

Lesson 1 Lead Your Life

The Power of Atomic Habits

A habit is an atomic routine that is easy to do but has life-changing power. Good habits lead to small improvements on a daily basis. Over time, these tiny improvements can make a huge difference in our lives. If you are seeking to build and maintain good habits for a better life, here are some valuable tips to guide you.

What to Change

Give Yourself a New Identity

You might find it challenging to develop and maintain good habits for more than a few days. This often happens when people focus on changing external outcomes or behaviors rather than on where they originate from — their inner identity.

Behavior change consists of three layers. The outermost layer is outcome — what you achieve. The middle layer is process — what you do. The deepest and most fundamental layer is identity — what you believe or who you are. While changes in all three layers are useful in their own way, the key to lasting success lies in the direction of change. True behavior change occurs when there is a shift in your identity from within. If your new habit is not in harmony with your identity, it is unlikely to last.

You can work on changing your identity through two steps. First, keep asking yourself, “What kind of person do I want to become?” Once you have an idea of the kind of person you want to be, start reinforcing that identity through your actions. Specifically, repeat the action that kind of person would choose to do, and over time, you will naturally become such a person. For example, if you want to start exercising daily, think of yourself as an energetic and motivated person who cares about his or her health. Then try to do the routines that such a person would naturally do. Repeating these routines will gradually lead you to become that kind of person.

How to Change

Make Your Habit an Automatic Loop

After defining your desired identity, you will want to integrate new habits into your daily routines. It is worth noting here that any lasting habits take as little effort as possible. To make habits take effect almost automatically, we need to understand the concept of the habit loop, which consists of four steps: cue, craving, response, and reward. The smoother this loop operates, the more easily the habit is performed. The following four laws offer practical guidance for each step.

The 1st Law: Cue

"Make an obvious cue for your habit."

When creating a new habit, set a cue that sparks the habit and make the cue as obvious as possible. The two most common cues are time and location. The formula for your action plan can be "I will [BEHAVIOR] at [TIME] in [LOCATION]." Instead of a vague intent like "I will work out," be specific and tell yourself "I will work out for an hour starting at 8 p.m. at home."

Another effective method is habit stacking. Your current habit is already associated with a particular time and location, so pair it with a new one by saying something like "After I [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT]." Your action plan can be "After I finish dinner around 8 p.m., I'll immediately change into my workout clothes." The more this link between the cue and the action is repeated, the more firmly the new habit will be rooted in your life.

The 2nd Law: Craving

"Make your habit feel attractive."

When you enjoy doing something, a chemical substance called dopamine is released in your brain, which increases your motivation and makes you eager to repeat the action. Thus, it is crucial to make your habits attractive and enjoyable. This is where a strategy known as temptation bundling comes into play. Temptation bundling works by linking [ACTION I WANT] with [HABIT I NEED]. For example, if you want to watch your favorite TV show but need to work out, you can bundle these two actions together by watching the show only while exercising on your stationary bike in the living room. This way, you can seamlessly do what you need to do along with what you want to do.

The 3rd Law: Response

"Make your action easy to start."

Every behavior requires effort, but people often prefer actions that require less effort. If a habit is easier to do, it's more likely to be repeated. It is important to create an environment that makes habits easier to do. For example, if you aim to work out regularly, you could set up a dedicated workout area like a space in your living room. This will ensure that all your workout equipment is readily available while keeping distractions away. Another approach is the two-minute rule. When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do. For instance, instead of setting a goal like "Work out," use a two minute version like "Place the mat on the floor." This strategy is powerful because once you've started an action, it becomes significantly easier to continue.

The 4th Law: Reward

"Make your effort satisfying."

What is rewarded is repeated. When a behavior feels rewarding and satisfying, people are likely to repeat it. To maintain a new habit, it is important to experience a sense of immediate accomplishment, even in small ways. In fact, simply knowing that you are making progress is a quick and highly motivating reward in itself. One effective method of keeping track of your progress is to use a habit tracker. This tool lets you use a formula like "After I [NEW HABIT], I will [TRACK MY HABIT]." For example, you can write "After I finish my daily workout, I'll record it in my workout journal." This provides you with moments of satisfaction, which helps you stick to your new habit.