

1.17 Atomic Habits

Strategies for establishing and maintaining new habits

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When you choose to start a new habit, such as exercising or practicing a skill that you wish to develop, it's easy to lose motivation and quit before you truly establish it as part of your routine. You may forget your intention as you get busy or let it slip down your list of priorities when other things come up. When you already have a busy life, it can be tough to fit new behaviors into your existing schedule. If you're committed to making your new habit work, however, try the techniques popularized by Atomic Habits author James Clear. They are designed specifically to make it as easy as possible to positively alter your habits.

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- Provides a comprehensive recipe for adopting positive, helpful habits.
- Taps into our natural drives, reducing the need to rely on willpower.

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- Setting up your environment to support new habits takes thought and discipline.
- No matter how easy you make it to adopt new habits, you'll still need some commitment to make them work.

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James Clear's book, Atomic Habits, has become a best-selling phenomenon. In it, he distills the factors that create positive behavioral change into a few simple rules and encourages readers to leverage these rules when adopting new habits. In order, they are:

- Make it obvious
- Make it attractive
- Make it easy
- Make it satisfying

Let's walk through these in turn. To make it obvious, create visual or other reminders of whatever you want to do so that you can't overlook it. Let's say you want to start running in the morning; you could place post-it notes on the fridge, by the front door, and on your bedroom table, reminding you that you plan to get out and go for a run at a particular time.

To make a habit attractive, the idea is to give yourself every opportunity to say yes to it, perhaps by pairing new habits with existing ones you already enjoy. In the running example, you might choose to put headphones in and play music or a podcast you enjoy while you run. Alternatively, maybe you have a habit of visiting a park in the early morning and feeding the birds. If you choose to run to the park, you can pair those habits together in your mind, making it more likely you'll keep up with your new habit.

Making it easy is about reducing the friction that prevents you from moving forward. To get yourself

out the door and on a run, you might prepare your running clothes and shoes the night before and leave your coffee and a snack out on the kitchen table so you don't need to waste a moment thinking about them when you get up and possibly succumb to the temptation to go back to bed. The shoes could also double as a reminder instead of a note.

Finally, to make it satisfying, intensify the habit loop by celebrating small victories and finding ways to make your new habit feel rewarding. For example, try tracking your progress by ticking off days on a calendar or by writing details of your runs in an app or on paper so that you can see yourself running faster or farther. Another option is to create a reward system in which you allow yourself treats such as a massage or a fun date night with your partner when you achieve goals such as running four days per week. It's important that the reward doesn't counteract the habit—in this case, a big slice of cake might not be a great reward for maintaining your running habit. Finally, consider talking to friends, family, or a supportive community about your goals so that you have the satisfaction of sharing your achievements with them and gaining social reinforcement.

Each of these principles works in reverse if there's an existing habit you wish to eliminate. Let's say you eat too many cookies. You can make it invisible by hiding the cookies at the back of the cupboard or, even better, not keeping them in the house at all. Make it unattractive by concentrating on the weight gain and negative health consequences of eating cookies, not the delicious taste. Make it difficult by telling your partner you wish to eat fewer cookies and agreeing to pay a fine if you exceed your desired intake (see Tool 1.13: Accountability Partners).

Finally, make it unsatisfying by linking a failure to achieve your goal with negative outcomes. This isn't about punishing yourself for perceived failures—it's about finding ways to hold yourself accountable. For example, you might publicly commit to a goal, knowing that you will need to share your progress, including any setbacks, with others. You could even use an app that donates money to causes you dislike in the event that you don't reach your goals. These approaches harness your natural aversion to loss, creating an environment where the desire to avoid negative feedback helps you stay disciplined and on track.

Clear's Atomic Habits method has proven successful for millions of people, enabling them to develop more positive habits and reduce negative ones. While it's true that it takes time to solidify a new habit, once anchored, habits become significantly easier to sustain.

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1. James Clear, Atomic Habits (Avery, 2018).
2. Atomic Habits: How to get 1% Better Every Day:
https://youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=U_nzqnXWvSo&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fjamesclear.com%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjY