

How to Make Habits Stick



Follow these do's and don'ts for better habit building

According to Statistic Brain, less than 10% of people actually achieve their goal when trying to create new habits. When it comes to safety, everyone knows that good habits are essential. Most of what we do every day is habitual, learning how to change or form new habits effectively can be applied to many things. Don't settle for just achieving one goal, habit building should be a continuous part of improving your life and this guide will help you learn how to build habits once and for all.

If you want to create a new habit, in safety or otherwise, you first need to tie it to an existing cue. Duhigg uncovered that instead of focusing on the routine (the habit) to make a change, more attention should be put on the cues and rewards. By being aware of this habit loop, you can make conscious decisions to create new beneficial habits. Determining how the cue and reward influence the routine can help change the way you do things.

In his book, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, Charles Duhigg explains that habits are broken down into three components, known as the habit loop:

- > 1. CUE
- > 2. ROUTINE
- > 3. REWARD

The cue is the trigger (whether it's a combination of sight, smell, sound, taste or touch) or reminder that sets up the habitual routine that follows. The rewards are increases/decreases in feelings, emotions or

thoughts—whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. The reward has to be powerful enough for your brain to remember that the habit loop is worth remembering for the future.

A common morning routine can illustrate how this loop works. The cue is the alarm clock and the routine is hitting the snooze button in an automatic motion that requires no thought. The reward is getting another nine minutes of sleep until the alarm goes off again.

less than
10%
STICK
to their
goals

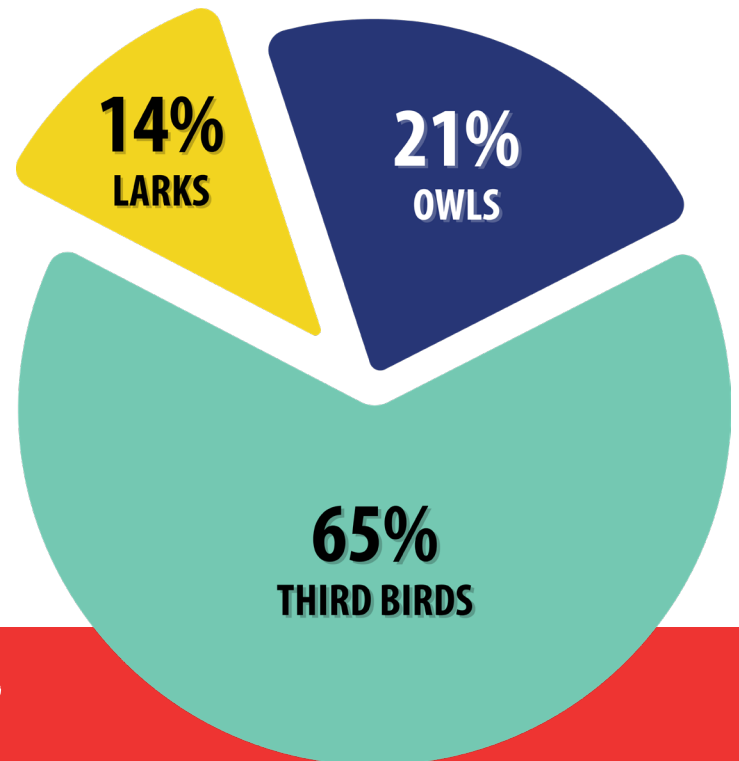
Say the new habit, in this case, is making your bed in the morning. Tie it to the cue of the alarm clock, use the reward of saving embarrassment of an unkempt room when people stop by as motivation not to snooze the alarm but to wake up and make your bed. When you repeat this scenario, the routine will eventually change from snoozing the alarm clock to getting up and automatically making your bed. It is important to keep that reward at the forefront of your mind if you want to succeed.

This can also impact what Duhigg referred to as *keystone habits*. Keystone habits are the development of multiple good habits. By making your bed in the morning, you may also want the rest of your room to be tidy, thus removing dirty laundry upon exiting your room—a trickle-down effect. The same mentality applies to safety. You can start with the habit of putting on your PPE before you begin work. This will lead you to think about the potential dangers in other areas of the jobsite, the keystone habit of being in a safety mindset will cause you to inspect tools before use, look for moving equipment before walking, etc.

When you're planning to create new habits, it's common to select a specific day to start. In the case of New Year's resolutions, that day is January 1. A new year often symbolizes a fresh start for people and what better way to start anew than to create some good habits? Expert Daniel Pink deduced that when you assign special meaning to a day, it can go a long way in creating new habits. In fact, in his book *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*, he identified 86 days that are effective for making a fresh start including Mondays, the first day of the month, or the first day of a new season (spring, summer, autumn, winter) to name a few.

Everyone has a chronotype, derived from circadian rhythms, that impacts how they feel and react to emotional stimuli since our state of mind runs on a scheduled cycle throughout the day. Pink mentions that the larks (morning people) have their emotional highs and lows earlier than most people because they get up earlier in the day. The owls (night people) don't like getting up early and therefore work best later in the evening. Interestingly, 60 to 80 percent identify themselves as neither larks nor owls and fall in between. Knowing your chronotype can help to determine your peak performance time. If you're a morning person or you're in between,

MOST OF US ARE THIRD BIRDS



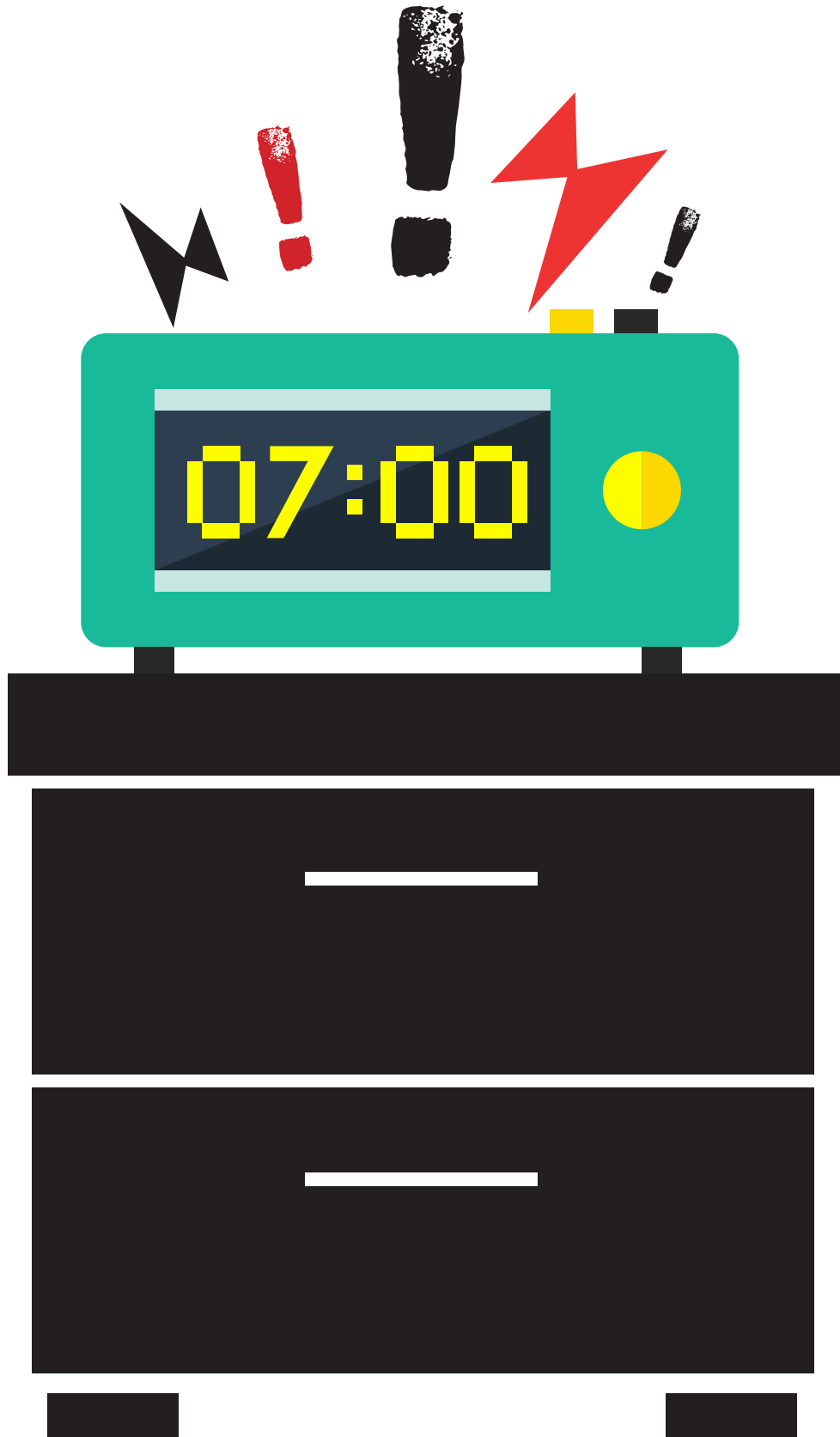
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plan your new habit activities for the morning. If you're a night person, try to get your mundane activities out of the way in the afternoon and reserve your habit-building time for later in the evening.

So how long will you have to repeat your behavior until it sticks?

There is a common misconception that it takes 21 days to form a new habit. This notion is believed to have come from a book by Maxwell Maltz called *Psycho Cybernetics* where he wrote about how it takes a minimum of 21 days to effect perceptible change in a mental image (like getting used to your face after plastic surgery). Somewhere along the line, 21 days became the magic number of days required to form a habit. Unfortunately, it's not that easy. There's no magic number—it's not something you can plot in your calendar.

It's important to realize that you need to identify things within yourself in order to form habits. It could take 21 days for some people while it could take hundreds of days for others. Researchers from University College London found that habits take a lot longer to form—dependent on the person and the habit, the average number they came up with was 66 days for a behavior to become automatic on a spectrum that ranged from 18 days to 254 days. It's not always the number of days, rather, the cues and number of routine repetition performed that form a habit. A habit that has a cue in the workplace would not take place on your days off—but this does not negate that habit being strong while you're at work.



Here are some Do's that will work in trying to create new habits.

DO

start
small



It's good to have an end-game but the most common reason that people fail at creating habits is that they set unrealistic timelines for their goals. When you put effort into something, you want that instant gratification, a testament to a job well done. If you start out trying to reach a big goal, you'll become overwhelmed and give up. Instead, keep your sights set on that bigger goal as your motivation while you take smaller steps to get there. The smaller goals are easier to achieve and completing them will provide you with a feeling of purpose and accomplishment.

When you start with small, easy tasks, adding another small task will seem fairly easy until you've paved your way to your end game. For example, say you have a goal of walking 3 miles before work. If you start by trying to tackle 3 miles off the bat when you're not used to walking at all, you're destined to fail because it will be too challenging. But if you start with a 10-minute walk in the morning, you can easily do that for a week or so until you get used to it. Then, increase the length of your walk by 5 or 10 minute intervals until you've slowly progressed to a 45-minute walk (the average time it takes to walk 3 miles). What seemed like a lofty goal to start became attainable by making gradual increases. And by continuing to do this regularly, you've created the habit of walking before work.

DO

change
your
view



Much like combining small tasks until you reach your overall end goal, the way you measure those tasks plays a role in making a regular habit too. In the previous example, the end goal was a 3-mile walk before work. If you were to break that goal down but you're still measuring in miles, it continues to sound like a lofty goal.

What if you changed the unit of measurement? Would you rather walk one mile or walk for 15 minutes? Even though on average, they are the same, the minutes sound much easier to accomplish than the miles because our brains can compute minutes better than they understand miles. By changing the unit of measurement, you perceive the goal as attainable and you're much more likely to achieve it. It's important to change your perspective on things and find a way to measure your goal that won't cause you to give up before you start.

DO

make
it
easy



As part of your plan to succeed, why not set yourself up for a win. Make performing your habit easy by preparing for it ahead of time. When you take five minutes to prepare, you are actually eliminating all of the excuses that will get in the way of you following through.

For example, if you want to eat healthy, have cut-up fruits and veggies on hand for easy access. If they are not prepped, it's so much easier to grab something else that's quicker (and often less healthy). Or if you want to go for a walk in the morning, get out all of the things you'll need for your walk the night before. When you have easy access to your clothes, running shoes and a fully charged music player, you'll have no excuse not to go—plus you already went to the trouble of getting your stuff out.



In order for a habit to work, you have to want the reward. *Really want it.* When trying to replace an old habit with a new habit, it can be hard to visualize why that new reward is so important. That's why people often fail when they're trying to quit smoking—that cigarette has been the reward for so long it's hard to perceive quitting as a reward. So far, nothing bad has really happened because of smoking (in fact, they usually do it because they enjoy it) and it's easy to become complacent to the benefits of quitting.

Sometimes it takes a health scare for a person to realize how much they want that new reward. When you can't breathe, suddenly the reward of improved health becomes more obvious. The focus shifts from quitting smoking to being healthier and that newfound motivation helps craft their new routine.



It seems counterproductive to plan to fail but when it comes to forming habits, there are bound to be unforeseen setbacks and things that come up that are beyond your control. By planning to fail, you're less likely to be surprised by the setbacks, eliminating the frustration that causes you to give up or beat yourself up. Anticipating the obstacles ahead of time allows you to have a plan in place to overcome them.

The best thing you can do is accept that this is part of the process and just keep moving forward to achieve your goal. For example, accepting setbacks makes people less likely to completely give up on a new diet just because they had some pizza or indulged in a piece of cake. They will see it as a hiccup and not the end of the world, which will make it easier for them to get back on track.



Here are some Don'ts that will work in trying to create new habits.

DON'T



put off starting

The problem with selecting a specific day to start your habit is that when that day comes and goes without any attempt to start your habit, you tend to wait until the next Monday or the beginning of next month to start fresh. In the famous words of a procrastinator: Why start today what I can put off until tomorrow?

Daniel Pink indicated that assigning meaning to a day can help provide purpose to that specific day in starting your habit. But if assigning a day didn't work, you need to just make it happen and create a routine from there. For example, if Monday came and went, make a point to start on Tuesday. The most important thing is to start creating that habit, the day itself isn't crucial to keeping your goal.

DON'T



give up

If you aren't seeing the results you thought you would immediately, don't throw in the towel. The reason they say "work on habits" is because they take a lot of work. Another important thing to remember is that you're human and you're bound to make mistakes, but don't get discouraged.

If you're trying to create a new habit by replacing an old one and accidentally slip up, all is not lost. Think of the progress you made and you'll be less likely to give up—I've come this far, I don't want to go back now, it would have all been for nothing.

DON'T



keep it to yourself

The best way to ensure that you stick to what you set out to do is to involve someone else. If you share your goals with others, they will keep you accountable—which is vital to sticking to a routine and achieving your goals.

Having to tell someone you failed is more distressing than missing a day and quietly resuming your activities the next day. That's why it's good to have a buddy at the gym. They will push you to go that little bit further where, if you were by yourself, you'd stop when it got too hard.



The key to making habits stick is that you have to find what works for you. While it's worthwhile to determine all the individual factors about yourself that will help you succeed, start with this list of Do's and Don'ts that apply to everyone to ensure you succeed in creating your new habit. ■

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