

SIMPLIFY MAGAZINE

· A QUARTERLY, DIGITAL PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES ·



Issue 014 — Habits

1. A Letter from the Editor

By Elissa Joy Watts

2. The Quick Start Guide to Quitting a Bad Habit

By Leo Babauta

3. How to Form a Positive Habit: A Short Guide to Lifelong Change

By Darius Foroux

4. Sidchas: The Secret to Making Habits Last

By Joshua Spodek

5. Restoring the Love: Habits for Vibrant Romantic Relationship

By Chrisanna Northrup

6. Be a Broken Record: Power Words for Powerful Parenting

by Denaye Barahona

7. Make It a Better Day at Your House: Household Rhythms

by Rebecca Onion

8. Habits for Fit Finances

by Kelvin Wong

9. Cold Turkey: The Behavioral Economics Diet

by Nir Eyal

10. 8 Essential Habits to Nurture Your Creativity

by Carolyn Gregoire

11. Nepalese Taxi Saints: The Power of Habitual Kindness

by John Wang

12. Poetry Collection

by Ronald Banks

An Introduction: Habits

by Elissa Joy Watts

You know what's ironic? An editor turning out a magazine about habits in the midst of a global pandemic. Me, a mother of four, skirting around the kids, skipping breakfast and dodging the shower (again), only to sit down and review a poem called "Morning Routine." Ah, yes. Family life in 2020.

What a peculiar and powerful moment in history. Most people's routines, mine included, dissolved in a sea of good intentions and coping mechanisms by April. Different habits emerged—some noble, some less so.

By May, I think everyone was asking some form of the same question: "Is this how I want to spend my wild and precious life?" Probably not.

In recent weeks, I've been inspired by Viktor Frankl's words from his remarkable book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Reflecting on his time in a Nazi concentration camp, Frankl says, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are forced to change ourselves."

Change ourselves, both individually and collectively—this is the opportunity before us.

Annie Dillard says, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” She’s right. And regardless of the circumstances—global pandemic, social unrest, economic uncertainty—the choice to change is ours to make. Every day.

In this relevant issue, we’ve invited 11 fascinating people to offer their slant on habits. Award-winning authors, prominent thought leaders, avid researchers, skilled writers—even a poet.

Their words will inspire you to change, to set intentions and build grit. And while most articles are brimming with practical tips to help shape your days, there is plenty of space to simply read and ruminate too.

I’m happy to report that, in the end, compiling this issue gently nudged me out of my pandemic-induced rut. I’m sleeping better. My phone is no longer married to my bedside table. Spending is under control. My husband and children rightfully hold my attention. I’ve even lost ten pounds.

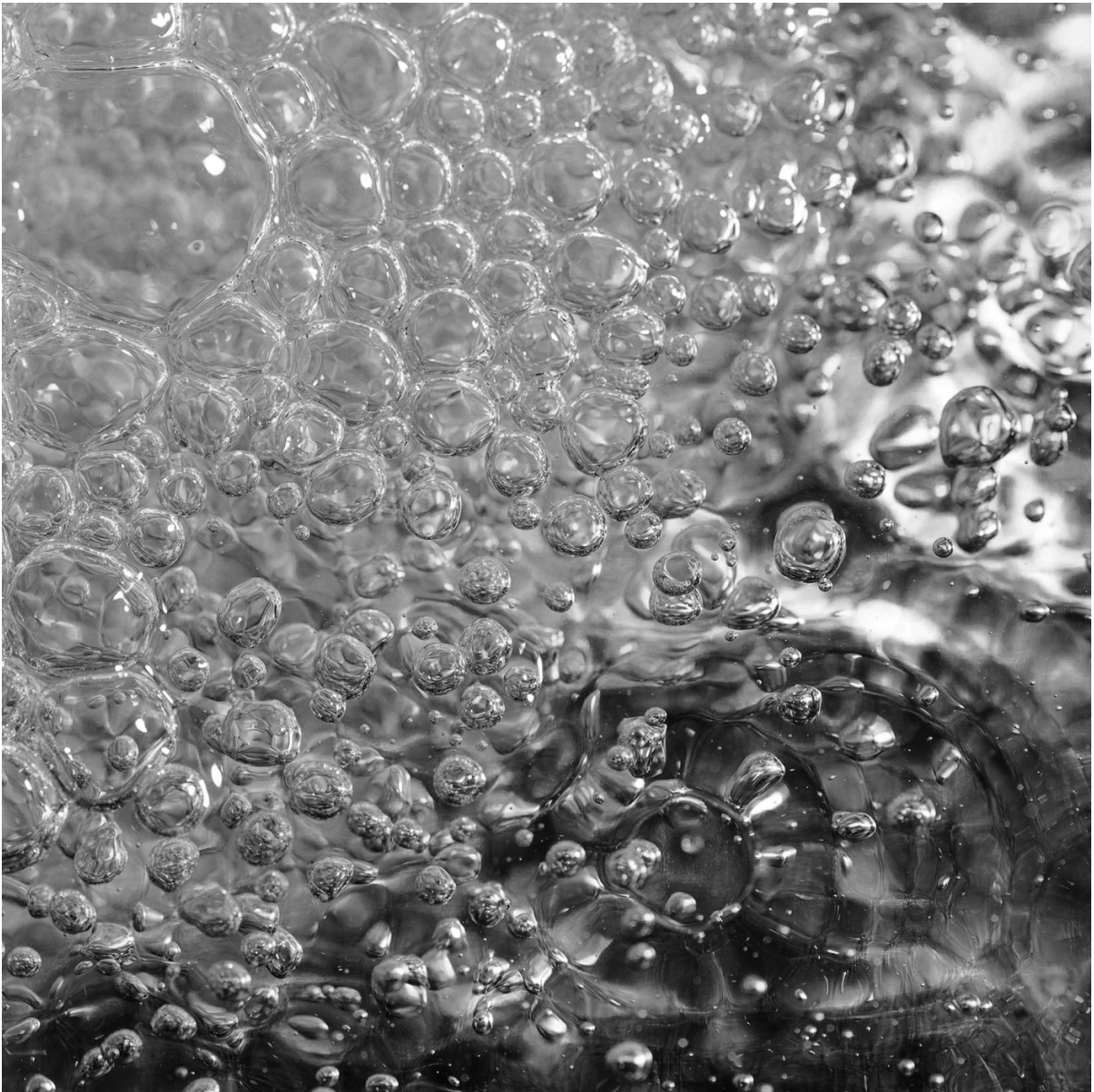
I say this only to reiterate what we already know: habits are malleable. Change is possible.

If there was ever a time to dissect and discuss habits, it's now. I hope you like the issue.

Elissa Joy Watts, Managing Editor

The Quick Start Guide to Quitting a Bad Habit

Leo Babauta



It seems like it was only last year when I was quitting smoking while stuck in debt, bad eating habits, procrastination, and a sedentary lifestyle ... but in reality that was me 15 years ago. I still remember how hard it was to quit, how I justified those bad habits to myself for years, and how I didn't think I could do it.

Fifteen years later, I'm living proof that anyone can change their bad habits. If I can do it, you can. I'm not special.

What worked is a series of small, doable steps that added up to monumental change in mindset and environment. I'm going to list those steps here, but know this: you don't have to (and shouldn't) do these all at once, and each step is not that hard.

Why Make a Change?

Why quit cigarettes or all those sweets you've been eating? Isn't life short and meant to be enjoyed? Don't you deserve a treat?

Yes, these are the justifications I gave myself too. And they're full of crap.

Life is short, so why waste it on pure junk? Those things don't make you happy—if anything, they made me unhappier and unhappier

about myself. I've been happier once I gave up those habits and learned to be healthy and trustworthy to myself.

Eating healthy food is a treat. Living smoke-free is pure bliss.

But the biggest reason to change is that you love yourself. You don't need to harm yourself to find happiness and contentment. Taking care of yourself is a form of self-compassion, and the sooner you start, the sooner you'll feel good about how you're loving yourself.

The Steps to Quitting a Bad Habit

So let's say you're ready to quit. What do you do?

What you don't do is just think quitting will be easy, and start without preparing yourself.

What you also don't do is think quitting will be too hard, and you should do it later because you don't really think you can do it.

Instead, try these steps:

1. Have a deeper *why*.

When things get tough, you'll ask yourself, "Why am I putting myself through this?" And you should have a good answer. Be ready with answers for all your mind's weaseling.

For me, quitting smoking was for my kids—if I didn't quit, they'd probably smoke as grown-ups.

I didn't want them to be plagued with bad health. That was a powerful motivator for me. For others, you might do it to support the health of other people you love, or yourself.

2. Make a commitment.

If you're ready to quit, commit to starting your quit three to seven days from now. Mark it on your calendar and tell everyone about it. Make this a big deal in your head, so that you're fully committed. One of the biggest mistakes I used to make was thinking it would be easy, so I didn't fully commit. Tell the world, and count down to the days.

3. Get some accountability and support.

Tell all your friends to hold you accountable, and to ask daily for updates. Create a blog just for this change, and share it with everyone

you know on social media and elsewhere. Join an online forum about quitting this kind of habit, and ask for their support. Get an accountability partner who you give regular updates to and who you have to call if you are getting a really strong urge (no smoking until *after* you call them).

The accountability will cause you to pause before you give in to an urge, and the support is there for when things get tough.

4. Understand your triggers.

Every habit is triggered by some event. For me, I would smoke after stress, eating, drinking coffee, a meeting, drinking alcohol, or being around other smokers. I found this out by carrying around a notebook and pencil and making a tally mark in the notebook each time I smoked, for a couple of days. Then I wrote down the triggers in the notebook for a day or two—if I smoked, I'd look at what happened just before the urge to smoke. This helped me to be more aware of the triggers, some of which I didn't realize I had.

The same applies to eating junk food, shopping, chewing your nails, playing video games, watching videos or TV, etc. Each of these habits is triggered by something else. Write those down in a document

titled, “Quit Plan.” Put the date of your quit, your accountability system, your why, and the triggers in this document.

5. Know what need the habit is meeting.

We have bad habits for a reason—they meet some kind of need. For every trigger you wrote down, look at what need the habit might be meeting in that case. For stress, obviously the habit is helping you cope with stress. Same thing for smoking after a meeting. For some of the others, it was helping me socialize. But a bad habit can help you cope with bad feelings, such as sadness, loneliness, feeling badly about yourself, being sick, dealing with a crisis, needing a break or treat or comfort.

Write these needs down in your Quit Plan, and think of other ways you might cope with them.

6. Find replacements.

For each trigger, find a replacement habit. For me, I had meditating and doing pushups for stress, taking notes after a meeting, reading with my coffee, talking with my wife as I drank wine (or friends if I was having beer), journaling after I ate. These replacements should

meet whatever need the bad habit was meeting, ideally, for that trigger. Write these on your Quit Plan.

7. Have reminders.

What will you do to remember to do your new habits? Put up visual reminders everywhere, especially around where the trigger happens.

8. Don't give yourself exceptions.

For smoking, I had an acronym, NOPE (Not One Puff Ever), that I learned from an online smoking cessation forum. It meant that I should never give in to the rationalization that one puff wouldn't hurt. It does hurt, because it leads to a second, then a third.

Don't give in to this rationalization. Be vigilant. You're worth it. Write the No Exceptions rule on your Quit Plan.

9. Learn from mistakes.

That said, if you do mess up (and we all do), be forgiving to yourself, and don't let one mistake derail you. See what happened, accept it, figure out a better plan for next time. Write this on your Quit Plan.

Your plan will get better and better as you continually improve it. In this way, mistakes are helping you improve the method.

10. Watch the urges, and delay.

You will get urges to do your bad habit. These are dangerous if you just act on them without thinking. Learn to recognize them as they happen, and just watch them rise and fall, without acting. Delay yourself, if you really want to act on the urge. Breathe. Drink some water. Call someone for help. Go for a walk. Get out of the situation. The urge will go away, if you just delay.

11. Be positive.

The right mindset is everything, because if you allow yourself to listen to negative self-talk (“I can’t do this”), you’ll fail. See the negative self-talk, don’t believe it. Have a positive answer for it.

An overly optimistic mindset isn’t necessarily helpful, because if things don’t go well, that could make you feel horrible that you were wrong. Instead, just tell yourself you can do this, you’re strong, you got this. And be realistic in that things won’t go as planned, but those are learning opportunities. In the long run, you’re going to make it, because you’re worth it.

...

Leo Babauta is the creator of *Zen Habits*, and writes about simplicity, habits, mindfulness, and training with uncertainty. He lives in southern California with his wife and kids, where he eats vegan food, writes, runs, meditates, and reads.

How to Form a Positive Habit: A Short Guide to Lifelong Change

by Darius Foroux



People write articles and books about habits for a reason: Habits work. Your life becomes a lot easier if you form certain habits. Because let's face it, life is hard.

We can try all the “life hacks” we want, but when that alarm goes off in the morning, it's like getting punched in the face. And most days, the punching doesn't stop.

You get an email from work about some emergency. Your kid gets into trouble at school (my mother experienced this with me many times in the past). You read about rising cases of COVID-19 in your city. Life is just one endless problem-solving exercise.

Whether you like it or not, the way you respond to the challenges of life is all based on your habits. A habit is a subconscious routine or behavior you regularly repeat.

For example, do you complain every time you're stuck in traffic? Habit. Do you grab a bag of potato chips when you watch your favorite TV show? Habit. Do you check your phone when you wake up? Habit. You get the idea.

Your life is a result of your habits. Positive habits=positive life. And vice versa. The historian Will Durant said it best: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

That’s the logic behind habits. And that’s why so many people in personal growth focus on forming good habits. It’s the most reliable way to achieve lifelong change.

But how does one form a habit? I’ve been actively researching this question since 2015—that’s when I started my blog. But I’ve been reading about habits for a decade. My conclusion is that there’s not just one way.

In this article, I will give you my four-step process for making life-changing habits stick. This is based on my personal research and the feedback I’ve received from the nearly 100,000 people who downloaded my free ebook, *The Road to Better Habits*.

While this system might work for a lot of people, it does not work for every person. Keep that in mind every time you’re reading a comment, article, or book on habits. Use the advice I, and many others, share as a foundation. Here’s my system.

Step 1: Decide what habits are worth it.

I can talk to you about the habits that have changed my life for the better all day long, but that's not helpful. The reason is that only you can decide what a good habit is for you.

Deciding if a habit is worth it to you is critical to forming new habits. Too often we hear about something, and we think: "I should do that!" But just because someone wakes up at four am or takes cold showers, it doesn't mean you should do the same.

For one thing, you should keep genetic differences between people in mind. Robert J. Plomin, a renowned psychologist and geneticist, wrote a book called *Blueprint: How DNA Makes Us Who We Are*. In the book, he mentions how scientists have been conducting studies on genetic differences since the 1960s, and they've "built a mountain of evidence showing that genetics contributes importantly to psychological differences between us."

We're all wired differently, literally. And that's not an issue. It only becomes an issue when you try to do things that are not a good fit with who you are as a unique person.

Maybe waking up early is actually helpful to you. I don't know. When I wake up early, I behave like a grumpy old man who hates people—that deteriorates the quality of my life. Hence, I don't wake up very early (seven am or earlier) no matter how many people tell me it will make me successful.

Just ask yourself, “Will habit x improve the quality of my life?”

The reason you want to ask yourself that question is that we all need a reason to change. We need something that's bigger than superficial reasons.

“I want to read one book a week,” you might say. Why? So you can do what? What's your vision? What are your goals?

I read two books a week because I'm a teacher/trainer. I need to learn every single day so I can do my job better. I do strength training because I want to be a useful person. I do many chores around my house and the office. I want to make and fix things. I need to be in good shape to lift heavy things or do strenuous tasks.

That's my why. What's yours? Answer that. And then adopt habits that bring you closer to the things you want in life.

Step 2: Focus on one habit at a time.

For years, I tried to form a daily exercising habit. There were many reasons I failed, one of them was that I always tried to form a million habits at the same time.

I don't know why, but sometimes I get on a self-improvement spree. I feel like reading more, writing more, working more, living better, eating healthier, you name it.

It's best to hold back the enthusiasm if you're the same. In general, when you do too many things at the same time, you end up with chaos. And you end up right back where you started. Sound familiar?

One of the reasons we try to do so many things at the same time is that we overestimate ourselves. We think we can achieve a lot in a short period. That's false.

We can achieve a lot over a long period. That's true. But we overestimate what we can achieve today or this week. We still have to get on with our lives—that also takes energy.

So focus on one thing at a time. Stack one habit on top of the other, one by one.

Step 3: Set the bar very low.

We often want to do big things, without understanding it. Starting a business or building a career requires effort. In fact, everything in life that's remotely valuable requires a lot of work to achieve.

In my experience, the challenge is not getting started. Everyone can start a habit. Few actually keep it up.

One of the biggest reasons we give up is that we set the bar too high. But here's the thing: it takes 66 days on average to form a habit. That's the average. A simple habit like drinking a glass of water after you wake up is easier to form than working out daily.

But you form *no* habit if you give up. That's why you want to focus on small actions. Here are a few examples:

- Want to run daily? Start by walking.
- Want to write a book? Write once sentence.
- Want to start a business? Get one client.
- Want to read two books a week? Read one page a day.

- Want to save for your retirement? Don't buy another shirt you're only going to wear once.

The idea is that you form the habit. It's not about results; it's about doing something so often that you do it unconsciously. When you find yourself doing something repeatedly without effort, you know you've been successful in adopting the habit.

What matters is that you listen to your body and mind. John Ratey, author of *Go Wild*, talks about this: "Our bodies and minds are endowed by evolution with marvelous systems tuned to attention to our happiness. Our task is to learn to listen to those systems and stay out of their way."

Don't force anything. Listen to your body. Some people can work out every day without ever getting injured. If you want to try that as well, that's great. But keep listening to the systems that your body uses to warn you. If you feel some aches and pains, dial it down.

It's not worth beating your body up for anything. But it doesn't mean you should give up either. Keep going at a lower intensity.

Step 4: Use checklists.

I forget everything.

A few years ago, I started a daily reading habit. I messed up often in the beginning. I would read for five or six days straight, and then all of a sudden I would completely forget about it. It's like the desire for reading more just vanished from my head.

We've all experienced this. You want to do something. You actually do it. But at some point, you get caught up in the banality of daily life, and you forget all about your new habit. Shit happens, right?

Well, no. Don't let yourself off the hook like that!

Keep reminding yourself of the habits you want to live by in life. The easiest way to do that is by using checklists to keep track of yourself. I've created a simple checklist for myself that I've printed and put on my desk. You can also use a habit tracker app. The medium doesn't matter. What matters is that you keep track.

Why? Remember that we form habits to *transform* our lives—to make things *better*. So check off your habits daily.

One day, you'll be surprised by how much your life changed by such, seemingly, small habits. At least, that's what happened to me and the thousands of other people who focus on their habits. And I'm sure it will happen to you too.

...

Darius Foroux is the author of seven books and the founder of *The Sounding Board*. He writes about productivity, habits, decision making, and wealth building. His ideas and work have been featured in TIME, NBC, Fast Company, Inc., Observer, and many more publications. His blog hosts 500K+ people each month over at dariusforoux.com. Stop by if you'd like to borrow his habits checklist.

Sidchas: The Secret to Making Habits Last

Joshua Spodek



I grew up undisciplined. I probably watched more television growing up than anyone I knew. I didn't eat well, enough that my older stepbrother taunted my chubbiness. Until nearly my 40s, my freezer always had ice cream, my cupboards pretzels or chips, especially Snyders of Hanover pretzel bits with flavor powder that stuck to your fingers.

Things have changed. I can tell you the moment in January 2011 that changed them. My friend was installing WordPress to set up my blog for me. I asked him how often he posted to his site. We had been bantering and joking. He turned, suddenly serious, and said this: "Every day. If you miss one day, you can miss two. If you miss two, it's all over."

Since that moment, I haven't missed a day. I'm at 3,985 posts and counting.

This habitual writing practice paid off almost immediately. When an editor at *Inc.* asked for a writing sample, I pointed to thousands and got a column. Same with *Psychology Today*. Same with my book agent, which probably contributed to my first book becoming a number-one bestseller.

That December I started my next self-imposed daily challenge—a healthy activity.

To be clear, these personal endeavors are more than just habits. I call them *sidchas*. Sidcha stands for Self-Imposed Daily Challenging Healthy Activity. I gave them a separate name to differentiate from habits that don't necessarily help you reach your life potential, like brushing your teeth or reading the paper.

My second sidcha also started with a friend. I had just learned about burpees—bodyweight exercises that don't need equipment, spotters, weather, or any potential hindrance. We agreed, over drinks, to try 10 burpees a day for 30 days. It stuck. I kept going, never missing a day. Over the years, I went from doing 10 burpees a day to 54 plus calisthenics.

I keep tabs on my sidchas.

Total burpees: 156,958 and counting

Cold showers: 508 and counting

Months not flying (by choice, to practice stewardship): 53 and counting

Days picking up at least one piece of litter: 1,219 and counting

I do others, but people seem to appreciate these *sidchas* the most. I do them because without them I'd lack discipline and revert to TV and pretzels. I've learned that, like any skill, discipline comes with practice and atrophies without it.

The Most Valuable Advice You'll Ever Hear on Habits

I've read every major book and tons of research on habits. They're like learning music appreciation when I really want to play piano. Nice to know music history and theory about it, but learning and growth emerge from internal struggle. To perform, you have to play scales and music.

Most habit advice is on how to start them—to start simple, to set up your environment to trigger the behavior you want, and so on. It's not bad advice, but it misses the main reason people don't keep habits. Anyone can resolve in December to go to the gym twice a week the next year. They genuinely mean it when they say "Nothing will stop me." Gyms are pretty empty by Valentine's Day, though.

The problem for most people isn't starting. It's not stopping.

By contrast, if you adopt a sidcha, get what they're about, and stick with it, you will eventually embody the advice found in every book on habits. You'll be able to write your own book.

We learn through experience—playing the piano, practicing scales and simple pieces, committing to consistency. Don't stop and you'll eventually learn all you need about keeping habits. You'll reach your version of Carnegie Hall.

Why do we stop?

We don't stop because we didn't start right, nor lack of intent or resolution when we committed. It's because we are practically a different person when we stop. Our emotions and motivations react to our present situations, not what happened months ago. This made sense for our ancestors. If a lion appeared, they had to feel fear then, not a month later.

As for us, in late December, after a satisfying workout or an overly indulgent holiday meal, we may feel intense resolve. But in February, after a long day at work, especially if we got a lot done or we're

looking forward to a show on TV, we feel different emotions—like we deserve a break or reward. Psychologists call the effect *empathy gaps*.

In February, we don't decide to quit. Rather, it's something more like "I've worked hard. I deserve a break. I'll go an extra day next week."

We decide *for* a well-earned rest, not *against* the habit and its benefits, though we may regret that decision the next morning. After missing one day we can miss two. After missing two, like my friend said, *it's all over*.

You might think the trick in February is to steel our resolve more and think back to December. If only. Few people can recreate December's resolve on a February evening.

Then what do I do?

The trick is to prepare for February's distraction in December. Here is the advice:

Think of the most discouraging day you can. Your dog pukes on your irreplaceable carpet, you get a flat tire, your check bounces, you lose your job, your nose is running, it's raining, and more. You get the picture.

Before starting, think of what you can do *that* day. Then start there.

For example, say you want to do push-ups daily. Say you can do 100 this moment without breaking a sweat, but on that day you can only do one. Then make your habit one push-up daily. After you do that one, do another 99 any day you want, but require only one. Because you can't predict when that day will come. But it will. So when it comes, do one that day. It counts. You won't have missed one, so you won't miss two and it won't be all over.

The advice applies if you want to start any *sidcha*—meditating, yoga, drawing a picture daily, making someone smile daily, cooking at home, or any other. Don't just start with an abstract "small." Start with specific self-awareness that you quantify from self-reflection, which this advice requires and prompts. How many minutes will you meditate, do yoga, draw, spend making someone smile, or cook on that day? Start there.

After you practice your *sidcha* long enough, you might discover from experience that even on those awful days you can do two push-ups, not one. Then based on your self-awareness developed through experience and reflection, consciously choose to increase your number, noting that you've improved your life at the foundation. I took years to go from 10 burpees a day to 54. You will have moved from someone who in the face of adversity can do two push-ups, not

one. You won't just imagine or hope for this change. You will develop it as surely as Arnold developed his physique, Coltrane his sound, Oprah her character, and Hemingway his voice.

Sometimes people tell me, “Josh, I had to stop. My child was sick. It was an emergency” or something equally serious. They didn't understand the exercise. They didn't consider how heavy the discouragement might feel. No problem. We can learn from their experience. Reflect more on what might befall you. If on that day all you can do is lift your little finger, start with lifting your little finger. Sound too little? You'll be surprised how fast your self-awareness increases to where you know from experience you can do more. You'll achieve beyond your expectations before you know it—not in your dreams but in your actions. You have your whole life to grow from wherever you start.

Think of anyone who possesses the results you want for yourself. Ask if they could have attained them any other way. They'll tell you mastery doesn't come from starting and stopping many habits. It comes from not stopping a few. After that, meaningful results are inevitable.

Your Potential

Eventually, you'll learn that even when your life seems like it's falling apart, you can do three, then four, and so on. Sooner than you can imagine, you'll find that your life won't fall apart, because no matter what happens around you, your *sidcha*—meditation, yoga, painting, playing music, writing, burpees, or whatever you choose—will hold it together. It will keep you thriving.

In the time of COVID-19, I consider Nelson Mandela the most relevant historical example to illustrate how daily habits create greatness no matter the adversity. Did you know he boxed as a young man? Throughout his 27 years in prison, he maintained his daily training regimen. In fact, in his autobiography, he tells that he did so on the day he was released—a major date of world history. He doesn't tell the names of the leaders he met or what he said to the media. He does mention waking up at 4:30 am to do his routine—the one he maintained for 27 years.

Much of the world remains under lockdown. Still, we can access all the art and knowledge that has ever been recorded. We can connect with friends and family worldwide by video. We can access food and drink at whim. We may be locked in to some degree, but we're mostly free. Yet many of us lost our shit after a few months. Nelson Mandela

was imprisoned for 27 years, most of them breaking rocks on a bleak disconnected island or left all alone in a cell—without plumbing—barely larger than a bed. He went on to become his nation’s first black president, replacing Apartheid. His 70th birthday party, celebrated globally before the Internet, was attended by 200 million people.

What can you make happen if you don’t stop?

...

Joshua Spodek, PhD, MBA, is a three-time TEDx speaker and the bestselling author of *Initiative* and *Leadership Step by Step*. An “astrophysicist turned new media whiz,” according to NBC, he is also the host of the award-winning *Leadership and the Environment* podcast and a professor at NYU. He blogs daily at JoshuaSpodek.com.

Restoring the Love: Habits to Create a Vibrant, Long-Lasting Romantic Relationship

by Chrisanna Northrup



I married the love of my life and had three kids, a house, and a solid career. Sounds perfect, right? And yet I wondered, *Is this as good as it gets?* Somehow I pictured my life a little different.

Fifteen years into our marriage, my husband and I seemed like two people in survival mode, both trying our best to keep up with the house and kids.

For years, I wrote it off, thinking, *This is just a phase and it will pass.* Then I started questioning what I envisioned for my marriage in the first place.

Was it walking through the door and being swept off my feet? My husband telling me how amazing I was every day? I wasn't sure if that was even realistic.

I wondered how other couples fared in their relationships. Were they satisfied? Were they happy? Or were they in a rut waiting for the phase to pass too?

My curiosity took over. I figured asking people directly was the best way to find out who was happiest and why. I decided to locate extremely happy couples, take stock of their behavior, and then

borrow their habits to improve my marriage. Quite frankly, I wasn't even sure if these couples existed.

I did more than ask around town. I partnered with two of America's top sociologists and conducted the world's largest and most extensive study on relationships.

I composed an interactive online survey and promoted it far and wide by working with a handful of world-class media partners. The survey put forth a lot of questions—over 1,500, to be exact.

As I gathered data, I would give each media partner exclusive information for their articles. These articles drove more and more readers to my online survey. As people completed the survey, they discovered how their relationships compared to others around the world. This kept people answering questions, giving me a wealth of data. In the end, I surveyed more than 100,000 people worldwide.

The data revealed interesting habits among happy couples. Some were straightforward behaviors, little things that were easy for me to adopt with my husband. We started using pet names, for example, and prioritized passionate kissing—two hallmarks of long-term happy couples.

Others habits were more tailored to individual couples. These were more elusive, but the trends were clear. The couples who reported extreme happiness did three habitual things:

1. They prioritized romance.
2. They were in touch with and supportive of each other's passions and interests.
3. They steered clear of damaging deal-breaking behavior.

Here's how my husband and I used the data to design simple habits to strengthen our relationship.

Let's Talk Romance

A common theme among couples who divorce? The romance is gone. The big takeaway here is simple. Don't let the romance go!

The trick is to identify your partner's definition of romance and then pick up habits to keep it alive and well. It starts with a conversation.

To get a better idea of what your partner thinks is romantic, simply ask them to share their most romantic memory. Knowing what

stands out for your partner will give you a better idea of how to plan future romantic memories.

I got off easy on this one. My husband defined romance as anytime I made him feel like he is the most important person in the world to me. He likes when I shower him with affection in any form. Now I make it a habit to take our romance up a notch by holding hands, giving him a kiss, stroking his hair, or making time for extra cuddling each day.

You don't know until you ask. Once you know each other's definition of romance, it's up to both of you to implement some intentional habits and not let that romance ever die.

What Matters to You Matters to Me

Another clear takeaway from my research was how easily couples drift apart over the years if they're not in touch with what makes their partner happy. People evolve. So do their passions and interests. When partners fail to support each other in this area on a consistent basis, things fall apart.

Unchecked habits play a big role in drifting apart. People operate on autopilot. Often, years go by before people check in and ask their

partner what's holding their interest and keeping them happy. By that point, each person has likely developed bad habits and settled into undesirable patterns that don't foster mutual satisfaction.

Many people don't pause and ask their partner intimate questions about what makes them happy. They rarely ask how they can support each other in pursuing their passions. Why? They're afraid of being criticized or rejected. Ego gets in the way. We either think we know the answer or we don't want to hear it. This was crystal clear to me after reviewing the data. I quickly discovered I was guilty of this too.

The good news is that it's never too late to communicate and develop new habits. It's possible to change.

Start off by asking your partner what drives their happiness. This is an easy way to open up positive conversation.

Next, ask your partner to share three specific things they're passionate about. No answer is too outrageous. Have fun with it! How can you support each other's passions if you don't know what they are?

Then it's your turn to share. Again, you might think you know (and maybe you do), but bringing up the subject of happiness will likely

bring you closer. Maybe you can enjoy more activities together. Maybe you can support each other's solo pursuits.

My husband shared that his top passions were health, fitness, and motocross. I knew these things mattered to him, but understanding they hit his top three drove home just how important they were to him.

To better support his happiness, I made an effort to consistently invest my time in sharing his passions. I got into fitness more. I learned how to dirt-bike.

One of my passions I initially shared with him was my love of dance. At the time, I'd stopped dancing altogether. Shortly after our conversation, we made a habit of going out to dance on a regular basis. We still do. It turns out he enjoys dancing more than I do!

What's the Big Deal?

The last one to share with each other is a biggie: deal breakers. I'm talking about egregious habits. If you and your partner haven't discussed deal breakers—the behavior that upsets you to the point of ending the relationship—it's time. This can be a difficult conversation, but it's vital.

My number-one deal breaker was my husband's cursing. Before our conversation, I would tell him all the time how much it bothered me when he would get upset and start cursing. He thought I was making a big deal over nothing. He would get upset and then justify his cursing by saying it's how he grew up talking. Words were just words. It was a tiny bad habit. It wasn't that big of a deal.

But for me it was a big deal. I told him he needed to respect that or his cursing would drive me away. He was taken back by just how much his language impacted me. He worked on breaking the habit and changed his ways.

His deal breaker for me was my social butterfly habit. On top of my job and our family, I had a handful of friends I tended to, plus creative outlets that took up a lot of my time. He loved my creative and social energy, but he felt like when I was with him, I wasn't really present. My mind was always elsewhere. It wasn't the relationship he signed up for.

When that sunk in, I went to work seeking balance and changed my habits immediately. I made sure that when I was spending time with him, I was fully engaged, enjoying the moments we had together. We made a habit, each Sunday, of discussing our upcoming schedules for

the week. I began including him more in social events and limited my solo outings to maybe one or two nights a week.

No one wants to make their significant other so upset that they would want to leave. Taking time to understand each other's deal breakers is crucial. Listening and complying can salvage almost any relationship.

The Relationship You Always Wanted

Romance, supporting each other's passions, and deal breakers. The data says these are three major areas that make or break a relationship. The conversations I've laid out in this article may seem intuitive, but many couples never get around to using these communication methods. The extremely happy couples ask the hard questions, listen, and build their relationships around each other's answers.

Before the study, more than anything I wanted to have the relationship I always dreamed of: happy, healthy, passionate, exciting, and fun. Now I have been with my husband for 27 years, and by implementing what I learned from the study, I feel as if we are just getting started. I currently have the relationship I've always wanted, and I know he feels the same.

...

Chrisanna Northrup is creator and co-author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Normal Bar: The Surprising Secrets of Happy Couples and What They Reveal about Creating a New Normal in Your Relationship*. Her study received national attention through multiple media outlets, including *The Today Show*, *USA Today*, *Fitness Magazine*, CNN, and more. She currently spends time furthering her 25-year career in wealth management and training as a fitness model. She and her husband have three grown children and reside in southern California.

Be a Broken Record: Power Words for Powerful Parenting

by Denaye Barahona



When we speak to our kids, words do matter. We don't have to get it right every time, but as parents, we should strive to make a habit of using words intentionally.

The good news is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel every day; it's actually better to use the same phrases on repeat. You might sound like a broken record (are you old enough to remember records?), but repetition helps to drive home understanding in children.

We can make a habit of using impactful phrases to teach and build connection with our children. Therefore, I'm sharing eight expressions my kids hear from me on a regular basis. They might seem simple, but sometimes the simplest things can be the most effective.

1. "Sometimes we get angry with each other, but we still love each other"

Why does this matter? Because children tend to think in black and white—all or nothing. It is developmentally normal for kids to think in absolutes, but it can be hurtful. For little ones, it can be hard to understand that we can still love each other and be angry with one another, that those feelings can coexist.

When we get upset with each other and angry feelings are exchanged, it's not uncommon for our kids to fear that our love might be turned off like a light switch. So in our house, we end every dispute with this statement: "Sometimes we get angry with each other, but we still love each other." Because even if the default is for my kids to think in black and white, I'm going to make darn sure they know that my love is absolute and unconditional.

2. "It sounds like you don't prefer this."

Our kids are allowed to say no. They are allowed to opt out. But sometimes they express themselves in words we don't love. "This food is gross." "I don't like him." "I hate this toy." "I won't play that game."

We could spend all day telling them the words we do not want to hear: "Don't say that" or "Don't be mean." Or instead of criticizing their criticisms, we can lead by example. We can respond with the words that we want to hear instead. As their language is developing, they will adapt to the words we use (but it takes time!).

That's why I respond to complaints and negativity with "It sounds like you don't prefer this." This allows me to acknowledge their choice and

reflect back some new (and more desirable) language to be filed away in their brains and used in the future.

3. “As your mama, it’s my job to keep your brain and body healthy.”

“Can I have candy?” “I need more iPad time.” “I don’t want to go outside.” “I want whipped cream for breakfast.” Our kids are persistent. And often they want things we don’t want to give them. So I say, “As your mama, it’s my job to keep your brain and body healthy.”

Full disclosure: this phrase is as much for me as it is for them. This saying gives me strength and helps me stay rooted in my principles. It also helps my kids to recognize that I’m not just “being mean”; I’m actually just doing my job.

Here’s a specific example of how I used this recently: “I know, I know. You don’t want to go on a hike. You just want to stay home and watch TV. But as your mom, it’s my job to keep your brain and body healthy. That means I have to feed you good food and make sure you move your body a lot. I know it’s not what you want to hear, but I’m just doing my job.”

4. “I feel like I’m about to get angry.”

In many ways, this feels like a threat. But these sayings aren't about being perfect, they are about being real. So here's why I use it.

Anger has the tendency to simmer quietly inside of our minds and then explode. When you are trying to hold in your agitation, you are sitting in silence and then all of a sudden you are yelling—you just can't hold it in anymore. You go from 0 to 100. When I use this phase, I'm going from 0 to 50. I'm not totally calm, but I'm also showing some personal restraint. It prevents the explosion.

So when I notice myself feeling increasingly agitated (like on the path to yelling), I will say out loud, "I feel like I'm about to get angry." This serves as a warning sign for myself and the people around me that I'm doing my darned best not to explode. And most of the time, it works. My kids will usually step back and give me some breathing room. And I take some deep breaths and calm down.

So mostly I do it for myself. But also for my kids. They are watching and listening. They are seeing me use self-talk to mediate my intense feelings before they get to be unbearable. They are seeing me take deep breaths. They are learning. I am learning.

5. "You are *more* than pretty. You are brave, strong, kind, and clever."

In the world we live in, “pretty” gets a lot of emphasis. So don’t be surprised if your little girl approaches you frequently to ask, “Do I look pretty?” Don’t be surprised if strangers stop you in the grocery store to shower her with praise of how “pretty” she is.

So, how do I respond? First I affirm, then I broaden. “Yes, you are beautiful. But you are so much more than that. You are brave, strong, kind, and clever.”

As with all these simple sayings, we use this on repeat. By using these phrases repeatedly, we are planting important seeds. It’s wonderful to be pretty, but it’s a small part of who we are as women. We are so much more than pretty.

6. “It sounds like you need some personal space.”

As children are growing, they are learning to communicate their needs. In the early years, it is rare that these needs are communicated gracefully.

“Get away from me!”

“Leave me alone!”

“I don’t want you here.”

“Go away.”

Sometimes we get so caught up in the way the message is being delivered that we can’t even hear the message. Here’s an example.

Scenario A: Your child is feeling irritated and she screams at you, “Go away!” Your authoritarian instincts kick in and say, *She can’t talk to me like that! I need to discipline her!* So you get in her face and firmly declare that she can’t speak to adults that way and she’s in big trouble. You find yourself carrying on about how rude she is being. It’s hard to let it go—because you feel so triggered. Perhaps you put her in timeout. You end the interaction feeling like you sort of disciplined her but not really sure if you did the right thing.

The truth is, sometimes we get irritated and we need personal space. That is a perfectly reasonable request—and really that’s what she wanted in this scenario. She just didn’t communicate it the way you wanted her to communicate it. And the result is that now you have another battle on your hands.

So let’s try it another way.

Scenario B: Your child is feeling irritated and she screams at you “Go away!” You remind yourself to listen to the core of her message, so

you reflect back, “It sounds like you need some personal space,” and then you close the door and walk away. You avoided a battle *and* you have taught her new words to communicate her needs.

You *have* disciplined her—because discipline is about teaching. You taught her how you wanted her to communicate instead of lamenting about how you *didn't* want her to communicate.

7. “Can you tell me more about what you’re doing?”

One day I heard a ruckus outside. I walked out, and my son was running back and forth along the stone pavers in our yard, pounding them with a metal shovel. My first inclination was to scream, “Knock it off! You are going to break something!” Instead I took a deep breath and calmly asked, “Can you tell me more about what you’re doing there?”

He told me he was making music. At second glance, he wasn’t behaving erratically after all. He was pretending the stones were a giant xylophone and the metal shovel was a mallet. Each stone made different sound based on its size.

Instead of being mad, I was actually impressed with his creativity. So what did I do? I told him that he could continue as long as he wasn’t

damaging anything. We walked around and checked the stones, and they were unharmed. So I let him carry on.

Sometimes there's a method to kids' madness and we just have to pause and figure out what it is. Always strive to approach with inquiry rather than accusation, because there might be some serious exploratory learning going on.

8. "Okay, let's do it together!"

Cooking dinner is part of my regular routine, but some days I'm tired and overwhelmed and cooking dinner feels hard. On those days, I'd give anything for someone to sneak up behind me and cheerfully say, "Okay, let's do it together!"

This is the phrase I use to break down resistance in my kids, because we all need a helping hand. Even with things we do every day. Even with things we already know how to do.

I'm teaching my kids that family is about working together and collaboration. Therefore, I'm always willing to jump in and model that family value. "You don't want to put your shoes on? Okay, let's do it together. I'll put on one and you put on the other." "You don't want to

clean up the toys? Okay let's do it together. I'll clean up this pile and you get the other one."

Because as my kids grow and they see me struggling with something simple like cooking dinner, do I want them to tell me, "You already know how to do this, Mama. You are old enough to cook dinner"? No. I want them to jump in and say, "Let's do it together." I want us to offer help and support to each other as well as to other people in need.

I encourage you to give it a try. Get familiar with some phrases that help to teach your children the values and beliefs that are the most poignant in your family. Then make it a habit to use them regularly. Maybe your kids will inscribe a few of these in your tombstone one day when you are gone, because they will surely be inscribed within their hearts.

...

Denaye Barahona, PhD, is a mother of two and the founder of Simple Families, a podcast and community for families interested in minimalism with kids, family wellness, and positive parenting. Denaye has a doctorate in child development and over a decade of

experience in coaching parents to more harmonious lives with children.

Make It a Better Day at Your House: How Establishing Household Rhythms Improves Family Life

by Rebecca Onion



My friends and family knew me as a person with entrenched habits. And then, almost four years ago, I had a child and I developed whole new galaxies of ritual and schedule.

Before Kid (BK): I went to bed at normal adult times, between 11:00 and 12:00. Sometimes, when I had a chance to see friends and the conversation was really fun, I'd push it to 1:00 am.

After Kid (AK): I acquired terrible insomnia after having a baby, and regularity of sleep schedule was the only thing that fixed it. Now I'll set an alarm on my phone to kick friends out of my house so I can be in bed by 9:45.

BK: I worked out every morning after getting up at a normal adult time.

AK: I started getting up every morning between 5:15 and 5:22, even on vacation, to shoehorn in some exercise before my child stirred.

There are some significant problems with this new rigidity, which my husband suspects I adopted in order to gain some mental control over the major life disruption of having a child. Is he right? Probably! A routine can be a prison, without some flexibility. That's why the number-one concept that's helped me most in my new life as a

mother has come from a century-old holistic tradition in education known as Waldorf education.

Waldorf teaches the value of rhythm. With “rhythm,” you have habits and schedules, but they are about feelings and modes of being rather than a strict and arbitrary order of events. For example, Waldorf kindergartens alternate periods of quiet and concentration, which they equate to the inhale of a breath, and sociality and expansion, which (they say) is like an exhale. Examples of an “inhaling” activity might be drawing or handicrafts or rest time; an “exhaling” activity could be going outside for a walk, or meeting a friend at the playground to play tag with wild abandon. Children come to expect this alternation of modes: a period of retreat and then a period of stimulation.

The idea makes perfect sense when I think about how I (and maybe most people) feel after a few days of business travel, filled with conversations and excitement. At least for me, there’s no better feeling than following that stretch of time with a few days of nothing but cooking, gardening, and nightly Netflix. The creation of a household rhythm echoes that good feeling of a balance of stimulation and quiet, though it changes on an hour-to-hour basis, rather than day-to-day.

At home, with my daughter in her fourth year (and home from preschool because of the pandemic), we always spend time together right when she gets up: reading, chatting, practicing yoga moves. Then I cook for the day while she putters around, playing with toys for about an hour and a half. (Right now, she wants nothing more than to arrange figurines and stuffies around a table and pretend they are eating. She can do this for hours.) Next, she wakes her dad up and reads books with him. After that, I leave for work and they go out into the world for a walk or a bike ride.

In such a way, the morning passes with gentle sameness. She gets quiet togetherness, quiet solo play, quiet togetherness, then the relative excitement of the outside world. This works well for both parents and child.

Benefits for Everybody

Kim John Payne, a Waldorf-inspired counselor and educator who wrote the book *Simplicity Parenting*, explains in his extended meditation on this concept that one of its benefits is that it gives children predictability and transparency about what is going to happen in their lives. Especially when they are so young that they don't read or have much of a sense of time, they can feel like they're buffeted "from pillar to post," as my grandfather used to say.

When we follow our morning rhythm, we have a much easier time with possible pain points—waiting to wake up Dad until the appointed time, for example, or putting on shoes to go out for a walk. Since these things happen every morning, in roughly the same sequence, they now pass by practically without struggle.

A household rhythm, well constructed, can make many hard parts of parenting much easier.

I babysat too much as a teenager and, as a result, thought that parenting might be an endless experience of being “on”—alternately entertaining children and scolding them into doing things, for *years*. It seemed horrible, and mainstream parenting writing, which often describes parenting as an imposition on your regular life (rather than a catalyst to remake your life altogether), didn’t help.

The most freeing thing I’ve read, as the parent of a small child, was the idea that you can alternate periods of giving strong doses of attention to your child with periods when you are doing separate things, alongside one another. If you have a rhythm for it, your togetherness and separateness become a habit, for both of you. You can get to a point where your child knows when to expect to have your undivided devotion and when to expect that you’ll be loading the dishwasher or chopping vegetables for tonight’s salad.

Waldorf teacher Faith Collins uses an oceanic metaphor for this in her book *Joyful Toddlers and Preschoolers* that's quite lovely: parent and child come together, then recede from one another, then come together, like waves crashing on shore, all day long. This habit of alternating modes of togetherness and apartness gives the child security in your presence and frees the parent from the panic that can come when you feel like your child won't leave your side and you wonder if you've done something wrong.

This worked for us, who have what some might call an “easy” child, fairly sunny and secure. But others' experience shows that it works even better with anxious and worried children, who can, through rhythm, know that an adult is always coming back around to connect.

Adapting Lessons from the Past

It can be hard for me to swallow some of the parts of the rhythm idea that feel regressive. Waldorf is in love with the past, and often in the writing about rhythm from Waldorf teachers, you find nods to the idea that in some vaguely described “history,” households had “more rhythm”—that people lived more naturally, in tune with their bodies. I wonder if, for some people, being stuck in an endless round of

grueling domestic tasks, with every day and week the same, may not have brought bliss.

Also, it seems to me that the imposition of rhythm in today's households is much easier when you have resources. Key requirements for family rhythm, like the predictability of parental working schedules, are, themselves, a privilege.

Be that as it may, for those of us who can, building back some of the tick-tock that used to govern people who lived and died before electricity or modern medicine offers us a tremendous tool for more peace in our households.

And the concept frees me, just a little, from my own rigidity. If I begin to resist a change of plans, or want to reject a dinner invitation that pushes bedtime late, my husband will remind me: "We'll get back in the rhythm tomorrow." We always can.

...

Rebecca Onion, a former academic with a PhD in American Studies, lives in Athens, Ohio, and works as a staff writer for Slate.com. She cooks far too often, but her husband and daughter don't seem to

mind. You can see the rest of her writing about culture, history, food, and kids at www.rebeccaonion.com.

Habits for Fit Finances

Kelvin Wong



Pretend this article's title was something sensational, like "Achieve Financial Success by Doing These Five Simple Things (Number Three May Shock You!)." Clickbait exists for a reason. We put so much pressure on ourselves to be productive that we no longer feel comfortable being patient. Perhaps this is why so many ads promise shortcuts and quick fixes to every aspect of our lives. This is no exception when it comes to finances.

In reality, financial success requires good financial habits. It requires good planning and daily discipline over a long period of time. In what follows, I share with you some lessons I have learned over the years from research on financial empowerment. While none of these will shock you, as the fictional title suggests, they serve as reminders on how to create good financial habits.

1. Set good goals.

If you do not have a clear idea of where you are going, you won't think much about the actions needed to get there. While setting goals sounds easy, there is a best practice: set SMART goals. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Goals that are SMART will have a much better shot at completion, so let me discuss each characteristic.

First, a goal should be *specific*. Consider these two goals: (1) Try to spend less on cheesecake this month. (2) Spend less than \$20 on cheesecake this month. Which one gives a better picture of what you need to do? For someone who loves cheesecake like me (and may possibly spend much more than \$20 a month on cheesecake), goal 2 gives me a specific target to hit.

Making a goal specific will also often make a goal *measurable*. Goal 1 simply mentions that I should try to spend less on cheesecake this month. But compared to when? And how do I measure whether I'm actually trying or not? Maybe I tried really hard to spend less but failed. If my goal was only to try to spend less, maybe I succeeded? Just so you do not run into ambiguities, be sure there's a way to measure the success of your goal.

Third, a goal should be *achievable*. If my goal is to save \$500 this month to throw a cheesecake party for all of my friends and family, but my income is \$700 per month and I spend \$600 of that on essentials like rent and food, then saving \$500 is an unachievable goal. Goals that are not achievable leads us to think that goals do not need to be kept. Why even try if we are destined to failed? So set goals that are achievable.

Fourth, goals should be *relevant*. While it is good to save up for your child's college fund, if you currently do not have kids, it might not be as relevant. You may be tempted often to shift money out of that fund if the goal is not relevant. Another example: If you are a high school student and thinking about having enough saved for your retirement, that's great! But it's not as relevant to you as other major things, such as college or buying a car or house. We are more likely to neglect goals that are not relevant to us.

Last, goals should be *time-bound*, or basically have a completion date. A goal to save a thousand dollars might be specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant, but if there's no time restriction on the goal, it is somewhat meaningless. Save a thousand dollars by when? By next week? By the time I die? Before my next cheesecake? Just as a race with no finish line will simply tire us out eventually, so will goals not bounded by time.

It is a good idea to make SMART goals that are small. While it is easy to dream big, the little steps are what will actually move you closer to your goal. Rather than wanting to save a million dollars for retirement, figure out what this looks like each year or each month, and work toward that.

2. Have social accountability.

If we are honest with ourselves, we all tend to care a little too much about what others think about us. We can use this to our advantage when trying to reach our financial goals. Finding someone who can help keep you accountable will increase the likelihood that you stick to your goals.

Adding a social aspect to goal making will increase the reward of achieving goals (you get to share your victories) and increase the cost of ignoring or failing them (not the easiest to tell someone that you failed). If that person is willing, have them check in with you every week or two to see how you are doing. Think of questions that this person can ask you to keep you on track, and suggest these questions to them.

3. Avoid temptations.

We arrive at financial habit number three, the habit that was supposed to shock you based on this article's fictional title. While this is likely not shocking, I think that avoiding temptations is likely the most important daily habit that will help in having good financial habits.

First, we need to understand what temptations will arise. When making goals, spend time reflecting on possible temptations. For instance, if you are saving up for a new car, where are you going to be most tempted to overspend? Perhaps you are trying to cut down on how much you spend on restaurants each month and putting that money toward the car. Don't just stop there—think of when you are most likely to be tempted to eat at a restaurant. Is it when you are with friends, and they suggest eating out? Is it on a Friday night when you are tired and not wanting to cook? Think of strategies ahead of time to avoid these tempting situations. After all, the best way to ensure successful financial self-control is to avoid having to use self-control in the first place.

4. Have a game plan.

Even though you might have cooked ahead of time for Friday night, when you are usually too tired to cook, maybe it's now Saturday night and you are still too tired to stick with your plan of not eating out. What do you do in a moment like this?

The reality is that as much as we try to avoid financial temptations, we still find ourselves often in one. Thus, having a game plan before encountering temptations is important. Here are some tips.

First, clearly knowing where you are in your financial goals is helpful. If you only have a vague idea of your progress, then you might let your optimism get the best of you. How many times have you said to yourself, “Oh, it’s *probably* okay. I’m *probably* still on track with my goals if I do this”? Since we do not have a clear picture, we let our optimism do the talking. And optimism is a *really* good talker. Also, this type of thinking tends to be recurring, so we take ourselves further and further away from our goals. Thus, knowing where you are with your financial goals will clearly show the cost of deviating.

Second, take advantage of social accountability, as mentioned previously. Always have someone that you can talk to about a financial decision. And don’t just ask those who you know will agree with you! Ask someone who you think may disagree, as they can give you the rationale for why your decision may not be the best idea. Having the arguments from the other side is important in balancing your own desires for why you think you should be spending.

Last, sometimes it helps to defer your purchase decision to later. This is especially true for impulse purchases. If you tend to overspend because you see online ads for products that you think you absolutely need, maybe have a plan to always wait a couple of days before purchasing. You are not saying “no” to the product, but “later.” In this

way, you can assess over that time period whether you really do need the product. More often than not, we realize what we thought were “must-haves” are really just “might-be-nice-to-haves.”

5. Reflect often.

Finally, it is important to reflect often. Reflect at the end of each day about your successes and failures. What can you continue doing that was helpful? What can you stop doing that was not beneficial? How can you make sure you do not end up in the same situation as one where you failed your goals?

Having good financial habits is really not too different than having good habits in general. As you become more structured and disciplined in different areas of life, you will also find your own techniques and strategies to help you reach your financial goals.

Above all, be sure to show yourself grace. Everyone will have bad days—it is the decision to not give up and do better next time that will ultimately lead to building successful financial habits.

...

Kelvin Wong is a clinical assistant professor of economics and the director of the program on economic education at Arizona State

University. He has been nationally awarded for his teaching and continues to be at the forefront of innovation in the teaching of economics. He holds a BS in economics, a BA in mathematics from the University of Washington, and an MA and PhD in economics from the University of Minnesota.

Cold Turkey: The Behavioral Economics Diet

by Nir Eyal



When my family immigrated to the United States in 1981, my father weighed 185 pounds. He came chasing the American dream but got more than he expected. Along with a new, more prosperous life for his family, he acquired some bad habits. For one, he took up smoking because, as he sheepishly admits, “that’s what business people here did back then.” And to ward off the boredom of long car rides between sales calls, he began eating American-made junk food.

Eventually, he stopped smoking. The junk food habit, however, got the better of him. His weight ballooned by over 50 pounds, and when he was in his late 50s, his doctor told him he was pre-diabetic. If he didn’t change soon, his doctor warned, he’d be at risk for serious health problems.

His doctor prescribed a cocktail of pills to help him control his cholesterol and blood pressure but provided little practical advice regarding what to do about his weight. “Eat better, get more exercise,” the doctor advised after an annual physical. “You can get dressed now,” he said before sending my father on his way.

For the next ten years or so, my father struggled to control his weight with no success—that is, until about five years ago.

In a matter of six months, my father returned to his slender 1981 weight, losing about two pounds per week, and finally broke his bad eating habits. No diet pills, no miracle shakes, no expensive accountability groups. In fact, the solution didn't cost him a dime. He found a way to resist the temptation of the food he'd been trying to stop eating for years.

Instead of some fad diet, my father and I shook on a \$25,000 wager that binds him to never eat refined carbohydrates again—no processed sugars, no processed grains.

Many people are shocked by the dollar amount of the bet, but that's missing the point. My objective was to never win the money. The bet just had to create a moment of consequence to disrupt the bad habit with an amount large enough to be meaningful.

Less Attractive, More Effective

Diets don't work. Studies show that temporary fixes to old habits actually make people gain weight. Essentially, the dieter's brain is trained to gorge when off the diet and inevitably the weight returns.

The wager method is far more effective in this context. Admittedly, my father is just one person, providing little more than anecdotal

evidence. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, however, provides supporting evidence that putting skin in the game makes people more likely to accomplish their goal of stopping a bad habit.^[1]

The study followed three groups of people trying to quit smoking.

The control group was offered information and traditional methods for smoking cessation, like free nicotine patches. After six months, 6% of the people in this group stopped smoking.

The next group, called the “reward” group, was offered \$800 if they were smoke-free at six months. Of those, 17% quit. From just these two groups, we see paying people does indeed provide an incentive to stop a bad habit, at least short term.

The third group provided the most interesting results. In this group, called the “deposit” group, participants were asked to put down \$150 of their own money, which they would receive back if they successfully quit in six months. In addition, they were given a \$650 bonus prize from their employer if they quit. Of those who accepted the deposit challenge, 52% succeeded.

On the surface, this makes no sense. Why would winning \$800 be less effective than winning only \$650 plus \$150 of your own money back?

Perhaps people in the deposit group were more motivated to quit smoking in the first place? The researchers admitted that over 85% of people who were offered the deposit deal refused to take it. The study authors, however, took efforts to scrub the effect of extra motivation by only using data from smokers willing to be in either group.

Loss Aversion, Commitment, and a Social Out

So, what else might explain the results? For one, the study authors write, “People are typically more motivated to avoid losses than to seek gains.” This irrational tendency, known as “loss aversion,” is a cornerstone of behavioral economics. As *Nudge* author Cass Sunstein, wrote, “A 5-cent tax on the use of a grocery bag is likely to have a much greater effect than a 5-cent bonus for bringing one’s own bag.”

There are other factors at work as well. Commitment contracts, like putting money down or taking a bet, have proven to be effective at changing behavior because they make us accountable to our future selves.

People are notoriously bad at predicting their behavior, due to a phenomenon called “time inconsistency.” Essentially, we punt difficult-to-do behaviors, saying, we’ll “eat better tomorrow” or we’ll “clean the garage” next weekend.

Tim Urban, author of the Wait But Why blog, explains his struggle with procrastination.

I banked on Future Tim’s real-world existence for my most important plans, but every time I’d finally arrive at a time when I thought I would find Future Tim, he was nowhere to be found—the only person there would be stupid Present Tim. That’s the thing that really sucks about Future You—whenever time finally gets to him, he’s not Future You anymore, he’s Present You, and Present You can’t do the tasks you assigned to Future You. ... So you do what you always do—you re-delegate them to Future You, hoping that next time time catches up with Future You, he actually exists.[2]

By creating a binding commitment, like the \$25,000 bet my father took with me, we make sure our future selves behave in line with our present goals.

There's one more important and often overlooked reason these types of commitments work—they change the language we use. When I asked my father how he manages the temptation to not cheat with just a bite of cake now and then, he told me, “I just don't. It's actually not a big deal anymore.”

Frankly, I was surprised he is having such an easy time with it. Here's a man who has struggled with his weight for over 30 years but who suddenly finds giving up some of his favorite foods to be, well, a piece of cake. What gives?

It turns out that the way we describe our behaviors can have a dramatic impact on what we will and won't do. A study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that people who were prompted to use the words “I don't” versus “I can't” were nearly twice as likely to resist the temptation of choosing unhealthy foods. The researchers believe using “I don't” rather than “I can't” gave people greater “psychological empowerment” by removing the need to make a decision. “I don't” is outside our control while “I can't” is self-imposed.[3]

When It Doesn't Work

Would you take a bet that would change your life? Maybe not. The wager technique clearly isn't for everyone. In fact, when I think about

how I could apply this method to my own life, I cringe. There is irony in the fact that I'm scared to use a method I know to be so effective. At least I know I'm not alone.

While this technique can prove effective, there are also many faults to this method. The most obvious weakness is that so few people are actually willing to take such a wager.

My guess is that the biggest barrier to people not taking the bet is the imposition on their freedom. I've written about the psychological phenomenon of reactance—our tendency to reject threats to our autonomy. People generally don't like being told what to do and taking the bet can feel restrictive. However, giving people the freedom to choose has been shown to increase compliance. Perhaps offering a limited number of “cheat passes” may disarm reactance by reminding participants that quitting is still their choice.

Second, I doubt this technique would prove effective at stopping behaviors with constant triggers. For example, nail biting is a devilishly hard habit to break because biters are constantly tempted whenever they become aware of their hands. These body-focused repetitive behaviors are not good candidates for using this technique.

Finally, and perhaps worst of all, this technique does not accommodate failure. Even in the smoking cessation study, some 48% of the participants in the most successful group did not achieve their goal. Behavior change is hard and people will inevitably fail. Therefore, any long-term behavior modification program must accommodate those who, for one reason or another, can't stick with the program.

While the wager method is more effective at stopping certain behaviors for certain people, it is not a perfect program. Nothing really is. This technique is yet another tool for healthful behavior modification that works under the right circumstances. It's worth consideration. If you're like my dad, it might be just what you've been waiting for.

You might consider finding an accountability partner and defining your own \$25K-shaped consequence. If you want to up the ante, a website called stickK.com uses commitment contracts to help its users accomplish goals. People sign legally binding agreements where they have to pay a third party if they don't meet their obligations to stop smoking, exercise, or finish their novel, for example. The site, founded by two Yale professors, has proven effective for those brave enough to take the bet.

Five months after we shook hands, my father called me with good news. “My doctor says I can take my pills every other day!” He’s stayed true to the bet and swears that resisting the temptation to eat things he knows he shouldn’t is much easier than he expected.

Now when my father goes out to lunch with his friends and dessert is brought to the table, he has a story to tell. “When they offer me a bite, I let them know it would be a very expensive mouthful,” he said. “I explain I just *don’t* eat that stuff anymore because the bet I made is for life.” He explains, “When I tried to lose weight before, I had to explain to people that I was on a diet. Eventually, I would get tired of saying ‘I can’t’ and I’d cave in and tell myself, ‘Just this once.’ But now with this bet,” my father joked, “I can just blame you!”

...

Nir Eyal is a former lecturer at Stanford and is the bestselling author of *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products* and *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*, which won numerous honors and was named one of the Best Books of the Year by Amazon. Nir offers a complimentary Indistractable workbook on his blog, NirAndFar.com

8 Essential Habits to Nurture Your Creativity

by Carolyn Gregoire



We live in a culture obsessed with productivity. As a result, many of us were taught to approach our lives with a goal-oriented mindset: Set goals. Achieve them. Work hard. Strategize and optimize our way to success.

It's tempting to approach our creative lives with the same mindset—but it doesn't tend to work out very well. Why? Unlike productivity, creativity can't easily be boiled down to simple formulas or structured approaches. By its very nature, creativity is mysterious, paradoxical, messy, and often elusive. Even after decades of research, psychologists have yet to uncover the unique spark of creative brilliance. Creativity is as perplexing to us today as it was to the ancients, who cast it in the realm of the supernatural and declared it the work of the muses.

While there's no formula for creative inspiration, what we do know is that creativity thrives in a mind that is open, relaxed, and expansive. On a neurological level, it involves the quieting down of externally focused, task-oriented thinking in favor of more fluid and inwardly reflective thought processes. To put it simply: less doing, more being.

The Essential Habits

We can nurture a creative state of being by slowing down and connecting with our innermost selves; creating more space in our schedules, our minds, and our physical environment; embracing joy, play, and spontaneity; and quieting the mental chatter long enough to allow inspiration to flow forth from the deeper wellsprings of the imagination.

Try these simple, science-backed habits to help open your mind, embrace a creative state of being, and tap into the deeper sources of inspiration within.

1. Daydream.

When was the last time you let yourself indulge in a little daydreaming? While daydreaming gets a bad rap (and many of us were punished for it growing up), it's one of the best things we can do to tap into our creative mind.

In our over-scheduled, tech-saturated lives, we don't often give our minds much a chance to rest and wander freely. But when we do, the brain switches into a different mode of engagement, known as the default mode network, or the "imagination network." This brain

network is activated when we're not focusing on anything specific and instead are allowing the mind to idly wander or to dip into our deep storehouse of memories, ideas, and emotions. Neuroscience research confirms that daydreaming involves the same brain processes associated with imagination and creativity.[1]

According to psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman (with whom I co-authored the book *Wired to Create*), mind-wandering can support the process of “creative incubation”: the essential marination time for ideas, visions, and creative problem-solving. This explains why so many of our best ideas come seemingly out of the blue when our minds are drifting elsewhere.

Find a time in your daily schedule when you can give your mind permission to roam freely, whether it's a short “brain break” during the work day or while you're walking or showering.

2. Seek out solitude.

Activating the imagination network requires a state of deep internal reflection—the state that many artists and writers refer to when describing how they arrive at their most original ideas. This type of reflection is facilitated by solitude.

Creatives share a deep need for alone time, making a practice of turning away from the distractions of daily life to give their minds space to reflect, make new connections, and find meaning. As the American existential psychologist Rollo May wrote in *The Courage to Create*, “In order to be open to creativity, one must have the capacity for constructive use of solitude. One must overcome the fear of being alone.”

Make a solo date with yourself at least once a week as a time of personal retreat, reflection, and renewal.

3. Play.

The creative mind is a mind at play. Any time we’re making something new, we take all the different pieces of whatever we’re working with—the characters of a play, the shapes of a sculpture, the ideas for a new business—and use our imaginations to bring them together in a new and exciting way.

In the busyness of adult life, play falls by the wayside. But making room for play keeps us curious, inspired, and spontaneous—and it naturally fuels our creative process. Children are naturally creative, and it’s because they play! According to the renowned development psychologist Lev Vygotsky, child’s play is the very birthplace of the

creative imagination. In children and adults alike, studies have shown that engaging in imaginative play stimulates creative thinking and problem-solving.

Play games, go out for an adventure, sing and dance, and pick up a new creative hobby just for the heck of it. Prioritize whatever it is that brings more joy and fun into your everyday existence.

4. Make something with your hands.

Working with your hands is powerful medicine for your brain. Think of it this way: busy hands mean a less-busy mind. Whenever our hands are at work, our minds get a much-needed opportunity to shift into low-gear. Research has shown that, by putting the brain into a relaxed state, tactile activities like knitting, cooking and gardening can relieve stress, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve learning, memory, and creative thinking processes.

Making things with your hands also serves as a tangible reminder of your ability, through the magic of the creative process, to bring something new into the world, whether it's a knit scarf, a wooden table, a rose garden, or a delicious meal.

5. Get outside.

Nature nourishes the creative brain. Spending time in the great outdoors is another powerful way to give our brains the cognitive break they so desperately need, clearing out mental clutter and opening a pathway for new and innovative ideas.

Research has shown that being in nature enhances higher-order thinking, restores attention, and boosts creativity. One 2012 study found that backpackers performed 50 percent better on a creative problem-solving task after they had spent four days out on the trail. [2]

A big reason for this phenomenon is that gentle outdoor activity also activates the imagination network, which explains why so many artists and writers describe having “Aha!” moments when walking in the woods or enjoying a beautiful garden. The next time you’re experiencing writer’s block, stepping outside may be a better solution than sitting and suffering.

6. Get moving.

Shifting out of the thinking mind and into the feeling body is one of the best and most reliable ways to get your creative juices flowing. We all know that exercise reduces stress levels, but it also cultivates the relaxed, positive state of mind in which new insights can more easily emerge.[3] (Novelist Haruki Murakami swears by his running routine for coming up with ideas for his writing!) As the existential philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, ideas should be born “of free movement.”

Part of the cognitive and creative benefits of exercise are connected to the breath: When we move our bodies, we move our breath. Breathing more deeply and fully de-activates the physiological stress response and puts your body in a calmer, more relaxed state, one with the space for new visions and ideas to flow freely.

7. Just add water.

It's a scientific fact: people really do tend to get their best ideas in the shower. A survey conducted by my co-author, Dr. Kaufman, showed that 72% of people have gotten new ideas in the shower, and 14% of people regularly take showers to come up with new ideas. It seems that the relaxing, solitary environment of the shower is a perfect

environment to support the “positive-constructive daydreaming” that opens up access to deeper streams of thought.

But it’s not just the shower. Being around water—rivers, oceans, lakes, streams, or even just images of water—activates what marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols calls our “blue mind,” a gently meditative mental state characterized by calm, clarity, and enhanced creativity.

Bring some flowing water into your daily life and allow it to stimulate your own creative flow.

8. Try something new.

Creativity is all about thinking differently. There’s no better way to facilitate that than to *do* something different, getting outside of your comfort zone and exposing yourself to new ideas, cultures, activities and explorations.

Psychologists have found that the personality trait of “openness to experience”—the drive for cognitive exploration of one’s inner and outer worlds—is the number-one predictor of creative achievement in the arts and sciences. Creative people are natural adventurers, risk-takers and trail-blazers, and they feed their creativity through constant exploration.

Anything that disrupts the familiar can trigger new ways of seeing. If creativity is all about “connecting the dots,” as Steve Jobs once said, then exposure to new ideas and experiences gives us both more dots and more opportunities for connection.

Flourishing Creativity

These habits are nourishment for your creative spirit. When you nourish a plant with water, sunlight and good soil, it naturally grows to its fullest expression. We humans are not so different.

Water the seeds of your creative potential with space to dream and imagine, time to rest and stillness, and regular play and adventure, and your creativity will naturally blossom, ever guiding you to new worlds of beauty and possibility.

...

Carolyn is a Brooklyn-based writer, creative strategist and “book doula.” She is the co-author of *Wired to Create: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind* and the creator of the Webby Award-winning *Creative Types* personality test, which has been taken by over 7 million people worldwide. Her work has been published in

Scientific American, TIME, Harvard Business Review, The New Republic, Tricycle: The Buddhist Review, Yoga Journal and other publications.

Nepalese Taxi Saints: The Power of Habitual Kindness

by John Wang



So there I was, lost and stranded in Nepal. I was on vacation at the time, escaping from the overwhelm and stress of work, and upon finishing a (terrifying) hang-gliding excursion over the Himalayas, I realized I'd forgotten to book a car back to my hotel.

In most places you get stranded, you can call a taxi to get out, but this country was in the middle of a fuel shortage at the time, with drivers waiting hours or even days at a time to fuel up and many going home empty. So not many taxis were around. It would take almost an hour of waiting, shivering, and angry self-criticizing brought on by my lack of preparation before my hitchhiker's thumb finally flagged a car down.

I was elated. My rescuer was a middle-aged Nepalese man driving a boxy, paint-chipped green van, but he may as well have been Mother Teresa in a golden chariot. He was friendly, and we got to chatting as soon as I squeezed into a tight back seat next to his wife and his two unreasonably adorable children. Despite some language gaps, we managed to piece together a working conversation: the family was from Pokhara, the two kids' favorite sport was soccer, and—an important detail—the family lived on the *opposite* direction of where they were dropping me off. As a matter of fact, they were burning

nearly an hour of fuel in a shortage crisis, going out of their way, just to drive me to my hotel.

My jaw dropped when I heard this. I offered them money, but they said no. I insisted on taking them out to dinner, on buying them something for their inconvenience, but they refused everything. As I started to emptying my bag, hoping to find at least a souvenir or a trinket—something to even out this karmic imbalance—my rescuer patted my arm and said, “I do for me, not for you.”

Half stunned and fully grateful, I thanked him with sheepish acceptance and watched as they drove off, waving at me in the rear-view mirror. Eventually, my trip would come to an end, but those words lingered well past my return flight.

The Kindness High

For an entrepreneur working in the digital age, coming home after a vacation means returning to a to-do list that resembles the mythical hydra—every time you cross off one task, two more take its place. After Nepal, my mind immediately flooded with work, but something had clicked in me.

The words “I do for me, not for you” kept whispering in the back of my mind like an old commercial jingle. So, after I shared the story with a friend of mine, he put me in touch with a psychology professor who offered to explain why the idea felt so...familiar. We got to chatting on the phone, and upon hearing the quote, the professor laughed, “Oh yes, the kindness high at work.”

“Kindness high?” I ventured.

“Yes, it’s a colloquial term, but when you do something kind, or just remember a time when you did something kind, your body releases all these chemicals that make you happier. Here, I’ll send you a few studies.”

When the email arrived, I discovered the professor and I clearly had different definitions of “a few studies.” As a matter of fact, there have been an *astounding* number of studies on the effects of kindness, charity, philanthropy, and their correlation with happiness, stress, and wellness.

In one psychology study at the University of British Columbia, participants who performed one random act of kindness a day saw a massive decrease in social anxiety and an increase in sense of well-being.[1]

In a separate study of a group of healthy adults, kind acts were shown to induce an increase of oxytocin, which reduced the inflammation in the cardiovascular system, lowering the chances of heart disease.[2]

A study of seniors' homes discovered that retirees who regularly volunteered in their spare time lived an estimated ten years longer than their peers.[3]

The list goes on. Kindness lowers stress. Kindness reduces heart disease. Kindness increases life span. Kindness makes you appear more attractive to romantic and sexual partners, outranking physical fitness and financial prospects. Companies with kindness initiatives typically have higher profits and higher employee satisfaction. Study after study—neuroscience, psychology, biology, whatever-ology—they all point to the same, undeniable fact: *Being kind is actually a form self-care.*

It was a surprise to me. Like many, I grew up being taught about how important it was to be kind to others. I never thought of it as a way to improve my wellness; it was just something you do for others because you're not a jerk.

We know we should be kind because that's just what makes you a *good person*. But what about the fact that it's *good for you, as a person*?

An Experiment

I needed to test this hypothesis on myself, so I created a personal kindness challenge: I would perform at least one act of kindness a day for 30 days. The act had to be unreciprocated (as in, not just me returning a favor), and if I missed a day, I would have to start the challenge over. I would record the details in my journal every night, tracking my mood each day.

On my first official day, while driving home after a night at the movies, I recognized someone walking down the street. Despite the fact that it was nearly midnight, I pulled over to say hi and ask if he needed a ride, something normal-me probably wouldn't have done, but I had a mission.

The guy seemed surprised at first, but he accepted the offer. He needed to buy some late-night groceries, so we spent 20 minutes driving around downtown Vancouver before finding a 24-hour store where we both walked around and did some shopping. I had a great time and we got to become friends. Looking back, I probably would have just sat in front of Netflix had I gone straight home. Instead, I returned to my condo feeling satisfied.

The next day, I noted that I not only felt happier, but I felt less stressed in general. I was definitely enjoying the “kindness high” the professor told me about. The experiment was working.

Over the next month, I created a kindness to-do list and went around town like a college freshman on a scavenger hunt, high on the happiness chemicals generated by my brain.

I bought a cake for a barista wearing a birthday pin.

I handed out two dozen roses to passing strangers on Valentine’s day.

I wrote thank-you emails to my old high school teachers.

I handed out gift cards for free coffee and brought chocolate for bank tellers.

I put coins in expired parking meters. (The parking attendant who was about to write a ticket even thanked me for saving him the trouble—two acts for the price of one!)

At one point, I told a custodian at a food court that I was grateful for her and that I appreciated her work. She stopped what she was doing to glance me up and down. Then she started crying. I started crying.

She gave me a hug and said thank you as I kept crying, without even knowing why. It was the highlight of my month.

I also learned a lot about people. I discovered that many people aren't used to receiving unwarranted kindness. I got a few weird looks when I offered strangers flowers. People kept asking what I was selling, but when I explained that I was trying to be more kind so I wouldn't die young, they became generally receptive. Aside from that, the worst thing that happened was a polite no, which I didn't take personally. I was (and still am) doing it for myself anyway.

Another thing I learned is that most people are struggling on any given day. Sometimes I'd have a conversation with a stranger and, maybe because of the experiment or maybe because they saw me as a harmless weirdo, they started opening up and sharing their stories. Work struggles. Family struggles. Relationship struggles.

When you are kind to someone, you're creating a micro-community with them, and your world gets a little bit bigger in the process. It was hard to feel isolated or socially anxious when I spent my days looking for ways to help others. As kindness became a habit, I became more focused and motivated at work. I felt purpose-driven. And for the first time, my to-do-list hydra felt tameable.

One Kindness Challenge

In a matter of weeks, the *big* changes started coming. The world felt more optimistic and less divisive, which apparently is due to a psychological effect called the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon—it's like when you buy a new car and start seeing the same model everywhere. I was looking for kind things to do, so it felt like everyone around me was being kind. When my month came to an end, I had to keep going.

I started sharing about the challenge with my friends, who then shared it with their friends. We made it official and called it the One Kindness Challenge.

A friend suggested we find a way to track our daily acts. I made leather bracelets, each with a small silver bar across the top, like an ID bracelet. The idea was we would flip the metal bar over each day after completing our daily act of kindness.

Soon after that, I built a website so people near and far could complete their own challenge. I got invited to speak at local schools and entrepreneurship events. A hotel chain reached out to learn how they could start their own kindness initiative. The challenge was gaining momentum.

I asked people to share their stories with me. That's when things *really* got interesting. One by one, tales of people's lives being changed started pouring in. I received an email from a woman who, after her first week of the One Kindness Challenge, found the courage to call up her estranged mother and rebuild the relationship. A local business owner spotted a high school student picking up garbage in front of his house and offered the kid a job. And most powerfully, several people wrote about how great they felt when they woke up in the morning.

It's not an easy feeling to put into words, but it's one most people can relate to. Do you remember a time you did something kind for others? Remember how it felt? Imagine that feeling for a moment. Imagine if you felt like that *every day*. Imagine if our society became *addicted* to that feeling of helping others and it became a habit.

Pretty powerful, right? Here's the cool thing about it: once I started, there was no going back. It turns out the challenge I created is not just a matter of being kind for a few days—it changes how people see the world forever.

A few months passed. Then a year. I noticed one day I hadn't been actively flipping my bracelet to track my daily kindness habit anymore. I was just doing kindness whenever I saw an opportunity.

About a year after that, the most surprising personal benefits became clear.

First, I stopped caring about how other people felt about me. Kindness is empowering because it comes from a place of personal abundance. I felt more comfortable saying no to obligations and requests, as I felt secure in my contributions. As such, I owed no one an explanation.

Second, I felt more connected to my community. Before the kindness experiment, I didn't even know my own next-door neighbors or the people in my community. Now I don't just know them—I can name them. The clerks at the grocery store three blocks away, the staff at my local shops—we wave to one another when I pass by.

Finally, I became kinder to myself. I let go of the thoughts that no longer served me. I let go of the stories dictating who I was supposed to be. I gave myself permission to honor my own needs first so I could have the resources to help others. This change took the longest to set in but it was also the most transformational.

I had no idea how habitual kindness could change my life one day at a time, but the decision to serve those around me was without question one of the best things I've done for my own well-being.

You Try!

If you want to try the One Kindness Challenge for yourself, here are the rules.

Perform at least one act of kindness a day for 30 days. If you miss a day, start over.

Keep it random and off-the-cuff whenever possible.

You can perform an act of kindness for anyone, including you.

To improve accountability, invite two friends to join you and share your experiences.

When someone does something kind, the most natural response is a desire to return the gesture. The feeling is rooted in gratitude, not obligation.

Kindness is empathy in action. It is nearly impossible to demonstrate kindness while holding onto anger or resentment, because the first step toward kindness is compassion. The more we practice habitual kindness, the more we see empathy and compassion at work. We all reap its benefits.

So make it a habit to be kind, but don't do it out of guilt or obligation.
Be like my Nepalese taxi saint and do it for yourself first.

...

John Wang is the founder of the One Kindness Movement Foundation, a registered nonprofit that spreads community kindness initiatives. He is also a speaker and educator at Mastery Academy. When he's not globetrotting, he's spreading kindness in and around Vancouver, Canada. To find out more about the One Kindness Challenge or to start your own challenge, visit their site or follow @OneKindness on Instagram.

Poetry Collection

Ronald L. Banks



Habits

Ronald L. Banks

Habits shape our lives
more than we
probably realize.

Our brains
cling to them
like newborns
do their mothers.

Our bodies
function because of them.

I mean,
our actions
are influenced by them.

See, how we think,
how we act,
and how we grow
are all affected
by these things
we call habits
or routines.

A series

of systems
orchestrating
this song
we've titled life.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Ronald L. Banks

Believe it or not,
your habits
have more power
over you
than you think.
Without them,
your mind
is soft like clay,
waiting for something
or someone else
to give it shape.
Be careful.
As you become
what you do,

your actions
speak louder
than your lips can.

Morning Routine

Ronald L. Banks

Every morning
I wake up around six.
My eyes are barely
strong enough
to lift their lids.
My hands feel weak,
yet they grip these sheets
for dear life.
I yawn.
As the sun is just beginning
to peek its eyes
through the blinds
in my bedroom window,
I roll out of bed
five minutes after,

only to begin this day
like every day prior.
My feet hug the carpet beneath them
as I shuffle across the room.
Good morning,
I think silently to myself,
while folding my body
into a tabletop position.
This stretch hurts
in the most beautiful way it can.

Ten, nine, eight—breathing.
Four, three, two—breathing.

Every morning
I wake up around six,
only to begin this day
like every day prior.

A Life with Meaning

Ronald L. Banks

And then I realized
that in order
to live
a life
of purpose
and meaning,
I had to live
my life
with purpose
and meaning.
Chasing habits
instead of
lost promises.

...

Ronald L. Banks is a traditional guy who broke free from traditional thinking in order to live an intentional life on his own terms. A poet and minimalist based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, his podcast and YouTube audience has grown exponentially from 500 to over 100,000

a year. Ronald offers his words to strong-minded people who want to think differently and regain control of their life. His work lives [here](#).

Colophon

Becoming Minimalist — becomingminimalist.com

Becoming Minimalist is designed to inspire others to journey towards minimalism in life... discovering the joy of intentionally living with less... and realizing what that means for your unique lifestyle.

No Sidebar — nosidebar.com

No Sidebar is a collaborative blog about minimalism, simple living, and happiness. We want to help you turn down the noise that disrupts the quiet of your heart and mind and soul.