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for Work and Business



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Developing Successful Habits for Work and Business



It takes 21 days to form a new habit.

That's what we've been told by everyone from such motivational speakers as Zig Ziglar and Brian Tracy to fitness trainers. The fact is it takes a *minimum* of 21 days to begin forming a new habit. In reality, it can take up to 245 days for a new habit to form.

Let me tell you a story. This is the story of a man, let's call him Joe. Joe was overweight and knew he needed to change his habits to get healthier. You see, Joe works at a job, sitting at a desk all day long. He comes home from work each night, grabs a sandwich and handful of cookies, just to tie him over until dinnertime. Then he plops down in front of his TV and stays there. After a couple of hours of mindlessly watching the tube, he calls his favorite pizza place to get a large pizza with everything delivered. Oh, and he has a bag of chips to go with that as well as a beer or two. And of course, he sits in front of the TV while he eats.

So in order to lose some weight, Joe decides he will take up running every day. He's also filled his pantry with healthy foods. Joe does a good job following the plan for about three weeks. He hasn't seen much progress in his weight loss yet, though. He gets discouraged and thinks, "Hey, I'll just skip running today." And "a pizza sure would taste good." Soon Joe has gone back to his old ways. His new habit fizzled away after only 21 days.

We'll come back to Joe in a bit.

Everyone has habits. You drink your coffee at certain time every day. You take the same route to work or school. You watch the same television shows each week. You eat your toast with butter and jelly every time. You do your job the same way every day.

Developing successful habits for work or your business is necessary if you want your business or career to grow. Your habits directly affect how you are perceived as an employee or an expert in your field.

To be sure, not every habit is a good one and changing them takes time and persistence.

Many bad habits can affect your career. For example:

- Being late for work or meetings
- Thinking negatively
- Seeking attention
- Resisting change
- Making rash decisions
- Being defensive
- Procrastinating
- Multitasking
- Micromanaging

You want to know what it takes to change bad habits and make the good ones stick.

Well, that's where this report helps. It digs deeper into what habits are and how they are formed. Then we get to the heart of the matter. It looks at the differences between good and bad habits. Then it goes into how you can create the good habits and how to break the bad habits. Finally, you'll find tips for staying motivated, on track and getting back on track when you take a misstep.

What is a Habit and How is it Formed?

According to Wikipedia.com, "A habit (or wont) is a routine of behavior that is repeated regularly and tends to occur unconsciously."

In other words, a habit is something you do repeatedly and regularly without even thinking about doing it. For example, you get up every day at the same time even without an alarm clock. You have a set routine you do each morning. In your business or job, you attack projects in the same way.

Habits are routine and sometimes mandatory. When you think of having successful habits for work or business, you think of the ones that make you productive and fit in worth growth.

The process of changing a habit into a new behavior is called habit formation. It's very hard to break old habits and form new habits since our behavior is engrained into our neural pathways. But repetition is the key to changing a habit.

So how are they formed then?

It turns out that habits are a three-step process.

1. The first step is the trigger or cue telling your brain to go into automatic mode. This is the decision-making part of your brain.
2. The second step is the routine or the behavior itself. This is where your decision-making part of the brain and the emotional or memory part of the brain work together.
3. The third step is the reward. It's something you enjoy that helps your brain remember this habit in the future. Here is where the memory part of the brain takes over.

Habits are formed through performing a certain action or behavior so regularly that it becomes automatic.

The length of time it takes to break or form a new habit has been debated often. We've been told that a habit can be formed and sustained in 21 days. This came from a plastic surgeon, Maxwell Maltz, who published a book, "Psycho-Cybernetics" in the 60s. In it, he talked of his observations that amputees took on average only 21 days to adjust to the loss of a limb. He reasoned that the same must be true of all big changes and it must take 21 days to change a habit.

However, this isn't totally accurate.



Don't take my word for it though. A study by the University College London psychologist Phillippa Lally (source: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ejsp.674/abstract;jsessionid=98D00892F8C79349E09076AAB16F133B.f02t03>) found that subjects trying to learn new habits such as eating fruit daily or exercising every day, took on average as 66 days before the behavior became automatic. In fact, it ranged from 18 days to 245 days.

Habits can be initially triggered by a goal but over time that goal fades and the habit becomes an automatic behavior.

Habits are formed in a part of the brain called the basal ganglia, which has to do with the development of emotions, pattern recognition, and memories.

Decisions, however, are from the prefrontal cortex part of the brain.

Once a behavior becomes a habit, the decision-making part of the brain stops processing new data.

So, you see, a habit is something you do without thinking about doing it. It takes anywhere from 18 days to 245 days to form a new habit, depending on the complexity of the habit. Changing a bad habit into a good one can be difficult but not impossible.

How to Identify Bad/Good Habits

Now you know what a habit is and how it's formed, you're probably curious on how to identify bad habits from good habits. In your personal life, you most likely already know what your bad habits are. In your work life, it might be more difficult to tell.

One way to determine if you have a bad habit that needs to be changed is to ask others. Then you can work on changing them to good habits. Good habits are often recognized when you are getting the results you want from a certain aspect of your life, for example, your business is growing.

Here are some examples of both kinds of habits.

Examples of Good Work Habit

- You are a doer. You don't procrastinate when you have deadlines looming. You are consistently finishing projects and taking on new challenges. You don't put off doing work because of fear of failing or a lack of planning.

For example, Jane has a big presentation coming up in a month. She has set up a schedule for herself to complete each step of what needs to be done. Each day she completes what needs to be done in order to have her presentation ready. She has a good habit of following through and doing the work.

- You take responsibility and ownership of your work even when something goes wrong.

For example, Adam researched the data on a project the company he works for was doing. The company began working on the project only to find the data was incorrect. Adam realized the mistake was his. He has a good habit of taking responsibility for his work.

- You're an active learner. You keep up with the latest trends and news in your niche. You get involved in projects that help you learn new skills or technology.

For example, Michelle reads the latest news and trends in her niche every day before beginning her work. She uses that knowledge to keep her business up to date and current. She volunteers to be a part of a project that is testing new technology she is excited to learn. She has the good habit of always learning.

- You're organized. You keep your desk organized, you keep paperwork organized, and you have a system of doing thing.

For example, Lee is notorious for filing papers as soon as he finishes with them. He keeps his desk clean and organized and the files on his computer are kept in well-labeled files. His good habit of being organized helps him to be more efficient at his job.



Tips for developing good habits

I've already shown you that developing a new habit can take a long time.

Here are some tips to help you develop your own.

1. Focus on one habit at a time. Forming a new habit is a lot of work and takes conditioning for it to become automatic. Trying to take on too many changes at once can overwhelm you. Start with one, even a small one, before moving on to another.
2. Gradually work up to it. For example, if your goal is to be organized at work, you won't be able to be instantly organized every day. It will take time and willpower to keep up with it every day in the beginning. There will be days you slip and leave an unorganized mess on your desk. That's okay. Just keep at it until it becomes a habit.
3. Build the good habit into your routine of regular habits. For example if you want to start taking vitamins every day, put the bottle in your coffee cup so whenever you grab your mug for coffee in the morning you can take your vitamin as well.
4. Get an accountability buddy. In your business, you probably have someone to stay accountable to that keeps you on track. The same is true when trying to create a good habit. Trying to change on your own can be difficult but if you have someone who can do it with you or keep you motivated, you're more likely to continue doing it.
5. Give yourself time to develop your self-discipline. I've mentioned before it takes time to form a new habit. On average, it can be around 66 days. That means you are going to have to build your self-discipline. One way to do this is to create a visual map of what you want to achieve. So, for example, you want to be the leader in your company's next big project. Create a visual map of what you need to do to be a leader. Include words like confident, focused, good listener, a doer. This map reminds you of why you want to form that new positive habit.



Developing good, positive habits helps you reach your goals.

But what about those bad habits? How do you recognize and change them?

Bad habits

Remember Joe from our story earlier? He had a few bad habits such as eating unhealthy food while watching mindless television shows and avoiding exercise. His job performance was just as bad. His desk is covered with papers and clutter. He doesn't finish projects or take responsibility for when he does something wrong.

Ignoring your bad habits might seem like the way to avoid them but eventually these habits catch up to you. Your bad habits will hold you back from moving forward.

You already know that smoking and late night ice cream binges are bad habits. These aren't the only kind of bad habits though. They can include a variety of emotional, cognitive and behavior consequences.

Here are some bad habit examples

- You don't learn from your mistakes. You continue to make the same unhealthy or inefficient choices repeatedly.

For example, Elizabeth has been trying to lose some weight. She goes to the gym every day. The problem is she doesn't change her eating habits. She still has a doughnut and soda for breakfast every day and snacks on sugary sweets. Each time she starts a new routine at the gym, she doesn't make the necessary changes to her diet.



- You resent other's people's success. You're jealous that they seem to have what you don't. You don't look at how hard they worked to get there.

For example, Bob works with a fellow marketer. His friend just received a promotion and the lead in a big account. Bob feels he should have been chosen. He didn't always turn in his marketing ideas on time, but so what? He did the work, eventually. Why shouldn't he be the one to get the promotion?

- You procrastinate. You put things off until the last minute then end up doing a poor job.

For example, Betty is a writer. She loves her job, but always thinks she can put off her research and writing until later. She waits until the day before her article is due before she begins researching. She ends up staying up late finishing her article. It's filled with errors and is never her best work.

- You're afraid to take risks. You don't step up or speak up because you're afraid of what others will think of you or you might fail.

For example, John wants to open a business selling dog collars. He loves creating them and has a lot of ideas. The problem is that he's afraid no one will buy them, even though he gets compliments on them. John is afraid to ask others for help in getting started. Instead, he continues to go to a job he hates and makes his dog collars as a hobby.

Tips for breaking bad habits

As you might guess, breaking a bad habit is going to be as difficult as creating a good one.

Here are some tips to help you along the way.

1. Become aware of when you are doing the bad habit. Figure out when and why you are biting your nails or cracking your knuckles. Increase your awareness of what you're doing.
2. Write down when and why you are doing it and how it makes you feel. This helps you establish a baseline and then you can analyze and recognize why you are doing it. Create a list of the pros and cons of the behavior.
3. Switch it out. Once you know why and when you're committing the habit, find a temporary or permanent replacement habit for it. So if you're trying to stop biting your nails chew gum instead. You can also try meditation to break a bad habit.
4. Choose the approach that works for you. Some people can quit a behavior all at once while others need to quit gradually.
5. Avoid the people, places, and situations that trigger the bad habit as much as you can.
6. Replace the bad behavior with a positive behavior until it becomes a habit.
7. Give yourself a reward whenever you engage in a good habit over an old, bad habit.
8. Have others hold you accountable. Consider asking your colleagues, family, or friends to help you break a bad habit.

Undoubtedly, recognizing and changing a habit requires persistence, consistency, and time. Once you've recognized what you want to change and why you are one step closer to changing it.

Tips for changing your habits

Let's face it. Any kind of behavior change requires motivation. Sometimes you get off track and need to find a way to get back on track. Here are some tips to help you stay motivated and get back on track.

- Keep at it. If you get off track, get back at it as soon as you realize you are slipping.
- Give yourself a reward for each small step you make towards changing a habit.
- Commit to it for 30 days. If that seems too hard, commit to a week at a time.
- Get a buddy to join you and keep you accountable. They can motivate you and keep you on track.
- Mark it on your calendar. This works well for habits like exercising.
- Create a ritual. For example, if you want to floss your teeth every day, put the floss next to your toothbrush.
- Start small and focus on one habit at a time.
- Be specific on what you want to change.



- Create an action plan for what you need to do to change a habit. Re-read this plan when you don't feel motivated or you get off track.
- Make a list of what you want to accomplish each day towards your habit change.
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and progress. This lets you see how well you are doing.
- If you get off track, look for a different way to approach your habit change. For example, you're trying to become better organized. You've been trying to keep your office tidy every day but can't keep up. Instead try doing your desk one day, the files another and so on.
- Not feeling motivated? Listen to an inspirational song or speaker that inspires you.
- Stay motivated by revisiting your motivational collage or vision map. It includes pictures of your goal and the reason you want to get there.

The bottom line is you will have days when you don't feel motivated to change your habit. You may hit a snag or get side tracked and go back to the old way. That's okay. Just recognize what's happened and why and then get back at your goal of creating a positive change.

What is the next step?

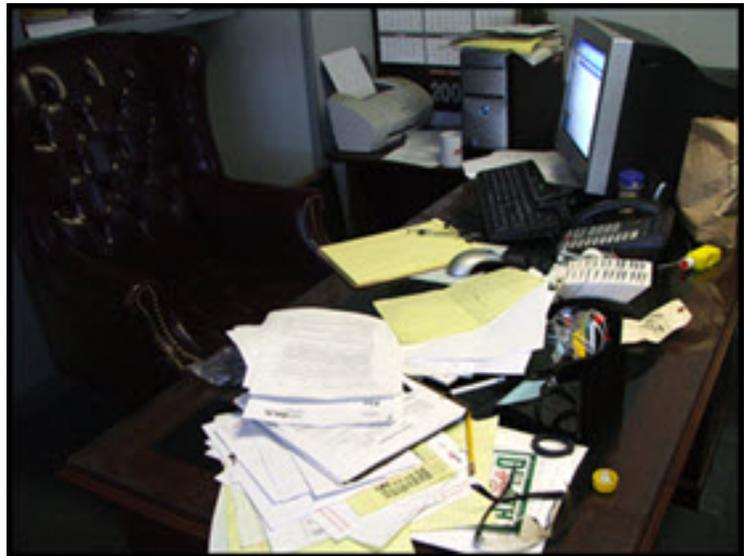
Do you remember Joe from the beginning of our story? He wants to change his bad habit of eating unhealthy foods and start exercising.

Here's his story after implementing the tips he found here.

Joe gets up an hour before work now. He takes a brisk walk around his neighborhood. He keeps track of how often and how far he walks. He writes in a journal every day with how it makes him feel and he's beginning to feel better. Now that he walks every day and it's becoming a habit, he's started changing his eating habit as well. Now when he arrives home every day, he grabs a piece of fruit to tie him over until dinner. He then spends time with his family, plays with his kids or catches up on motivational reading. Dinnertime is a healthy meal that includes a protein, vegetables, and a salad.

His coworkers are seeing an improvement in his work as well. He now gets his projects done on time and takes responsibility for his work.

Can you imagine how great it would feel if you could change all those old, bad habits into positive good habits quickly?



There is no magic wand or quick-change button. Changing bad habits and creating new ones takes motivation on your part. You will have to self-motivate to do what it takes to make the changes you want. But in the end, it will be worth it.

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