

The PSYCHOLOGY of DAILY ROUTINE

The most successful people in history—the ones many refer to as “geniuses” in their fields, masters of their crafts—had one thing in common, other than talent: Most adhered to rigid (and specific) routines.

Routines seem boring, and the antithesis to what you’re told a “good life” is made of. Happiness, we infer, comes from the perpetual seeking of “more,” regardless what it’s “more” of. Yet what we don’t realize is that having a routine doesn’t mean you sit in the same office every day for the same number of hours. Your routine could be traveling to a different country every month. It could be being routinely un-routine. The point is not what the routine consists of, but how steady and safe your subconscious mind is made through repetitive motions and expected outcomes.

Whatever you want your day-to-day life to consist of doesn’t matter, the point is that you decide and then stick to it. In short, routine is important because habitualness creates mood, and mood creates the “nurture” aspect of your personality, not to mention that letting yourself be jerked around by impulsiveness is a breeding ground for everything you essentially do not want.

Most things that bring genuine happiness are not just temporary, immediate gratifications, and those things also come with resistance and require sacrifice. Yet there is a way to nullify the feeling of “sacrifice” when you integrate a task into the “norm” or push through resistance with regulation. These, and all the other reasons why routine is so important (and happy people tend to follow them more).

01. Your habits create your mood, and your mood is a filter through which you experience your life.

It would make sense to assume that moods are created from thoughts or stressors, things that crop up during the day and knock us off-kilter. This isn’t so. Psychologist Robert Thayer argues that

moods are created by our habitualness: how much we sleep, how frequently we move, what we think, how often we think it, and so on. The point is that it's not one thought that throws us into a tizzy: It's the pattern of continually experiencing that thought that compounds its effect and makes it seem valid.

02. You must learn to let your conscious decisions dictate your day—not your fears or impulses.

An untamed mind is a minefield. With no regulation, focus, base or self-control, anything can persuade you into thinking you want something that you don't actually. "I want to go out for drinks tonight, not prepare for that presentation tomorrow" seems valid in the short-term, but in the long-term is disastrous. Going out for drinks one night probably isn't worth bombing a super important meeting. Learning to craft routine is the equivalent of learning to let your conscious choices about what your day will be about guide you, letting all the other, temporary crap fall to the wayside.

03. Happiness is not how many things you do, but how well you do them.

More is not better. Happiness is not experiencing something else; it's continually experiencing what you already have in new and different ways. Unfortunately as we're taught that passion should drive our every thought move and decision, we're basically impaled with the fear that we're unhappy because we're not doing "enough."

04. When you regulate your daily actions, you deactivate your "fight or flight" instincts because you're no longer confronting the unknown. This is why people have such a difficult time with change, and why people who are constant in their habits experience so much joy: simply, their fear instincts are turned off long enough for them to actually enjoy something.

05. As children, routine gives us a feeling of safety. As adults, it gives us a feeling of purpose.

Interestingly enough, those two feelings are more similar than you'd think (at least, their origin is the same). It's the same thing as the fear of the unknown: As children, we don't know which way is left,

let alone why we're alive or whether or not a particular activity we've never done before is going to be scary or harmful. When we're adults engaging with routine-ness, we can comfort ourselves with the simple idea of "I know how to do this, I've done it before."

06. You feel content because routine consistently reaffirms a decision you already made.

If said decision is that you want to write a book—and you commit to doing three pages each night for however long it takes to complete it—you affirm not only your choice to begin, but your ability to do it. It's honestly the healthiest way to feel validated.

07. As your body self-regulates, routine becomes the pathway to "flow²."

"Flow" (in case you don't know—you probably do) is essentially what happens when we become so completely engaged with what we're doing, all ideas or worries dissolve, and we're just completely present in the task. The more you train your body to respond to different cues: 7 a.m. is when you wake up, 2 p.m. is when you start writing, and so on, you naturally fall into flow with a lot more ease, just out of habit.

08. When we don't settle into routine, we teach ourselves that "fear" is an indicator that we're doing the wrong thing, rather than just being very invested in the outcome.

A lack of routine is just a breeding ground for perpetual procrastination. It gives us gaps and spaces in which our subconscious minds can say: "well, you can take a break now," when in fact, you have a deadline. But if you're used to taking a break at that point in time, you'll allow it simply because "you always do."

² Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. 2008. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

10 THINGS EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE *do not DO*

Emotional intelligence is probably the most powerful yet undervalued trait in our society.

We believe in rooting our everyday functions in logic and reason, yet we come to the same conclusions after long periods of contemplation as we do in the blink of an eye³. Our leaders sorely overlook the human element of our sociopolitical issues and I need not cite the divorce rate for you to believe that we're not choosing the right partners (nor do we have the capacity to sustain intimate relationships for long periods of time).

It seems people believe the most intelligent thing to do is not have emotions at all. To be effective is to be a machine, a product of the age. A well-oiled, consumerist-serving, digitally attuned, highly unaware but overtly operational robot. And so we suffer.

Here are the habits of the people who have the capacity to be aware of what they feel. Who know how to express, process, dismantle, and adjust their experience as they are their own locus of control. They are the true leaders, they are living the most whole and genuine lives, and it is from them we should be taking a cue. These are the things that emotionally intelligent people do not do.

01. They don't assume that the way they think and feel about a situation is the way it is in reality, nor how it will turn out in the end.
They recognize their emotions as responses, not accurate gauges, of what's going on. They accept that those responses may have to do with their own issues, rather than the objective situation at hand.
02. Their emotional base points are not external.

Their emotions aren't "somebody else's doing," and therefore "somebody else's problem to resolve." Understanding that they are the ultimate cause of what they experience keeps them out of falling into the trap of indignant passivity: Where one believes that as the universe has done wrong, the universe will ultimately have to correct it.

03. They don't assume to know what it is that will make them truly happy.

Being that our only frame of reference at any given time is what's happened in the past, we actually have no means to determine what would make us truly happy, as opposed to just feeling "saved" from whatever we disliked about our past experiences. In understanding this, they open themselves up to any experience that their life evolves toward, knowing there are equal parts good and bad in anything.

04. They don't think that being fearful is a sign they are on the wrong path.

The presence of indifference is a sign you're on the wrong path. Fear means you're trying to move toward something you love, but your old beliefs, or unhealed experiences, are getting in the way. (Or, rather, are being called up to be healed.)

05. They know that happiness is a choice, but they don't feel the need to make it all the time.

They are not stuck in the illusion that "happiness" is a sustained state of joy. They allow themselves time to process everything they are experiencing. They allow themselves to exist in their natural state. In that non-resistance, they find contentment.

06. They don't allow their thoughts to be chosen for them.

They recognize that through social conditioning and the eternal human monkey-mind, they can often be swayed by thoughts, beliefs, and mindsets that were never theirs in the first place. To combat this, they take inventory of their beliefs, reflect on their origins, and decide whether or not that frame of reference truly serves them.

07. They recognize that infallible composure is not emotional intelligence.

They don't withhold their feelings or try to temper them so much as to render them almost gone. They do, however, have the capacity to withhold their emotional response until they are in an environment wherein it would be appropriate to express how they are feeling. They don't suppress it; they manage it effectively.

08. They know that a feeling will not kill them.

They've developed enough stamina and awareness to know that all things, even the worst, are transitory.

09. They don't just become close friends with anyone.

They recognize true trust and intimacy as something you build, and something you want to be discerning with whom you share. But they're not guarded or closed as they are simply mindful and aware of who they allow into their lives and hearts. They are kind to all, but truly open to few.

10. They don't confuse a bad feeling for a bad life.

They are aware of, and avoid, extrapolation, which is essentially projecting the present moment into the foreseeable future—believing that the moment at hand constitutes what your entire life amounted to, rather than just being another passing, transitory experience in the whole. Emotionally intelligent people allow themselves their “bad” days. They let themselves be fully human. It’s in this non-resistance that they find the most peace of all.

³ Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. 2007. Back Bay Books.

HOW *the* PEOPLE WE ONCE LOVED *become* STRANGERS AGAIN

It's interesting to think about how we make people who used to be everything into nothing again. How we learn to forget. How we force forgetting. What we put in place of them in the interim. The dynamics afterward always tell you more than what the relationship did—grief is a faster teacher than joy—but what does it mean when you cycle out to being strangers again? You never really stop knowing each other in that way. Maybe there's no choice but to make them someone different in your mind, not the person who knew your daily anxieties and what you looked like naked and what made you cry and how much you loved them.

When our lives revolve around someone, they don't just stop doing so even if all that's left is some semblance of their memory. There are always those bits that linger. The memories that are impressed on the places you went and the things you said and the songs you listened to remain.

We all eventually find ourselves standing in the checkout line, hearing one of those songs come on and realizing that we're revolving around them again. And maybe we never stopped.

Do you ever really forget your lovers' birthdays, or all your first times, intimate and not? Do your anniversaries ever become normal days of the year again? Are the things you did and promises you made ever really neutralized? Do they become void now that you're broken up or do you decidedly ignore them because there's simply no other choice? The mind tells you to go on and forces your heart to follow suit, I guess.

I want to believe that you either love someone, in some way, forever, or you never really loved them at all. That once two reactive chemicals cross,

both are changed. That the wounds we leave in people are sometimes too raw to risk falling back into them. I don't want to believe that we write each other off because we simply don't matter anymore. I know love isn't expendable. I wonder, and maybe hope, if we ever just force it to be out of necessity.

Maybe it's just that we're all at the centers of our own little universes, and sometimes they overlap with other people's, and that small bit of intersection leaves some part of it changed. The collision can wreck us, change us, shift us. Sometimes we merge into one, and other times we rescind because the comfort of losing what we thought we knew wins out.

Either way, it's inevitable that you expand. That you're left knowing that much more about love and what it can do, and the pain that only a hole in your heart and space in your bed and emptiness in the next chair over can bring. Whether or not that hole will ever again include the person who made it that way...I don't know. Whether or not anybody else can match the outline of someone who was so deeply impressed in you...I don't know that, either.

We all start as strangers. The choices we make in terms of love are usually ones that seem inevitable anyway. We find people irrationally compelling. We find souls made of the same stuff ours are. We find classmates and partners and neighbors and family friends and cousins and sisters and our lives intersect in a way that makes them feel like they couldn't have ever been separate. And this is lovely. But the ease and access isn't what we crave. It isn't what I'm writing about right now. It isn't what we revolve around after it's gone. We are all just waiting for another universe to collide with ours, to change what we can't ourselves. It's interesting how we realize the storm returns to calm, but we see the stars differently now, and we don't know, and we can't choose, whose wreckage can do that for us.

We all start as strangers, but we forget that we rarely choose who ends up a stranger, too.