

5.12 Short-Circuit Habits

Learn to break away from automated habits and gain control over your actions.

0

We all do certain things automatically, from brushing our teeth, to driving to work, to switching on the TV. Some habits are healthy; they keep us gainfully employed, physically in shape, or in fully-functioning relationships. These are excellent automated habits to maintain. Sometimes, however, we reflexively do things without thinking them through—to our detriment.

When we regularly indulge in unhealthy habits, we often find that we're not living in accordance with our values and damage our well-being. Succumbing to poor habits can make us feel like we have little choice in the world and are not living with intention, whereas challenging them can give us back our sense of agency.

1

- Break bad habits and stop indulging in behaviors that are not good for you.
- Live more authentically by making choices aligned with who you really are.

2

- If the habits are truly ingrained in your mind, this can be very hard.
- Merely altering your habits without digging deeper into their emotional roots can lead to internal conflict.

3

The first step is to identify the habits you want to address. You can do this by listing them on paper or digitally or by simply by taking a mental inventory. Once you've done this, be on the lookout for moments when one of them takes over and dictates your behavior.

When you're about to do something you'd like more control over, stop, take a couple of long breaths, and ask yourself why you are about to do whatever it is. Try to connect with your authentic self, deep inside you, and truly understand what is calling you to engage in the behavior. What needs are you fulfilling?

At times, you may discover that the answer feels right, positive, and healthy. In this case, you should go ahead and act on the impulse. Otherwise, you should exercise self-control and do something else instead.

Let's say you see a delicious-looking cake, and your knee-jerk reaction is to eat it. If you are on a diet or trying to cut back on sugar, however, stop for a moment and think about the cake. Do you really want it, or are you reaching for it out of habit? Are you hungry? What emotions are present? If you really want it, go ahead and enjoy it. If you're just reaching for it because it's in front of you and you habitually eat tempting food when it's available, you can choose to hold firm and find another option, like eating something nourishing or going for a walk.

4

1. Tool 5.13: Allow Yourself to Be Bored
 2. Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (Random House, 2014).
-