

## THE BIG IDEAS

### What Is a Habit?

An outfit a nun wears, of course!

### Consistency

Is everything.

### New vs. Old

We want more old habits.

### Don't Miss a Day

Seriously. Don't.

### Never Skip Twice

Absolutely (!) don't do that.

### Use Your Mistakes

To focus.

### Evaluating Progress

Focus on process more than results.

### Negative Habits

Get rid of them.

### Starting vs. Finish Lines

Optimize for the finish line.



# Superhuman by Habit

A Guide to Becoming the Best Possible Version of Yourself One Tiny Habit at a Time

BY TYNAN © 2015

"It doesn't always feel like it, but these days my life is dictated by the habits I've created. When people learn that I write every single day, study a foreign language every day, work on my big projects every day, eat healthy every day, work out every other day, and maintain a consistent sleep schedule, they marvel at the deep well of self discipline that I have. In truth, though, it's all just habits that feel easy. Habits are the closest thing we can get to having superpowers.

This book is a collection of the mindsets and techniques I've used to rebuild myself with habits. If you, like I used to be, can barely stay on top of the essentials of day-to-day living, this book is for you. If you perform well, but are inconsistent, this book is for you. Or if you're a self-optimizer who already performs at a high level, but wants to squeeze even more out of himself, this book is for you."

~ Tynan from *Superhuman by Habit*

I randomly found this book on Amazon and was pulled in by the cover and title.

I'd never heard of Tynan but within the first few pages I was already blown away and knew I'd be doing a Note on it while *\*strongly\** recommending this little manifesto for your reading and optimizing pleasure.

We've done a number of Notes on willpower + habit building, including [Willpower](#) by Roy Baumeister, [The Willpower Instinct](#) by Kelly McGonigal, and [The Power of Habit](#) by Duhigg. Plus books like [Mastery](#) by George Leonard, [Mindset](#) by Carol Dweck, [The Talent Code](#) by Daniel Coyle, and [Talent Is Overrated](#) by Geoff Colvin.

I highly recommend all of them.

But this one distills the practical essence of all of those books into one little transformative manifesto that I think you'll really love. And you can read it in an afternoon if you're feeling so inspired. Pick it up on Amazon here. Learn more about Tynan here.

The first half of the book focuses on the strategic mindset of habit building and the second half focuses on super practical plans to build specific habits.

Most of my book is underlined. We'll focus on some of my favorite Big Ideas on the mindset side of things.

Let's start by defining habits!

## WHAT IS A HABIT?

"A habit is an outfit a nun wears.

Also, it's an action that you take on a repeated basis with little or no required effort or thought. The power of a habit lies in the second part of that definition--the bit about no required effort or thought. It's a loophole that allows you to upgrade your health, quality of life, productivity,

*"The glorious benefit of a habit is that it converts something that requires a lot of willpower and focus into something that becomes automatic and often outside of our conscious thought."*

~ Tynan

*"Replacing just a few key negative habits with a few positive habits can easily be the difference between being mostly unhappy and being happy almost all of the time."*

~ Tynan

and enjoyment of the world with a fixed expenditure of energy in creating a habit, rather than an ongoing drain on your willpower.

This is the engine that drives the people we most admire: those people who consistently seem to excel at their work, stay healthy, stay connected to those around them, and do all of this while remaining calm and happy. The easy explanation for their success is to say that they're somehow built differently or better than the rest of us, but if they are, it's only because of one key thing: they are better at building and sustaining new habits."

There ya go.

A habit = "an action that you take on a repeated basis with little or no required effort or thought."

It's the secret sauce to superhuman abilities.

I remember the first time I read [Robin Sharma's](#) *Greatness Guide* (awesome book, btw). The most powerful passage in the whole book for me was this simple line: "Success is all about consistency around the fundamentals."

Robin tells us that the great ones are incredibly (!) consistent on their fundamentals. Of course, the specific practices will be different for an athlete vs. an artist vs. a CEO vs. ... but they ALL have mastery on the fundamentals in their lives.

Pretty much exactly what Tynan's pointing out.

Their engine = their habits.

Here's a little more on the importance of consistency:

## CONSISTENCY IS EVERYTHING

"When looking through a long-term lens, we can easily see that consistency is the most important factor. Just as it would be better to make 5% interest per year on your financial investments for the rest of your life than 50% interest for one year, it's better to maintain a modest life-long habit than to start an extreme habit that can't be sustained for a single year.

Your results will be commensurate with the consistency with which you execute your habits, not with the magnitude of their one-time impact."

Brilliant.

Consistency. Consistency. Consistency.

After selling my first biz and first getting into all this goodness, I realized optimizing my physical energy would be a key to optimizing my life and reaching my potential. I figured getting certified as a personal trainer would be a good way to master some of the fundamentals.

The #1 lesson from that training?

It's all about consistency over intensity.

It's easy to get all jacked up for a day, head to the gym, go nuts and wake up so sore the next day that you give up.

Wayyyyy better to start small and keep at it.

Consistency over intensity. Consistency on the fundamentals.

Consistency is everything.

(How's yours?)

*"Habits can only be thought of rationally when looked at from the perspective of years or decades. The benefit of a habit isn't the magnitude of each individual action you take, but the cumulative impact it will have on your life in the long run."*

~ Tynan

## NEW HABITS VS. OLD HABITS

"New habits are things that you do, but old habits are things that you are. There's a difference between waking up early and being an early riser, eating a healthy meal and being a healthy eater, getting some work done and being a productive person.

If you want to improve yourself permanently, you must develop more old habits, which is done by creating new habits and sticking with them until they mature into old habits. You know that a habit has crossed that threshold when it becomes something that you subconsciously do, rather than something you must think about doing."

--> "New habits are things that you do, but old habits are things that you are."

I love that distinction.

New habits vs. old habits.

We want to move from eating a healthy meal to simply being a healthy eater. Meditating once in a while to being a meditator.

[Tynan](#) has some brilliant ideas on how to create and sustain new habits so they become automagic, subconscious-driven old habits. Let's explore some.

## DON'T MISS A DAY

*"Consistency of practice is the mark of the master."*

~ George Leonard

"You should be very scared to fail to execute a habit, even once. By failing to execute, potentially you're not just losing a minor bit of progress, but rather threatening the cumulative benefits you've accrued by establishing a habit. This is a huge deal and should not be treated lightly. So make your habits relatively easy, but never miss doing them."

That's REALLY strong advice.

Tynan advises us to focus on setting up \*daily\* habits (vs. weekly or some other measure). And then to NEVER miss a day.

We've talked about this in the context of the 100%, non-negotiable commitment realm.

It's \*huge.\*

The key here is to: "Make your habits relatively easy, but never miss doing them."

Don't say you're going to go from 0 minutes of meditation a day to 60 minutes a day (or even 30 minutes).

Make it easy.

Commit to at least ONE minute of meditation.

That might sound less inspiring than levitating off your cushion for an hour a day, but, as Tynan comes back to again and again (and again and again), we need to see our habits over the LONG RUN. It's not about the hit we get thru a couple good sessions. It's about installing a habit that lasts FOREVER.

And, to do that, it's best to start small, NEVER (!) miss a day, and build from there.

Get your 1 minute of meditation rockin'. You can easily double that to 2. Bump it up to 5. 10's not a big deal then. Move it to 20 minutes if you're feeling it, etc. Bam. You have a habit that's not going anywhere.

= (very) good!

Here's something else to keep in mind:

*"Remember that the power of a habit isn't actually in the individual execution, but in the consistency. It is far far worse to skip doing something than to just do a horrible job of it."*

~ Tynan

## ABSOLUTELY NEVER SKIP TWICE

"I was talking to a friend about a daily habit that I had. He asked me what I did when I missed a day. I told him about my strategies and how I tried to avoid missing a day. What do you do when you miss two days, he asked.

I don't miss two days, I replied.

Missing two days of a habit is habit suicide. If missing one day reduces your chances of long-term success by a small amount like five percent, missing two days reduces it by forty percent or so. Three days missed and you may as well be starting over. At that point you have lost your momentum and have made it far too easy to skip in the future."

That is REALLY (!) cool.

Do whatever you can to never miss a day.

And ABSOLUTELY don't miss two days.

Period.

As [Tynan](#) goes on to say, if you miss that first day, make getting back on track a big priority for the following day. Look at your schedule and prioritize rockin' it.

As he says: "The solution is to plan your day around the habit for the next day. Rather than say, "Okay, I'm definitely going to do it tomorrow," decide specifically when you're going to do it, and come up with solutions to problems in advance, particularly whatever problem stopped you from executing in the first place."

## USE YOUR MISTAKES TO FOCUS

"Use your mistakes to focus. They draw attention to an area that needs more attention, so give it that attention. Challenge yourself to do better next time. Instead of saying, "I'm so bad at this," say "I'm better than this." That's how you use mistakes to your advantage.

Forgive yourself easily, but remember the lessons you learn from mistakes. You've earned them, after all."

This is a great line:

--> "Instead of saying, "I'm so bad at this," say "I'm better than this."

It's a perfect encapsulation of [Carol Dweck's](#) fixed vs. growth mindset--which, ultimately, is at the heart of all optimization. (See Notes on [Mindset](#).)

If we have a fixed mindset, we think our abilities are carved in stone and any tiny little stumble reveals our ultimate inadequacy at a given task (or as a human being).

If we have a growth mindset, we view every challenge and setback as an opportunity to get a little better and we know that falling short is an inherent part of the process.

It's the difference between saying "I'm so bad at this" vs. "I'm better than this./I can get better at this."

Let's just focus on getting back in the game and getting a little better each time we stumble.

AND...

Let's use our mistakes to focus.

Shine the spotlight of awareness on the places we fall short so we can capitalize on the hard-earned lessons!!

It's hard to do that if we're going all fixed-mindset on ourselves. But with an empowered "I'm getting better!!!" perspective, we can crush it.

(Let's!)

## EVALUATING PROGRESS: PROCESS VS. RESULTS

*"Whether for small or big habits, bias yourself strongly toward habits which require daily execution. There are several factors in play that counter-intuitively make daily habits easier to maintain."*

~ Tynan

"When evaluating your progress in building habits, you need something consistent to grade yourself against. Use your adherence to process, not your actual results. So if you're trying to lose weight, evaluate yourself based on how well you stick to your plan rather than the number on the scale, especially in the short term.

Focusing on results, especially short term results, is an excellent way to add stress to your life. That could lead to you quitting the habit associated with that stress, thus ensuring no long term results are ever achieved. Track your adherence to process, not your results."

More goodness.

Want to stress yourself out?

Obsess on immediate results.

Want to cultivate mastery?

Focus on the process.

[George Leonard](#) talks about this as well in his brilliant book [Mastery](#) (see Notes). He tells us: "It's easy to get on the path of mastery. The real challenge lies in staying on it."

Then he outlines some of the pitfalls on the path.

A big one? "Obsessive goal orientation. As pointed out numerous times in this book, the desire of most people today for quick, sure, and highly visible results is perhaps the deadliest enemy of mastery."

[Russell Simmons](#) echoes this wisdom in his great book [Do You!](#) (see those Notes): "I know some people say 'Keep your eyes on the prize,' but I disagree. When your eyes are stuck on the prize, you're going to keep stumbling and crashing into things. If you really want to get ahead, you've got to keep your eyes focused on the path."

Process. Process. Process.

Consistency. Consistency. Consistency.

Let the results be the natural (long-term) by-product of our mastery of the process.

## GET RID OF NEGATIVE HABITS

"Just as building positive habits creates a meta-benefit of becoming better at creating habits, certain negative habits will reach beyond their own scope and interfere negatively with other habits. If you have these habits, attack them first by finding their triggers and reprogramming them with new positive habits. By doing this you get a triple win: the elimination of the negative habit, the elimination of its tangential harm, and the creation of a new positive habit.

The three main disruptive habits are the use of drugs, the seeking of stimulation, and the habit of hanging out with negative friends."

If we want to optimize our lives by building great habits, we need to be aware of the NEGATIVE habits that are holding us back.

As Tynan advises, the good news is that when we identify and replace these negative habits with a positive one, we get a triple win: the negative habit is gone along with the ancillary negative

effects of that habit and we have a new shiny good habit to boot!

How about *you*?

What negative habits do you have that, to say the least, just aren't serving you?

Now a good time to swap it out?

(Tynan has some wisdom on how to identify the "triggers" for the negative habit and use those triggers to initiate a new, healthier habit. Basic idea: Identify when you spiral out, what triggers it and what do you do. It's just a habit. Change it!)

## OPTIMIZE FOR THE FINISH LINE, NOT THE STARTING LINE

"Start small, become consistent, and increase at a manageable pace. That's how you optimize for the finish line, rather than for the starting line."

Love that.

Do you want to optimize for the STARTING line or for the FINISH line? If you're all about looking good and feeling super pumped at the \*starting\* line, then go big from day 1, baby!!!

If you'd like to optimize for the long-term (measured in years + decades + a lifetime), then "*start small, become consistent, and increase at a manageable pace.*"

... Well, there ya go. I hope you loved this quick look at a great little book. I think you'll love the full thing!

Here's to cultivating superhuman abilities one tiny habit at a time!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

[Willpower](#)

[The Willpower Instinct](#)

[Mastery](#)

[The Power of Habit](#)

[Talent Is Overrated](#)

[Mindset](#)

[The Talent Code](#)

## About the Author of "Superhuman by Habit"

TYNAN



In his own words: "I'm Tynan and I believe in making deliberate decisions and breaking away from the herd mentality. I like learning new things, building habits, exploring the world, connecting with awesome people, and creating good work. I also like good Japanese green tea." Learn more at [Tynan.com](http://Tynan.com).

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).