SHORTFORM

Summary of The Power of Habit

Original book by Charles Duhigg

In *The Power of Habit*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg draws on extensive research to explore how habits develop into automatic behaviors that influence personal lives, businesses, and communities. He explains why unhealthy habits are notoriously difficult to break and provides a practical framework to help you **understand and change any habit**.

In this guide, we've restructured Duhigg's key ideas to focus on how your habits form and what you can do to change them. We've also compared and contrasted each key concept with updated research on habit formation and expanded on Duhigg's advice with actionable methods from other self-improvement authors and psychologists.

1-Page Summary

In *The Power of Habit*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg draws on extensive research to explore how habits develop into automatic behaviors that influence personal lives, businesses, and communities. He explains why unhealthy habits are notoriously difficult to break and provides a practical framework to help you **understand and change any habit**.

We'll explore *The Power of Habit* in four parts: We'll first explain how your brain's tendency to rely on automatic routines encourages you to engage in habits unconsciously. In the second part, we'll explore the individual components of habits and cravings. Then, we'll discuss how advertisers play on your habits to sway your buying decisions and examine the impact of collective habits on businesses and communities. Finally, we'll provide actionable steps you can take to take control of your habits.

Part 1: Habits Are Automatic Patterns of Behavior

Charles Duhigg argues that habits are *unconscious* decisions you make without actually *thinking* about them. While you may assume that you're continually making *conscious* decisions, Duhigg claims that **more than 40% of your daily behaviors are driven by habits that you automatically engage in without conscious thought**. Since your habits inform such a large part of how you think and what you do, they have an enormous impact on your health, productivity, relationships, and overall happiness.

(Shortform note: In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear argues that more than *50%* of your daily behaviors are driven by unconscious habits. Because your habits play such a significant role in your life, Clear suggests that you go beyond simple reflection to develop awareness around your unconscious behaviors and their effect on you. He recommends that you track all of the actions you take daily. Then, determine which of your habits are beneficial or harmful to your overall well-being.)

You Form Habits to Save Mental Energy

To explain why habits form and develop into automatic behaviors, Duhigg draws on neurological research that explores how your brain processes information and helps you function. According to this research, every time you attempt to learn or do something new, you have to apply conscious effort to do it right. **This process takes up a lot of mental energy** and restricts your ability to think about other things.

Duhigg explains that **your brain is designed to save mental energy** on the things you do most often to avoid information overload and function efficiently. It does this by learning the sequence of actions it takes to achieve something. It then converts this sequence into an *automatic routine* and stores it so that you can perform your daily tasks automatically (without conscious thought). This explains why, the more often you practice doing certain things, the easier it becomes for you to do them without thinking.

Automatic Routines Require Strong Neural Pathways

What Duhigg says here about the brain's learning and automation processes isn't new—

neuroscientists and psychologists agree that the brain relies on automation to avoid information overload. However, Duhigg doesn't explain exactly *how* your brain converts a sequence of actions into an automatic routine. We'll explore the molecular activity that occurs inside your brain to clarify how your brain transitions from "learning" to "compartmentalizing as an automatic routine."

Every time your brain creates a new automatic routine, it changes its physical structure by strengthening specific neural pathways. Here's a very brief overview of neural pathways:

- The brain consists of a dense network of pathways consisting of neurons, or information messengers.
- Synapses transmit sensory information through this network of neurons.
- This sensory information is then stored in your short-term memory while your brain compares it to the memories you've stored in your long-term memory. This allows your brain to *judge* how relevant the new information is to your habitual behaviors (the processes stored in your long-term memory) and determines whether it should be kept or discarded.

Neuroscientists believe that your memory and recall rely upon the relationship that your neurons have with each other. Each time you learn something new or attempt to change your habitual routine, your brain applies conscious effort and attention to form new neural connections and pathways. The more you perform a certain sequence of actions, the stronger the relationship between the corresponding neurons in your brain, and the more likely your brain is to store it as an automatic routine.

Why Bad Habits Are Difficult to Break

Your brain creates automatic patterns based on the routines you engage in most often. While this process does offer many benefits such as not having to relearn everything you need to do on a daily basis, there is a significant drawback: **Your brain permanently stores these patterns even if your habits are bad for you**. According to Duhigg, this permanent storage explains why bad habits are notoriously difficult to break. Without deliberate intervention, you continue to automatically engage in these habits.

(Shortform note: Neuroscientists confirm that once your brain permanently stores your automatic patterns, it's not possible to delete them. However, neuroplasticity research confirms that it's possible to weaken these patterns so that your brain no longer relies on them for instructions about what to do in a given situation. This weakening process involves practicing new behavioral patterns to encourage the formation of new neural pathways in your brain.)

Part 2: The Anatomy of Habits

Duhigg argues that the main reason people fail to change their habits is that they don't understand the nature of their habits and how to most effectively change them. They assume that they can simply apply their willpower to end the habit. However, according to Duhigg, **applying willpower alone is ineffective as this method doesn't address the elements that fuel and *reinforce* your habit**.

(Shortform note: *The Willpower Instinct* by Kelly McGonigal offers insight into why relying solely on willpower to change habits is ineffective. She explains how applying willpower to change existing habits is often difficult because external factors such as stress, lack of sleep, or distractions compromise your ability to exercise self-control. Since most people face such issues daily, their willpower isn't strong enough to resist their brain's reliance on the automatic patterns that fuel their habits.)

Habits Require Three Elements to Become Automatic

Duhigg argues that your brain relies on assigning a specific starting point and endpoint to each of your

habits so that it knows what automatic routine it should default to in different situations. Duhigg claims that all habits require three essential elements to help your brain determine these starting and endpoints:

1. A **cue**: This is a trigger that signals the starting point of your habit and tells your brain to move into automatic mode to execute a specific routine. For example, you see a cookie and feel the urge to eat it.
2. A **routine**: You act out the physical, mental, or emotional sequence of behavior (automatic routine) that your brain has stored. For example, you open the jar of cookies and eat all of the cookies.
3. A **reward**: This is the result of your routine and signals the end of your habit. For example, you feel a sugar rush from eating all of the cookies.

Duhigg claims that these three elements only form part of the story. **On their own, the cue and the reward don't make a habit**. Consider an activity you perform *infrequently* such as replacing a flat tire on your car. You have a cue (the tire bursts), a routine (you fix it), and a reward (self-satisfaction). But, **you don't have a habit of fixing your tire**. According to Duhigg, this sort of activity doesn't turn into a habit because you don't do it often enough and the reward isn't inextricably linked to the activity—your brain doesn't feel the need to convert it into an automatic routine.

Habits Rely on Obvious Cues, Easy Routines, and Satisfying Rewards

In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear expands on the role that cues, routines, and rewards play in habit formation by categorizing these individual elements into two distinct phases: problem and solution.

- **Problem phase**: The cue (seeing a cookie) that triggers your urge (to eat the cookie).
- **Solution phase**: Your routine (eating the cookie) resolves the problem and provides a reward (sugar rush).

In addition, Clear explains that habits rely on *obvious* cues, *easy* routines, and *satisfying* rewards. This adds clarity to why you don't have a habit of infrequent or difficult tasks, like fixing your tire: Flat tires are a rare occurrence so your brain doesn't have an obvious, automatic response to the cue, the routine to fix them is laborious, and the satisfaction you receive isn't worth the effort you have to go through. Consequently, Clear suggests that you consider how to make your unwanted habits as inconvenient as possible.

Cravings Reinforce Habits

Duhigg argues that habits require an additional essential component to encourage your brain to create automatic routines and reinforce your habits: cravings. **A craving is the *anticipation* of the reward when you perceive the cue**.

Duhigg explains that every time you engage in a habit and receive a reward, dopamine (happy hormone) levels in your brain spike. Interestingly, the more you engage in this habit, the more **your brain associates the habit's cue with the habit's reward**. This causes your dopamine levels to spike as soon as you perceive the cue. In other words, you sense the cue and **anticipate the reward before you engage in the routine**. Because **your brain expects to receive the reward**, it encourages you to engage in the automatic routine to fulfill this expectation. If, however, you fail to receive the reward, **your dopamine levels drop and you feel disappointed**.

According to Duhigg, **cravings lie at the heart of every habit**: Your brain craves the reward it anticipates and pushes you into an automatic routine to avoid disappointment. The more often you engage in this routine, the stronger your craving gets. This explains why you may suffer from a **lack of self-control** when you try to stop your bad habits—you feel compelled to satisfy your cravings even when faced with strong disincentives such as damaging your health or relationships.

Anticipating a Reward Feels More Pleasurable Than Experiencing a Reward

What Duhigg explains about cravings and dopamine spikes has been verified and well documented in a number of psychology and self-help books. In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear adds that dopamine spikes occur both when you *anticipate* pleasure and when you *experience* pleasure. However, your emotional reaction when you're anticipating or craving something is **10 times stronger** than it is when you're actually receiving or experiencing the thing.

The pleasure you experience when you're craving something is so strong that it motivates you to follow through with your automatic routine. However, once you receive the reward, your feelings of pleasure remain neutral because you've already experienced the high of anticipation. Consequently, **the reward you receive feels less satisfying than the anticipation you feel about receiving it**.

Clear's research adds weight to Duhigg's argument that cravings lie at the heart of every habit. In addition, his explanation concerning the difference between dopamine levels in the *anticipating* and *receiving* stages clarifies why people suffer from addictions—their anticipation of the substance overrides the pleasure they receive from consuming the substance. They repeatedly overindulge in the reward in an attempt to match the high of anticipating it.

Part 3: How Habits Influence Individuals, Businesses, and Communities

In this section, we'll explore the multiple ways that habits influence you. We'll first reveal how advertisers play on your habits to sway your buying decisions. Then, we'll explain how collective habits determine how a business operates. Finally, we'll look at how successful social movements in any society rely on the convergence of social habits across various communities and social groups.

How Advertisers Exploit Your Habits

According to Duhigg, **advertisers deliberately play on your brain's reliance on automatic routines to influence your shopping decisions**. They know that you're more likely to buy things that you're familiar with to avoid making conscious decisions every time you go shopping (because your brain wants to conserve energy.) This is why they try so hard to figure out your preferences—for example, by tracking website cookies when you shop online or your reward cards when you shop offline. These methods allow them to send you customized deals that appeal to your predictable nature and get you back in their stores.

(Shortform note: Psychologists warn that your brain's tendency to operate in autopilot mode when shopping may save you time but it *doesn't* save you money. Retailers manipulate their environments to accommodate your habitual purchases and trick you into making impulsive and unnecessary buying decisions. Research indicates that you're more likely to make impulsive purchases when you shop without a list, walk through more aisles, feel hungry, or when your store rearranges its layout (which they deliberately do periodically). Psychologists recommend that you write a shopping list and go straight for these items to avoid falling into the trap of making impulsive purchases.)

The Influence of Collective Habits

According to Duhigg, businesses and communities rely on automatic routines just as much as you do to save time and energy. However, what's interesting here is that, by their nature, **these entities rely on the collective habits of multiple people to determine how they operate**. We'll explore this further throughout the rest of this section.

How Habits Impact Businesses

Duhigg argues that businesses rely on automatic routines so that managers and employees can get things done without having to question every action they take. However, many of these *collective* habits grow organically from an accumulation of *individual* decisions taken by different managers and employees. Over time, the company loses track of the individual decisions that initiated the habits that are now deeply ingrained in the company's culture. As a result, they end up acting out these automatic routines without knowing why. New employees quickly adopt these habits to fit in, and the cycle of automatic routines perpetuates.

Duhigg argues that, when a company is unaware of the automatic routines that underpin its organization, it can easily fall into the trap of adopting deconstructive habits that undermine its operations.

Businesses Fail to Align Collective Habits With Their Overall Goals

Management experts explain that many organizations fail to take control of their collective habits because they assume that what worked historically to bring them success will continue to work in the future. However, this strategy falls short because business priorities—the goals that determine what types of customers the business serves and how it intends to provide value—evolve over time, and the collective habits they rely on must adapt, too.

Experts argue that businesses must continually assess whether their collective habits support their overall priorities, and take the necessary steps to align employee behaviors with the organization's goals. However, they warn that managers and employees tend to resist change for the same reasons that they develop habits in the first place: to save mental energy. Learning to do things differently increases the amount of effort that they need to apply to carry out their daily tasks and often creates resentment. Organizations can help smooth the transition to new collective habits by ensuring that managers and employees understand why they need to change their behaviors.

How Habits Impact Communities and Societies

Duhigg argues that every major movement that has impacted communities and societies has been fueled by a particular type of habit: **social habits**. These habits define how you relate to and behave around other people. According to Duhigg, social habits influence the way you identify with and act on the information you're exposed to.

(Shortform note: Research backs up Duhigg's claim that the choices you make about the movements you support are influenced by social habits. While you may think that your opinions about all of the issues you hear about are solely your own, social psychologists confirm that your perceptions and behaviors are heavily influenced by other people. You think a lot about other people, allow them to impact your emotions, and feel motivated to adapt your behaviors to please others. Consequently, the movements you choose to follow are an extension of this social influence.)

Duhigg explains that successful social movements rely on social habits in three ways:

1) The movement begins with the social habits of close friends: Someone is afflicted, and the people close to them immediately help.

(Shortform note: While taking action to help a friend in need feels like a natural and selfless response, James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) argues that your *underlying motivation to belong* affects all of your behaviors, including this one. He claims that there are three groups of people that greatly influence how you respond to situations: the close (family and friends), the many (the general public), and the powerful (the people you perceive as successful.)

2) The movement grows from the habits of a community: The social ties that combine loosely affiliated people create social pressure to join the cause.

(Shortform note: In *How Behavior Spreads*, behavioral expert Damon Centola explains that you're more influenced by the *percentage* of people that are doing something, rather than the total number. If a high percentage of people in your community support a cause, you'll naturally *feel* like it's the right thing to do.)

3) The movement endures because the participants engage in new social habits: The participants identify with the movement and take on habits that reflect their belief in the cause.

(Shortform note: While Duhigg focuses on the endurance of movements due to participants engaging in new social habits, he doesn't mention another vital factor: Eventually, **collective individual habits influence business habits**, making these new habits even more visible and accessible to *potential* participants. For example, when animal rights activists decided to become vegetarians, stores and restaurants changed their offerings to cater to this demand. This visible change brought vegetarianism to the attention of shoppers, some of whom then adopted the cause.)

Part 4: How to Change Your Habits

Duhigg argues that, while you can't delete unwanted automatic patterns from your mind, through self-awareness and conscious control, you can override them with new automatic patterns that align with the habits you do want to practice. (Shortform note: Recall: Neuroscientists confirm that it's possible to weaken these permanent patterns so that your brain no longer relies on them.)

Change an Existing Bad Habit

According to Duhigg, once you understand the cues and cravings that drive your habits, you'll gain conscious control over the behavioral pattern you engage in. This allows you to disrupt your unwanted habit and override it with a new, more productive behavioral pattern. However, **the cues and cravings that fuel your habits aren't always as obvious as they appear to be**. This is because the longer you engage in a habit, the less aware you become of the specific cravings that motivate your habit.

Mindfulness Helps to Uncover the Root Cause of Your Habits

Mindfulness experts agree that you're often unaware of the specific cues and cravings that drive your habits. However, they argue that **your *emotions* are the cause of your habits** because they make you susceptible to cues and cravings. They explain that you're often triggered by an emotional feeling that you seek to alleviate through the use of your habit. For example, if you smoke cigarettes, you're more likely to notice your cues (for example, the smell of tobacco) and give in to your cravings when you feel uncomfortable emotions such as fear or feelings of anxiety.

> However, while engaging in the habit does provide temporary relief, it doesn't fix the root of the problem—the uncomfortable feeling that you're trying to overcome. To give yourself a better chance of successfully changing your habits, examine the root cause (your emotions) of the habits you seek to change before you attempt to change them.

Duhigg claims that all successful habit changes begin with experimentation to uncover the cues and rewards that drive your habits. He suggests following a four-step process that relies on identifying your routine and experimenting with different rewards so that you can effectively isolate your cue and understand why you engage in your habits. Let's explore the process in detail.

Step 1: Write Down Your Habit-Driven Routine

The routine is the automatic behavior pattern that surrounds the habit you want to change. Duhigg suggests that you detail every step of the routine from beginning to end, even the steps you think aren't important.

(Shortform note: Not all habits have a clear-cut routine, especially if they're emotional rather than behavioral. For example, if you habitually feel anxious before you need to drive somewhere, it's easy to pinpoint driving as a high-anxiety situation. However, you may feel low-level anxiety throughout your day in a number of other situations. This makes it difficult to define a specific start and endpoint for the routine that surrounds your habitual feelings of anxiety. In *The Craving Mind*, neuroscientist Dr. Judson Brewer suggests building self-awareness through mindfulness techniques such as meditation to help develop conscious awareness of the specific routines around your emotional habits.)

Step 2: Switch Out Rewards to Discover Your Craving

Duhigg suggests that each time you recognize that you're about to engage in your typical habit, **change the reward.** This will help you to figure out what part of the routine you're truly craving. Is it the reward you've habitually turned to, or is it something else? Each time you perform this experiment, **write down the first three words that come to mind**—this will encourage you to consciously acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. For instance, are you still feeling unsettled and like your craving is unfulfilled? If you're not, your new reward satisfies your true craving—and you can discover what that craving is by considering what need the reward fulfills.

(Shortform note: According to Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, Duhigg's method of changing the reward forces your brain to step out of autopilot mode and increases your awareness of how you feel. This process, coupled with writing down three words, encourages you to think about why you're engaging in your habit, the feelings you're chasing or trying to avoid, and the justifications you make for sticking with this habit. This awareness makes it much easier for you to avoid falling into your habitual routines.)

Step 3: Use Categories to Identify Your Cue

The purpose of this step is to figure out exactly what's triggering you to engage in your habit. Duhigg claims that **all cues fit into one of five categories**: location, time, emotional state, other people, and what's happening immediately before you engage in the habit. He argues that you can isolate the cue to your habit by considering these five categories the next time you feel a craving.

(Shortform note: It may seem that Duhigg's method doesn't work so well for habits that people compulsively engage in throughout the day, such as chain-smoking or nail-biting. It's difficult to track and correlate the causes of something you unconsciously engage in. But, psychologists argue that, at their root, these compulsive behaviors are an attempt to relieve underlying anxieties or other negative emotions.

Consequently, they argue that all of Duhigg's categories help track the impact of different situations and people on your emotional state, making it easier to disentangle the subtle cues that trigger your habit.)

Step 4: Head Off Temptation

Once you've completed your experiments and defined the cue, routine, and reward components of your habit, Duhigg suggests that you make a plan to overcome any temptations you might feel to give in to your old cravings. This involves designing your cues to trigger new behavioral routines and cravings for the new reward to come—it could be as simple as removing the cue that triggers your cravings.

(Shortform note: James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) adds to Duhigg's approach by suggesting that you not only *remove* the cues for your unwanted habits but also *add* cues for your new habits. He explains that an effective plan involves shaping the visual cues within your environment to encourage only the new habits you seek to adopt. Visual cues are the biggest instigators for action because they trick your brain into thinking that it's more convenient to act on them. For example, it's convenient to drink more water when there's a glass of water on your desk.)

Start a Ripple Effect by Changing One Core Habit

You may feel tempted to use the four-step process to tackle multiple habits and overhaul your life. Duhigg says that addressing and managing multiple automatic routines will be difficult and, as a result, likely end in failure. Instead, he recommends an easier way to change all of your habits: **Leverage one core habit**. According to Duhigg, when you feel the benefits of changing one core habit, you start a chain reaction that encourages you to change other existing habits or develop additional good habits. In other words, **the rewards you feel from successfully changing this habit influence you to restructure the rest of your habits**.

(Shortform note: Like Duhigg, Tony Robbins (*Awaken the Giant Within*) argues that making one beneficial change in your daily routine sets into motion a series of beneficial decisions and habits that improve your entire life. He explains that if you try to tackle all of your habits at the same time, you're more likely to focus on how difficult it is, feel overwhelmed, and resign yourself to staying in the same situation. On the other hand, committing to change a single habit allows you to effectively focus your energy and produce successful results. These positive results naturally encourage you to feel more confident about your ability to take control of your behaviors, and they motivate you to improve all of your habits.)

Create an Entirely New Habit

Duhigg claims that you can also apply your understanding of how cues, routines, and rewards underlie habitual behaviors to create *entirely new* habits. He suggests three steps to establish new habits:

1) Decide upon your cue and your reward: Duhigg claims that new habits require a clearly defined cue and a reward to become automatic routines.

(Shortform note: James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) argues that the easiest way to implement this step is to specifically link your new cue and reward to an existing routine (for instance, your current morning routine). This way, you've already completed the hardest part of your new habit—deciding on the cue and reward—and you simply have to follow through with your intended action.)

2) Develop a craving for your reward: According to Duhigg, the more positive you feel about your reward, the more likely your brain will want to set up an automatic routine to support your new habit. Duhigg suggests that you find ways to actively develop a craving for your reward—visualizing, anticipating, or imagining this reward.

(Shortform note: In *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins expands upon Duhigg's claim that your reward must *feel* positive by arguing that **neuro-associations—the way your brain links experiences with pain or pleasure—influence all of your habits**. According to Robbins, your brain relies on these neuro-associations to direct your behavior *toward feeling pleasure* and *away from feeling pain*, and you have to reprogram these associations to create new automatic routines. Your brain's more likely to create an automatic routine for your new habit if you remove all pain points from the routine and set it up to feel as pleasurable as possible.)

3) Make a plan to overcome obstacles: You might feel reluctant to engage in your new habits for a number of reasons. Duhigg claims that you're more likely to stick to your new habits if you predict potential obstacles and plan ways to reduce your reluctance.

(Shortform note: Brendon Burchard (*High Performance Habits*), claims that the tendency to focus on obstacles and limitations occurs when you don't have a clear *purpose* for your actions. This causes you to focus too much on the difficulty of overcoming your present circumstances (unwanted habits) to look to the future (the benefits of your new habits). Burchard encourages you to focus on your purpose—what you'll gain from overcoming your obstacles—and use this to motivate yourself to move forward with your new habit.)

Believe That You Can Change Your Habits

Duhigg argues that **belief is an essential part of overcoming your cravings and permanently changing any habit**. Sometimes your cravings will feel unbearable and you'll want to fall back into your old habits. During these times, it's critical to believe that you can overcome your cravings and consciously decide how you want to act.

(Shortform note: Numerous studies prove that positive beliefs and expectations encourage you to rise above any limitations you face and focus on solutions that move you toward what you want. However, psychologists warn that **unrealistic positive expectations**—such as blindly believing that you'll easily overcome your habits without effort—set you up for failure because they don't prepare you to take proactive steps to counter the inevitable obstacles that you'll face. On the other hand, **realistic positive expectations acknowledge that the road to change requires effort and persistence**, and they encourage you to take a proactive approach towards making the changes that you want.)

Shortform Introduction

In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg explores the components of habit formation. He helps readers understand *why* they have certain habits, just how much these habits influence their daily lives, and how they can stop or change bad habits.

About the Author

Charles Duhigg is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, speaker, and bestselling author. He contributed to a number of award-winning series for *The New York Times* and currently writes for *The New Yorker Magazine* and other publications. He hosts the podcast *How To!* and has been featured on numerous TV programs including *Frontline* and PBS's *NewsHour*. In tandem with his work as a reporter, he published his first book, *The Power of Habit*.

His subsequent book, *Smarter Faster Better*, draws on research in neuroscience, psychology, and behavioral economics to explore how to dramatically increase productivity with less effort.

Connect with Charles Duhigg:

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The Book's Publication

Publisher: Penguin Random House

The Power of Habit was published in 2012. It's Duhigg's most popular book—it spent more than 60 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It has since been translated into more than 40 languages.

The Book's Context

Intellectual Context

Habits play an important role in our lives. That's why people are always looking for ways to break bad habits and implement good ones. Consequently, the self-help market is saturated with books that provide productive methods for changing habits in various contexts—personal, professional, financial, creative, and so on. Some of the most popular habit-focused books include:

- *Atomic Habits*, James Clear: Offers a four-step process to effectively break bad habits and adopt new ones
- *The Creative Habit*, Twyla Tharp: Presents strategies for implementing creative pursuits into your daily routine
- *High Performance Habits*, Brendon Burchard: Defines the six habits you need to excel in every area of your life
- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey: Discusses how to prioritize your time, focus your actions, and build relationships to achieve personal and professional success

- *Tiny Habits*, BJ Fogg: Demonstrates the power of applying small incremental changes to your routine to create positive improvements in your life

While the majority of books on improving habits discuss what types of habits are beneficial before walking you through specific methods and exercises to implement change, *The Power of Habit* takes a more theoretical approach. Duhigg argues that the more you understand the nature and influence of habits, the more power you have to change them. Therefore, instead of offering advice on which habits to implement and following up with *how-to* methods for changing habits, he focuses more on explaining *why* you rely on habits and how they influence you personally, professionally, and socially.

The Book's Strengths and Weaknesses

Critical Reception

The Power of Habit enjoys excellent feedback—many reviewers comment that they've successfully changed their habits since reading the book. These reviewers find the case studies that Duhigg uses to illustrate his discussion well-written, highly relevant, and engaging.

However, some reviewers hold a contrasting view, commenting that the case studies are irrelevant and laborious to read. Since these studies take up the bulk of the book, these reviewers don't appreciate having to sift through the "overly-long" examples to find the practical methods they're searching for.

Commentary on the Book's Approach and Organization

Each chapter in *The Power of Habit* focuses on the central argument that habits can be changed if you understand how they work. Duhigg draws on extensive research—academic studies and interviews with scientists and executives—to explore how habits develop into automatic behaviors that influence personal lives, businesses, and communities.

Duhigg tackles these topics in three parts: In the first part, he presents neurological research to explain how habits form and eventually turn into automatic behaviors. In the second part, he explores case studies of various companies to examine how managers can instill productive habits to transform any organization. In the third part, he illustrates how various social movements succeeded by changing ingrained social habits to influence communities and create momentum for their cause.

Our Approach in This Guide

In this guide, we've extracted Duhigg's key ideas and restructured them to focus on how your habits form and what you can do to change them. We've organized the material into four parts:

- **Part 1: Habits Are Automatic Patterns of Behavior** explains how your brain's tendency to rely on automatic routines encourages you to engage in habits without consciously thinking about them.
- **Part 2: The Anatomy of Habits** breaks habits down into their individual components and clarifies how cravings reinforce your habits.
- **Part 3: How Habits Influence Individuals, Businesses, and Communities** discusses how advertisers play on your habits to sway your buying decisions. It also examines the influence of collective habits on businesses and communities.
- **Part 4: How to Change Your Habits** provides actionable steps you can take to redesign your current habits or introduce entirely new habits.

Additionally, we compare and contrast each key concept with up-to-date research on habit formation. We also expand on Duhigg's advice with actionable methods from other self-improvement authors and psychologists.

Part 1: Habits Are Automatic Patterns of Behavior

In *The Power of Habit*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg draws on extensive research to explore how habits develop into automatic behaviors that influence personal lives, businesses, and communities. He explains why unhealthy habits are notoriously difficult to break and provides a practical framework to help you **understand and change any habit**.

We'll explore *The Power of Habit* in four parts: In this first part of the guide, we'll explain how your brain's tendency to rely on automatic routines encourages you to engage in actions without consciously thinking about them. In the second part, we'll break habits down into their individual components and clarify how cravings reinforce your habits. In the third part, we'll discuss how advertisers play on your habits to sway your buying decisions. We'll also examine the influence of collective habits on businesses and communities. In the final part, we'll provide actionable steps you can take to redesign your current habits or introduce entirely new habits.

What Are Habits?

Duhigg argues that habits are *unconscious* decisions you make about how to act, think, or feel without actually *thinking* about them. While you may assume that you're continually making *conscious* decisions, Duhigg claims that **more than 40% of your daily behaviors are driven by habits that you automatically engage in without conscious thought.** Since your habits inform such a large part of how you think and what you do, they have an enormous impact on your health, productivity, relationships, and overall happiness.

(Shortform note: In *Atomic Habits,* James Clear agrees that you engage in unconscious habits, but he argues that more than *50%* of your daily behaviors are driven by these habits. Because your habits play such a significant role in your life, Clear suggests that you go beyond simple reflection to develop awareness around your unconscious behaviors and their effect on you: He recommends that you track all of the actions you take on a daily basis. Then, determine which of your habits are beneficial or harmful to your overall well-being.)

You Form Habits to Save Mental Energy

To explain why habits form and develop into automatic behaviors, Duhigg draws on neurological research that explores the specific procedures your brain relies on to efficiently process information and help you function.

According to this research, every time you attempt to learn or do something new, you have to apply conscious effort to do it right. As a result, your brain explodes with activity as it focuses on processing and learning new information so that you can make informed decisions about how to move forward with your task. **This process takes up a lot of mental energy** and restricts your ability to think about other things.

Duhigg explains that **your brain is designed to save mental energy** on the things you do most often to avoid information overload and function efficiently. It does this by learning the sequence of actions it takes to achieve something. It then converts this sequence into an *automatic routine* and stores it so that you can perform your daily tasks automatically (without conscious thought). This explains why, the more often you practice doing certain things, the easier it becomes for you to do them without thinking. The more often you perform your tasks automatically, the more your brain gets to relax.

Without these automatic routines, Duhigg notes, you would have to relearn every single thing you do—brushing your teeth, tying your shoelaces—every time you do them. This would involve making decisions every step of the way (How much toothpaste do I need to use? Which foot does this shoe go on?) and leave you with very little mental energy to think of or achieve anything else.

Automatic Routines Require Strong Neural Pathways

What Duhigg says here about the brain's learning and automation processes isn't new—

neuroscientists and psychologists agree that the brain relies on automation to avoid information overload. However, Duhigg doesn't explain exactly *how* your brain converts a sequence of actions into an automatic routine. We'll explore the molecular activity that occurs inside your brain to clarify how your brain transitions from "learning" to "compartmentalizing as an automatic routine."

According to neuroscience research, every time your brain creates a new automatic routine, it changes its physical structure by strengthening specific neural pathways. Here's a very brief overview of neural pathways:

- The brain consists of a dense network of pathways consisting of neurons, or information messengers.
- Synapses transmit sensory information through this network of neurons.
- This sensory information is then stored in your short-term memory while your brain compares it to the memories you've stored in your long-term memory. This allows your brain to *judge* how relevant the new information is to your habitual behaviors (the processes stored in your long-term memory) and determines whether it should be kept or discarded.

Neuroscientists believe that your memory and recall rely upon the relationship that your neurons have with each other. Each time you learn something new or attempt to change your habitual routine, your brain applies conscious effort and attention to form new neural connections and pathways. The more you practice performing a certain sequence of actions, the stronger the relationship between the corresponding neurons in your brain, and the more likely your brain is to store the sequence as an automatic routine.

How Does Your Brain Know When to Cede Conscious Control?

According to Duhigg, even though your brain wants to save mental energy, it also needs to ensure that it remains alert and involved during times when you need to pay attention—for example, when you're crossing a busy road or using a chainsaw. Consequently, when it learns the sequence of actions for your most common routines, it analyzes the sequence to figure out when the activity starts and ends. It uses this information to compartmentalize your routines so that it knows when it needs to be alert and in charge (conscious thoughts), and when it can function on autopilot and take a rest (automatic routines).

For example, when you're driving to a new location and aren't sure of the directions, your brain is extra alert as it takes notice of every street sign to help you make decisions about which way to go. On the other hand, when you're driving to a place you know well, you don't need to concentrate so hard to get to where you're going. Unless an unexpected diversion or car malfunction requires attention, your brain knows that it's safe enough for you to function on autopilot while it takes a break.

Ceding Conscious Control Limits Your Perceptions and Delays Your Reactions

While Duhigg argues that your brain effectively compartmentalizes your routines so that it remains alert when you need it, some psychologists argue that your brain fails to correctly judge the potential risks of these habitual routines. They claim that while your automatic routines do allow you to think of other things while involved in an activity—for example, you can think about your to-do list while driving to work—being in autopilot mode limits your awareness of your surroundings and delays your reactions.

They explain that, when your brain's in autopilot mode, it's unable to plan ahead or come up with responses to the potential hazards that you may face—because it's not consciously processing possible obstacles in your environment. Consequently, if you're in autopilot mode while on your daily commute, you'll be caught off guard and slow to respond if something unexpected happens, such as a pedestrian running into the road or a car abruptly braking in front of you. This information clarifies why drivers are more likely to have accidents closer to home than they are to have them in unfamiliar locations.

Habits Begin With a Conscious Decision

Now that we've explored how your brain relies on automatic routines so that you can get through your day without overloading it, we'll explore how this research specifically relates to the formation of habits.

Duhigg explains that every single one of your habits started with a conscious decision to do something—all of your habits began this way even if you don't remember making the initial decision. Over time, as you repeatedly made the same decision, your brain took over to develop **an automatic pattern of behavior that turned this decision into a habit**. This pattern of behavior is stored in your brain and encourages you to engage in your habits automatically.

(Shortform note: You may doubt Duhigg's claim that every habit begins with a conscious decision because you don't remember deciding to start your habit. Psychologists clarify this by explaining how underlying motivations impact the way you initially form and later remember your decisions. The initial decisions you made were an attempt to fulfill an (often unconscious) need or motivation: You were more focused on fulfilling your needs than on the specific actions you took to fulfill them. For example, you wanted to fit in with your social group so you smoked a cigarette, or you wanted to ease your stressful thoughts so you had a drink. Over time, this changed: You focused more on the *action itself* than on *why* you initially chose this action.)

Why Bad Habits Are Difficult to Break

Your brain creates automatic patterns based on the routines you engage in most often. While this process does offer many benefits such as not having to relearn everything you need to do on a daily basis, there is a significant drawback: **Your brain permanently stores these patterns even if your habits are bad for you**. According to Duhigg, this permanent storage explains why bad habits are notoriously difficult to break. Without deliberate intervention, you continue to automatically engage in these habits.

This explains why many people continually try and fail to change "bad" habits they'd prefer to avoid such as smoking or drinking too much, binge-watching TV, or shouting at their kids every morning. They *decided* often enough to take a specific action, their brains recorded the pattern, and now they automatically carry out this pattern on a regular basis regardless of their current preferences.

(Shortform note: Neuroscientists confirm that once your brain permanently stores your automatic patterns, it's not possible to delete them. However, neuroplasticity research confirms that it's possible to weaken these patterns so that your brain no longer relies on them for instructions about what to do in a given situation. This weakening process involves practicing new behavioral patterns to encourage the formation of new neural pathways in your brain. We'll cover this research more in Part 4 of the guide.)

Part 2: The Anatomy of Habits

Now that you understand your brain's tendency to rely on automatic routines, we'll break habits down into their individual components to understand their complex nature.

Duhigg argues that the main reason people fail to change their habits is that they don't understand the nature of their habits and how to most effectively change them. They assume that they can simply apply their willpower to end the habit. However, according to Duhigg, **applying willpower alone is ineffective as this method doesn't address the elements that fuel and *reinforce* your habit**. Let's explore the elements underlying each of your habits and how they reinforce your automatic patterns of behavior in more detail.

(Shortform note: *The Willpower Instinct* by Kelly McGonigal offers insight into why relying solely on willpower to change habits is ineffective. She explains how applying willpower to change existing habits is often difficult because external factors such as stress, lack of sleep, or distractions compromise your ability to exercise self-control. Since most people face such issues on a daily basis, their willpower isn't strong enough to resist their brain's reliance on the automatic patterns that fuel their habits.)

Habits Require Three Elements to Become Automatic

We previously discussed how your brain compartmentalizes the routines you perform so it can figure out when it needs to be alert and when it can go on autopilot. In line with this reasoning, Duhigg argues that your brain relies on assigning a specific starting point and endpoint to each of your habits so that it knows what automatic routine it should encourage you to follow in different situations. Duhigg claims that all habits require three essential elements to help your brain determine these starting and endpoints:

1. A **cue**: This is a trigger that signals the starting point of your habit and tells your brain to move into automatic mode to execute a specific routine. For example, you see a cookie and feel the urge to eat it.
2. A **routine**: You act out the physical, mental, or emotional sequence of behavior (automatic routine) that your brain has stored. For example, you open the jar of cookies and eat all of the cookies.
3. A **reward**: This is the result of your routine and signals the end of your habit. For example, you feel a sugar rush from eating all of the cookies.

Duhigg argues that these three elements only form part of the story. **On their own, the cue and the reward don't make a habit**.

For example, consider an activity you perform *infrequently* such as replacing a flat tire on your car. You feel the cue when your tire bursts. You perform the routine of fixing your tire. You experience the reward of self-satisfaction once you're back on the road. But, **you don't have a habit of fixing your tire**. According to Duhigg, this sort of activity doesn't turn into a habit because, first, you don't do it often enough. Second, the reward isn't inextricably linked to the activity. Consequently, your brain doesn't feel the need to convert it into an automatic routine.

Habits Rely on Obvious Cues, Easy Routines, and Satisfying Rewards

In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear expands on the role that cues, routines, and rewards play in habit formation by categorizing these individual elements into two distinct phases: problem and solution.

- **Problem phase**: The cue (seeing a cookie) that triggers your urge (to eat the cookie).
- **Solution phase**: Your routine (eating the cookie) resolves the problem and provides a reward (sugar rush).

In addition, Clear explains that habits rely on *obvious* cues, *easy* routines, and *satisfying* rewards. This adds clarity to why you don't have a habit of infrequent or difficult tasks, like fixing your tire: Flat tires are a rare occurrence so your brain doesn't develop an obvious or automatic response to the cue, the routine to fix them is quite laborious and messy, and the satisfaction you receive from fixing your tire isn't worth the effort you have to go through. Consequently, Clear suggests that you consider how to make your unwanted habits as inconvenient as possible:

- Make your cues invisible: Hide all of the cookies.
- Make the routine difficult: Don't buy cookies and warn others not to offer you any cookies.
- Make the reward unsatisfying: Commit to doing something you dislike every time you eat a cookie, such as taking on extra chores or paying a friend $50.

Cravings Reinforce Habits

Duhigg argues that habits require an additional essential component to encourage your brain to create automatic routines and reinforce your habits: cravings. **A craving is the *anticipation* of the reward when you perceive the cue**.

Duhigg draws on neurological research to explain how cravings reinforce your habits. This research reveals that every time you engage in a habit and receive a reward, dopamine (happy hormone) levels in your brain spike.

- For example, you put an extra sugar cube in your coffee. You take a sip and taste the burst of sweetness. At this specific point, your brain registers your pleasure (dopamine spike) and records this feeling.

Interestingly, the more you engage in this habit, the more **your brain associates the habit's cue with the habit's reward**. This causes your dopamine levels to spike as soon as you perceive the cue. In other words, you sense the cue and **anticipate the reward before you engage in the routine**.

- For example, you see your coffee cup and anticipate the hit of sweetness (dopamine spike) you'll get from putting in an extra sugar cube. Your craving encourages you to automatically add this sugar to your cup.

Further, Duhigg notes, research reveals that, because **your brain expects to receive the reward**, it encourages you to engage in the automatic routine to fulfill this expectation. If, however, you fail to receive the reward, **your dopamine levels drop and you feel disappointed**.

- For example, someone makes you a coffee but they haven't added sugar. You're so used to expecting sugar in your coffee that you feel disappointed (dopamine drop) because your craving isn't satisfied.

According to Duhigg, **cravings lie at the heart of every habit**: Your brain craves the reward it anticipates

and pushes you into an automatic routine to avoid disappointment. The more often you engage in this routine, the stronger your craving gets. This explains why you may suffer from a **lack of self-control** when you try to stop your bad habits—you feel compelled to satisfy your cravings even when faced with strong disincentives such as damaging your health or relationships.

Anticipating a Reward Feels More Pleasurable Than Experiencing a Reward

What Duhigg explains about cravings and dopamine spikes has been verified and well-documented in a number of psychology and self-help books. In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear adds further insights into how your dopamine levels and cravings influence your automatic behaviors. He explains that dopamine spikes occur both when you *anticipate* pleasure and when you *experience* pleasure. However, your emotional reaction when you're anticipating or craving something is **10 times stronger** than it is when you're actually receiving or experiencing the thing.

The pleasure you experience when you're craving something is so strong that it motivates you to follow through with your automatic routine. However, once you receive the reward, your feelings of pleasure remain neutral because you've already experienced the high of anticipation. Consequently, **the reward you receive feels less satisfying than the anticipation you feel about receiving it**.

For example, consider how much more exciting the days leading up to Christmas were than actual Christmas morning as a child. Or, think about how infatuated and eager you felt about going on a first date with your partner compared to how you felt while experiencing that date.

Clear's research adds weight to Duhigg's argument that cravings lie at the heart of every habit. In addition, his explanation concerning the difference between dopamine levels in the *anticipating* and *receiving* stages clarifies why people suffer from addictions—their anticipation of the substance overrides the pleasure they receive from consuming the substance. They repeatedly overindulge in the reward in an attempt to match the high of anticipating it. When they fail to match this high, they feel like they're missing something.

For example, you started to have one glass of wine after work to relax. Over time, the pleasure you received from anticipating the wine became stronger than the pleasure you received from drinking just one glass of wine. Feeling dissatisfied, you reached for another glass in an attempt to fill the void that your anticipatory dopamine spike left. This satisfied you for a short time until two glasses of wine (your reward) failed to match the high of your anticipatory dopamine spike (your craving).

Exercise: Identify Your Habit

Apply what you've learned about the components of a habit to develop awareness around the habits you want to break.

What is a bad habit that you want to stop? How often do you engage in this habit?

A cue is a trigger that kicks off the habit. What's the cue for your bad habit? (For example, "When I open the fridge after work, I always grab a beer." Opening the fridge is your cue.)

The cue kicks off a craving and makes you anticipate the reward. What does the craving feel like? What reward do you want? (For example, you crave something refreshing and relaxing—you want something that helps you unwind at the end of a long day.)

To get your reward, you act out a routine. What's the routine you take to get your reward? Write out every specific step from beginning to end. Include the steps that don't seem important to you.

Part 3: How Habits Influence Individuals, Businesses, and Communities

So far in this guide, we've discussed how our habits form and the specific elements that fuel them. In this third part of the guide, we'll explore the multiple ways that habits influence you. We'll first reveal how advertisers play on your habits to sway your buying decisions. Then, we'll explain how collective habits determine how a business operates. Finally, we'll look at how successful social movements in any society rely on the convergence of social habits across various communities and social groups.

How Advertisers Exploit Your Habits

According to Duhigg, **advertisers deliberately play on your brain's reliance on automatic routines to influence your shopping decisions**. They know that you're more likely to buy things that you're familiar with to avoid making conscious decisions every time you go shopping (because your brain wants to conserve energy.) This is why they try so hard to figure out your preferences—for example, by tracking website cookies when you shop online or your reward cards when you shop offline. These methods allow them to send you customized deals that appeal to your predictable nature and get you back in their stores.

Retailers Trick You Into Buying More Than You Need

Psychologists warn that your brain's tendency to operate in autopilot mode when shopping may save you time but it *doesn't* save you money. Retailers manipulate their environments to accommodate your habitual purchases and trick you into making impulsive and unnecessary buying decisions.

For example, a shop may encourage you to add the same brand of toothpaste to your basket every week—without considering the 10 tubes you already have in your cupboard—by placing a large sale sign for the toothpaste right by the payment area. Seeing that your favorite toothpaste is on sale, you excitedly add it to your cart and pay for it before you can consider the wisdom of the purchase.

Research indicates that you're more likely to make impulsive purchases when you shop without a list, walk through more aisles, feel hungry, or when your store rearranges its layout. Therefore, many retailers rearrange their layouts periodically, and some shops are designed in such a way that you *must* walk through every section to exit. Psychologists recommend that you write a shopping list and go straight for the listed items to avoid falling into the trap of making impulsive purchases.

Further, Duhigg argues that advertisers use the information they gather about you to influence you to buy products you wouldn't normally consider. They know that seeing familiar items (cue) encourages you to go into automatic shopping mode (routine). So, they deliberately sandwich new and unfamiliar products in between your usual items. The more you see the new product amidst your usual items, the more familiar and, therefore, appealing, it seems. Eventually, your brain learns to associate this new product as part of your automatic shopping routine and encourages you to buy it.

(Shortform note: This advertising tactic relies on what psychologists refer to as **the mere exposure effect**—the premise that the more often you're exposed to something, consciously or unconsciously, the more you like it. Researchers suggest that increased exposure makes things easier to interpret and, consequently,

reduces the uncertainty you feel about them. However, the mere exposure effect doesn't work for something you initially dislike—it tends to only work if your initial reaction to something is neutral or positive. For example, if you dislike K-pop, repeated exposure is unlikely to convert you into a fan.)

Advertisers Align Cues and Rewards to Make You Crave What They're Selling

In addition to playing on your habitual nature, Duhigg argues that advertisers also deliberately align the three elements of a habit (cue, routine, and reward) to fuel your cravings and convince you to buy their products. They achieve this by attaching a particular sensation to their products such as a unique smell or taste to inspire a craving. Examples of sensations that encourage cravings include the tingling sensation from your mouthwash, the satisfying crunch of your favorite brand of chips, or the relaxing scent of your bath foam.

(Shortform note: In *Hyperfocus*, Chis Bailey further clarifies that the sensations that advertisers use to fuel your cravings are designed to be strong enough to break through your brain's autopilot mode. He explains that on autopilot, your brain only notices things that are new, potentially dangerous, or gratifying. Since advertisers are aware that you prefer to buy familiar things to save mental energy, and that you're more likely to avoid danger than seek it out, they frame their products in a way that appeals to your innate tendency to seek gratification. Consequently, they spend millions of dollars on research so that they can create the perfect sensations to make their products *feel* irresistible.)

The Influence of Collective Habits

According to Duhigg, businesses and communities rely on automatic routines just as much as you do to save time and energy. However, by their nature, **these entities rely on the collective habits of multiple people to determine how they operate**. We'll explore this further throughout the rest of this part.

How Habits Impact Businesses

Many people assume that business operations—the routines and processes that allow a company to function—rely on a continuous sequence of rational and deliberate choices. According to Duhigg, this is not the case. He argues that **businesses rely on automatic routines to save energy**. Automatic routines help managers and employees get things done without having to question every action they take.

(Shortform note: In *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Clayton M. Christensen clarifies how businesses rely on automatic routines. He explains that a business needs established processes and procedures to ensure consistent operations across the entire organization. Whether these processes are explicitly defined protocols or implicitly understood, they allow both veteran employees and new employees to fall in line with the company's habitual routines without having to question every decision they make.)

However, Duhigg continues, many of these *collective* habits grow organically from an accumulation of *individual* decisions taken by different managers and employees. Over time, the company loses track of the individual decisions that initiated the habits that are now deeply ingrained in the company's culture. As a result, they end up acting out these automatic routines without an awareness of why they're engaging in these behavioral patterns. New employees quickly adopt these habits to fit in, and the cycle of automatic routines perpetuates.

Duhigg argues that, when a company is unaware of the automatic routines that underpin its organization, it can easily fall into the trap of adopting deconstructive habits that undermine its operations.

For example, one manager's habit of missing important deadlines may encourage her entire department to

develop a relaxed attitude toward meeting target dates, and this has a domino effect on the rest of the company. To avoid failing company-wide deadlines and undermining their reputation, other employees and managers may develop the habit of compensating for this department's inefficiencies. However, this habit encourages them to feel overworked and resentful and ultimately leads to further inefficiencies.

Businesses Fail to Align Collective Habits With Their Overall Goals

Management experts explain that many organizations fail to take control of their collective habits because they assume that what worked historically to bring them success will continue to work in the future. However, this strategy falls short because business priorities—the goals that determine what types of customers the business serves and how it intends to provide value—evolve over time, and the processes (collective habits) they rely on must adapt, too.

Experts argue that businesses must continually assess whether the processes they have in place support their overall priorities and take the necessary steps to align employee behaviors with the organization's goals. However, as Christensen points out in *The Innovator's Dilemma*, company processes are designed to *prevent* change by ensuring that everyone sticks to the established rules. Consequently, processes, and the habits that underpin them, are very difficult to change.

What makes these collective habits even more difficult to change is the fact that managers and employees tend to resist change for the same reasons that they develop habits in the first place: to save mental energy. Learning to do things differently increases the amount of effort that they need to apply to carry out their daily tasks. This creates resentment, especially when employees don't feel like there is a good enough reason to change.

For example, the manager in the example above doesn't recognize the consequences of her relaxed attitude since other colleagues always compensate for her inefficiencies. As far as she's concerned, the system is working. So, when asked to change her approach, she doesn't feel motivated to change her habitual behavior.

To resolve these types of situations, Duhigg suggests that companies *deliberately* cultivate habits that support every practice in the company such as communication, collaboration, and morale.

(Shortform note: Duhigg doesn't offer advice on how companies should deliberately cultivate collective habits. Management experts suggest that businesses begin the process of change by examining all aspects of their current structure and processes—specifically, the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that prevent change from occurring. Next, define the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that would support the organization's priorities and ongoing success. This process encourages businesses to become conscious of the automatic routines that they're engaged in and allows them to disrupt and improve the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that hinder their success.)

How Habits Impact Communities and Societies

By their nature, Duhigg explains, communities and societies are composed of hundreds or thousands of people who engage in a wide variety of different individual habits. When social movements rock the ideologies that form the foundation of these entities, it's difficult to see how collective habits play a significant role in these movements.

However, Duhigg argues that every major movement that has impacted communities and societies has been fueled by a particular type of habit: **social habits**. These habits define how you relate to and behave

around other people. According to Duhigg, social habits influence the way you identify with and act on the information you're exposed to.

(Shortform note: Research backs up Duhigg's claim that the choices you make about the movements you support are influenced by social habits. While you may think that your opinions about all of the issues you hear about are solely your own, social psychologists confirm that your perceptions and behaviors are heavily influenced by other people. You think a lot about other people, allow them to impact your emotions, and feel motivated to adapt your behaviors to please others. Consequently, the movements you choose to follow are an extension of this social influence.)

Duhigg explains that successful social movements rely on social habits in three ways:

1) The movement begins with the social habits of close friends: Someone is afflicted, and the people close to them immediately help.

(Shortform note: While taking action to help a friend in need feels like a natural and selfless response, James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) argues that your *underlying motivation to belong* affects all of your behaviors, including this one. He claims that there are three groups of people that greatly influence how you respond to situations: the close (family and friends), the many (the general public), and the powerful (the people you perceive as successful).)

2) The movement grows from the habits of a community: The social ties that combine loosely affiliated people create social pressure to join the cause.

(Shortform note: In *How Behavior Spreads*, behavioral expert Damon Centola explains that you're more influenced by the *percentage* of people that are doing something rather than the total number. If a high percentage of people in your community support a cause, you'll naturally *feel* like it's the right thing to do.)

3) The movement endures because the participants engage in new social habits: The participants identify with the movement and take on habits that reflect their belief in the cause.

(Shortform note: While Duhigg focuses on the endurance of movements due to participants engaging in new social habits, he doesn't mention another vital factor: Eventually, **collective individual habits influence business habits**, making these new habits even more visible and accessible to *potential* participants. For example, when animal rights activists decided to become vegetarians, stores and restaurants changed their offerings to cater to this demand. Similarly, when environmentalists chose to only buy products with recyclable packaging, many stores banned plastic bags. These visible changes brought these causes to the attention of shoppers, some of whom then adopted the causes in turn.)

An Example of How Successful Social Movements Rely on Social Habits

Let's explore how your social habits change how you relate to what you see on the evening news. There are various reports about what's occurring around the world. **Much of this news doesn't directly concern you** so, while you may feel interested and even empathize with the plight of others, your brain doesn't want to process all of the information that's being thrown at you.

Now imagine that you see one of your close friends on the news because she's suffered an injustice. Your brain wakes up and you pay attention because you care about this friend. **You feel compelled to act** and help, so you call on others in your social circle to lend support. For various reasons—they care about what's important to you or they care about how you'll perceive them if they don't help—these people agree to help and **spread the word to their social circles**.

News about the injustice spreads and people rally to take up the cause and provide support. Many of these

people also have friends or acquaintances who have suffered the same injustice as your friend. As a result, **the movement naturally evolves** to address how this injustice has impacted thousands of people beyond your own community. Over time and with increased participation, the movement achieves critical mass: The participants form **a collective identity with habits that continue to influence others to participate and pursue the same goal**.

Social Biases: You're Either With Us or Against Us

In the book, Duhigg uses the Rosa Parks bus boycott to argue that social movements rely on the three social habits mentioned above. He explains that Rosa Parks was the catalyst for the movement because she had many close social ties and had powerful connections in the community. Furthermore, the incident incited a *specific* habit: Don't take the bus to show your support. While the example he uses does back up his argument, it's difficult to determine how these three social habits apply to *all* successful movements.

By their nature, social movements require us to change how we think or behave in response to others. Even though the focus of these movements tends to be positive—promoting equality and inclusion for all—there are always going to be those who resist these changes. However, Duhigg's case study of Rosa Parks focuses solely on the habits of the people that supported the cause. We'll therefore explore why people *don't* join progressive movements by explaining how social biases prevent us from feeling compassion for the plight of people outside of our social groups.

Researchers confirm that we unconsciously internalize the unspoken rules and biases of our social groups so that we can instinctively cooperate with others. They found that we're socially reinforced to follow these rules through the use of rewards (social approval and advantages) and punishments (social disapproval and sanctions). Our inherent need to feel connected to others and to avoid punishment motivates us to adopt these rules. In addition, **this need for connection encourages us to spend time with people who are similar to us**—the feeling of sameness enhances our sense of belonging.

However, researchers warn that our innate preference for people who are like us can contribute to the prejudices we feel for those who are not like us—because we don't *feel* connected to them. In other words, we unconsciously judge other people as good or bad depending on whether we view them as part of the social group that we're connected to.

The research confirms that we're more likely to give preferential treatment to those we judge as part of our social group than those we consider outsiders. What's more concerning is that **we're also more likely to give *unfair* treatment to outsiders**—this includes ignoring any injustices that we'd react to if they happened to someone within our social group. According to this research, the reason why people refuse to join progressive causes isn't that they're unaware of the social injustices in the world, but that their social biases discourage them from feeling any concern for those that live outside of their social group.

While this research raises a number of concerns about how we unconsciously judge and choose to respond to the many injustices in the world, it does clarify how social habits determine the success or failure of all social movements.

Part 4: How to Change Your Habits

In the second part of this guide, we discussed the three elements of a habit (cue, routine, and reward) and explained how cravings, coupled with your brain's reliance on automatic routines, compel you to engage in your habits automatically. This information raises an important question: If habits are so strongly wired within you that you act automatically when confronted with a cue, are you responsible for your actions? According to Duhigg, **if you're aware of your habits, then you are responsible for them**.

(Shortform note: Mark Manson (*The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*) adds weight to Duhigg's argument that you're responsible for your habits by explaining how your level of accountability impacts your overall well-being. He claims that acknowledging your role in your behaviors (by recognizing that you're always choosing your responses to your experiences) empowers you to make conscious choices that benefit your overall well-being. On the other hand, ignoring your role in your behaviors (by believing that your habits are too deeply ingrained to change) disempowers you from making choices that'll ultimately improve your well-being.)

Duhigg argues that, while you can't delete these unwanted patterns from your mind, through self-awareness and conscious control, you can override them with new automatic patterns that align with the habits you do want to practice. (Shortform note: Recall: Neuroscientists confirm that it's possible to weaken these permanent patterns so that your brain no longer relies on them.)

In this final part of the guide, we'll explore how you can apply this understanding to deliberately and permanently redesign your habits.

Change an Existing Bad Habit

According to Duhigg, once you understand the cues and cravings that drive your habits, you'll gain conscious control over the behavioral pattern you engage in. This allows you to disrupt your unwanted habit and override it with a new, more productive behavioral pattern. However, **the cues and cravings that fuel your habits aren't always as obvious as they appear to be**. This is because the longer you engage in a habit, the less aware you become of the specific cravings that motivate your habit.

For example, if you smoke cigarettes, you may assume that this habit is fueled by your craving for nicotine. However, depending on when and where you engage in this habit, you could be motivated by a number of different cravings such as wanting to take a break from your work, the urge to engage in social interactions, or the need for a change of scenery.

Mindfulness Helps to Uncover the Root Cause of Your Habits

Mindfulness experts agree that you're often unaware of the specific cues and cravings that drive your habits. However, they argue that **your *emotions* are the cause of your habits** because they make you susceptible to cues and cravings. They explain that you're often triggered by an emotional feeling that you seek to alleviate through the use of your habit. For example, if you smoke cigarettes, you're more likely to notice your cues (for example, the smell of tobacco or the lighter on your desk) and give in to your cravings when you feel uncomfortable emotions such as fear or feelings of anxiety.

However, while engaging in the habit does provide temporary relief, it doesn't fix the root of the problem—the uncomfortable feeling that you're trying to overcome. Consequently, it's necessary to

examine the root cause (your emotions) of the habits you seek to change before you attempt to change them.

According to these experts, there are four main categories of habits that come from underlying negative emotions:

- Habits of **wanting** involve cravings and addictions that you rely on to feel better.
- Habits of **distraction** include what you do when you're trying to avoid what you're feeling or experiencing.
- Habits of **resistance** show up as negative reactions to what you're experiencing, such as impatience, anger, or judgment. They're an attempt to protect yourself from what you're feeling.
- Habits of **doing** focus on keeping busy in an attempt to feel like you're in control.

In addition to experimenting with the cues and rewards as Duhigg suggests, become mindful of the *type* of habit you're engaging in and its likely emotional trigger to give yourself a better chance of successfully changing your habits.

Duhigg claims that all successful habit changes begin with a process of experimentation to uncover the specific cues and rewards that drive your habits. He suggests that you follow a four-step process that relies on identifying your routine and experimenting with different rewards so that you can effectively isolate your cue and understand why you engage in your habits. This process will help you to plan effective ways to disrupt and replace the automatic patterns that fuel your habit. Let's explore the process in detail.

Step 1: Write Down Your Habit-Driven Routine

The routine is the automatic behavior pattern that surrounds the habit you want to change. Duhigg suggests that you detail every step of the routine from beginning to end, even the steps you think aren't important.

For example, you work from home and have a habit of drinking too much coffee. You want to change this because you're having problems sleeping at night. Your entire routine might look like this: You get up from the desk, walk to the kitchen, put on the coffee machine, play with your dog in the garden for a few minutes, take a bathroom break, make your coffee, and then go back to your desk and drink your coffee.

(Shortform note: Not all habits have a clear-cut routine like the one described above, especially if they're emotional rather than behavioral. For example, if you habitually feel anxious before you need to drive somewhere, it's easy to pinpoint driving as a high-anxiety situation. However, you may feel low-level anxiety throughout your day in a number of other situations. This makes it difficult to define a specific start and endpoint for the routine that surrounds your habitual anxiety. In *The Craving Mind*, neuroscientist Dr. Judson Brewer suggests building self-awareness through mindfulness techniques such as meditation to help develop conscious awareness of the specific routines around your emotional habits.)

Step 2: Switch Out Rewards to Discover Your Craving

During this step, Duhigg suggests that each time you recognize that you're about to engage in your habit, avoid acting out the automatic routine. **Instead, change the routine so that it has a new reward**. This will help you to figure out what part of your routine you're truly craving. Is it the reward you've habitually turned

to, or is it something else?

Each time you perform this experiment with a new reward, **write down the first three words that come to mind**—this will encourage you to consciously acknowledge your thoughts and feelings (for instance, are you still feeling unsettled and like your craving is unfulfilled?). Then, set an alarm for 15 minutes and, when it goes off, ask yourself whether you still feel the craving. If you're not, your new reward satisfies your true craving—and you can discover what that craving is by considering what need the reward fulfills.

(Shortform note: According to Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, Duhigg's method of changing the routine and adding a new reward forces your brain to step out of autopilot mode and increases your awareness of how you feel. This process, coupled with writing down three words, encourages you to think about why you're engaging in your habit, the feelings you're chasing or trying to avoid, and your justifications for sticking with this habit. This awareness makes it much easier for you to avoid falling into your habitual routines.)

Let's explore how you could change the reward and complete this step for the coffee-drinking habit outlined in Step 1.

	Experiment 1	**Experiment 2**	**Experiment 3**
Reward	Eat a cookie.	Drink some water.	Play with your dog and drink some water.
New routine (instead of drinking coffee)	You grab a cookie and take it back to your desk.	You take a glass of water back to your desk.	You play with your dog for a few extra minutes and take a glass of water back to your desk.
Three notes	Yuk, tired, guilty	Bored, fed up, gggrrrr	Good, funny, clear
Does the craving still exist?	Something's missing.	You want to get up from your desk but are not sure if you want coffee.	You forgot about the coffee.

It turns out you just wanted to relax, forget about work, and give your dog some affection: You didn't really crave the coffee itself.

Obviously, this example simplifies the process. Figuring out what cravings fuel your habits could take multiple experiments over the course of many weeks. Duhigg suggests that you continue to perform these experiments until you find a new routine that feels satisfying to you.

Substitute Rewards Can Have Negative Side Effects

Many addiction therapists recommend Duhigg's strategy to simply replace the reward that you're craving. However, some therapists believe that this method can have negative side effects, especially

when you focus more on *avoiding* the habit you seek to change and less on what type of habit you replace it with. They explain that when you deny yourself the reward that you're craving, you feel like something's missing. You attempt to fill this void by taking on unproductive habits that induce the same dopamine high. This explains why ex-smokers often turn to overeating, ex-alcoholics turn to marijuana, or ex-binge-eaters turn to shopping.

Further, therapists warn that even positive substitutions such as exercise or work can have negative effects if you develop unhealthy compulsive behaviors as a means to maintain your dopamine high. They suggest that learning how to manage the thoughts and feelings that underlie your cravings empowers you to make beneficial decisions, and prevents you from lapsing into substitute habits that may do more harm than good.

Step 3: Use Categories to Identify Your Cue

The purpose of this step is to figure out exactly what's triggering you to engage in your habit. Since you're exposed to so much information and stimuli at any given time, it might be hard to narrow this down. However, Duhigg claims that **all cues fit into one of five categories**: location, time, emotional state, other people, and what's happening immediately before you engage in the habit. Consequently, he argues that you can isolate the cue to your habit by asking yourself the following questions the next time you feel a craving:

1. Where are you?
2. What time is it?
3. What's your emotional state?
4. Who else is around?
5. What just happened?

Continuing with the coffee example, after asking yourself these questions during the course of a week, you discover that your coffee cravings commonly occur when you've been sitting at your desk for over 90 minutes, feel bored, and have difficulty concentrating.

Not All Habits Have a Clear Cause and Effect Relationship

Duhigg's method of categorizing cues into five categories seems to work well for habits that have a clear cause and effect relationship: for example, smokers who only smoke when taking a break from work or when out with friends, or shoppers who only make purchases on their lunch breaks. These habits play out at specific times or in particular locations and it's relatively simple to identify their triggers.

However, it may seem that Duhigg's method doesn't work so well for the habits that people compulsively engage in throughout the day, such as chain-smoking, constant snacking, nail-biting, or anxious thinking. It's difficult to track and correlate the causes of something you unconsciously engage in.

But psychologists argue that, at their root, these compulsive behaviors are an attempt to relieve underlying anxieties or other negative emotions. Consequently, they argue that all of Duhigg's categories help you to track the impact of different situations and people on your emotional state, providing clues about *why* you feel like you need to engage in your habit.

For compulsive habits, carry a pen and a small notebook pre-filled with Duhigg's five questions—or install a habit-tracking app on your phone—so that whenever you catch yourself engaging in your habit, you can immediately take note of what's happening around you and how it makes you feel. While you may not catch every instance of the habit, the details you do end up tracking will help you to develop conscious awareness of how your cravings fluctuate. This will make it easier to disentangle the subtle cues that trigger your habit.

Step 4: Head Off Temptation

Once you've completed your experiments and defined the cue, routine, and reward components of your habit, Duhigg suggests that you make a plan to overcome any temptations you might feel to give in to your old cravings. This involves designing your cues to trigger new behavioral routines and cravings for the new reward to come—it could be as simple as removing the cue that triggers your cravings.

For example, you now know that you're most likely to crave coffee when you've been sitting at your desk for over 90 minutes and have difficulty concentrating. You also know that playing with your dog and drinking a glass of water fulfills your need to take a break in the same way that drinking coffee did. Consequently, your plan involves setting a timer every 90 minutes so that you can regularly take breaks to play with your dog and drink water.

(Shortform note: James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) adds to Duhigg's approach by suggesting that you not only *remove* the cues for your unwanted habits but also *add* cues for your new habits. He explains that an effective plan involves shaping the visual cues within your environment to encourage only the new habits you seek to adopt. Visual cues are the biggest instigators for action because they trick your brain into thinking that it's more convenient to act on them—it's convenient to drink water when there's a glass of water on your desk. Consequently, for the coffee example, Clear's plan would involve removing all cues related to coffee (your mug, French press, or coffee machine) and replacing them with a jug of water, a glass, and dog toys.)

With repetition, you'll eventually create an entirely new automatic habit: The timer (cue) will signal that you're about to receive a reward (playing with your dog, drinking water) and this will encourage you to engage in this new routine. Eventually, the timer and your new reward will become inextricably linked to create a new craving. As a result, this routine will become automatic, and your new habit will replace your old habit (drinking coffee).

(Shortform note: According to James Clear (*Atomic Habits*), your desired habits can only become automatic and replace your unwanted habits if you practice them at a rate of frequency that either matches or exceeds the rate you engaged in the habits you're trying to replace. He explains that your current habits were formed from multiple repetitions over the course of many months or years. Every repetition strengthened the neural pathways underlying this habit and ingrained the automatic routine deeper into your brain. To weaken your brain's reliance on the unwanted habit, you must repeat your new habit as frequently as possible to develop neural pathways that are just as strong.)

Start a Ripple Effect by Changing One Core Habit

Now that you understand how habits develop and what you need to do to replace them with new habits, let's examine how shifting just one habit can positively influence many of your other habits.

You may feel tempted to use the four-step process to tackle multiple habits and overhaul your life. Duhigg

says that addressing and managing multiple automatic routines will be difficult and, as a result, likely end in failure. Instead, he recommends an easier way to change all of your habits: **Leverage one core habit**. According to Duhigg, when you feel the benefits of changing one core habit, you start a chain reaction that encourages you to change other existing habits or develop additional good habits. In other words, **the rewards you feel from successfully changing this habit influence you to restructure the rest of your habits**.

Each Positive Decision Sets Into Motion a Series of Subsequent Positive Decisions

Like Duhigg, Tony Robbins (*Awaken the Giant Within*) argues that making one beneficial change in your daily routine sets into motion a series of beneficial decisions and habits that ultimately improve your entire life. He explains that if you try to tackle all of your habits at the same time, you're more likely to focus on how difficult it is, feel overwhelmed, and resign yourself to staying in the same situation.

On the other hand, committing to change a single habit allows you to effectively focus your energy and produce successful results. These positive results naturally encourage you to feel more confident about your ability to take control of your behaviors, and they motivate you to improve all of your habits so that you can continue to feel good about yourself.

An Example of How Changing One Core Habit Influences Many Habits

Let's demonstrate how changing one core habit can influence many of your other habits.

Your morning routine is stressful: You don't have time for breakfast, you can't find anything clean to wear, you often struggle to get to work on time, you indulge in sweet drinks and snacks to curb your appetite, and then you waste your money on expensive and fatty lunches to see you through the rest of your workday. You come home to an empty fridge, order pizza, and binge-watch TV until you pass out on the couch.

The example above illustrates many unhealthy habits. Let's apply Duhigg's theory and explore how changing one habit in your evening routine can have a domino effect on all of your other habits.

In the evening, instead of watching TV, you prepare everything you need for the morning (this is your new core habit): breakfast, outfit, a packed lunch, and car keys. Without the TV to keep you up, you get to bed on time and set your alarm for the morning. When you wake up, you find it easy to get ready and get to work ahead of time. Since you had breakfast, you don't feel the urge to snack. You eat your packed lunch and use the rest of your lunch break to buy some groceries to take home. You get home and make yourself a healthy meal.

This example is a very simple one but it does demonstrate how changing one habit can create an environment for more healthy habits to thrive. The benefits you feel from changing one core habit motivate you to practice more self-awareness and conscious control over your other habits. As a result, **you naturally feel more motivated to change your other habits** so that you can continue to enjoy the benefits of changing your core habit.

Small Steps Overcome Your Mind's Resistance to Change

While it's true that changing one habit gives you the confidence and motivation to change other habits, this process is not going to work overnight. This is because your brain doesn't *want* to have to work hard to overwrite your automatic patterns. It's going to offer resistance when you first try to

change your automatic routines—this resistance may show up as laziness, boredom, or simple forgetfulness.

So how can you get past this resistance so that you can effectively change your habits and produce the results that you want? In *The Kaizen Way*, psychologist Rober Maurer claims that you're more likely to make successful changes if you take very *small but regular* steps toward the large goal you intend to achieve. This is because small changes are more likely to bypass your brain's instinctive reaction to resist new behavioral changes. Therefore, consider what small achievable steps you can easily take to improve your core habit.

In the example above, this may be as simple as leaving your car keys by the door for the first few days. Once this small habit becomes automatic, consider adding the step of preparing your outfit the night before. Again, wait for this to become automatic before adding another improvement. This method will allow you to easily and permanently set positive habit changes into motion without facing mental resistance.

Create an Entirely New Habit

We've just discussed how you can deconstruct your *existing* habits to understand and replace them with new productive habits. Duhigg claims that you can also apply your understanding of how cues, routines, and rewards underlie habitual behaviors to create *entirely new* habits.

Let's explore how to apply this understanding to develop the new habit of walking for an hour every morning:

Decide upon your cue and your reward: Duhigg claims that new habits require a clearly defined cue and a reward to become automatic routines. Decide on a cue to signal the start of your habit, such as leaving your walking boots where you can see them. Then decide what your reward is, such as listening to an audiobook you enjoy during your walk, or treating yourself to a cup of hot chocolate when you get back.

(Shortform note: James Clear (*Atomic Habits*) argues that the easiest way to implement this step is to specifically link your new cue and reward to an existing routine. This way, you've already completed the hardest part of your new habit—determining the cue and reward—and you simply have to follow through with your intended action. For example, you decide that after brushing your teeth, you'll put on your walking boots and head out. When you come back, your reward will be to eat breakfast and read a chapter of your book. Because you already brush your teeth, eat breakfast, and read a chapter of your book every morning, it's easy to link your new habit to the cues and rewards in your existing routine.)

Develop a craving for your reward: According to Duhigg, the more positive you feel about your reward, the more likely your brain will want to set up an automatic routine to support your new habit. Duhigg suggests that you find ways to actively develop a craving for your reward—visualizing, anticipating, or imagining this reward.

(Shortform note: In *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins expands upon Duhigg's claim that your reward must *feel* positive by arguing that **neuro-associations—the way your brain links certain experiences with pain and others with pleasure—influence all of your habits**. According to Robbins, your brain relies on these neuro-associations to direct your behavior *toward feeling pleasure* and *away from feeling pain*, and you have to reprogram these associations to create new automatic routines. So, your brain's more likely to create an automatic routine for your new habit of walking if you remove all pain points from the

routine and set it up to feel as pleasurable as possible.)

Make a plan to overcome obstacles: You might feel reluctant to go for your morning walk for a number of reasons, such as if you feel tired or if it's raining outside. Duhigg claims that you're more likely to stick to your new habits if you predict these obstacles and plan ways to reduce your reluctance. For example, you could go to bed earlier so that you don't feel tired or invest in a good raincoat and walking boots so that you can go out in any weather.

(Shortform note: Brendon Burchard (*High Performance Habits*) claims that the tendency to focus on obstacles and limitations occurs when you don't have a clear *purpose* for your actions. This causes you to focus too much on the difficulty of overcoming your present circumstances (unwanted habits) to look to the future (the benefits of your new habits). Burchard encourages you to focus on your purpose—what you'll gain from overcoming your obstacles—and use this to motivate yourself to move forward with your new habit.)

Believe That You Can Change Your Habits

Now that you understand how to redesign your habits, let's discuss how believing in your ability to change improves your chances of successfully changing any habit.

Duhigg argues that **belief is an essential part of overcoming your cravings and permanently changing any habit**. Sometimes your cravings will feel unbearable and you'll want to fall back into your old habits. During these times, it's critical to believe that you can overcome your cravings and consciously decide how you want to act.

Unrealistic Beliefs Set You Up for Failure

The idea that self-belief improves your chances of success is not new—numerous studies prove that positive expectations encourage you to rise above any limitations you face and focus on solutions that move you toward what you want. However, psychologists warn that **unrealistic positive expectations**—such as blindly believing that you'll easily overcome your habits without effort—set you up for failure because they don't prepare you to take proactive steps to counter the inevitable obstacles that you'll face. On the other hand, **realistic positive expectations acknowledge that the road to change requires effort and persistence**. This attitude forces you to take a proactive approach towards making the changes that you want.

For example, a weight loss study discovered that participants who believed that they'd *easily* succeed lost considerably *less* weight than those who prepared themselves for potential challenges. The "easy" group failed to honestly assess challenges such as their cravings for unhealthy snacks or their tendency to find excuses to avoid exercising. Consequently, they weren't prepared enough to overcome and replace the habits that led them to gain weight in the first place.

One way to bolster your belief in your ability to change your habits is to engage with people who have successfully overcome the same cravings. According to Duhigg, hearing the stories and strategies of people who have successfully changed their habits will increase your confidence and inspire you to stick with your decision to change. Therefore, consider how you can surround yourself with people who can help you stick to your plan.

(Shortform note: We've already established how social habits impact individual beliefs and habits. Interestingly, the reverse is also true. Sociologist Nicholas Christakis cites various research studies on smoking, drinking, obesity, divorce, and altruism to explain how individual habits impact social beliefs and habits just as much as social habits impact individual beliefs and habits. He explains that not only do you forge relationships with people who are like you, but also that your behavior spreads to friends, friends of friends, and so on. This eventually influences what complete strangers think of as normal. Consequently, you're both *vulnerable* to the influence of social habits, and you have the *power* to influence the social habits of others.)

Exercise: Rewire Your Habit

Experimenting with rewards will help you to redesign the habits you want to change.

To review the previous exercise, write down the cue, routine, and reward for a habit you want to change.

What other rewards might you be seeking in your current habit, beyond the one you initially identified? (For example, if you have a craving for cookies, you might be seeking emotional comfort rather than a sugar high.)

To change a habit, keep the same cue and the same reward, but change the routine. What new routine can you easily implement to get the same underlying reward that you identified above?