

Your Kindle Notes For:

Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones

James Clear

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A habit is a routine or behavior that is performed regularly—and, in many cases, automatically. As each semester passed, I accumulated small but consistent habits that ultimately led to results that were unimaginable to me when I started.

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We all deal with setbacks but in the long run, the quality of our lives often depends on the quality of our habits. With the same habits, you'll end up with the same results. But with better habits, anything is possible.

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Anything wise in these pages you should credit to the many experts who preceded me. Anything foolish, assume it is my error.

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The backbone of this book is my four-step model of habits—cue, craving, response, and reward—and the four laws of behavior change that evolve out of these steps.

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Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement.

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Making a choice that is 1 percent better or 1 percent worse seems insignificant in the moment, but over the span of moments that make up a lifetime these choices determine the difference between who you are and who you could be.

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Mastery requires patience.

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The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision.

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FORGET ABOUT GOALS, FOCUS ON SYSTEMS INSTEAD

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Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results.

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Goals are good for setting a direction, but systems are best for making progress. A handful of problems arise when you spend too much time thinking about your goals and not enough time designing your systems.

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You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. Focusing on the overall system, rather than a single goal, is one of the core themes of this book.

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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.

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

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Outcomes are about what you get. Processes are about what you do. Identity is about what you believe.

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Behind every system of actions are a system of beliefs.

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It's one thing to say I'm the type of person who wants this. It's something very different to say I'm the type of person who is this.

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Improvements are only temporary until they become part of who you are.

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In this way, the process of building habits is actually the process of becoming yourself.

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This is one reason why meaningful change does not require radical change.

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It doesn't matter if you cast a few votes for a bad behavior or an unproductive habit. Your goal is simply to win the majority of the time.

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The concept of identity-based habits is our first introduction to another key theme in this book: feedback loops. Your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits. It's a two-way street.

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You need to know who you want to be. Otherwise, your quest for change is like a boat without a rudder.

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Ultimately, your habits matter because they help you become the type of person you wish to be.

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This is the feedback loop behind all human behavior: try, fail, learn, try differently. With practice, the useless movements fade away and the useful actions get reinforced. That's a habit forming.

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Habits are mental shortcuts learned from experience. In a sense, a habit is just a memory of the steps you previously followed to solve a problem in the past.

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The process of building a habit can be divided into four simple steps: cue, craving, response, and reward.

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Cues are meaningless until they are interpreted. The thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the observer are what transform a cue into a craving.

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Finally, the response delivers a reward. Rewards are the end goal of every habit. The cue is about noticing the reward. The craving is about wanting the reward. The response is about obtaining the reward. We chase rewards because they serve two purposes: (1) they satisfy us and (2) they teach us.

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that we tie the same shoe first each morning,

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Whenever you want to change your behavior, you can simply ask yourself: How can I make it obvious? How can I make it attractive? How can I make it easy? How can I make it satisfying?

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If you're still having trouble determining how to rate a particular habit, here is a question I like to use: "Does this behavior help me become the type of person I wish to be? Does this habit cast a vote for or against my desired identity?"

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The process of behavior change always starts with awareness.

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The sentence they filled out is what researchers refer to as an implementation intention, which is a plan you make beforehand about when and where to act. That is, how you intend to implement a particular habit.

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The simple way to apply this strategy to your habits is to fill out this sentence: I will [BEHAVIOR] at [TIME] in [LOCATION]. Meditation. I will meditate for one minute at 7 a.m. in my kitchen. Studying. I will study Spanish for twenty minutes at 6 p.m. in my bedroom. Exercise. I will exercise for one hour at 5 p.m. in my local gym. Marriage. I will make my partner a cup of tea at 8 a.m. in the kitchen.

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The human body has about eleven million sensory receptors. Approximately ten million of those are dedicated to sight. Some experts estimate that half of the brain's resources are used on vision.

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no surprise that visual cues are the greatest catalyst of our behavior. For this reason, a small change in what you see can lead to a big shift in what you do.

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If you want to drink more water, fill up a few water bottles each morning and place them in common locations around the house.

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Stop thinking about your environment as filled with objects. Start thinking about it as filled with relationships. Think in terms of how you interact with the spaces around you.

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Create a separate space for work, study, exercise, entertainment, and cooking. The mantra I find useful is “One space, one use.”

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Every habit should have a home.

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The people with the best self-control are typically the ones who need to use it the least. It's easier to practice self-restraint when you don't have to use it very often. So, yes, perseverance, grit, and willpower are essential to success, but the way to improve these qualities is not by wishing you were a more disciplined person, but by creating a more disciplined environment.

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To put it bluntly, I have never seen someone consistently stick to positive habits in a negative environment.

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Ultimately, such strategies enable food scientists to find the “bliss point” for each product—the precise combination of salt, sugar, and fat that excites your brain and keeps you coming back for more. The result, of course, is that you overeat because hyperpalatable foods are more attractive to the human brain.

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Scientists can track the precise moment a craving occurs by measuring a neurotransmitter called dopamine.*

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Whenever you predict that an opportunity will be rewarding, your levels of dopamine spike in anticipation. And whenever dopamine rises, so does your motivation to act.

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It is the anticipation of a reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action.

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Your brain has far more neural circuitry allocated for wanting rewards than for liking them.

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We imitate the habits of three groups in particular: The close. The many. The powerful.

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One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior.

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Humans are similar. There is tremendous internal pressure to comply with the norms of the group. The reward of being accepted is often greater than the reward of winning an argument, looking smart, or finding truth. Most days, we'd rather be wrong with the crowd than be right by ourselves.

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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.

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Your habits are modern-day solutions to ancient desires. New versions of old vices. The underlying motives behind human behavior remain the same. The specific habits we perform differ based on the period of history.

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You see a cue, categorize it based on past experience, and determine the appropriate response. This all happens in an instant, but it plays a crucial role in your habits because every action is preceded by a prediction. Life feels reactive, but it is actually predictive. All day long, you are making your best guess of how to act given what you've just seen and what has worked for you in the past. You are endlessly predicting what will happen in the next moment.

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Desire is the difference between where you are now and where you want to be in the future.

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What you really want is to feel different. Our feelings and emotions tell us whether to hold steady in our current state or to make a change.

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I once heard a story about a man who uses a wheelchair. When asked if it was difficult being confined, he responded, "I'm not confined to my wheelchair—I am liberated by it. If it wasn't for my wheelchair, I would be bed-bound and never able to leave my house." This shift in perspective completely transformed how he lived each day.

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Instead of telling yourself "I need to go run in the morning," say "It's time to build endurance and get fast."

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Saving money is often associated with sacrifice. However, you can associate it with freedom rather than limitation if you realize one simple truth: living below your current means increases your future means.

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Once a habit has been built, the cue can prompt a craving, even if it has little to do with the original situation.

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I refer to this as the difference between being in motion and taking action. The two ideas sound similar, but they're not the same. When you're in motion, you're planning and strategizing and learning. Those are all good things, but they don't produce a result. Action, on the other hand, is the type of behavior that will deliver an outcome. If I outline twenty

ideas for articles I want to write, that's motion. If I actually sit down and write an article, that's action. If I search for a better diet plan and read a few books on the topic, that's motion. If I actually eat a healthy meal, that's action. Sometimes motion is useful, but it will never produce an outcome by itself.

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One of the most common questions I hear is, "How long does it take to build a new habit?" But what people really should be asking is, "How many does it take to form a new habit?" That is, how many repetitions are required to make a habit automatic?

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What matters is the rate at which you perform the behavior. You could do something twice in thirty days, or two hundred times. It's the frequency that makes the difference.

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Energy is precious, and the brain is wired to conserve it whenever possible.

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Habits like scrolling on our phones, checking email, and watching television steal so much of our time because they can be performed almost without effort. They are remarkably convenient.

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we discussed environment design as a method for making cues more obvious, but you can also optimize your environment to make actions easier. For example, when deciding where to practice a new habit, it is best to choose a place that is already along the path of your daily routine.

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"When I walk into a room everything is in its right place," Nuckols wrote. "Because I do this every day in every room, stuff always stays in good shape. . . . People think I work hard but I'm actually really lazy. I'm just proactively lazy. It gives you so much time back."

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Want to exercise? Set out your workout clothes, shoes, gym bag, and water bottle ahead of time. Want to improve your diet? Chop up a ton of fruits and vegetables on weekends and pack them in containers, so you have easy access to healthy, ready-to-eat options during the week.

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It is remarkable how little friction is required to prevent unwanted behavior. When I hide beer in the back of the fridge where I can't see it, I drink less.

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Whether we are approaching behavior change as an individual, a parent, a coach, or a leader, we should ask ourselves the same question: "How can we design a world where it's easy to do what's right?" Redesign your life so the actions that matter most are also the actions that are easiest to do.

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Habits are automatic choices that influence the conscious decisions that follow. Yes, a habit can be completed in just a few seconds, but it can also shape the actions that you take for minutes or hours afterward.

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What you want is a "gateway habit" that naturally leads you down a more productive path.

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You're not worried about getting in shape. You're focused on becoming the type of person who doesn't miss workouts. You're taking the smallest action that confirms the type of person you want to be.

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A commitment device is a choice you make in the present that controls your actions in the future.

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Commitment devices increase the odds that you'll do the right thing in the future by making bad habits difficult in the present. However, we can do even better. We can make good habits inevitable and bad habits impossible.

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I'd wager that if the average person were to simply do half of the onetime actions on this list—even if they didn't give another thought to their habits—most would find themselves living a better life a year from now.

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When you automate as much of your life as possible, you can spend your effort on the tasks machines cannot do yet. Each habit that we hand over to the authority of technology frees up time and energy to pour into the next stage of growth.

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The downside of automation is that we can find ourselves jumping from easy task to easy task without making time for more difficult, but ultimately more rewarding, work.

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The constant tug of “just one more minute” can prevent me from doing anything of consequence. (I’m not the only one. The average person spends over two hours per day on social media. What could you do with an extra six hundred hours per year?)

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By utilizing commitment devices, strategic onetime decisions, and technology, you can create an environment of inevitability—a space where good habits are not just an outcome you hope for but an outcome that is virtually guaranteed.

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Pleasure teaches your brain that a behavior is worth remembering and repeating.

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Stories like these are evidence of the Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change: What is rewarded is repeated. What is punished is avoided. You learn what to do in the future based on what you were rewarded for doing (or punished for doing) in the past. Positive emotions cultivate habits. Negative emotions destroy them.

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Put another way, the costs of your good habits are in the present. The costs of your bad habits are in the future.