

# ATOMIC HABITS

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## Summary Of All Note in Atomic Habits

### Chapter Summary 1 (The Surprising Power of Atomic Habits)

- Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. Getting 1 percent better every day counts for a lot in the long-run.
- Habits are a double-edged sword. They can work for you or against you, which is why understanding the details is essential.
- Small changes often appear to make no difference until you cross a critical threshold. The most powerful outcomes of any compounding process are delayed. You need to be patient.
- An atomic habit is a little habit that is part of a larger system. Just as atoms are the building blocks of molecules, atomic habits are the building blocks of remarkable results.
- If you want better results, then forget about setting goals. Focus on your system instead.

- You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.

## Chapter Summary 2 (How Your Habits Shape Your Identity (and Vice Versa))

- A habit is a behavior that has been repeated enough times to become automatic. The ultimate purpose of habits is to solve the problems of life with as little energy and effort as possible.
- Any habit can be broken down into a feedback loop that involves four steps: cue, craving, response, and reward.
- The Four Laws of Behavior Change are a simple set of rules we can use to build better habits. They are (1) make it obvious, (2) make it attractive, (3) make it easy, and (4) make it satisfying.

## Chapter Summary 3 (How to Build Better Habits in 4 Simple Steps)

- There are three levels of change: outcome change, process change, and identity change.
- The most effective way to change your habits is to focus not on what you want to achieve, but on who you wish to become.
- Your identity emerges out of your habits. Every action is a vote for the type of person you wish to become.
- Becoming the best version of yourself requires you to continuously edit your beliefs, and to upgrade and expand your identity.
- The real reason habits matter is not because they can get you better results (although they can do that), but because they can change your beliefs about yourself.

## Chapter Summary 4 (The Man Who Didn't Look Right)

- With enough practice, your brain will pick up on the cues that predict certain outcomes without consciously thinking about it.
- Once our habits become automatic, we stop paying attention to what we are doing. The process of behavior change always starts with awareness. You need to be aware of your habits before you can change them.
- Pointing-and-Calling raises your level of awareness from a nonconscious habit to a more conscious level by verbalizing your actions.
- The Habits Scorecard is a simple exercise you can use to become more aware of your behavior.

## Chapter Summary 5 (The Best Way to Start a New Habit)

- The 1st Law of Behavior Change is *make it obvious*.
- The two most common cues are time and location.
- Creating an implementation intention is a strategy you can use to pair a new habit with a specific time and location.
- The implementation intention formula is: I will [BEHAVIOR] at [TIME] in [LOCATION].
- Habit stacking is a strategy you can use to pair a new habit with a current habit.
- The habit stacking formula is: After [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT].

## Chapter Summary 6 (Motivation Is Overrated; Environment Often Matters More)

- Small changes in context can lead to large changes in behavior over time.

- Every habit is initiated by a cue. We are more likely to notice cues that stand out.
- Make the cues of good habits obvious in your environment.
- Gradually, your habits become associated not with a single trigger but with the entire context surrounding the behavior. The context becomes the cue.
- It is easier to build new habits in a new environment because you are not fighting against old cues.

## Chapter Summary 7 (The Secret to Self-Control)

- The inversion of the 1st Law of Behavior Change is *make it invisible*.
- Once a habit is formed, it is unlikely to be forgotten.
- People with high self-control tend to spend less time in tempting situations. It's easier to avoid temptation than resist it.
- One of the most practical ways to eliminate a bad habit is to reduce exposure to the cue that causes it.
- Self-control is a short-term strategy, not a long-term one

## Chapter Summary 8 (How to Make a Habit Irresistible)

- The 2nd Law of Behavior Change is *make it attractive*.
- The more attractive an opportunity is, the more likely it is to become habit-forming. Habits are a dopamine-driven feedback loop. When dopamine rises, so does our motivation to act.
- It is the anticipation of a reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action. The greater the anticipation, the greater the dopamine spike.
- Temptation bundling is one way to make your habits more attractive. The strategy is to pair an action you *want* to do with an action you *need* to do.

## Chapter Summary 9 (The Role of Family and Friends in Shaping Your Habits)

- We tend to adopt habits that are praised and approved of by our culture because we have a strong desire to fit in and belong to the tribe.
- We tend to imitate the habits of three social groups: the close (family and friends), the many (the tribe), and the powerful (those with status and prestige).
- One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where (1) your desired behavior is the normal behavior and (2) you already have something in common with the group.
- The normal behavior of the tribe often overpowers the desired behavior of the individual. Most days, we'd rather be wrong with the crowd than be right by ourselves.
- If a behavior can get us approval, respect, and praise, we find it attractive.

## Chapter Summary 10 (How to Find and Fix the Causes of Your Bad Habits)

- The inversion of the 2nd Law of Behavior Change is *make it unattractive*.
- Every behavior has a surface level craving and a deeper underlying motive.
- Your habits are modern-day solutions to ancient desires.
- The cause of your habits is actually the prediction that precedes them. The prediction leads to a feeling.
- Highlight the benefits of avoiding a bad habit to make it seem unattractive.
- Habits are attractive when we associate them with positive feelings and unattractive when we associate them with negative feelings. Create a motivation ritual by doing something you enjoy immediately before a difficult habit.

## Chapter Summary 11 (Walk Slowly, but Never Backward)

- The 3rd Law of Behavior Change is *make it easy*.
- The most effective form of learning is practice, not planning.
- Focus on taking action, not being in motion.
- Habit formation is the process by which a behavior becomes progressively more automatic through repetition.
- The amount of time you have been performing a habit is not as important as the number of times you have performed it.

## Chapter Summary 12 (The Law of Least Effort)

- Human behavior follows the Law of Least Effort. We will naturally gravitate toward the option that requires the least amount of work.
- Create an environment where doing the right thing is as easy as possible.
- Reduce the friction associated with good behaviors. When friction is low, habits are easy.
- Increase the friction associated with bad behaviors. When friction is high, habits are difficult.
- Prime your environment to make future actions easier.

## Chapter Summary 13 (How to Stop Procrastinating by Using the Two-Minute Rule)

- Habits can be completed in a few seconds but continue to impact your behavior for minutes or hours afterward.
- Many habits occur at decisive moments—choices that are like a fork in the road—and either send you in the direction of a productive day or an unproductive one. ■ The Two-Minute Rule states, “When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.”

- The more you ritualize the beginning of a process, the more likely it becomes that you can slip into the state of deep focus that is required to do great things.
- Standardize before you optimize. You can't improve a habit that doesn't exist.

## Chapter Summary 14 (How to Make Good Habits Inevitable and Bad Habits Impossible)

- The inversion of the 3rd Law of Behavior Change is *make it difficult*.
- A commitment device is a choice you make in the present that locks in better behavior in the future.
- The ultimate way to lock in future behavior is to automate your habits
- Onetime choices—like buying a better mattress or enrolling in an automatic savings plan—are single actions that automate your future habits and deliver increasing returns over time.
- Using technology to automate your habits is the most reliable and effective way to guarantee the right behavior.

## Chapter Summary 15 (The Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change)

- The 4th Law of Behavior Change is *make it satisfying*.
- We are more likely to repeat a behavior when the experience is satisfying.
- The human brain evolved to prioritize immediate rewards over delayed rewards.
- The Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change: *What is immediately rewarded is repeated. What is immediately punished is avoided.*
- To get a habit to stick you need to feel immediately successful—even if it's in a small way.
- The first three laws of behavior change—*make it obvious, make it attractive, and make it easy*—increase the odds that a behavior

will be performed this time. The fourth law of behavior change—*make it satisfying*—increases the odds that a behavior will be repeated next time.

## Chapter Summary 16 (How to Stick with Good Habits Every Day)

- One of the most satisfying feelings is the feeling of making progress.
- A habit tracker is a simple way to measure whether you did a habit—like marking an X on a calendar.
- Habit trackers and other visual forms of measurement can make your habits satisfying by providing clear evidence of your progress.
- Don't break the chain. Try to keep your habit streak alive.
- Never miss twice. If you miss one day, try to get back on track as quickly as possible. Just because you can measure something doesn't mean it's the most important thing.

## Chapter Summary 17 (How an Accountability Partner Can Change Everything)

- The inversion of the 4th Law of Behavior Change is *make it unsatisfying*.
- We are less likely to repeat a bad habit if it is painful or unsatisfying.
- An accountability partner can create an immediate cost to inaction. We care deeply about what others think of us, and we do not want others to have a lesser opinion of us.
- A habit contract can be used to add a social cost to any behavior. It makes the costs of violating your promises public and painful.
- Knowing that someone else is watching you can be a powerful motivator.



## Chapter Summary 18 (The Truth About Talent (When Genes Matter and When They Don't)

- The secret to maximizing your odds of success is to choose the right field of competition.
- Pick the right habit and progress is easy. Pick the wrong habit and life is a struggle. Genes cannot be easily changed, which means they provide a powerful advantage in favorable circumstances and a serious disadvantage in unfavorable circumstances.
- Habits are easier when they align with your natural abilities. Choose the habits that best suit you.
- Play a game that favors your strengths. If you can't find a game that favors you, create one.
- Genes do not eliminate the need for hard work. They clarify it. They tell us *what* to work hard on.

## Chapter Summary 19 (The Goldilocks Rule: How to Stay Motivated in Life and Work)

- The Goldilocks Rule states that humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities.
- The greatest threat to success is not failure but boredom.
- As habits become routine, they become less interesting and less satisfying. We get bored.
- Anyone can work hard when they feel motivated. It's the ability to
- Keep going when work isn't exciting that makes the difference. Professionals stick to the schedule; amateurs let life get in the way

## Chapter Summary 20 (The Downside of Creating Good Habits)

- The upside of habits is that we can do things without thinking. The downside is that we stop paying attention to little errors.

- Habits + Deliberate Practice = Mastery
- Reflection and review is a process that allows you to remain conscious of your performance over time.
- The tighter we cling to an identity, the harder it becomes to grow beyond it.

## Little lessons from the Fours Laws

IN THIS BOOK, I have introduced a four-step model for human behavior: cue, craving, response, reward. This framework not only teaches us how to create new habits but also reveals some interesting insights about human behavior.

Problem Phase
1. Cue
2. Craving
Solution Phase
3. Response
4. Reward

In this section, I have compiled some lessons (and a few bits of common sense) that are confirmed by the model. The purpose of these examples is to clarify just how useful and wide-ranging this framework is when describing human behavior. Once you understand the model, you'll see examples of it everywhere.

**Awareness comes before desire.** A craving is created when you assign meaning to a cue. Your brain constructs an emotion or feeling to describe your current situation, and that means a craving can only occur after you have noticed an opportunity.

**Happiness is simply the absence of desire.** When you observe a cue, but do not desire to change your state, you are content with the current situation. Happiness is not about the achievement of pleasure (which is joy or satisfaction), but about the lack of desire. It

arrives when you have no urge to feel differently. Happiness is the state you enter when you no longer want to change your state.

However, happiness is fleeting because a new desire always comes along. As Caed Budris says, “Happiness is the space between one desire being fulfilled and a new desire forming.” Likewise, suffering is the space between craving a change in state and getting it.

**It is the *idea of pleasure that we chase.*** We seek the image of pleasure that we generate in our minds. At the time of action, we do not know what it will be like to attain that image (or even if it will satisfy us). The feeling of satisfaction only comes afterward. This is what the Austrian neurologist Victor Frankl meant when he said that happiness cannot be pursued, it must ensue. Desire is pursued. Pleasure ensues from action.

**Peace occurs when you don’t turn your observations into problems.** The first step in any behavior is observation. You notice a cue, a bit of information, an event. If you do not desire to act on what you observe, then you are at peace.

Craving is about wanting to fix everything. Observation without craving is the realization that you do not need to fix anything. Your desires are not running rampant. You do not crave a change in state. Your mind does not generate a problem for you to solve. You’re simply observing and existing.

**With a big enough *why* you can overcome any *how*.** Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher and poet, famously wrote, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” This phrase harbors an important truth about human behavior. If your motivation and desire are great enough (that is, *why* are you are acting), you’ll take action even when it is quite difficult. Great craving can power great action—even when friction is high.

**Being curious is better than being smart.** Being motivated and curious counts for more than being smart because it leads to action. Being smart will never deliver results on its own because it doesn’t get you to act. It is desire, not intelligence, that prompts behavior. As Naval Ravikant says, “The trick to doing anything is first cultivating a desire for it.”

**Emotions drive behavior.** Every decision is an emotional decision at some level. Whatever your logical reasons are for taking action, you only feel compelled to act on them because of emotion. In fact, people with damage to emotional centers of the brain can list many reasons for taking action but still will not act because they do not have emotions to drive them. This is why craving comes *before* response. The feeling comes first, and then the behavior.

**We can only be rational and logical *after* we have been emotional.** The primary mode of the brain is to feel; the secondary mode is to think. Our first response—the fast, nonconscious portion of the brain—is optimized for feeling and anticipating. Our second response—the slow, conscious portion of the brain—is the part that does the “thinking.”

Psychologists refer to this as System 1 (feelings and rapid judgments) versus System 2 (rational analysis). The feeling comes first (System 1); the rationality only intervenes later (System 2). This works great when the two are aligned, but it results in illogical and emotional thinking when they are not.

**Your response tends to follow your emotions.** Our thoughts and actions are rooted in what we find attractive, not necessarily in what is logical. Two people can notice the same set of facts and respond very differently because they run those facts through their unique emotional filter. This is one reason why appealing to emotion is typically more powerful than appealing to reason. If a topic makes someone feel emotional, they will rarely be interested in the data. This is why emotions can be such a threat to wise decision making.

Put another way: most people believe that the reasonable response is the one that benefits them: the one that satisfies their desires. To approach a situation from a more neutral emotional position allows you to base your response on the data rather than the emotion.

**Suffering drives progress.** The source of all suffering is the desire for a change in state. This is also the source of all progress. The desire to change your state is what powers you to take action. It is wanting more that pushes humanity to seek improvements, develop new technologies, and reach for a higher level. With craving,

we are dissatisfied but driven. Without craving, we are satisfied but lack ambition.

**Your actions reveal how badly you want something.** If you keep saying something is a priority but you never act on it, then you don't really want it. It's time to have an honest conversation with yourself. Your actions reveal your true motivations.

**Reward is on the other side of sacrifice.** Response (sacrifice of energy) always precedes reward (the collection of resources). The "runner's high" only comes after the hard run. The reward only comes after the energy is spent.

**Self-control is difficult because it is not satisfying.** A reward is an outcome that satisfies your craving. This makes self-control ineffective because inhibiting our desires does not usually resolve them. Resisting temptation does not satisfy your craving; it just ignores it. It creates space for the craving to pass. Self-control requires you to release a desire rather than satisfy it.

**Our expectations determine our satisfaction.** The gap between our cravings and our rewards determines how satisfied we feel after taking action. If the mismatch between expectations and outcomes is positive (surprise and delight), then we are more likely to repeat a behavior in the future. If the mismatch is negative (disappointment and frustration), then we are less likely to do so.

For example, if you expect to get \$10 and get \$100, you feel great. If you expect to get \$100 and get \$10, you feel disappointed. Your expectation changes your satisfaction. An average experience preceded by high expectations is a disappointment. An average experience preceded by low expectations is a delight. When liking and wanting are approximately the same, you feel satisfied.

$$\text{Satisfaction} = \text{Liking} - \text{Wanting}$$

This is the wisdom behind Seneca's famous quote, "Being poor is not having too little, it is wanting more." If your wants outpace your

likes, you'll always be unsatisfied. You're perpetually putting more weight on the problem than the solution.

Happiness is relative. When I first began sharing my writing publicly it took me three months to get one thousand subscribers. When I hit that milestone, I told my parents and my girlfriend. We celebrated. I felt excited and motivated. A few years later, I realized that one thousand people were signing up each day. And yet I didn't even think to tell anyone. It felt normal. I was getting results ninety times faster than before but experiencing little pleasure over it. It wasn't until a few days later that I realized how absurd it was that I wasn't celebrating something that would have seemed like a pipe dream just a few years before.

**The pain of failure correlates to the height of expectation.**

When desire is high, it hurts to not *like* the outcome. Failing to attain something you want hurts more than failing to attain something you didn't think much about in the first place. This is why people say, "I don't want to get my hopes up."

**Feelings come both before and after the behavior.** Before acting, there is a feeling that motivates you to act—the craving. After acting, there is a feeling that teaches you to repeat the action in the future—the reward.

Cue > Craving (Feeling) > Response > Reward (Feeling)

How we feel influences how we act, and how we act influences how we feel.

**Desire initiates. Pleasure sustains.** Wanting and liking are the two drivers of behavior. If it's not desirable, you have no reason to do it. Desire and craving are what initiate a behavior. But if it's not enjoyable, you have no reason to repeat it. Pleasure and satisfaction are what sustain a behavior. Feeling motivated gets you to act. Feeling successful gets you to repeat.

**Hope declines with experience and is replaced by acceptance.** The first time an opportunity arises, there is hope of what could be. Your expectation (cravings) is based solely on *promise*. The

second time around, your expectation is grounded in reality. You begin to understand how the process works and your hope is gradually traded for a more accurate prediction and acceptance of the likely outcome.

This is one reason why we continually grasp for the latest get-rich-quick or weight-loss scheme. New plans offer hope because we don't have any experiences to ground our expectations. New strategies seem more appealing than old ones because they can have unbounded hope. As Aristotle noted, "Youth is easily deceived because it is quick to hope." Perhaps this can be revised to "Youth is easily deceived because it only hopes."

There is no experience to root the expectation in. In the beginning, hope is all you have.