

The Power of HABIT

Charles Duhigg

‘All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits.’

William Jones.

Most of the choices we make each day may feel like the products of well considered decision making, but they are not. They’re habits.

**Duke university research in 2006
found that 40 % of the actions
people performed each day
weren't actual decisions but
habits.**

The process in which the brain converts a sequence of actions into an automatic routine – is known as ‘chunking’ and its at the root of how habits form.

Habits, scientists say, emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Left to its own devices, the brain would want to make any routine into a habit, because habits allow our minds to ramp down more often.

The process within our brains is a three step loop. First there is a CUE, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is ROUTINE, which can be physical or mental or emotional. Finally there is REWARD, which helps our brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future.

Cravings are what drive habits. And figuring out how to spark a craving makes craving a new habit easier. Foam in toothpaste, detergents and shampoo is an example, every morning, millions put on their jogging shoes to capture an endorphin rush they've learned to crave.

Tony Dungy the football coach said, ‘Champions don’t do extraordinary things. They do ordinary things, but do them without thinking, too fast for the other team to react. They follow the habits they’ve learned’

To change a habit, you must keep the old cue, and deliver the old reward, but insert a new routine.

Most people's habits have occurred for so long they don't pay attention to what causes it anymore.

How do habits change?

Unfortunately, there is no specific set of steps guaranteed to work for every person. We know that a habit cannot be eradicated-it must, instead be replaced. For a habit to stay changed, people must believe change is possible.

Some habits have the power to start a chain reaction, i.e. some habits are more powerful than others. These are 'keystone habits'. They start a process and transform everything.

For many people, exercise is a keystone habit that triggers widespread change. There is something about exercise that makes other good habits easier. Keystone habits offer what is known in academic literature as ‘small wins’

Small wins fuel transformative changes by leveraging tiny advantages into patterns that convince people that bigger achievements are within reach.

When Paul O'Neill looked at infant mortality in the US, he dug deep to realize that the teacher education and training was important to reducing this and not about educating doctors or midwives.

A keystone habit for people on a diet is food journaling, i.e. writing down everything they eat in a day. People who have a food journal lose twice as much weight as others who don't have a food journal.

Cultures grow out of keystone habits in a firm, whether leaders like it or not. In west point for instance, it's not IQ or physical strength that correlates to success later on but it is GRIT. Grit defined as the ability to work strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress.

Companies use keystone habits to create a culture. IBM focused on its research and selling techniques, Mc Kinsey through the habit of internal critiques, and risk assessment for Goldman Sachs.

When a manager in a factory wanted his people to come on time, he abolished allocated parking slots and moved to a first come first park basis. This immediately improved on time attendance in the factory.

An all important habit is willpower. Many studies show that willpower is the single most important keystone habit for success in life. Will power is about self control and discipline

Sometimes it looks as if people with great self control aren't working hard- but that's because they have made it so automatic. Their willpower happens without them having to think about it.

This is how willpower becomes a habit, by choosing a certain behavior ahead of time, and then following that routine when an inflection point arrives.

In companies, routines help employees to experiment with new ideas without having to take permission at every step.

The most important thing in firms about routines is that they create truce between potentially warring groups or individuals in a firm.

Companies aren't families. They are battlefields in a civil war.

In most companies an unspoken compact emerges. It's ok to be ambitious, but if you play too tough, your peers will unite against you. Its better to focus on boosting your own department, rather than undermining your rival.

Consumers change brands when they go through major life changing events.

In a society, a movement starts because of the social habits of friendship and the strong ties between close acquaintances.

Peer pressure, and the social habits that encourage people to conform to group expectations is difficult to describe, because it differs from one person to another. These are dozens of individual habits that cause everyone to move in the same direction.

Change might not be fast and it isn't always easy. But, with time, and effort, almost any habit can be reshaped.

The Framework of change

- **Identify the routine**
- **Experiment with rewards**
- **Isolate the cue**
- **Have a plan**