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How To Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones | James Clear on Making Sense with Sam Harris • Podcast Notes

6-8 minutes

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Key Takeaways

- **Luck, habits, and choices all collectively determine success in life. You can't control the first, but you can control your habits and choices.**
- Habits are a solution to a problem, but oftentimes they aren't the BEST solution to a problem
 - **"I have this set of habits that I use to resolve those problems but what are the odds that the habits I have now are the optimal solution to the problems that I face repeatedly? It's probably very unlikely."** – James Clear
- Your habits are your responsibility
 - **"It's your choice as an adult how you respond to these recurring problems and if you have the option, to build habits that solve those things in a healthier, more productive, and fruitful way, then that's your responsibility to try and build those"** – James Clear
- **"The cost of your good habits is in the present. The cost of your bad habits is in the future."** – James Clear
- **"Most of your outcomes in life are lagging measures of your habits"** – James Clear
 - Your knowledge is a lagging measure of your reading and learning habits
 - Your bank account is a lagging measure of your financial habits
 - Your physical fitness is a lagging measure of your eating and exercise habits

Intro

- James Clear ([@JamesClear](#)) is the author of [Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones](#)
- Host: Sam Harris ([@SamHarrissOrg](#))

Books Mentioned

- Sam really enjoyed James's book [Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones](#)

How James Got Interested In Habits?

- When James was 16, he got into a bad accident while playing baseball—it broke his nose and both eye sockets
 - James was rushed to a hospital and the doctors put him into a medically induced coma since he was too unstable to undergo surgery
- As part of his recovery process, James had to essentially relearn all of his habits such as basic-motor functions
 - James didn't make the baseball team his junior year but he did make it back onto the team his senior year
 - James went on to play college baseball
- James didn't make into the pros, but by building good habits and making smart choices, he was selected as part of the All-American team (the 30 best players in college)
 - **The moral of his story: Luck, habits, and choices all collectively determine success in life. You can't control the first, but you can control your habits and choices.**

- **“It did teach me about the importance of small habits and how they can help you rebound from challenges if you can stick with them” – James Clear**

Feedback Loops

- **Feedback loops can go in either direction: Positive or Negative**
 - Example of a negative feedback loop: You're overweight which makes you feel depressed which makes you want to sit on the couch and eat your feelings away and then you get more overweight
 - **James would often look for some small positive action he could take to help push himself into a positive feedback loop instead of a negative one**
 - Doing just one positive action can give you the momentum to do another positive action which will create a positive feedback loop

What Is A Habit?

- Habit = Automatic behavior: It's a behavior that's been repeated enough times that it basically becomes automatic
- Another definition: “They're solutions to recurring problems in your environment” – James Clear
 - The brain is constantly trying to find solutions for recurring problems in life. Many people may have the same problem, but they often come up with different solutions.
 - If someone is stressed, one person's solution may be to play video games while another person's solution is to go for a walk with their spouse
- “Habits are often heavily influenced by the environment that we're in” – James Clear
 - People often watch how friends or family members solve recurring problems and copy that solution or habit
 - “You sort of inherit the habits of the people around you”

Your Habits = Your Responsibility

- Realize that habits are a solution to a problem, but oftentimes they aren't the BEST solution to a problem
 - **“I have this set of habits that I use to resolve those problems but what are the odds that the habits I have now are the optimal solution to the problems that I face repeatedly? It's probably very unlikely.” – James Clear**
- Your habits are your responsibility
 - **“It's your choice as an adult how you respond to these recurring problems and if you have the option, to build habits that solve those things in a healthier, more productive, and fruitful way, then that's your responsibility to try and build those” – James Clear**

Why Good Habits Are So Hard To Form

- Every action has two outcomes: An immediate outcome and an ultimate outcome
 - The immediate outcome of most bad habits is positive even though the ultimate outcome is negative
 - E.g: Eating a donut feels great but doing it daily will likely cause long-term health problems
 - With good habits, it's the opposite. The immediate outcome is often negative but the ultimate outcome is positive.
 - E.g: Going to the gym for the first month often sucks but in the long run it's good for your health
- For most of history, humans have lived in an immediate term environment
 - E.g: Finding something to eat, finding shelter from a storm right now, etc.
 - However, in the last 500 years or so, a lot of the greatest returns come from a delayed-gratification environment
 - E.g: Going to class every day to get a college degree 4 years from now, save for retirement today so you can retire 20 years from now, etc.
- **“The cost of your good habits is in the present. The cost of your bad habits is in the future.” – James Clear**

Goals vs. Systems

- **“You do not rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems”** – *James Clear*
- **“Most of your outcomes in life are lagging measures of your habits”** – *James Clear*
 - Your knowledge is a lagging measure of your reading and learning habits
 - Your bank account is a lagging measure of your financial habits
 - Your physical fitness is a lagging measure of your eating and exercise habits
- Your goal is your desired outcome while your system is a collection of your daily habits
 - If you’re failing to meet your goal it’s because your daily habits are falling short
- **“Your current habits are perfectly designed to deliver your current results”** – *James Clear*

Waking Up with Sam Harris : [atomic habits](#), [feedback loops](#), [good habits](#), [habits](#), [james clear](#)

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