arabic, but you *must* stop after two minutes. It's not a strategy for starting, it's the whole thing. Your habit can *only* last one hundred and twenty seconds.

One of my readers used this strategy to lose over one hundred pounds. In the beginning, he went to the gym each day, but he told himself he wasn't allowed to stay for more than five minutes. He would

**Lorem Ipsum** is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. Lorem Ipsum has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since the 1500s, when an unknown printer took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book. It has survived not only five centuries, but also the leap into electronic typesetting, remaining essentially unchanged. It was popularized in the 1960s with the release of Letraset sheets containing Lorem Ipsum passages, and more recently with desktop publishing software like Aldus PageMaker including versions of Lorem Ipsum.

instance, walking into a restaurant is a decisive moment because it determines what you'll be eating for lunch. Technically, you are in control of what you order, but in a larger sense, you can only order an item if it is on the menu. If you walk into a steakhouse, you can get a sirloin or a rib eye, but not sushi. Your options are constrained by what's available. They are shaped by the first choice.

We are limited by where our habits lead us. This is why mastering the decisive moments throughout your day is so important. Each day is made up of many moments, but it is really a few habitual choices that determine the path you take. These little choices stack up, each one setting the trajectory for how you spend the next chunk of time.

Habits are the entry point, not the end point. They are the cab, not the gym.

### THE TWO-MINUTE RULE

Even when you know you should start small, it's easy to start too big. When you dream about making a change, excitement inevitably takes over and you end up trying to do too much too soon. The most effective way I know to counteract this tendency is to use the *Two-Minute Rule*, which states, "When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do."

You'll find that nearly any habit can be scaled down into a two-minute version:

There are many variations of passages of Lorem Ipsum available, but the majority have suffered alteration in some form, by injected humor, or randomized words which don't look even slightly believable. If you are going to use a passage of Lorem Ipsum, you need to be sure there isn't anything embarrassing hidden in the middle of text. All the Lorem Ipsum generators on the Internet tend to repeat predefined chunks as necessary, making this the first true generator on the Internet. It uses a dictionary of over 200 Latin words, combined with a handful of model sentence structures, to generate Lorem Ipsum which looks reasonable. The generated Lorem Ipsum is therefore always free from repetition, injected humor, or non-characteristic words etc.

Hailing a cab each morning may be a tiny action, but it is a splendid example of the 3rd Law of Behavior Change.

Researchers estimate that 40 to 50 percent of our actions on any given day are done out of habit. This is already a substantial percentage, but the true influence of your habits is even greater than these numbers suggest. Habits are automatic choices that influence the conscious decisions that follow. Yes, a habit can be completed in just a few seconds, but it can also shape the actions that you take for minutes or hours afterward.

Habits are like the entrance ramp to a highway. They lead you down a path and, before you know it, you're speeding toward the next behavior. It seems to be easier to continue what you are already doing than to start doing something different. You sit through a bad movie for two hours. You keep snacking even when you're already full. You check your phone for "just a second" and soon you have spent twenty minutes staring at the screen. In this way, the habits you follow without thinking often determine the choices you make when you are thinking.

Each evening, there is a tiny moment—usually around 5:15 p.m.—that shapes the rest of my night. My wife walks in the door from work and either we change into our workout clothes and head to the gym or we crash onto the couch, order Indian food, and watch *The Office*.<sup>4</sup> Similar to Twyla Tharp hailing the cab, the ritual is changing into my workout clothes. If I change clothes, I know the workout will happen. Everything that follows—driving to the gym, deciding which exercises to do, stepping under the bar—is easy once I've taken the first step.

Every day, there are a handful of moments that deliver an outsized impact. I refer to these little choices as *decisive moments*. The moment you decide between ordering takeout or cooking dinner. The moment

It is remarkable how little friction is required to prevent unwanted behavior. When I hide beer in the back of the fridge where I can't see it, I drink less. When I delete social media apps from my phone, it can be weeks before I download them again and log in. These tricks are unlikely to curb a true addiction, but for many of us, a little bit of friction can be the difference between sticking with a good habit or sliding into a bad one. Imagine the cumulative impact of making dozens of these changes and living in an environment designed to make the good behaviors easier and the bad behaviors harder.

Whether we are approaching behavior change as an individual, a parent, a coach, or a leader, we should ask ourselves the same question: "How can we design a world where it's easy to do what's right?" Redesign your life so the actions that matter most are also the actions that are easiest to do.

## Chapter Summary

- Human behavior follows the Law of Least Effort. We will naturally gravitate toward the option that requires the least amount of work.
- Create an environment where doing the right thing is as easy as possible.
- Reduce the friction associated with good behaviors. When friction is low, habits are easy.
- Increase the friction associated with bad behaviors. When friction is high, habits are difficult.
- Prime your environment to make future actions easier.

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