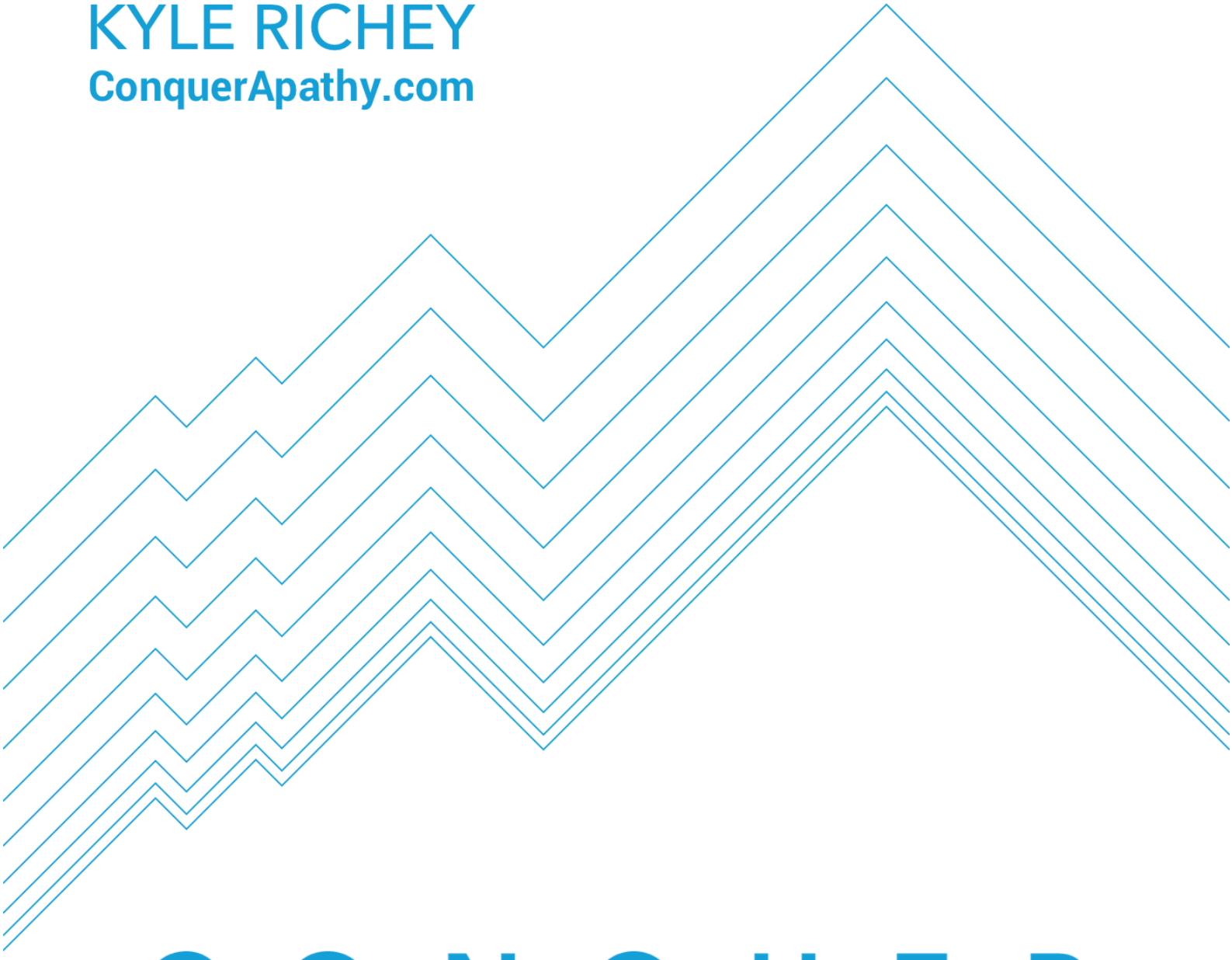
KYLE RICHEY
ConquerApathy.com



CONQUER HABITS

3 Steps to Take Control of Your Habits and Make Strides Every Day

Copyright © 2018 Kyle Richey

All rights reserved worldwide.

ConquerApathy.com

To Danielle, Aiden & Connor.

I love you more than anything.

Introduction

“Deep in the snowy mountains lives a tiny bird. Tortured by the numbing cold of the night, the bird cries out that it will build a warm nest in the morning.

Yet when morning comes, it sleeps the day away, basking in the warmth of the sun.

And so it continues, crying vainly throughout its life.”

I can almost hear someone yelling “Somebody get that bird a tiny blanket!”

From our outside perspective, there’s an easy solution, right? “Make your nest during the day when it’s warm, little bird, and everything will be so much easier for you. Your whole life would be better if you would just do that one simple thing.”

Right? Right. Well, sort of. Turns out it’s a bit more complicated than that.

Here’s the deal: This book is not about birds (don’t worry, the bird got its act together and built an epic nest, so it’s all warm and cozy now). It’s about people.

It's about you, me, all of us…and the habits we've built over the years. Even the ones that are so "easy" to fix from the outside. We know what's right and what's wrong, it's just tough to actually do it.

So why kick things off with a story about a bird that complains about its circumstances, but won't do anything to improve them?

Because that's exactly what we do. Every last one of us.

The most common disconnect between our goals and reality? Our habits.

We give in to our impulses and get set in our ways, causing us to make irrational decisions with little to no conscious thought, all for a small, short-lived benefit.

The deeper we're set in our ways, basking in the warmth of our comfort zone, the more difficult it is to overcome the habits we've formed, even when we desperately want to build better habits that actually make our lives the best they can be.

In some cases, the fact that habits form naturally can be a great thing.

For instance, it would really suck if you couldn't make a habit out of mundane or repetitive tasks like driving or brushing your teeth, right?

Our brains are wired to make habits of these things so we don't have to exert much energy or attention to them. That way, we can focus on more important tasks.

It's also incredibly useful once you've built a new habit that improves your life, because you can keep getting its positive results with minimal effort from then on.

However, there are two main problems with habits:

1. When we develop bad habits, it's really hard to break them.
2. When we build good habits, we tend to settle in and stop improving.

The goal with this book is to solve both of those problems for you, quickly.

Fortunately, just like that cold little bird that could easily build a nest when conditions are right, we can set ourselves up for success.

Complaining about where we're at can be useful, if we motivate ourselves by striving for an inspiring goal. Or, it can be draining and pointless. It's up to you.

Most people live their lives wanting something more, to become the best versions of themselves…yet they don't consistently put in the work every day to make progress toward their goals.

Fortunately, you're not one of those people.

You're taking the initiative, so you're clearly not one to complain without taking action, which puts you way ahead of most from the start.

So, let's dive in!

You might be wondering who I am, or how this book is going to help you build good habits, break bad habits, and achieve your goals.

Quick background: Why I wrote this book

My name is Kyle Richey. At the start of 2011, I was getting tired of hearing people say things like “Why even set New Year’s resolutions? They never last anyway.”

Not because they were wrong, but because they were right…I felt the same way.

It’s really difficult to change our behavior, especially habits we’ve developed over decades.

By the end of the year, I felt pretty good about how I was managing my tasks and planning my day (using software to keep everything organized), but I still felt like a huge piece of the puzzle was missing.

I didn’t have a way to set big-picture goals and keep track of my progress, all the way down to the little things I do every day to keep moving in the right direction.

When I couldn’t find something to help me track all of my daily and life goals in one place, I set out to create it myself.

Little did I know, that simple decision would change my entire life…

After a few years of hard work, I finally had a flexible app to track everything that was important to me and hold me accountable. In that time, I used it to dramatically improve my health, finances, relationships, and even my hobbies.

It's called Strides, and in just a few years I used it to lose 40 lbs, cut more than seven points off my body fat percentage, and pay off over $100,000 in debt, all while spending more time with my family and on my hobbies.

The crazy part? During that time, my wife and I had both of our sons, only 20 months apart. I thought it'd be really difficult to keep up with things as I became a new parent twice-over, and it was, but having a system to keep me on track was key.

Improving all these things was the reason it all started, but I could never have guessed that 100,000's of other people from 142 countries would have tracked millions of goals and habits with Strides too. Those numbers grow every day, and I couldn't be more proud.

But that's not why I'm writing this book.

Honestly, it doesn't matter if you use my app, or any app for that matter.

You could use a notebook, whiteboard, kitchen timer, spreadsheets, whatever you want, as long as you're tracking the things you care about. More on that in a bit...

I'm writing this because I've learned a lot from building and improving a habit tracking app used by so many people. I've personally talked with over 12,000 people through email and over the phone about their habits, and the same questions come up over and over.

I never planned on writing a book because the app seemed to work well enough on its own, but I kept getting requests for a strategy guide to outline the concepts, which could be used by anyone, no matter what system they're using.

How this book is different

It's a step-by-step guide, like a workbook you can go through at a comfortable pace, then reference it whenever you're trying to solve a problem with your habits.

My goal is to answer the most common questions, so you can:

1. Focus on the highest-impact habits.
2. Set goals that are achievable, yet inspiring.
3. Get faster, longer-lasting results by pushing just past your comfort zone.
4. Pick the most effective rewards and/or punishments.
5. Avoid the most common mistakes with tracking habits.
6. Get back on track when things don't go as planned.
7. Break bad habits, even if they're really deeply-rooted.
8. Treat life like a game to make it all genuinely fun.

In short, I want to help you conquer your habits.

Why call the book “Conquer Habits”?

Conquer - verb. To successfully overcome, take control of.

An estimated 40% of our actions are not conscious decisions we make.

That’s crazy! If someone said they were going to take control of almost half the actions you take every day, you’d be mad, right? Well, that’s the whole idea:

Your habits aren’t in control. You are.

If you feel like you’re not in control of forming positive habits that will add value to your life, and replacing bad habits that make your life worse with good ones, then this book will help you take back control and conquer your habits.

Sound good? Awesome. Let’s start with why habits matter in the first place:

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” ~Aristotle

It’s simple, really: If you repeatedly do things that add value, your life will be better. If you repeatedly do things that subtract value, your life will be worse.

For all my math geek homies out there, here's a cool way of breaking it down:

$$1.01^{365} = 37.8$$

$$0.99^{365} = 0.03$$

This means if you improve by just 1% every day, you'll be 37.8x better in a year.

But, if you slip by just 1% per day, you'll lose 97% of your progress in a year.

It's crazy how different the results are, with such a gradual adjustment.

That must be why Albert Einstein called this compounding effect the *"greatest mathematical discovery of all time."*

Your habits work in exactly the same way.

The more good habits you can develop - even if they're little things - the more value they'll add to your life.

Conversely, the more bad habits you form - again, even if they seem insignificant - the more value they'll subtract from your life.

Each positive action you take, and each bad habit you break or replace with a better one, is like taking a huge step toward your long-term goals.

Habits may be a simple concept, but in order to take control of a process deeply hardwired in to our brains, we're going to need to get more intel on them.

How do habits work?

It's worth going into a tiny bit of the background here, but I won't spend much time on it because several great books have been written on the theory.

If you're interested in learning the concepts behind how they work, The Power of Habit is the book to read for the deep-dive into how we form habits.

Since this book is more of an action plan, I'm excited to jump in to the first step to take, but it's important to briefly lay the foundation for the way habits work.

Basically, all habits have the same three stages.

Charles Duhigg, the author of The Power of Habit, calls them:

1. **Cue**: Something triggers a thought or impulse to do the habit.
2. **Routine**: You act on the behavior without much thought.
3. **Reward**: Lastly, you get some sort of short-lived benefit.

This is a loop, and the more you go through the loop, the more engrained the habit becomes, making it more and more difficult to control.

Fortunately, you can definitely regain control, and that's what we're focused on.

Awesome, now that you know why habits are so important, how they can improve your life, and how they work, the first step to conquering them is...

Planning

“By failing to prepare, you’re preparing to fail.
~Benjamin Franklin

You’re smart, so I’m sure you know that setting goals will help you succeed. No need to hammer that point home, right? Cool. But here’s the thing…

Having a goal in mind is crucial, but planning is so much more than that.

The most important benefit of planning ahead is a simple shift in mindset that, when applied in practice on a daily basis, can be totally life-changing:

In everything you do, consider how it will affect <u>future you</u>.

Whether it’s doing the dishes so you don’t have to see them in the morning, not eating that second piece of cake at a party, or focusing on an important project for an hour every day to gradually make progress, think about how *future you* will feel about the choice you make today.

So who is this “future you”? A real person, just like present you, but one you often mistreat, take for granted, and quite frankly screw over with short-sighted choices.

Little decisions you make in the present, like hitting the snooze button, skipping a workout, or watching too much TV, actually hurt future you.

Oh, and this isn’t limited to the long-term future. It could be as short-term as doing something now that will help you 15 minutes later.

It’s easy to prioritize now. That’s what mindfulness is all about, after all, and being present is vital for true happiness. If you can’t be happy in the moment, what makes you think you’ll be happy later? Different circumstances aren’t the key to happiness, it’s all about being grateful for what you have, and working toward the next goal.

That said, being present and stuffing your face with pizza and ice cream don’t have to be one and the same.

Typically, they’re not. If that’s what you need right now, fine.

But if you make that a habit, then that’s a different story, and it’s one you’ll regret.

While it's awesome to "live in the now" and "focus on the present", there's a fine line between this mentality and never making any progress or living a fulfilling life.

Be present, but if you want to do great things and feel amazing about your life, there is one single realization that can change everything:

There are more moments for future you than for present you.

This is a wonderful thing. The present moment is most important, but it's still exactly that: one, single moment.

Think of it like a minute. This minute is the one to pay the most attention to, of course, but future you has all the minutes left in your entire life.

So, by all means, appreciate this moment. That's what life is all about. But...

If you deeply appreciate the present moment, doesn't it make sense to appreciate each of your future moments at least as much?

Collectively, wouldn't you say that all those moments add up to be worth a lot more than the present moment?

If so, the key is to keep those future moments in mind with the decisions you make now, and develop the habit of enjoying now *because* you're treating future you with respect.

You're actively making progress, preventing problems, and making decisions that add real value to your life and others' so you can truly enjoy life now and in the future.

This is why planning ahead is so important.

Not because your plans will always work out perfectly (they won't, and that's fine because the plan is what's important, not exactly how it plays out), but because the act of thinking about how your future self and other people will be affected by your present actions can be even more rewarding.

Oh yeah, and it will give you a much higher sense of purpose, while dramatically increasing your chances of succeeding at your goals.

Convinced? Perfect, let's do this…

Where to Begin

Sweet, you're ready to lay a solid foundation for your habits!

This will be a fun process, and shouldn't take long. Here's what we'll cover:

- What are the most important areas of your life?
- What is your ideal outcome for each area? (Setting SMART goals)

- What actions can you take regularly to achieve your ideal outcome?

Choosing an ideal outcome across the board is too broad, and not very helpful.

Note: This is a good time to mention that you can treat this as a workbook. Feel free to take notes in the book or wherever you like as you go through the steps.

The most important areas of your life

The best way to get started is to break your life into areas. For most people, these are things like health, wellness, family, friends, spirituality, career, money, etc.

How would you categorize the areas of your life? Don't worry if they're totally different from the examples I gave. Just list the areas that come to mind.

Got it? Really? Don't skip this part!

Okay, I believe you. :)

Now, make a second pass at your list, trimming anything that doesn't fire you up.

If you included an area on the list that doesn't actually get you excited, maybe just because you think it *should* be important to you, the rest of this won't work well.

If there's an area that you haven't been prioritizing, but you'd genuinely like to, that's great. Having a lot of room for improvement is awesome for getting a big return on your investment.

However, if there's something you think you should prioritize because other people do, or because someone influential prioritizes it, but you don't actually care that much about it right now, then leave it out. You can always come back to it later.

The important part of this step is to choose the areas of your life that matter most to YOU.

If you choose too many priorities, you won't be able to prioritize any of them.

Did you know the plural *priorities* wasn't used in the English language until the 1940s?! For centuries it was just *priority*. Only one. Take that to heart and focus.

Once you have your list of important areas of your life, the next step is to write out the following for each area:

1. Define your ideal outcome with SMART Goals.
2. List at least 2-3 things you could do regularly to help achieve that outcome.

Define Your Ideal with SMART Goals

In case you haven't heard the term before, or could use a quick refresher:

Lots of people set goals like "Run a marathon" or "Start my own business".

Those are fine goals, but they could be...let's say, more intelligent:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Timely

For example, rather than setting a goal like “Start my own business”, setting a SMART Goal could be more like “Prototype my idea and get feedback from 5 people in my target market by June 1st.”

See the difference? This is a much more specific goal, which allows your mind to make it more concrete. You could still call your goal “Start my own business” or “Test Prototype”, but the target you set needs to be specific.

It’s also crucial to be able to measure the outcome (e.g. Get feedback from 5 people).

Since you can choose the number, make it achievable; it should be a bit difficult, outside your comfort zone, but close enough to feel motivating.

Note: Sometimes it can be a helpful thought exercise to think about what you’d do if you had to 10x your goal. Could you do it? How would it work? From there, I’d still recommend setting a closer goal as a milestone on the

way to that big goal, but the thought process can be eye-opening and inspiring.

In the case of starting a business, prototyping an idea is very helpful for processing your own thoughts, and it can move the business itself forward quickly, so it's relevant.

Putting a date to it makes it timely. Studies show that setting a deadline can inspire us to focus on the essential and consistently make progress to finish on time.

Alright, back to it: For each area you'd like to focus on, define your ideal.

Want an example to get the creative juices flowing? No problem…

One of the areas I chose is Health. My ideal for Health is to be in good shape so I can play with my sons, with a lean, muscular build that makes me feel strong and confident.

What does that mean specifically? A few ideas came to mind:

- Strength: Be able to lift weights at high reps with good form to prevent injuries.
- Speed: Be able to run at least a mile at a fast speed, or quickly at an incline.

- Agility: Be nimble and flexible; able to play, walk, or lift without feeling sore.
- Looks: To have a body fat % in the range I'm most confident about.

These are just my thoughts. Of course yours could be totally different.

The important thing is that you take those concepts and do something with them.

For example, here are some SMART Goals I could set for my health:

- Strength: Lift weights 5 times per week, gradually increasing weight/reps.
- Speed: Be able to run a mile in an average of 6 minutes or less.
- Agility: Do a full-body stretch routine once per day.
- Looks: Reach 14% body fat by June 1st.

Cool, so I have my ideal outcome, and I'm starting to drill down and get some ideas for what to focus on to reach that outcome.

Once you've completed this step (please take your time and feel free to go back through it to knock it out of the park before moving on), it'll be time to move on to building the routine that will get you there. So, now that you've set goals to define your ideal in each of the most important areas of your life, it's time to…

Choose Habits to Reach Your Ideal

Now it's time to break down these bigger-picture goals into simple things you can do on a regular basis. These are habits you can build over time to move you forward.

You're just brainstorming at this phase, so feel free to do some quick searches online to come up with more ideas that can help you reach your ideal.

No matter what you have in mind, there are bound to be dozens of high-quality blog posts by experts that will teach you at least the fundamentals for free.

So, you should have a nice list of everything you're thinking about doing for this area. All set? If not, take your time and write it down. This part is crucial.

Once you're ready, it's time to filter it down to the high-impact actions to focus on.

As an example, here's what I'd personally like to do every day for my health:

- Average at least 7.5 hours of sleep
- Walk: Get at least 10,000 steps
- Stretch: Do a 5-minute full-body stretch routine
- Drink at least 6 glasses of water
- Portion Control: Don't get seconds
- Avoid eating snacks at night after dinner
- Eat at least 3 servings of vegetables

These are the highest-impact things I can do every day for my health.

Some things are best done on more of a weekly routine:

- Work Out: Strength training 5 times per week (two rest days)
- Run at least a mile 2 times per week
- Interval training 3 times per week

The specific goals set for each of the chosen habits will be different for everyone, and will likely even change for you over time.

Important: Set goals just beyond what you feel would be easy for you. If it's too hard, it will be demotivating. If it's too easy, it won't help you grow.

For example, if I don't drink enough water I get headaches, so I set my goal to 5 glasses per day. Over time, I found that 6 glasses made me feel better, so I bumped up my goal.

I also tend to average about 7 hours of sleep, but I feel best when I get a bit more than that, so my goal of 7.5 hours keeps me in check and encourages me to get to bed instead of watching just "one more episode" on Netflix.

Side note: See how one good habit can lead to another? Because I care about getting more sleep, I watch less TV. The two combined mean I have more time and energy to invest in my other goals. It's a virtuous cycle.

Planning Checklist

Now that you've read through the concepts, let's make sure you've had a chance to really dive in and use them to lay out your own plan.

1. Write down all the areas of your life, however you like to think of them.
2. Then, trim the list down to the most important areas to focus on right now.
3. For the first area, define your ideal scenario by setting SMART Goals.
4. List the daily/weekly habits to build that will help you achieve that ideal.
5. Repeat Steps 3-4 for each of the important areas you chose in Step 2.

Now, it might be tempting to read that checklist and move right along.

Please don't.

Remember, this is not a novel. It's an action plan, a strategy guide for helping you lay a solid foundation to build good habits and set yourself up for success.

To take full advantage of this system, which has taken years to develop with 1,000's of people, it's important to complete each step fully.

Once you've chosen the areas of your life to focus on, set inspiring goals based on your ideal outcome in each area, and chosen habits to get you there, it's time to learn a few tricks of the trade to make it all easier.

We'll start with some tips to set yourself up for success, then explore rewards and punishments, and from there you'll be ready to start tracking your progress.

Setting Up for Success

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening my axe.” ~Abraham Lincoln

Good old Honest Abe is talking about a lot more than chopping down trees.

Success requires defining what it means to you (setting your goal), then giving yourself the best chance for succeeding by planning ahead.

In this case, he’s doing something simple upfront to make all the work from that point on as easy as possible.

This step is all about getting in the macro-level planning mindset to make adjustments to your surroundings/ setting so you don’t have to rely on willpower.

Willpower is a habit too, and it can be learned or even trained like a muscle, but it’s incredibly helpful to set up systems and routines to decrease your reliance on willpower in the moment.

It’s almost like your willpower is fuel in a tank, so you only have so much for the day. Some days you have less than

others, depending on how much sleep you got, your mood, how well you've eaten, stress, etc.

When someone is trying to overcome a powerful addiction, there's an acronym that is used to describe common triggers/moods to be aware of:

Bored

Lonely

Angry

Stressed

Tired

Some people add Hungry to that list, but BLASTH doesn't have quite the same ring to it. :)

These are emotions and physical states that make it even harder than usual to depend on willpower alone.

Your energy, environment, the people around you, and your daily routine all affect your willpower, and there are plenty of little tricks you can use to make your willpower last longer.

Being aware of your setting, and making simple adjustments to it, is one of the easiest ways to form new habits.

The first step? Know your triggers.

Think about what causes you to do something you know isn't good for you.

One of the most common triggers is proximity. Having something close by can create a powerful desire to do the wrong thing. 'Out of sight, out of mind' typically works well to fix this trigger.

For example, if your trigger for eating cookies is that you see the cookie jar on your counter after dinner, put it in the pantry so you don't see it all the time. Or, better yet: If you're trying to kick the cookie habit completely, get rid of the cookie jar and just have a cookie when you go to a party so it's actually a treat.

This is one simple change you can make in a moment, when your willpower is strong, that will make it so you don't need to use your limited willpower to make the right choice night after night.

Another commonly-cited example is to use smaller dinner plates. A study found this to be a very simple habit hack for people that are working on portion control:

“Using 10 inch diameter plates instead of the traditional 12 inch plates decreases the amount of food people eat without having an effect on their perceived fullness or satisfaction.”

One of the simplest little tricks I like is to set out my workout clothes the night before to lower the barrier for exercising.

If it only takes a minute to put on my workout clothes and shoes, then that’s one less excuse, so I’m more likely to do it.

Across the board, just about anything you’d like to be better about requires willpower, which is in limited supply.

Fortunately, there’s always a way to create a system or routine to make it easier in the moment, which can drastically improve your results.

Again, think about how to make life easier for future you.

Figure out what helps or hurts your habit, then set yourself up for success in a moment of strength so you don't have to be strong over and over again.

Rewards & Punishments

It's an age-old question: "Which is better, the carrot or the stick?"

Do you respond better to a potential reward for doing the right thing, or the threat of being punished if you do the wrong thing?

Any two people could see this one way or the other, but it's important to know about a key concept called Loss Aversion.

Loss Aversion is our tendency to greatly prefer preventing the loss of something we already have over gaining something new.

It's a simple idea, first proven by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, but it's incredibly powerful in practice.

To illustrate this concept, think of it this way:

If I offered you $1,000 if I flip a coin and it comes up heads, would you take it?

Of course! Why not? There's nothing to lose.

But what if the offer was you get $1,000 if it's heads, but you lose $1,000 if it's tails?

The vast majority of people won't take this bet, even though the expected value is 50% x $1,000 + 50% x -$1,000 = $0, meaning they could take this bet over and over without the risk of losing any money.

So why won't they take the bet? Loss Aversion.

The fear of losing $1,000 of our hard-earned money is far more powerful than the thought of getting an extra $1,000.

Some studies have shown that in order to take a bet like this, people would need the upside to be 2x, 3x or even 5x as much as the potential loss before they'd try it!

This shows that while it can be great to do something to get a reward, it can be far more motivating to do something difficult when avoiding a punishment.

For example, say you're trying to build the habit of not snacking at night.

Maybe someone you live with offers a reward: "If you don't snack at night for a whole week, I'm going to take you out to a movie, my treat."

Assuming you love movies, that's a cool reward for sticking to your habit.

But what happens after you get the reward?

Well, your mind will probably expect a similar reward each time you do the habit, and you start to lose sight of the true motivation behind it.

So, it could be better to set up the deal like this:

If you *do* snack at night, you have to do the dishes every night for a week. Or maybe you have to miss the next movie night, or even pay them $50.

Would that snack be worth $50 to you? What about $100?

Money can be a great motivator, but so can embarrassment.

Some people have gone to great lengths with accountability pacts to make punishments as embarrassing as possible; things like shaving your head if you have long hair, or even donating to a cause you despise.

These are awesome tactics for getting motivated, particularly during the hardest part of building/breaking a habit, the beginning.

That said, rewards can be useful as well.

It all depends on what will motivate you the most for the specific habit.

If structured properly, rewards can be great, but they're typically temporary because we grow accustom to things we have/get over time.

So, if you decide to use rewards for succeeding with a habit, focus on developing *intrinsic motivation*, what motivates you on the inside, not artificial or temporary external motivation.

That way, the reward is just a way to connect your positive action with a generally-positive outcome, which will help your mind to associate making the right choice with good results.

You don't need the reward to take the positive action, but to form the connection in your mind and solidify the fact that the habit is something you truly want to do, for its own benefits.

One trick with rewards is to make them small treats that can be earned in the near future, as opposed to big prizes that are far off. This helps to keep your "eyes on the prize"

without making the reward big enough to become the goal by itself.

For example, setting a big goal with a huge reward like “If you finish that marathon in June I’ll give you $10,000.” would likely be motivating.

The problem is that it’d be really easy to slip into the trap of focusing on the $10,000 reward, not the benefits of the exercise, which will make it far more difficult to reap the true rewards over the long haul.

In fact, in that scenario, once the race is over and you get the reward, you’d likely be far less motivated to keep running from then on since you’d be used to pushing through the training by thinking about the money.

Instead, assuming you can actually find someone else that’s willing to pay you for running (now that’s a nice friend), you could structure it so you get a much smaller reward each week as you progress through the training.

The rewards would be near-term, for reaching the next level, which makes them easier to believe in and appreciate, increasing the likelihood you’ll keep going. And, because each one is smaller, you’ll be less inclined to do it all for the reward.

Again, focus on being motivated to do the habit itself, not for the reward.

That's the most sustainable way to build a habit, and sustainability is crucial.

It doesn't matter if you do a great job working out for a month just to get a reward. What matters is that you're able to build a sustainable habit you can stick to over time. That's what gets the best results.

With any habit you feel you'll need more motivation to build sustainably, it's important to figure out whether a reward or punishment would help you more.

This can be based on your personality, or the nature of the specific habit, or even how difficult it has been for you in the past.

Once you figure out what will help you create intrinsic motivation, create a pact with someone you trust, preferably someone that is invested in your success. This could be a coach or trainer you hire, a friend or mentor, or an accountability partner that you're helping in return.

Come to an agreement with them that you'll get the reward or punishment you agreed on when you succeed/fail with

the habit, and have them hold you accountable throughout the process.

So how do you know if you'll be punished or rewarded? How can you tell how you're doing with your habits? It's as easy as…

Tracking

Let me be straight with you.

I'm not going to waste your time with quotes like "what gets measured gets managed", or by citing any of the countless studies that have proven, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that tracking things improves their results.

You get it. Tracking things that are important to you, like your habits, will make it far easier to get the results you're hoping for.

That said, there are a couple key points to mention before we get into exactly how to track your habits, common mistakes to avoid, and some advanced techniques:

1. Tracking is not the goal, but it's a very powerful means to an end.

2. Treating it like a game can not only make it more fun, it also increases motivation and improves success rates.

3. It's just as important to choose *what* to track as it is to learn *how* to track.

Some people think monitoring and measuring things can take the fun out of something. That can definitely be true if it's done incorrectly, but luckily that's easy to prevent.

For example, let's say you love to read, but you haven't been setting aside enough time to read lately, so you decide to track it.

This is the pivotal point: You're deciding to track something you care about.

That's great, but if you want to avoid making your hobby feel like a chore, then don't set a goal that will cause that feeling. How? Let's roll with this example...

If you're trying to keep up with reading for a class or test, it might be crucial that you read a certain number of pages or chapters per day, so you can get through all the material before the exam.

However, if reading is just a hobby you're doing for your own enjoyment, then don't track pages or chapters, just track the fact that you took some time to read for fun.

See the difference? You don't have to know every little detail. If you want to, and that would add more value for you, then track the specifics, like number of pages read.

If the point is just to consistently make an effort to do something, then keep it high-level. e.g. Read 1 time per day, Run 5 times per week, etc.

Remember, tracking is not the goal. If you're trying to get 10,000 steps per day, you don't need to walk in circles in your bedroom before you to go to bed just because you have 9,482 steps so far today...unless you really want to.

To put it simply: With tracking, all that matters is what matters to you.

Along the same lines, there's no need to feel like you're a manager at a factory measuring the output of machines.

Tracking is fun. The key is to treat it like a game.

My Mom used to make a game out of cleaning up my toys, just by saying "Let's see how fast we can pick these up! And the faster we do it, the sooner we can read stories."

As simple as it was, the idea of being timed like I was playing a game made it a lot more engaging.

Did that last forever? Nope, I don't time myself now, but that's not the point.

Making it fun by trying to beat the clock helped me build the habit right when it mattered most, and now it's easy

for me to keep my house clutter-free, and I'm teaching my sons the same thing.

With any habit, if you can frame it in an enjoyable way, and look at it like you're leveling up in a game, you'll get much better results.

Lastly, I can't stress this enough: Focus on what is most important to you.

You don't have to track everything, and you can track things in any way that will give you the best chance of succeeding. It's all up to you.

Best of all? You don't need to know what will work best. You can experiment.

Tracking evolves and gets better with time, just like you.

How to Track Habits

Spending 1,000's of hours and $100,000's building a flexible habit tracking app came with many lessons, but talking with 12,000+ people about how they track their habits has been the most enlightening part, by far.

Everyone is different. We each have our own unique perspective that changes with time, even with mood or energy level. Unfortunately, that can throw us off track far too easily.

That's why consistency is key, and habits create consistency.

Building a routine, a system you can rely on that doesn't require conscious thought or willpower, is the easiest way to be consistent.

Whenever you want to build a new habit, think through the points below.

Over the years, I've refined the concept of habit tracking down to the following:

1. *Don't wage war against yourself*: Embrace your strengths, and slowly improve weaknesses, focusing on the highest-impact areas.
2. *Set a goal just beyond your comfort zone*: With goals, it's good to think big. For habits, think small, steady progress.
3. *Focus on the process more than the product*: If the journey itself is genuinely rewarding, you'll reach the destination with less effort.

Each of these concepts helps to lay the foundation of habit tracking, so let's take a closer look at each.

1. Don't wage war against yourself

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." ~Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The opposite is also true. If you don't know where you stand, your strengths and weaknesses, it will be much more difficult to succeed.

So, the first step to changing a habit is to think about who you are now.

By knowing yourself, you'll know where you're starting out on your way to the desired destination (i.e. winning the war by conquering your habit).

Does this sort of thing come to you naturally, or is it a struggle? Why do you think that's the case?

For example, some people are naturally "early risers". For someone with this genetic predisposition, forming the habit of getting up early would be much easier than a "night owl", someone who prefers to stay up late and sleep in.

Now, that doesn't mean the night owl can't form the habit of getting up early if they really want to, but it's essential to be realistic about the starting point.

First, be honest with yourself about what building the habit would mean to you, your motivation behind building it, and where you stand now.

Once you're comfortable with that, it's time to set your sights on the first milestone.

2. Set a goal just beyond your comfort zone

To start tracking your habit, you'll need a goal. Your goal is what you aspire to, something that motivates you to grow and make progress.

A lot of people start by setting a goal like "Get up at 5:00am every weekday" because they're excited to get to that level they're picturing. e.g. "I'm going to get up super early every weekday so I have time to read, meditate and exercise before work."

That may be your end goal, but if you're used to waking up at 7:00am and you're more of a night owl, that's a surefire way to burn out and fail.

If you want to get to that point, you could start tracking your get up early habit with a reminder at 6:45am (just 15 minutes earlier than you're used to waking up).

That way, the definition of success isn't all that difficult.

Don't stop there though, because that won't do much for you.

Once you're starting to feel comfortable, change the goal. It doesn't matter if it takes a few days, or a month to get to that point.

In this case, keep the habit's name the same in your habit tracker (e.g. Get up early), but change the reminder by another 15 minutes to 6:30am.

When that's easy, move it to 6:15am, and so on, until you're comfortably getting up as early as you originally set out to.

This is a much more sustainable way to build habits and consistently stick to them.

Doing something for a week or two and dropping it doesn't help, and can actually hurt, so take it slow and focus on long-term achievement.

3. Focus on the process more than the product

Now that you've chosen a meaningful habit, been honest with yourself about where you are and where you want to go, and you've set a goal just beyond your comfort zone, it's time to learn to truly enjoy the journey.

If you're only doing this for the end result, the destination, it probably won't last.

For some short-term goals, that can be fine (e.g. a temporary project like building a deck in your backyard). You might be able to push through and finish on time.

For habits, the point is to make them stick. To keep doing them for years.

Say you don't like to run, but you can imagine yourself being a runner. You like the idea of the wind in your face, blood pumping through your veins, feeling fast, strong, powerful.

But, if you actually hate every moment when you go running, that dream won't likely come true. If that's the case, you can either adapt your goal - maybe biking would be more up your alley - or learn to love the process.

It's rarely easy, but it's a hell of a lot easier than pushing yourself through a grueling process you despise to get to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Note: Please don't take this as an easy out, an excuse to convince yourself that because something is hard you shouldn't do it. Far from it. Again, just be honest with yourself. Don't fight against your personality, your genes, your weaknesses, but if you have a real intrinsic

motivation to overcome something, then work hard and do it!

If you know you can get there, and that it's the right habit for you to conquer because you want it badly enough, make it easier on yourself by learning to love it.

How? Typically, the path of least resistance is to embrace it, almost like a "fake it 'til you make it" approach.

If you're all in, it'll be worth it to do some research about it online, maybe buy some decent running shoes, for example. Get an app to keep it top of mind, meet people that are further along than you, join a group, sign up for an event to prepare for.

Usually when people dive in like this they're able to see beyond one individual instance of the new habit, and zoom out to see the macro perspective, which helps to remind them that not enjoying one session is perfectly normal.

It can also help to ask questions to figure out if there's one thing that makes it a lot easier for people that have done what you're trying to do.

To stick with the running example, I've heard people say they hated running until they started listening to one

upbeat song on repeat while they run. That one little tweak made them love it.

Others have mentioned that they hated reading all through school, but once they started reading a certain genre of novels, or nonfiction books about a topic they're passionate about, they started reading happily every day.

The trick is to know your starting point, and spend a bit of time to figure out what it is that bothers you about something. What makes it difficult for you?

Then, ask around and do some research to minimize that issue.

If you can lower the biggest hurdle in your way, you'll be amazed at how much more you'll enjoy the process, and that makes getting the end product so much easier.

Mistakes to Avoid

Want a shortcut to avoid the most common mistakes people tend to make when working on their habits?

Avoid these five common pitfalls and you'll be way ahead of the game:

1. *Don't worry about how long it will take to build or break a habit*. The whole point is to develop a habit that lasts, something you can continue to do consistently over the long haul. Think of it less like saving up money for a one-time purchase, and more like an ongoing investment that keeps paying dividends.

2. *Don't forget about the Cue-Routine-Reward loop*. This is how all habits are formed, and it's what makes bad habits so hard to break. So, keep it in mind as you're deciding what to track and how to set your goals. Preventing or replacing bad cues with reminders to do the right thing will take you far.

3. *Don't try to tackle the toughest habit first*. Create confidence with habit building by getting a few easier wins first. The momentum you'll feel from developing a couple habits like drinking more water or going on a

walk after dinner will make it a lot easier to slay those dragons.

4. *Don't track one thing at a time*. Some people suggest this, but I have years' worth of data from 100,000s of people to prove this doesn't work as well as tracking at least a few habits at a time. Why? People that start with one tend to end on one and stop tracking altogether because everything is riding on the success of that one all-important habit. Those that start with at least 3-5 across different areas of their lives tend to see more success early on, and in the long-term. That said, it's a great idea to focus on one thing with each area at first (e.g. One health habit, one productivity habit, etc).

5. *Don't get carried away and start with 20 habits right out the gate*. The opposite of the previous point is also true. Everything in moderation. If you start off by tracking dozens of different things, you'll get diminishing returns and likely get overwhelmed. This is the idea behind the one habit approach, but according to the data 3-5 habits is the sweet spot as a starting point for lasting success.

6. *Don't stop tracking something once it's a habit*. This one seems a bit counterintuitive, but it's very important. Once you get in the habit of doing something, it's not

over. If you treat it like it's over by not tracking it anymore, it'll be really easy to lose those results after a week or two. Some people have streaks of 3+ years in Strides, and that's awesome! There's nothing wrong with continuing to track something because it only helps to solidify it in your life, and the few seconds it takes will give you an easy win every day.

Automation

Alright, so you're ready to start tracking your habits!

The next step is to figure out what tools you can use to save time and automate as much as possible to lower the barrier of entry and make things easier on yourself.

This is where I got stuck and decided to build my own app, but again, you don't have to use Strides. There are plenty of options for tracking your habits.

You could use any combination you like of a calendar, notebook or note-taking app, spreadsheets, or any app built specifically for tracking habits.

The important thing is that you *build the habit of tracking your habits*.

It sounds a bit meta, I know, but if you don't consistently keep track of what you're working on, then you'll start to lose faith in the system and it'll break down.

If you stick to it, even if you aren't doing exactly what you set out to do, you'll be FAR more likely to build good habits and achieve your goals.

The goal at this stage is to create a system for tracking your habits, preferably one that can automate as much of the process for you as possible. That way, you can focus on the behavior change itself, rather than managing it all.

Here are some key things to look for while creating your habit tracking system:

- Reminders: You shouldn't have to remember everything yourself. Your system should be like a friendly coach, reminding you at the times you need it most.
- Accountability: Think about what motivates you, and focus on that. Lots of people like to see charts, streaks, etc. to know how they're doing, for example. Treat it like a game and you'll be more inspired to do the right thing...and have more fun.

One way you could do this would be to use a calendar or reminders app to schedule recurring alerts at times that will help you keep your habits top of mind.

Then, you could use a notebook or spreadsheet to keep track of what you did. A notebook can work well, though it's very limiting since it's almost impossible to see trends over time. A spreadsheet is more flexible, but requires

quite a bit of setup and isn't very convenient, particularly on mobile devices.

I started out using a reminders app and a spreadsheet, but over time I realized it'd be a lot easier with one tool built for specifically for tracking habits, which is why I built Strides. Luckily, you don't have to spend $100,000's and years of hard work to take advantage of it like I did. :)

That said, there are plenty of other apps that have come out since, so feel free to look around at all the options to see which one you prefer.

Go ahead and spend some time now choosing the tool(s) you'd like to use for tracking your habits...

This part is very important, so please don't rush on to the next step!

All set? Great.

Once you have your habit tracking system set up, it's time to talk about accountability in more detail.

Accountability

Pop quiz: Is it better to be held accountable (a) by someone nagging you to do your habits, (b) by getting reminders, or (c) with charts and streaks?

Okay, this was a trick question. The answer could be any of those options, or (d) all of the above, depending on the person answering, or even their mood at the time.

That's what makes accountability tricky.

Fortunately, i's also what makes it so powerful.

If you feel unmotivated to do something difficult, being held accountable for your actions can be more motivating than anything else.

So, the key is to figure out what type of accountability will motivate you the most, focus on that, and support it with other forms of accountability to bring in reinforcements when needed.

Some people aren't as motivated by the stats, for instance, but for certain habits they might find that being on a 27-day streak helps them because they don't want to "break the chain".

The key is to focus on whatever will help you make the right choice in the moment, when it counts.

In some cases, simply getting a reminder at the right time of day does the trick.

For example, if you hate flossing but your dentist told you to do it, you might not care enough to worry about your streak or success rate.

But, getting a reminder saying “It’s time to floss” at the time you usually get ready for bed could be the little nudge you need to start doing it regularly.

Most people also like to impress people they care about and trust, so knowing someone else can see their progress can be incredibly helpful.

Interestingly enough, it’s not always about the other person “nagging” them like I mentioned in our little pop quiz earlier. Most people prefer not to be nagged, but rather encouraged, unless they really need an extra push.

Having an accountability partner is a great way to add more external accountability, which works primarily because of our deep desire to be liked and respected.

Because we don't want to be embarrassed, and we want to impress others, we go to greater lengths to do what is expected of us, even if it's just because we worry about what they'd think if they see how we're doing.

The catch? They don't actually have to pay much attention to our performance for us to go the extra mile.

Just knowing that they *could* be watching is enough.

If you want to add even more accountability with a partner, make a pact with them.

Figure out which will inspire you the most with this particular combination of habit and accountability partner, and form a pact with them that will keep you on track.

It works unbelievably well, especially if it's to avoid embarrassment.

To sum it up, here are the most effective ways to be held accountable with habits:

- Get reminders at relevant times throughout the day
- Keep track of the stats that matter to you (Streak, Success Rate, Pace, etc)

- Have someone you know and trust hold you accountable. Bonus: Hire an expert coach to be even more invested.
- Form a pact with your accountability partner to motivate you even more

Awesome, you're ready to start tracking your habits. You've laid out a solid plan to focus on the most important areas of your life, set goals for each one, and broken them down into manageable daily goals.

If not, go back and take some notes. Take your time, I can wait. :)

Once you've set up your tracking system, the third and final step is...

Reflection

The last step of the process is to regularly reflect on the progress you've made.

Some people like to block out time on their calendar to do this, others prefer to reflect periodically throughout the week, or even once a day.

Personally, I like to check in on things at a high level each day, and dive in to the progress of specific habits whenever I'm curious about them, or need a motivational boost.

For example, if I'm considering not doing one of my habits, I'll look at my current streak to remind me that if I take the easy way out I'll break my streak and go all the way back to zero.

That's usually enough reflection to get me to do the right thing.

Reflection can do more than just motivate you though.

It can also be used as a powerful tool for appreciating how far you've come.

That’s not just to give you a warm and fuzzy feeling in the moment. It also trains your mind to be grateful for the good choices you made in the past, which creates a clear link between making good choices with actually feeling good.

Appreciating your progress is crucial.

You really don’t want to find yourself constantly striving for more without ever taking a minute to feel proud of what you’ve accomplished.

Take the time to celebrate. It’s always worth it.

Treat Life Like a Game

Many of the people I've spoken with about their habits and goals are your typical Type-A overachievers that always want to improve.

Maybe you know one? You know who I'm talking about. :)

The trouble with this approach is that, while it may get results, it can be draining.

Fortunately, there's a powerful way to make reflection and analysis a lot more fun:

Treat your entire life like a game.

Think about leveling up, gaining experience, going on adventures, doing cool stuff, adding value, helping people, and making yourself better in the process.

Seeing progress as something that's actually enjoyable makes it much more rewarding and fun than treating yourself like a robot. Unless that's the type of game you like to play, in which case…be a kickass robot!

Sure, the stats matter. They do in games too, but it's that competitive spirit, that drive to make it to the next level that's just out of reach. That's what makes it fun.

Use the stats to push yourself, to reach higher, to keep track of what you care about, but treat it all like a game to keep it light and exciting.

You'll be more motivated and happy that way, and that's the whole idea.

One great way to do this is to pick your favorite metric - maybe it's pace, streak or success rate - and focus on that.

If you can make a game out of getting your success rate to 90% or reaching a 30-day streak, it'll make the whole habit-building process easier.

Whether you play sports/games or not, think back to a time when you felt that competitive spirit.

Maybe it was just a friendly card game, or vying for a promotion at work. Remember how you felt? Remember how excited you were to do well?

Channel that energy. Create that environment for yourself and your habits.

Make it fun. Make it worth it. Make it happen.

Getting Back on Track

Alright, look: If you start applying even half of these planning and tracking techniques, you'll almost certainly see huge improvements in your habits.

But what do you do if (when) you fall off track?

It's one of the most common questions I get, and my answer is always the same:

Focus on today. Don't let yesterday get to you. The best thing you can do is put your energy into doing the right thing, right now.

It's easy to beat ourselves up when we fall behind, break a streak, or fail to achieve a goal on time, but it's totally counterproductive.

Sometimes, it's best to start over with your tracking to get a clean slate so you don't remember the mistake.

In other cases, it'll help more to keep the misstep visible to remind you how it felt, as motivation not to slip up again.

Depending on your personality, one helpful thing to think about when setting your goal is to consider whether you do

better going all-in with something, or if you prefer moderation.

For instance, if your goal is to stick to a new diet you've never tried before, you might naturally do better setting your goal at 3 times per day (every meal).

Or, maybe you'd be more successful if you set your goal at 20 times per week, all but one meal, to give yourself a bit of wiggle room.

Some people feel trapped with rigid constraints and they rebel.

Others feel comforted by automating the decision-making process so they don't have to rely on willpower (e.g. getting back to it after a cheat day).

Think about what would work best for your personality and how you've reacted to changes in the past.

If you haven't tried this out before, feel free to experiment with it. It's typically best to start with a rigid 100% goal, then scale it back a bit if it's not working for you.

You might find that you prefer different goal setting methods for different types of habits too. Most people do.

Say you've never meditated in your life. In that case, if you know you're one to rebel and push back against big changes, feel free to start with a shorter session so it's easier, then build it up from there.

Remember: Each habit is unique. In some cases, you might find that tracking the number of minutes you do something - like practicing guitar, learning a new language, or getting lost in a hobby - can help to hold you accountable, but with others it's better to set your goal to do the habit in general.

The crucial element to setting your goal is to be flexible. If you find, for instance, that tracking how long you do your hobby is making it feel forced, which isn't working, then adjust your goal to make it work for you.

Whatever happens, don't waste time and energy feeling bad about the past.

The best thing you can do is take action now.

Never be afraid to adjust your goal, start your tracking over, or just stay present and do your best from now on. Be flexible, keep experimenting, and enjoy the process.

Make or Break: Bad Habits

Bad habits are a hot topic, and for good reason; they can make or break your progress with all of your other habits.

Lots of people try to quit doing something that's bad for them - like smoking, watching TV, or drinking/eating too much - and if they fail then they feel like they can't build or break other habits.

That's exactly why we're just now getting to the "how do I break my bad habits?" question. They're much easier to break after you've practiced and built a few good ones.

Why? For one, *it's much easier to replace a bad habit than to break it*.

For example, people who try to break the smoking habit tend to fail. A lot.

However, when they instead replace the bad habit with a better one, say by eating sugar-free lollipops, their success rate goes up tremendously due to the similar physical stimulus, because that's one of the most powerful parts of the behavior.

Rather than quitting “cold turkey”, some people prefer to gradually taper off with bad habits.

That can be effective for certain personalities and situations, but it’s typically better to replace the habit with something not as bad for you.

Then, over time, you can gradually replace the better habit with an even better one, until you replace something that’s not all that bad with something positive.

For example, maybe you’re trying to watch less TV after work.

First, find your cue, the thing that triggers your behavior. Example: Get home, eat dinner, sit on the couch.

Now, think of something that could fill in when that trigger pops up.

You could replace cable TV with an ad-free streaming service to cut out the unnecessary ads.

That would reduce the time it takes to watch shows, while saving you money on your cable bill, probably more because you won’t be tempted to buy as much stuff.

Plus, not seeing commercials for food every five minutes will reduce those late-night cravings for fast food and ice cream. :)

When you're comfortable with that, try watching more comedies, documentaries and educational shows, instead of dramas that do little more than stress you out.

Once you've replaced most of the fluff and stressful shows with things that make you happy and teach you new things, you could try setting a timer or tracking how many shows you watch per week to gradually decrease it.

If it's a habit that's really firmly established for you, it might even help to replace the entire experience with something different.

In the TV example, you could go a bit more extreme and sell your TV to replace that activity with something more useful, like taking online video courses on your computer.

This way, your body and mind still get the same stimulus after the trigger (watching videos on the couch after eating dinner), but they actually add value to your life.

From there, it's up to you. Maybe that could turn into a new hobby or starting a side business with what you learned?

Trying to break a bad habit doesn't have to be a horrible thing. It's all about how you track it, and what you choose to take its place in your life.

Once you find something better to replace it with, that will make easier to break it and keep it from coming back. Best of all, you'll be happier through the process!

Positive Snowball Effect

Imagine a tiny snowball that starts to roll down a hill. It gradually starts to collect more snow, getting bigger and bigger the farther it rolls. As its size increases, it rolls faster, collecting snow at a faster rate, getting bigger, and rolling faster still.

One of the best examples of this I've seen in my life is the Debt Snowball method.

My wife and I used it to pay off our student loans and our cars - well over $100,000 in debt - in only eight years.

Without the Debt Snowball method, it would have taken about 14 years. Plus, we saved $10,000's in interest and freed up $1,000+ every month in loan payments.

How does it work? It's super simple:

- Pay the minimum amount on each loan
- Use extra income/savings to pay more than the minimum to pay off the one with the lowest balance or highest interest first

- Once it's paid off, keep paying the same total, rolling the amount you were paying on the one that was paid off into the next loan you'd like to pay off

That's it. Say you were paying $400/month for your car loan, and $600/month for student loans. You found some ways to save $100/month on your budget or make some extra money, and changed your automatic payment on your car from $400 to $500 with the extra $100.

Once the car is paid off, you change the automatic payment of $600/month on the student loans to the same total you were paying before ($600 + $500 = $1,100).

Without paying any more on loans, you're now paying off an extra $500/month on your other loan, which will pay it off a *lot* faster.

Over time, this compounds, like that snowball rolling down the hill.

This is similar to what you'll do with your habits.

With each habit you build, you'll get more confidence and momentum, making it easier to build another, which makes it even easier.

It's a beautiful upward spiral, a virtuous cycle.

The key to making this work with habits is to track as many things as you can consistently accomplish.

Why? Because the compounding effect happens by growing the snowball.

If you stick to the same three habits for several months, you won't grow. If you continue to add another when you're doing well, you'll constantly improve.

Plus, if you're devoting a bit more attention to tracking your habits, since there are more of them to track, you'll have more opportunities to check in and stay on top of your progress with each of them.

Don't go too crazy with this, but if you start to feel comfortable, that's the perfect time to increase a goal or start tracking something new.

Conclusion

“I didn’t have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.” ~Mark Twain

My goal with this book was to keep it compact and focused. I spent a ton of time chopping out anything that didn’t add enough value, so I hope you were able to read it and work through the steps quickly.

To help with that, let’s sum it all up:

Habits and routines make up almost half of our lives, but they don’t have to control us. Your habits are not in control. You are.

If you don’t feel like you’re in control, or you want to improve, start by making a solid plan to set things up nicely for “future you”.

1. Pick the areas of your life you want to improve, then set SMART Goals for each.
2. Break down those goals into habits that will help move you forward.
3. Track the habits that will lead to achieving your goals.

Don’t rely on willpower. Set yourself up for success by creating an environment that will make it easier to achieve your goals and build positive habits.

Invest a bit of time and energy when you’re at your strongest. That investment will pay for itself over and over again.

If you respond well to accountability from others and/or competition, seek out people that will help you, and help them in return.

Create pacts, preferably with punishments, or rewards that don’t contradict or work against your goals. e.g. Instead of “If I work out all week, I’ll eat a brownie.” do “If I don’t work out 5 times this week, I have to do extra chores this weekend.”

If you use rewards, focus on small, positive things that will help solidify your intrinsic motivation. Avoid rewards that are big enough to become the sole reason for working hard.

Either way, try to link positive feelings with making the right choice to train your mind to do the right thing when it counts.

Once you've set your goals and chosen habits that will help you reach them, start tracking your progress. Remember: "What gets measured gets managed."

Know yourself, and set a goal just beyond your comfort zone to stay motivated and inspired to push to the next level.

Focus on the process, and treat it all like a game you can win by gradually expanding your horizons and growing.

Don't worry about how long it will take to build or break a habit, and feel free to start with a few easier ones to build confidence and momentum.

Use tools to automate reminders and hold yourself accountable with the stats and charts that matter most to you. Let the tool do the heavy lifting so you can focus.

Take the time to celebrate, even small wins. Any progress is a victory to appreciate.

Have fun with it all, and don't worry if you get off track. Just learn from it and focus on today to do the best you can in the moment.

To break bad habits, don't depend on willpower, replace them with better habits.

As you gain momentum, let it carry you forward by tracking more habits and goals, and keep setting your sights just beyond your comfort zone.

Never stop improving. Always strive for more and appreciate how far you've come.

~~

I really hope this guide has helped you. If you cranked through it quickly, hopefully some of the lessons, examples or strategies will stick with you, but don't hesitate to come back to it to look something up when you need some motivation or help.

Ideally, you used it like a workbook to follow along with the steps. If not, feel free to do that now. Take some notes, go through the process slowly, one step at a time, and I'm confident it'll make a big difference for you.

Best of luck with all your goals & habits!
Kyle Richey
ConquerApathy.com

Bonus: Advanced 80/20

Ever heard of the Pareto Principle, also known as the "80/20 rule"? If not, here's a quick primer:

In 1896, an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto realized that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by only 20% of the population. Well, it actually started with peas in his garden, but the epiphany came when he noticed the same pattern in economics.

Later, Joseph Juran popularized the concept by applying it to basically everything.

The takeaway? Focus on the highest-impact 20% that will produce 80% of the value.

This is true in habits and productivity, but also in finance, health, and pretty much everything else. Cool, huh?

Ready to take this further and put it to good use? Here are two advanced tactics to make the 80/20 rule work overtime and achieve your goals faster:

1. Find the 20% of effort that can add 80% of the value. Then, do that with five different things to diversify and get 4x the value for the same effort (100%).
2. Get 80% of the value from 20% of the effort, then make a second pass through to do it again, getting 96% of the value for 36% of the effort.

Sound good? Let's break these down.

I'm sure you've heard the saying "Don't put all your eggs in one basket."

You've probably also heard about diversifying to decrease risk, which is common in the investment/finance/business world.

Diversification does lower risk, but if done properly it also increases the total potential value earned for the same investment.

Here's how to take advantage of both of these at the same time...

Find the 20% of the effort that can produce 80% of the results with something.

For example, say you have a goal to learn how to play the guitar.

Let's go with learning guitar to illustrate the point:

How would you find the highest-impact 20% of learning guitar? Google is your friend here. Do some quick searches for broad terms like "learn guitar", "online guitar lessons", maybe even "fastest way to learn guitar".

Browse through the results and take note of anything you can find. Pro tip: Try to focus on blog posts summarizing key tips. They've typically done the hard part of researching and drawing on experience to boil down the concept for you.

In the case of learning guitar, the 20% to focus on would be to learn the most common chords, then practice transitioning between them by playing along with a few songs you like, using guitar tabs.

If you do your homework, which can be done in less than an hour, you'll find that G, C & D are the most common chords. From there, you can practice each chord on its own, then strumming basic rhythms and transitioning between them.

Once you're feeling pretty comfortable with that, search guitar tab websites for simple songs that use those chords, and play along with them until you're comfortable.

Gradually try new songs, expand to a new chord here and there, and you'll be playing guitar before you know it. Will you be shredding with insane solos in a week? No, but you'll feel comfortable with the 3-5 most commonly-used chords, and be able to play along with a couple songs you like, in a very short time.

Beyond that, you can keep practicing, learning new songs, and even dive into the theory, scales, etc. All of that can come after you cover the top 20% as you see fit.

So, find the 20% of the effort it takes to get 80% of the value. That way, you'll only invest 20% of the total time, energy, willpower, money, etc. you could devote to achieving that goal, but you're getting most of the value.

That's great, but don't stop there.

Since you've only invested 20% of the total available resources, you could invest the full 100% of effort that would be required to get all the value from one thing. In this case, it might be that you have 10 hours per week for hobbies, but you've only been putting in 2 hours so far.

A lot of people do this first part, focusing on the parts that will get you the most results, but that wouldn't be

diversified and would only get you 100% at a maximum, if that even works out.

Instead, invest 20% of your available resources into 5 different things, getting 80% from each, for a total of 400% of the value.

This multiplies the total potential value by 4x and diversifies your efforts.

This could mean putting the 10 total hours you have per week into other goals, or other aspects of the same goal.

So there's the first advanced 80/20 rule tactic.

Here's the second:

If you invest 20% to get 80% in something, maybe you don't want a B- grade. Maybe you want to be awesome at it. Maybe it gets some traction and shows signs of much higher potential.

Side note: Another benefit of trying multiple things is experimentation and learnings from quick data collection.

At this point, you can make a second pass through it, like editing a first draft.

It’s always easier to edit and improve than to create something from scratch.

Based on the experience you’ve picked up from your first run-through, find the 20% of the remaining effort that can bring you 80% of the remaining value.

Here’s how this breaks down with some simple math:

	EFFORT	VALUE
Phase 1	**20%**	**80%**
Phase 2	20% of 80% = **16%**	80% of 20% = **16%**
TOTAL	**36%**	**96%**

Let that sink in for a minute.

You can get 96% of the value from something, even if you ignore almost 2/3 of the stuff that most people do!

This is my favorite reason for using the 80/20 rule to experiment, diversify and increase the total potential of what you’re working toward.

Whether it’s investment earnings, business, health, nutrition, learning new skills, hobbies, or even relationships, this is the ultimate shortcut.

And once you've taken the shortcut, if you want to go deeper and get that 'A' grade, go another round to get even more value.

Bonus: Resources

If you're looking for more information about habits and some useful tools to make it all easier, here's a short list of my favorites from the many I've read/used/created:

Books:

The Power of Habit - Kindle | Apple Books

Atomic Habits - Kindle | Apple Books

Better Than Before - Kindle | Apple Books

The Willpower Instinct - Kindle | Apple Books

Mini Habits - Kindle | Apple Books

Tools of Titans - Kindle | Apple Books

Blogs:

JamesClear.com - Fantastic blog with story-driven insights on building habits.

ZenHabits.net - Focused on mindfulness and a minimal approach.

MarcAndAngel.com - Inspirational stories and thoughts to keep you motivated.

Apps:

Strides - Goal & habit tracking in one flexible app.

Summit - Plan all your tasks, events & notes in one place.