



Summary of Badass Habits

Original book by Jen Sincero

If you're like most of us, you've probably tried to change your habits before and failed. In *Badass Habits*, self-help expert Jen Sincero says the problem is that we're too focused on what we're *doing* rather than who we're *being*, and that building better habits starts with changing how you perceive yourself.

We'll begin this guide by explaining Sincero's principle that your identity gives rise to your habits. Next, we'll explore some practical strategies and psychological methods to reinvent yourself and build your ideal life.

Our commentary will compare Sincero's ideas with those of other influential books on changing your habits and your lifestyle, such as *Atomic Habits*. We'll also provide evidence and supporting details from the field of psychology to help explain why Sincero's principles are effective. Finally, we'll suggest some actionable ideas to help you start changing your identity, your habits, and your life.

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1-Page Summary

If you're like most of us, you've probably tried to change your habits before and failed. You also probably believe those failures happened because you lack willpower. However, self-help expert Jen Sincero says the real problem is that you're too focused on what you're *doing*, rather than who you're *being*. In *Badass Habits* (2020), Sincero argues that building better habits starts by changing how you perceive yourself. She then teaches you how to create the identity—and, in turn, the lifestyle—that you really want.

Sincero is a life coach, motivational speaker, and best-selling author who has spent decades helping people change their lives for the better. She's best known for her *You Are a Badass* series (including *You Are a Badass at Making Money*), which has reached millions of readers worldwide. Her signature approach to self-improvement uses a change in mindset as the foundation for practical habit-forming strategies. Sincero is also known for her accessible and sometimes irreverent writing style, which often resonates with people who find traditional self-help books boring or overwhelming.

We'll begin this guide by explaining how habits form and play out in your daily life, with emphasis on Sincero's principle that your identity gives rise to your habits. Next, we'll explore some practical strategies to change your identity, and therefore your habits. We'll conclude with some psychological methods to reinvent yourself and build your ideal life.

Our commentary will compare Sincero's ideas with those of other influential habit and lifestyle books, such as *Atomic Habits*. We'll also provide evidence and supporting details from the field of psychology to help explain why Sincero's principles are effective. Finally, we'll suggest some actionable ideas to help you start changing your identity, your habits, and your life.

What Are Habits?

Before you start the work of changing your habits, it will be helpful to have a clear definition of what a habit actually is. Sincero defines a habit as **a routine, action, or behavior you engage in repeatedly and more or less automatically**. These repeated behaviors can be helpful or harmful: For instance, many people have the good habit of checking for their keys, wallet, and phone before leaving the house. On the other hand, some people have the bad habit of setting those things down wherever happens to be convenient, then forgetting where they are.

(Shortform note: Sincero describes what habits are, but not why we have them. In *Free to Focus*, Michael Hyatt explains that we have limited mental resources (problem-solving ability and willpower) to get us through each day, and therefore it's important to use those resources as efficiently as possible. Habits are **one way for the brain to reduce its burden**. Automating as many of our behaviors as possible lessens the need for conscious thought and decision-making, and therefore saves those mental resources for more difficult tasks.)

We'll start this section with a brief description of what actually happens in your brain when you form and carry out a habit. Next, we'll explain how your self-image and your habits reinforce one another. Finally, we'll discuss how you can set healthy boundaries that protect your self-image and support your good habits.

How Habits Work

Sincero explains that habits, whether good or bad, always follow the same sequence: **A trigger signals your**

brain, which then executes a learned *response* that leads to some kind of *reward*. This process is mostly subconscious, which is why habitual behaviors happen so readily and are so hard to intentionally change.

To give an example, suppose you're in the habit of eating ice cream after dinner. You finish dinner (trigger), which signals to your brain that it's time for something sweet. You walk to the freezer and get yourself a bowl of ice cream (response) without really thinking about it—that's just what happens after dinner. The ice cream tastes good, and the sugar gives you a quick energy boost (reward). That reward reinforces the pattern, so your brain repeats it the next day.

(Shortform note: In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear says that [habits are composed of four parts](#) instead of three: the cue, the craving, the response, and the reward. The major difference here is that Clear adds a new component: the *craving*. According to Clear, the cue doesn't trigger the routine directly, meaning you don't simply perform the behavior without thinking about it. Instead, the cue simply alerts your brain to the opportunity to obtain the reward. This creates [a craving for the reward](#), and your brain executes the routine in response to the craving so that you obtain the reward.)

Furthermore, **the more often you carry out the same pattern, the more deeply it gets engraved in your brain**—which makes it even easier to keep doing and harder to replace with a different behavior. However, this also works to your advantage: At first, it might take tremendous effort to stick to a new habit, such as having an apple for dessert instead of ice cream. But the more often you do so, the easier it will become.

(Shortform note: Habits becoming “engraved” in your brain is more literal than you might expect. Because of the brain's [neuroplasticity](#) (its ability to change and adapt), the more you do something, the more you strengthen the [neural pathways](#) that allow you to do that action. The end result, as Sincero says, is that a new habit becomes easier and more natural over time.)

Your Self-Image Informs Your Habits

Sincero says that **habits are expressions of your identity, not simply behaviors**. From this perspective, a habit is more than just a behavioral pattern, it's a reflection of how you see yourself. In other words, you do what you do because of who you are. Therefore, when you try to adopt a new habit that goes against your idea of who you are, you're fighting a losing battle against yourself.

For example, a student who believes they're bad at a particular subject will struggle to build good study habits and improve their grades. They may think they're not a good student, and therefore won't believe they're capable of studying and succeeding like a good student would. Conversely, someone who sees themselves as a capable student will recognize that they can still do well in that subject—they just need to devote more time to studying.

Sincero adds that you actively created your current identity, though you probably didn't realize you were doing so. From childhood onward you've absorbed beliefs and behaviors from the people around you and either integrated them into your character or rejected them. Recognizing this fact gives you tremendous power: **If you subconsciously built your identity in the past, you can *consciously* rebuild it now.**

Shift to a Growth Mindset

Altering your identity starts with altering your mindset: In order to make any kind of major change, you first have to believe that change is possible. Psychologist Carol S. Dweck wrote the book *Mindset* to discuss her ideas about [two different ways of thinking](#)—one that promotes change and one that

stifles it—as well as the various beliefs that come with those mind frames.

Someone with a *fixed mindset* thinks people's abilities and personalities are innate and unchangeable. This comes with powerful limiting beliefs: People with a fixed mindset believe that they're inherently good at certain things and bad at others, and that no amount of effort can help them overcome their weaknesses. Furthermore, they believe that their identities—and therefore their habits—can never change.

Conversely, someone with a *growth mindset* understands that change and improvement are possible. By definition, a growth mindset doesn't have any limiting beliefs—it holds that any deficiencies in skills or personality can be overcome with concerted effort. Therefore, if you adopt a growth mindset, you'll believe it's possible to rebuild your identity (and your habits) in the way Sincero describes. That belief, in turn, will empower you to successfully make those changes.

Discover and Express Your True Self

Sincero emphasizes that your goal in building better habits should be to express your authentic self more fully. In other words, **adopt good habits so you can enjoy what you love and achieve what you really want**—not so you can become “perfect” or turn yourself into what others want you to be.

For example, many people want to develop the habit of exercising regularly, but fail because they haven't really thought about *why* they want to do it. Someone who wants to exercise in order to feel better and have more energy—which in turn will let them more fully enjoy activities they enjoy with people they love—is likely to succeed because their motivation is rooted in their authentic self. On the other hand, someone who only wants to exercise because society has told them to lose weight is unlikely to build that habit because it doesn't reflect their real goals and passions.

(Shortform note: Although Sincero doesn't use these terms, she's describing [intrinsic and extrinsic motivation](#). *Intrinsic motivation* is your natural drive to do what you innately enjoy or are interested in. For example, perhaps you like waking up to hike at dawn because of the wildlife you're interested in viewing and the pleasure of watching the sunrise. In contrast, *extrinsic motivation* is based on external factors: a reward such as money or praise, or a punishment like disciplinary action or a loved one's disappointment. In a study observing the effects of different motivation sources on long-term weight loss, external motivation was shown to be short-lived and ineffective, while [intrinsic motivation was long-lasting and effective](#).)

Sincero adds that the process of building better habits can be just as important as the results, because it will help you *learn* about your authentic self. As you choose and practice new habits, you'll discover your strengths, confront your fears, and expand your sense of what you can achieve. **The self-awareness and empowerment you cultivate can be more valuable than any individual habit.**

(Shortform note: In essence, Sincero is saying that your identity and your habits create a positive feedback loop, or *virtuous cycle*—your identity gives rise to your habits, and your habits reinforce your identity. The idea of the virtuous cycle is commonly credited to [Amazon founder Jeff Bezos](#). Crucially, Bezos realized that bolstering any part of a positive feedback loop would naturally cause the entire system to grow more quickly. In the context of *Badass Habits*, this means any extra work you put into improving your habits will reinforce your new identity, and any work you put into developing your identity will also improve your habits.)

Boundaries Protect Your Self-Image and Habits

Sincero's identity-based method for creating habits can only work if you're in control of yourself. Your new identity will be fragile at first—if you allow outside forces to influence your behavior, you'll compromise that self-image and fail to build the habits you want. For that reason, she says **it's essential to establish boundaries that protect your time, energy, and emotions.**

To protect your new identity, you have to consciously decide how to interact with the world around you. Consider what you're willing to do to reach your goals, and conversely, what would sabotage your new habits or go against your self-image. Also, think about what kinds of treatment you will and won't accept from others, and how you'll respond if someone crosses one of those lines. Finally, remember that you can only control your own actions, and be ready to protect your identity and stick to your new habits when people or events outside of your control tempt you to relapse.

(Shortform note: In *Set Boundaries, Find Peace*, therapist Nedra Glover Tawwab [breaks this process down into three clear steps](#). First, identify what your boundaries are by asking what specific actions or attitudes risk sabotaging you. Next, clearly explain those boundaries whenever someone violates them. Finally, *enforce* them: If that person keeps doing what you've asked them not to do, restate the boundary that they've violated, then take whatever action you've decided is appropriate. Tawwab adds that, ideally, such actions should protect your well-being instead of trying to control the other person. For example, you can't force someone to speak more kindly to you, but you *can* walk away and refuse to engage.)

Sincero adds that many people struggle with boundaries because they've been raised to believe that prioritizing their own needs is selfish. As a result, they do whatever they can to keep other people comfortable and happy, even at great cost to themselves. For such people to set boundaries, they have to overcome that conditioning and work through the discomfort of finally standing up for themselves.

If you struggle with people-pleasing tendencies, the author suggests that you **practice asserting yourself in small, low-stakes ways**. For example, immediately and firmly turn down pushy salespeople instead of hearing them out, or cut an unwanted conversation short and simply walk away. You'll probably find that advocating for yourself like this is easy, satisfying, and less likely to cause backlash than you expect.

(Shortform note: Psychotherapist Amy Morin, author of *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*, provides some more ways to help you break out of people-pleasing behavior. Like Sincero, [she suggests that you start small](#): For instance, say no to something unimportant, like a favor you don't want to do or a meetup you don't want to attend. Alternatively, give your honest opinion about something harmless, such as a popular movie that you didn't care for. Another option is to take a stand for something you really believe in—while not as trivial as Morin's other suggestions, you may find it helpful to have the “courage of your convictions,” as the saying goes.)

Practical Strategies to Change Your Habits

Sincero recognizes that the idea of changing your self-image and habits probably seems overwhelming. To help you stay motivated and focused, she presents a 21 day plan—each day introduces one new practice to reinforce your new identity and behavior. She urges you to take things one day at a time, and by the end of three weeks, you'll have a new habit firmly entrenched in your life.

(Shortform note: Sincero's 21 day plan is based on the popular idea that [it takes 21 days to form a new habit](#)—an idea that seems to have originated in the 1960s. More recent research has found that the timeframe for habit formation varies widely depending on the person and the activity: anywhere from 18 days to more than 250, with the average at [about 66 days](#). Since there's little scientific consensus on a system or plan to build habits, the main advice researchers agree on is to repeat the desired behavior as often as possible

until it becomes habitual, however long that takes.)

Let's dive deeper into the unifying themes behind the practices in Sincero's plan. In this section, we'll explore four practical strategies you can use to support good habits and work toward becoming your ideal self:

1. Create the right environment for yourself.
2. Preemptively solve problems that might derail you.
3. Track your progress.
4. Reward yourself for your hard work.

Practical Strategy #1: Create Your Ideal Self's Environment

Sincero suggests **designing your environment so that it mirrors the person you want to become**. This includes making practical changes like setting up spaces to practice your new habits—an exercise room, an office or a desk that's just for writing, or whatever is suitable for the life you're building. You can also hang up pictures that remind you of your goals, shop for the kinds of clothes that the "new you" will wear, or add anything else to your surroundings that helps you stay connected with your ideal self.

(Shortform note: Sincero says you should design an environment that reflects the person you want to become, but in *Willpower Doesn't Work*, psychologist Benjamin Hardy takes a slightly different approach: Hardy says the key to changing your behavior is to change your environment in ways that **force you to adapt**. For example, if you want to reduce your time on social media, you could delete all of the social media apps from your phone; this would force you to use social media only from your computer, which you probably spend far less time on.)

Sincero also urges you to **reorganize your emotional, social, and spiritual surroundings in the same way as your physical environment**. Surround yourself with people who support and reinforce your new identity, rather than people who make you want to relapse into bad habits. Consume media that uplifts you and motivates you to stick to your goals. Finally, take at least five minutes each day to sit quietly and connect with your inner thoughts through meditation, yoga, prayer, or a similar spiritual practice.

(Shortform note: In addition to Sincero's guidance, another crucial part of changing your mental and emotional "environment" is to deal with any unfinished business that may still be distracting you and draining your energy. In *The Compound Effect*, Darren Hardy calls this **psychic clutter**. He says things like broken promises and unfulfilled commitments keep you stuck in the past, worrying about the things you should have already done, rather than looking to the future and working toward your goals. This is also known as **the Zeigarnik effect**. However, experts note that you can largely counteract the Zeigarnik effect if you make a clear and specific plan for how you'll **complete those unfinished tasks**.)

Practical Strategy #2: Solve Problems Before They Happen

Sincero's next suggestion is to **make good habits as easy as possible and bad habits as inconvenient as possible**. For instance, if you're trying to eat healthier, keep healthy snacks in easy reach and get rid of any unhealthy snacks in your house—force yourself to go all the way to the store for candy or chips.

(Shortform note: In *Tiny Habits*, social scientist BJ Fogg offers a slightly different model of behavior that explains why this strategy is effective. Unlike Sincero's trigger-response-reward model, Fogg says our behaviors are determined by **a combination of motivation and ability**. In short, the less ability we have to do something (which is to say, the harder that thing is to do), the more motivation we need in order to do it. So, assuming your motivation levels stay the same, you can more-or-less control your behaviors by adjusting your **ability** to carry them out. Like Sincero says, this means making unwanted behaviors more difficult and

desired behaviors easier.)

Sincero also urges you to **anticipate the ways you'll sabotage your own efforts and figure out how to avoid those pitfalls**. You know your patterns of self-sabotage intimately: the ways you distract yourself from what you know you should do, the ways you rationalize your bad behaviors, and so on. Think carefully about how you get in your own way, and determine how you'll stay on track in spite of yourself.

(Shortform note: One way to avoid self-sabotage is to use what James Clear ([Atomic Habits](#)) calls [implementation intention](#). This is a simple if-then statement that predicts a situation and pre-sets your response. So, returning to the previous example of eating healthier, you might set this intention: "If I'm craving something sweet, then I will eat an apple." Then, when that self-sabotaging urge to eat junk food comes up, you've already got a plan to keep yourself on track.)

Practical Strategy #3: Track Your Progress

Next, Sincero says that you should find ways to measure and record your progress. **This makes your progress clearly visible**, which provides the immediate gratification that long-term habit change often lacks. Some examples include keeping a tally of how many days you've been sober, or using an app to track some relevant metric such as weight. This visible progress quickly begins to reinforce itself—as you build a streak, you become increasingly motivated to maintain it.

(Shortform note: Sincero's strategy takes advantage of what Mark Manson ([The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck](#)) calls the [motivation loop](#). Manson says many people misunderstand how motivation works because they think motivation has to come first and that it leads to action. However, Manson argues that motivation and action are a cycle: Motivation *does* lead to action, but taking action creates more motivation to keep going. Therefore, by making your progress (the results of your actions) clearly visible, you generate motivation and keep the loop going.)

Practical Strategy #4: Reward Yourself

Sincero adds that tracking your progress is a good way to stay motivated, but sticking to a habit is much easier when you reward yourself for every small success—remember that *reward* is the final step of habit formation, and the reason why you keep doing that habit.

So, every time you successfully perform your new habit (or avoid an old, bad habit), treat yourself to something you enjoy. **Just make sure the reward doesn't counteract the habit**. For example, if your goal is to get to bed sooner, don't reward yourself by staying up late the following night; instead, maybe treat yourself to a nice breakfast in the morning.

(Shortform note: A principle from neuroscience explains why this strategy is effective. Motivation comes, in large part, from a neurotransmitter called dopamine. Furthermore, your brain releases dopamine when [it anticipates getting some reward](#)—the dopamine motivates you to carry out whatever action you expect to lead to that reward. So, by intentionally rewarding yourself for certain behaviors, you train your brain to release dopamine and thereby motivate those behaviors.)

Psychological Strategies to Change Your Habits

We've discussed practical strategies for changing your life, but successfully making big changes is just as much of a psychological challenge as it is a practical one. Therefore, we'll now discuss four strategies you can use to cultivate the mindset and thought patterns you'll need to become your best self:

1. Give yourself an empowering mantra.
2. Refuse to negotiate or compromise on your new habits.
3. Be compassionate with yourself.
4. Let the changes happen naturally; don't rush the process.

Psychological Strategy #1: Create a Mantra

One of Sincero's psychologically-based strategies is to **create a *mantra*: a short, simple statement that you repeat over and over** until it becomes part of your typical thought patterns.

To use this strategy effectively, she says you should identify specific ideas or beliefs that are holding you back, then craft a statement to directly counter those self-imposed roadblocks. It must also evoke genuine emotion—a mantra is most effective when it resonates powerfully enough to override your habitual thoughts about yourself. For example, if you're trying to become less shy and more outgoing, your mantra might be "I'm friendly, I'm funny, and people like me."

(Shortform note: In *The Power of Vulnerability*, Brené Brown points out another way to use a mantra. In addition to repeating it until it becomes a habitual thought, you can **use your mantra as a reminder**—say it once or twice just before you go into a situation where that mantra will be relevant. To return to the previous example, you might say your confidence-boosting mantra right before you enter a social situation, like a party or a networking event, to remind yourself that you've got no reason to be shy.)

Psychological Strategy #2: Adopt a "Non-Negotiable" Attitude

Sincero's next strategy is to **refuse to negotiate or compromise with yourself on your new habits**. Instead, recognize when you're trying to talk yourself out of a good practice or into a bad one, and shut down those thoughts immediately. Remember that you're changing your identity, and the new you wouldn't even consider that kind of self-sabotage.

Think about how a recovering alcoholic can't have even one drink, under any circumstances, since doing so means risking a total relapse. Similarly, there must be no situation that can force you to relapse into bad habits, and no bargain you can make that will convince you to betray your new self-image.

(Shortform note: Making your new habit a non-negotiable commitment is one way to create positive pressure that will help you stay on track. In *Willpower*, Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney say you can amplify that pressure by **publicly announcing your new commitment**. When your new habit is a promise to others, you'll be even less inclined to negotiate or compromise on it, because doing so would mean disappointing other people as well as yourself.)

Psychological Strategy #3: Practice Self-Compassion

The previous strategy was about being stern with yourself in order to stay on track. This strategy is the opposite: **Be kind, patient, and forgiving with yourself in order to stay happy and motivated**. Sincero says this is necessary because there *will* be times when you want to give up or feel like you'll never become the person you want to be; those are the times when you must be the most compassionate toward yourself.

Whenever you're struggling with a new habit, look at your trackers and remember how much progress you've made already. If you slip up, don't berate yourself or give in to hopelessness, because that will only waste your mental energy. Instead, **acknowledge the mistake, forgive yourself for making it, and get back on track right away**.

(Shortform note: It can be difficult to show yourself compassion, especially when you feel like you're falling short of your goals or expectations. That's why psychology professor Kristin Neff ([Self-Compassion](#)) suggests you [reinforce self-compassion with self-appreciation](#). This simply means that you regularly and intentionally take note of the things you like about yourself. This will make it easier to maintain your sense of self-compassion when you make a mistake.)

Psychological Strategy #4: Let Change Happen—Don't Rush It

Finally, Sincero urges you to keep working toward your ideal life while, at the same time, letting go of your anxieties about how long it's taking for that ideal to become reality. Much like getting upset at yourself when you make a mistake, obsessing over your results and trying to force big changes to happen faster will only waste your energy. That, in turn, will impede your progress rather than accelerate it.

Instead, Sincero says the key is to **trust yourself and the process**: Keep working on becoming just a little bit better every day, and let the changes happen in their own time.

(Shortform note: This final strategy closely resembles what Greg McKeown ([Effortless](#)) calls "[effortless progress](#)." He clarifies Sincero's principle of letting change happen by explaining that the key to effortless progress is to pace yourself—figure out how much work you can do in a day without exhausting yourself, while still making enough progress to keep yourself motivated. McKeown adds that you'll have an ideal range for productivity; for instance, perhaps you need to work at least six hours a day to feel motivated, but more than eight or nine hours is too tiring to be sustainable.)

Exercise: Become Who You Want to Be

You've read about Sincero's identity-based approach to habits, as well as some practical and psychological strategies to build the habits you want to have. Now, take some time to consider how you might apply those principles to your own habits and start creating your ideal self.

Identify one aspect of your ideal self that you haven't achieved yet. This should be a part of the identity you want to create, rather than a specific goal. For example, the person you want to become might have a certain job, be a parent, be sober, or be in great shape.

Based on your answer to the previous question, what's one habit that your ideal self would practice? For example, if you said that you want to be a small business owner, perhaps you'd get into the habit of spending some time each day researching market conditions.

What's one *practical* strategy you could implement to support that new habit (and, in turn, your new

identity)? Continuing the previous example, maybe the version of you that's a small business owner would have a small room set aside as their personal office. In that case, your practical strategy could be to set up that space.

What's one *psychological* strategy you could implement? For instance, if you're afraid to start your own business because you don't think you're good at self-promotion, you might make a mantra to address that belief: "I know what I'm worth, and I'm not afraid to let everyone else know it too."