

THE BIG IDEAS

An Efficient Brain

Why we have habits.

Cue + Routine + Reward

How's your loop?

Get a Cue!

And shape your life.

Keystone Habits

Are H.U.G.E.

Believe You Can Change

It's essential.

Exercise

Changes everything.

Get Your Grit On

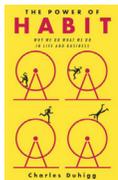
Now, please.

Willpower

= Most important keystone habit.

Every Habit

Is malleable. And that's good news!



The Power of Habit

Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business

BY CHARLES DUHIGG · RANDOM HOUSE © 2012 · 400 PAGES

“This book draws on hundreds of academic studies, interviews with more than three hundred scientists and executives, and research conducted at dozens of companies. It focuses on habits as they are technically defined: the choices that all of us deliberately make at some point, and then stop thinking about but continue doing, often every day. At one point, we all consciously decided how much to eat and what to focus on when we got to the office, how often to have a drink or when to go for a jog. Then we stopped making a choice, and the behavior became automatic. It's a natural consequence of our neurology. And by understanding how it happens, you can rebuild those patterns in whichever way you choose.”

~ Charles Duhigg from *The Power of Habit*

Habits.

They're powerful.

And, *The Power of Habit* by [Charles Duhigg](#) is a very cool look at why we have them, how they work, and what we can do to change them. The book is an incredibly well-written, fun read and it's packed with great stories and wisdom. I highly recommend it and trust you'll love it! (Get it on Amazon [here](#).)

I'm excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas and hope you dig it!

Let's start by taking a quick look at *why* habits exist in the first place and then we'll look at what we can do to optimize our habits!

AN EFFICIENT BRAIN

“Habits, scientists say, emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Left to its own devices, the brain will try to make almost any routine into a habit, because habits allow our minds to ramp down more often. This effort-saving instinct is a huge advantage. An efficient brain requires less room, which makes for a smaller head, which makes childbirth easier and therefore causes fewer infant and mother deaths. An efficient brain also allows us to stop thinking constantly about basic behaviors, such as walking and choosing what to eat, so we can devote mental energy to inventing spears, irrigation systems, and, eventually, airplanes and video games.”

Alright.

So, habits emerged b/c our brains are constantly looking for ways to save effort.

Got it.

What are the primary components of a habit you might ask? That would be a great question! :)

Here they are:

“All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits.”

~ William James

"As people strengthened their willpower muscles in one part of their lives—in the gym, or a money management program—that strength spilled over into what they ate or how hard they worked. Once willpower became stronger, it touched everything."

~ Charles Duhigg

CUE + ROUTINE + REWARD

"This process within our brains is a three-step loop. First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is the routine, which can be physical or mental or emotional. Finally, there is a reward, which helps your brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future."

Duhigg comes back to this three-step loop throughout the book.

Remember: Cue + Routine + Reward = Habit.

If you want to create a new habit, you need to identify your cues and rewards and create new routines!

We'll touch on this loop throughout this Note. :)

First step:

GET A CUE!

"If you want to start running each morning, it's essential that you choose a simple cue (like always lacing up your sneakers before breakfast or leaving your running clothes next to your bed) and a clear reward (such as a midday treat, a sense of accomplishment from recording your miles, or the endorphin rush you get from a jog). But countless studies have shown that a cue and a reward, on their own, aren't enough for a new habit to last. Only when your brain starts expecting the reward—craving the endorphins or sense of accomplishment—will it become automatic to lace up your jogging shoes each morning. The cue, in addition to triggering a routine, must also trigger a craving for the reward to come."

Back to the three components of habits: Cue + Routine + Reward. Now let's add a craving for the reward that's tied to the cue.

Want to exercise every morning?

Give yourself a cue by leaving your workout clothes next to the bed (that's what I do! :) and give yourself a clear reward (mine: the great post work-out buzz mixed with knowing I'm doing what's best for me!).

We want to get to a point where that cue gets you craving the reward.

Get there and voilà!

You're rockin' it.

KEYSTONE HABITS

"It wasn't the trip to Cairo that had caused the shift, scientists were convinced, or the divorce or desert trek. It was that Lisa had focused on changing just one habit—smoking—at first. Everyone in the study had gone through a similar process. By focusing on one pattern—what is known as a "keystone habit"—Lisa had taught herself how to reprogram the other routines in her life, as well."

Keystone habits.

This is my favorite Big Idea in the book.

The basic idea: There's a habit that, when we change it, will have the greatest positive impact on our lives.

It's a KEYSTONE habit.

"Where should a would-be habit master start? Understanding keystone habits holds the answer to that question: The habits that matter most are the ones that, when they start to shift, dislodge and remake other patterns."
 ~ Charles Duhigg

Keystones are good.

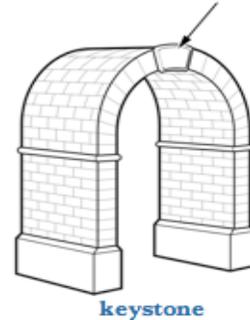
As our friendly Apple dictionary tells us, a keystone is "a central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together."

key•stone | 'kē, stōn |

noun

a central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together.

- [usu. in sing.] the central principle or part of a policy, system, etc., on which all else depends: *cooperation remains the keystone of the government's security policy.*



So... What's YOUR keystone habit?

What's the #1 thing you could change that would have THE most positive impact on your life?

Is it quitting smoking? No longer drinking? Drastically reducing your internet time? Getting your inbox to zero? Meditating every day?

Think about it.

And pick one.

This is a keystone habit for me that I commit to changing: _____

(Nice!!)

P.S. My most recent keystone habit change? I decided to never check my email before I meditated. That habit change positively influenced a number of areas of my life. In addition to starting my day with more presence and proactivity, I started exercising more intensely and consistently, eliminated my internet usage at night, reduced my overall internet/email usage during the day, boosted my productivity and enhanced my presence in our relationship!

P.P.S. My current new keystone habit I want to put in place? Rising with the sun. I've always loved the fact that Thomas Jefferson told of a fifty-year period in which the sun never caught him in bed. Fifty years!!! I've done this consistently before (it was *really* easy living in Bali with limited electricity/internet and no work obligations!) and I'm excited to make it a practice again.

So, let's look at my Cue + Routine + Reward.

Old pattern: Cue = Naturally rising (usually before the sun rises). Routine = Tell myself I needed more sleep; roll over, pet the dog and cuddle with the lady and go in and out of sleep for another little while. Reward = Convinced myself I'd have more energy that day.

New pattern: Cue = Naturally rising before sun (or with the help of an alarm when necessary). Routine = Tell myself how great I will feel hopping straight up and flexing my willpower muscles as I greet another great day. AND GET OUT OF BED! Reward = Convinced myself I'd have more energy that day by honoring my commitment, developing my willpower and getting a head start on another great day!!

Note: To rise with the sun successfully, I'm also going to need to observe/alter my NIGHT-time habits. Watching a movie and eating popcorn and coconut bliss isn't going to help the process! :)

Back to you: What's your keystone habit? And your Cue + Routine + Reward?

The book goes into more detail that will be very helpful for you as you look to re-shape your habits, but let's take a quick inventory:

My keystone habit: _____
My current Cue: _____
My current Routine: _____
My current Reward: _____
My new Cue: _____
My new Routine: _____
My new Reward: _____

Awesome. Now get on that!! :)

BELIEVE YOU CAN CHANGE

"The evidence is clear: If you want to change a habit, you must find an alternative routine, and your odds of success go up dramatically when you commit to changing as part of a group. Belief is essential, and it grows out of a communal experience, even if that community is only as large as two people."

~ Charles Duhigg

"How do habits change? There is, unfortunately, no specific set of steps guaranteed to work for every person. We know that a habit cannot be eradicated—it must, instead, be replaced. And we know that habits are most malleable when the Golden Rule of habit change is applied: If we keep the same cue and the same reward, a new routine can be inserted. But that's not enough. For a habit to stay changed, people must believe change is possible. And most often, that belief only emerges with the help of a group."

Great stuff.

First, notice the importance of keeping the cue and rewards the same and just changing the routine. Duhigg goes off on that throughout the book.

Second, we need to BELIEVE change is possible.

"I wouldn't have said this a year ago—that's how fast our understanding is changing," said Tonigan, the University of New Mexico researcher, "but belief seems critical. You don't have to believe in God, but you do need the capacity to believe that things will get better."

Belief.

It's essential!

And, finally: Groups are super helpful.

Whether it's AA helping recovering alcoholics or a running club supporting people training for a marathon or a couple supporting one another to meditate every day, groups rock.

So... How's your belief?

And... What group can you engage with to rock it?

EXERCISE

"When people start habitually exercising, even as infrequently as once a week, they start changing other, unrelated patterns in their lives, often unknowingly. Typically, people who exercise start eating better and becoming more productive at work. They smoke less and show more patience with colleagues and family. They use their credit cards less frequently and say they feel less stressed. It's not completely clear why. But for many people, exercise is a keystone habit that triggers widespread change. "Exercise spills over," said James Prochaska, a University of Rhode Island researcher. "There's something about it that makes other good habits easier."

Exercise. As we discuss all the time in these Notes, it's huge!!

How's *your* exercise looking these days?

For some mysterious reason, exercising has a ripple effect into the rest of our lives.

So, get on that! :)

GET YOUR GRIT ON!

"Dozens of studies show that willpower is the single most important keystone habit for individual success."

~ Charles Duhigg

"Cultures grow out of the keystone habits in every organization, whether leaders are aware of them or not. For instance, when researchers studied an incoming class of cadets at West Point, they measured their grade point averages, physical aptitude, military abilities, and self-discipline. When they correlated those factors with whether students dropped out or graduated, however, they found that all of them mattered less than a factor researchers referred to as "grit," which they defined as the tendency to work "strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress."

"Grit."

I just love that idea.

Here's how [Martin Selegman](#) refers to it in [Flourish](#) (see Notes): *"If we want to maximize the achievement of children, we need to promote self-discipline. My favorite social psychologist, Roy Baumeister, believes it is the queen of all the virtues, the strength that enables the rest of the strengths. There is, however, an extreme trait of self-discipline: GRIT. Indeed, Angela went on to explore grittiness, the combination of very high persistence and high passion for an objective."*

So, willpower is the queen of all virtues. And grit is the king.

If you haven't watched Angela Lee Duckworth's TEDx talk on grit yet, get on that. It's brilliant. Click [here](#) or Google "Grit + Duckworth + TED" to watch her talk on grit—which is essentially intense passion + intense persistence. It's the stuff of greatness. :)

THE MOST IMPORTANT KEYSTONE HABIT? WILLPOWER.

"Dozens of studies show that willpower is the single most important keystone habit for individual success. In a 2005 study, for instance, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania analyzed 164 eighth-grade students, measuring their IQs and other factors, including how much willpower the students demonstrated, as measured by tests of their self-discipline. Students who exerted high levels of willpower were more likely to earn higher grades in their classes and gain admission into more selective schools. They had fewer absences and spent less time watching television and more hours on homework. "Highly self-disciplined adolescents outperformed their more impulsive peers on every academic-performance variable," the researchers wrote. "Self-discipline predicted academic performance more robustly than did IQ. Self-discipline also predicted which students would improve their grades over the course of the school year, whereas IQ did not.... Self-discipline has a bigger effect on academic performance than does intellectual talent." And the best way to strengthen willpower and give students a leg up, studies indicate, is to make it into a habit."

Willpower.

It's the greatest predictor of and the most important keystone habit for individual success.

Let's build it!

EVERY HABIT IS MALLEABLE

"Hundreds of habits influence our days—they guide how we get dressed in the morning, talk to our kids, and fall asleep at night; they impact what we eat for lunch, how we do business, and

"Once you understand that habits can change, you have the freedom-and the responsibility-to remake them. Once you understand that habits can be rebuilt, the power of habit becomes easier to grasp, and the only option left is to get to work."

~ Charles Duhigg

whether we exercise or have a beer after work. Each of them has a different cue and offers a unique reward. Some are simple and others are complex, drawing upon emotional triggers and offering subtle neurochemical prizes. But every habit, no matter its complexity, is malleable. The most addicted alcoholics can become sober. The most dysfunctional companies can transform themselves. A high school dropout can become a successful manager. However, to modify a habit, you must decide to change it. You must consciously accept the hard work of identifying the cues and rewards that drive the habits' routines, and find alternatives. You must know you have control and be self-conscious enough to use it—and every chapter in this book is devoted to illustrating a different aspect of why that control is real."

"Every habit, no matter its complexity, is malleable."

That's an amazing fact.

We all have habits that don't serve us.

We've gotta KNOW that we can change them.

We need to decide it's time to change, accept the hard work required in shaping our lives, and then get to work!

As Duhigg tells us: *"Once you understand that habits can change, you have the freedom—and the responsibility—to remake them. Once you understand that habits can be rebuilt, the power of habit becomes easier to grasp, and the only option left is to get to work."*

Hope you enjoyed this quick look at another great book and here's to getting to work!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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you'll probably like...

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[Willpower](#)

[Succeed](#)

[Flourish](#)

About the Author of "The Power of Habit"

CHARLES DUHIGG



Charles Duhigg is an investigative reporter for *The New York Times*. He is a winner of the National Academies of Sciences, National Journalism, and George Polk awards, and was part of a team of finalists for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize. He is a frequent contributor to *This American Life*, NPR, *PBS NewsHour*, and *Frontline*. A graduate of Harvard Business School and Yale College, he lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two kids. Learn more at: <http://charlesduhigg.com>.

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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.