



Atomic Habits

An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones

By James Clear (Penguin Random House, 2018)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

- ~ This book shows you how to build better habits in life and work.
- ~ With four simple laws of human behavior, you can make any habit a regular part of your life.

Why I chose this book:

We all have habits we want to drop or start. For most people, having better habits makes them a better person. For school and district leaders, having better habits impacts your entire school or district. Even if it's a personal habit like sleeping more – think of the ramifications of having a leader with a clear head to make better decisions.

With four simple laws (outlined below), and *very concrete strategies*, James Clear shows us how to make the types of tiny changes that will ultimately lead to those remarkable changes we hope to see.

Plus, this book is a pleasure to read. I was entertained as well as inspired by the vivid stories – the 23-year-old stockbroker who earned millions using a jar of paperclips and the author who finished a book by hiding his clothes so he couldn't leave his desk. *I'm ready to start **HABIT STACKING** and **TEMPTATION BUNDLING!***

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ What makes some behaviors difficult while others are effortless:

Behaviors are effortless here.	Behaviors are difficult here.
Obvious...	...Invisible
Attractive...	...Unattractive
Easy...	...Hard
Satisfying...	...Unsatisfying

- ✓ The 4 laws of behavior change – each law is described on *one* page of the summary:

How to Build a Good Habit		
1 st Law (<i>Cue</i>) – p.3	Make it obvious.	How can I make it obvious?
2 nd Law (<i>Craving</i>) – p.4	Make it appealing.	How can I make it appealing?
3 rd Law (<i>Response</i>) – p.5	Make it easy.	How can I make it easy?
4 th Law (<i>Reward</i>) – p.6	Make it satisfying.	How can I make it satisfying?

Introduction

When James Clear was 15 years old he got smashed in the face with a baseball bat which shattered parts of his skull, nose, and eye sockets. Somehow, he was able to do more than simply piece his life back together. In fact, he ended up excelling as both a college student and college athlete. How did he come back from this devastating disaster? By developing tiny daily habits that mushroomed into substantive changes that greatly improved his life. One by one, he changed his sleep habits, his study habits, his weight-lifting habits, and more. When he examined what he did, he realized that he employed a four-step model of building habits drawing on ideas from biology, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology – cue, craving, response, and reward – that make up what he calls the **Four Laws of Behavior Change**. He used this same four-step approach to write this book and build his business and found success in both of these endeavors as well. After an introduction, this book devotes one whole section to each of these four laws.

The Fundamentals – Why Tiny Changes Make a Big Difference

The Surprising Power of Atomic Habits

For about a century, Great Britain had mediocre cyclists when it came to the Olympics and Tour de France. But when Dave Brailsford was hired he changed all of that. How? With surprisingly small and novel changes. He hired a surgeon to teach the cyclists how to wash their hands to avoid sickness. He got new pillows that would improve the cyclists' sleep. He redesigned bike seats to make them more comfortable. With small changes like these, he was able to transform mediocre cyclists into world champions.

Why did these small changes in habits make a difference when they seem so insignificant on their own? First, these new habits put you on a *path* to success. For example, if you adjust the front of a plane just 3.5 degrees, this is enough to re-route a plane going from Los Angeles to New York City so it will end up in Washington, D.C., instead! This suggests you should pay more attention to your *path* and your *results* (DC) will come. I like how James Clear phrases it here: “Your outcomes are a lagging measure of your habits.”

Another way to understand the significant impact of tiny adjustments is to imagine an ice cube on a table. The room is 26 degrees. Then the room very gradually warms up. 27 degrees, nothing happens. 28 degrees. 29. 30. 31 degrees, and the ice cube remains intact. Then, at 32 degrees the ice begins to melt. This seems to be the result of a one-degree difference, but we know that this is just the **breakthrough moment** that occurs after a number of small changes have already taken place.

This is why it can be hard to stick to new habits. You run every day for a month and yet you don't see any changes to your body, so you give up. It's just that you haven't yet arrived at that **breakthrough moment**. But once you break through, you can see significant improvement. As Clear puts it, “Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement.”

The current thinking is that to make improvements, we need to set a goal. But we've all set goals that we've never met. In fact, two people might have the same goal and one succeeds while the other doesn't. Clearly the difference isn't having a goal since they both had the same goal! Rather than focusing on *goals* (results), you should spend your energy **focusing on your systems** (the process).

You can set a goal to have a clean room, and then you get up and clean your room so you've met your goal. *However*, by the next day it gets messy again. Why? You never developed a *system* to keep your room clean. This book is about developing tiny habits – *atomic habits* – that will gradually change a larger system. These atomic habits are the building blocks of substantial results.

How Your Habits Shape Your Identity (and Vice Versa)

Clear asks a great question, “Why is it so easy to repeat bad habits and so hard to form good ones?” Of course we want to change the results, and of course we want to change our processes/systems (as mentioned above), but before either of those can happen, we need to change our **identity**. Your processes are what you *do*, but your identity is what you *believe*. Start by thinking, “Who do I wish to *become*?” When someone asks if you want a cigarette, it's reasonable to say, “No thanks, I'm trying to quit.” But it's even more powerful to say and believe, “No thanks, I'm not a smoker.”

Many people don't even consider *identity* when trying to change their habits. But behavior that contradicts who you are in your core, simply will not persist, “True behavior change is identity change. You might start a habit because of motivation, but the only reason you'll stick with one is that it becomes part of your identity.”

Rather than thinking that the goal is to read a book, the goal is to *become* a reader. Rather than thinking the goal is to run a marathon, the goal is to *become* a runner. Think about how the stories we tell ourselves about identities affect what we *do*: “I'm not a morning person” or “I'm bad at math.” The biggest obstacle to change is identity conflict.

But it's a two-way street. It's not just your identity that influences your habits, your habits slowly influence your identity. Every page you write starts to turn you into a *writer*. Every mile you run begins to turn you into a *runner*. To do this, you need **two simple steps**:

1. Decide what kind of person you want to be.
2. Prove this to yourself by accomplishing small wins.

When you're trying to decide whether to walk or take a cab, ask yourself, "What would a healthy person do?" The first step in habit change is not addressing the *what*, or even the *how*, but the *who*.

How to Build Better Habits in 4 Simple Steps

James Clear defines a habit as: "A behavior that has been repeated enough times to become automatic." He has drawn on the work of psychologist Edward Thorndike and the popular book by Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit* (click the title for The Main Idea's summary) to understand how habits work and to come up with his own approach to building better habits.

When you regularly face the same problem, for efficiency, your brain develops a habit to address it. All habits are about solving problems and human behavior is driven by the need to solve problems. Habits are mental shortcuts to addressing our problems that free up your mind for other things – if it is dark, then I flip on the light switch. There is a 4-step pattern that makes up every habit:

The 4 Steps of Any Habit			
1. <i>Cue</i>	2. <i>Craving</i>	3. <i>Response</i>	4. <i>Reward</i>
(Problem Phase)		(Solution Phase)	

Cue: First, the cue triggers your brain to begin a behavior. You see a pack of cigarettes.

Craving: Next, your craving is the motivational force that gives you a reason to act. You crave a change, not the habit itself. You don't crave the actual cigarette, but the feelings of relief it provides.

Response: The 3rd step is the actual habit. We only do it if it's worth the physical or mental effort.

Reward: Finally, the reward is the ultimate goal of the habit – it's what satisfies the craving.

Here are two examples of how these steps play out:

<i>Cue</i>	<i>Craving</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Reward</i>
Your phone buzzes with a text.	You want to learn the contents of the text.	You grab your phone and read the text.	You satisfy your craving and now when the phone buzzes, you grab it to get this reward.
You wake up.	You want to feel awake.	You drink coffee.	You satisfy your craving. Coffee becomes associated with waking up.

The rest of the book is devoted to a framework that will help you build good habits and terminate bad ones – the **Four Laws of Behavior Change**. Each law influences one of the above 4 steps that make up all habits and is described on *one* page of this summary:

How to Build a Good Habit		
1 st Law (<i>Cue</i>) – p.3	Make it obvious.	How can I make it obvious?
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These laws can be used to build habits in many aspects of human behavior from sports to medicine to management. If you're having trouble losing weight, look at each of the **Four Laws of Behavior Change** – the answer must lie there! The reverse of building a good habit is breaking a bad one. To end a bad habit, do the opposite of each of the four laws: make it invisible, make it unappealing, make it difficult, and make it unattractive.

There is more on these laws in the sections to come. Each law is summarized on one page in the following pages.

THE 1ST LAW – Make It Obvious

First, become aware of your habits.

Sometimes we're not even aware of our habits. You may put your hand over your mouth when you laugh, or say, "I'm sorry" whenever you ask a question and not even know it. In fact, the more automatic it is, the *less* likely you are to think about it. That's why the first step in building or changing a habit is to become *aware* of your habits.

One simple way to raise your awareness is to create a list of the regular habits you perform each day. Items might include: wake up, turn off alarm, check phone, go to the bathroom, take a shower, brush teeth, hang up towel, get dressed, make tea...

Next, "score" each habit as good, bad, or neutral by placing a "+" "-" or "=" next it. Clear calls this a **HABITS SCORECARD**. In reality, there are no "good" or "bad" habits – just habits that are effective, that is, effective at solving a problem. All habits serve you in some way – a cigarette can help you feel less stressed in the short-term, it just won't improve your health long-term.

So, the question is, "Does this habit help me become the type of person I want to be (my desired identity)?" At this point you're not changing anything or faulting yourself. Just be on the lookout for *all* of your habits like a neutral outside observer, "Oh, I eat a chocolate bar every morning, how interesting." It can even help you raise your awareness to say these things out loud.

Create a specific intention with a tool like HABIT STACKING.

In one research study about developing exercise habits, the group that created a *specific* plan was much more successful. In this group, people completed this sentence, "In the next week, I will engage in at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on [DAY] at [TIME] in [PLACE]." Hundreds of other studies have confirmed this result. In one study they found an increase in voter turnout when people shared the specific route, time, and method they would use to get to the polls. These types of detailed plans are much effective in changing behavior than, "I'm going to exercise more" or "I promise to vote." It's not motivation that people lack, it's *clarity*.

To create an intention, simply fill out this sentence: "I will [BEHAVIOR] at [TIME] in [LOCATION]." Examples:

Meditation. "I will meditate for one minute at 7am in my kitchen."

Studying. "I will study Spanish for 20 minutes at 6pm in my bedroom."

Exercise. "I will exercise for one hour at 5pm in my local gym."

One way to create a plan or an intention for a habit is to use what is called **HABIT STACKING** – that is, attaching a new habit to an already existing one. Some of our habits are naturally stacked. After going to the bathroom, we wash our hands. So, instead of identifying a specific time and location for a new habit (above), you might try identifying an existing habit to connect it to. The formula for habit stacking is: After [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT] and here are some examples:

Meditation. "After I pour my coffee each morning, I will meditate for one minute."

Gratitude. "After I sit down to dinner, I will say one thing I'm grateful for that happened today."

Exercise. "After I take off my work shoes, I will immediately change into my workout clothes."

You can also create a "general" habit stack for different situations. For example, Exercise: "When I see a set of stairs, I will take them instead of the elevator," or Finances: "Whenever I want to buy something over \$100, I will wait 24 hours before purchasing," or Health: "Whenever I serve myself a meal, I will always put veggies on my plate first."

Create an environment that supports good habits and that removes the cues of bad habits.

The most powerful of all of our senses is our *sight* – we have 11 million sensory receptors. While we may not think much of visual cues, they are powerful catalysts for behavior change. We may believe we are motivated by *individual choice*, but a much stronger predictor of what we'll purchase is whether a store puts soda or bottled water at eye level.

Given this impulse, we want to shape our environment to support the habits we wish to build. If the vitamins are on the highest shelf or the guitar is tucked away in the closet, we are less likely to take the vitamin or practice the guitar. But there are ways to shape our environment to support our habits. Place the vitamins next to the sink at night. To drink more water, fill up bottles and leave them around the house. It's not just the objects, but the entire *environment* can influence habits. Can't fall asleep easily? Then get out of the bedroom until you're tired and only enter it when you feel sleepy so you associate sleepiness with the bedroom.

The same is true for *stopping* a habit – take away the cues or make them *invisible*. It is far easier to take something tempting out of the environment (cookies, say) than to develop the tremendous willpower to resist. It is much easier to avoid disrupting your work if you put your phone in another room. It's much easier to stop watching TV before bed if you take it out of the bedroom. As Clear writes, "To put it bluntly, I have never seen someone consistently stick to positive habits in a negative environment." Self-control is a short-term strategy while changing the environment/cues – is a long-term one.

THE 2nd LAW – Make It Attractive

Use TEMPTATION BUNDLING – pair an action you want to do with one you need to do.

The 2nd law is all about making the habit you hope to develop *irresistible*. Obviously, you're more likely to do something if it is attractive to you. So, how can we get ourselves to crave good habits? Research shows that when cravings occur there is an increase in the neurotransmitter dopamine. One study showed that when rats were deprived of all dopamine they lost the craving for everything from food to sex, and soon died of thirst.

Research also shows that dopamine is released not just while you are *experiencing* something pleasurable, but also when you *anticipate* it. So, one way we can make it more likely to engage in a new habit is to increase our craving or desire for it – and we can do that by tying an action we *want* to do with an action we *need* to do, or **TEMPTATION BUNDLING**. This is similar to the **HABIT STACKING** tip in the previous section (remember the formula: After [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT]).

TEMPTATION BUNDLING: After [HABIT I NEED], I will [HABIT I WANT]. Below are a few examples:

Work Habit: After I call three potential clients (need to do), I will check ESPN (want to do).
Exercise Habit: After I do 10 burpees (need to do), I will check Facebook (want to do).

The hope is that the dopamine that is released in anticipation of what you *want* to do will help with the habit you *need* to do.

Join a culture where the desired habit is the norm.

The truth is that we don't *choose* our earliest habits – we imitate them from those around us: our family, school, or community. As humans, we tend to go along with the group and in fact, that feels like the easier path. After all, our ancestors lived in tribes so we want to fit in!

So, if we want to make a new habit attractive, it helps to be a part of a group or a culture where that habit is the norm. Want to develop the habit of playing jazz every day? Then join a group of jazz lovers. Want to become more fit? Join a group of fit people who take it for granted that one would exercise every day.

Not only does being a part of the tribe motivate us, but it has an impact on our *identity* (remember this from the 1st section?) – now, you are a *musician*, or you are an *athlete*. When changing your habits causes you to question or challenge the tribe to which you belong, that's tough! But if changing your habits helps you *fit in better* with the tribe, then change becomes quite *attractive*. “One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior.”

Reprogram your brain to enjoy hard habits or to dislike bad habits.

Every behavior has both a superficial craving and a deeper underlying motive. You might crave tacos in the moment, but the underlying motive is to survive. Below is a partial list of some of our *underlying* motives:

- Obtain food and water
- Connect and bond with others
- Reduce uncertainty
- Find love and reproduce
- Win social acceptance and approval
- Achieve status and prestige

Your brain didn't evolve to check Facebook or smoke a cigarette. Underneath, you really want acceptance or to relieve anxiety. Habits like these are just modern-day approaches to ancient underlying problems. Not everyone smokes a cigarette to relieve stress – some people go for a jog. The problem is that your current habits are not always the *best* way to solve your deeper problems.

The good news is that while it's harder to change underlying motives or problems, we *can* change the habits we believe are satisfying those deeper desires. We just need to stop associating certain solutions with certain problems.

Most of our conscious actions are *preceded* by a *prediction*, “If I smoke that cigarette, I will feel less stress.” It's the *prediction* that's causing your habits. It's your *prediction* that closes the gap between your craving and your desired state. What if we reprogram our brain to highlight the positive effects of habits we want to adapt, “If I go for a run, I will feel less stress” or “If I save money now, I will have more freedom later.” Or, what if we reprogram our brain to eradicate a behavior, “Smoking doesn't relieve nerves, it destroys them.”

THE 3rd LAW – Make It Easy

Reduce friction so you can repeat your good habits frequently.

The key to establishing habits is to just *do* them – not to get stuck procrastinating by thinking about them or preparing for them. You need to get started because it will take a number of repetitions to make your habit automatic. Repeating a habit actually leads to changes in the brain. So, when people ask, “How long will it take to form a new habit?” they really should be asking, “How many *repetitions* do I need to form a new habit?” That’s why the 3rd law is so important – if you can *make it easy* to accomplish your new behavior, then you will do it more frequently and it will become a habit.

My favorite story in the chapter is about the French author Victor Hugo. He was having trouble meeting his publisher’s timeline to finish *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* because he kept leaving his writing and going out to chat with friends in cafes. So, to increase friction, he had his assistant take away his clothes for the day so he couldn’t go out and he ended up meeting his deadline with two weeks to spare! For more suggestions to make your habits easier, other than having your clothing removed, see below.

Prime the environment to make your habits easier.

We tend to think that *motivation* is the key to successful habit change. We believe that if you *really wanted* to change badly enough, then you would gather up your motivation and do it. However, as Clear points out, “Our real motivation is to be lazy and do what is convenient.” Evolutionarily, our brain is wired to *conserve* energy. When given the choice, we take the easier path. That is, we are motivated to do what is easy.

Many of the habits we easily pick up don’t take much energy to do – scrolling through texts, watching TV, and eating ice cream. That’s why companies try to sell us products that make actions *easier* to do: meal-delivery services so you don’t have to shop, texting so you don’t have to send a letter, etc.

It is much harder to increase your *motivation* than it is to set up your *environment* to help good habits prosper. In the 1st law we saw how your environment could be used to make cues more obvious, but it can *also* be used to make the action itself easier. For example, by choosing a gym on the way to work, you make it easier to go regularly. Too often we try to start habits in *high-friction* environments. James Clear wanted to get better at sending greeting cards but when someone had a baby he’d think he should go to the store to buy a card, but never would. In contrast, his wife kept a box of cards, organized by occasion, and this set-up made the habit much easier (and more successful) for her. Below are other examples of how to design your environment to do what’s right:

To improve your diet: Chop and store a ton of fruits and vegetables in containers in your fridge.

To decrease your TV watching: Unplug it after each use. To make it worse – take out the batteries from the remote as well.

To improve work efficiency: Put your phone in another room when you work.

Master the DECISIVE MOMENTS – make small choices count.

Every day is filled with *decisive moments* that lead to productive or unproductive habits. When Clear’s wife walks in the door at 5:15pm from work, either they put on workout clothes and go to the gym or collapse on the couch and order in food. One of the greatest dancers of the modern era, Twyla Tharp, has a serious habit of working out for two hours each morning. It starts by waking up at 5:30am and then there are a series of steps, including taking a taxi to the gym where she works out. She says her **DECISIVE MOMENT** is hailing the taxi. Once she gets in, she knows that she will complete the workout. If you can master these decisive moments, you will be more likely to accomplish your good habits.

Use the TWO-MINUTE RULE to start your habits on a small scale.

One way to make a habit easy, is to *start small*. It’s hard to do 100 push-ups, so start with fewer and build up. Just about any habit can be broken down:

- “Read before bed each night.” ⇒ “Read one page.”
- “Do 30 minutes of yoga daily.” ⇒ “Take out my yoga mat.”
- “Study for class.” ⇒ “Take out my notes.”

The idea is to make the new habit easy to *start*. These smaller *gateway habits* help you to simply show up. That’s right, every day all you have to do to start your running habit is simply put on your sneakers. Then you’re done. That’s a lot easier than running 3 miles. Once you’ve established this gateway habit, *then* you can scale up. After you’ve arrived at the gym for 5 days in a row, then you can start working out. After you’ve journaled just one sentence a day, then you can do more. Any habit can be incrementally increased from the very easy (where you want to start) to much loftier goals.

Very Easy	Easy	Moderate	Hard	Very Hard
Write 1 sentence	Write 1 paragraph	Write 1,000 words	Write a 5,000-word article	Write a book
Open your notes	Study for 10 minutes	Study for 3 hours	Get straight As	Earn a PhD

THE 4th LAW – Make It Satisfying

Reward yourself for the habit, but it must be *immediate*.

In the 1990s, over 60 percent of the residents of Karachi, Pakistan, lived in slums. These extremely unsanitary conditions led to rampant illness and disease. When health workers showed up, they knew that hand washing could make a great deal of difference, but people did not yet have a regular habit of handwashing. People there *knew* that hand washing was important, they just hadn't made it a habit. Rather than supplying everyone with a typical bar of soap, instead the health workers introduced a soap that smelled great and foamed easily. Within a few months, handwashing became the norm and diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia dropped by 50 percent. Why? Hand washing had become a more pleasurable experience – people immediately experienced a benefit from handwashing.

You may be aware of the long-term effects of a habit, but you're more likely to conduct it regularly if you can enjoy it *now*, that is, make it satisfying. As James Clear puts it, "What is rewarded is repeated. What is punished is avoided." Evolutionarily, humans are wired for instant gratification. Our ancestors looked for food to consume *now*, to find shelter for *now*, to avoid a predator *now*.

It is only recently that our culture has shifted to focus on delaying our gratification. We carefully diet so we can live a longer life. We go to the gym so we can be more fit. Unfortunately, many of our bad habits are the reverse – they give us instant gratification and the negative consequences aren't felt for a while. Why would anyone smoke, engage in unsafe sex, or overeat? Because the rewards are immediate. That's why it's important to make good habits not only satisfying, but *immediately* satisfying.

Reward habits of avoidance (like no alcohol) in a visible way.

But how do you make it satisfying when you are trying to avoid a habit – like smoking, drinking, overspending or overeating? Where's the reward when you walk by a shoe store and don't buy that expensive pair? One idea is to open an account or have a jar for money – and every time you skip dessert or that happy hour, you put money in to save for something you want like a leather jacket or a vacation. These small deposits are a way to see some immediate rewards while you wait for the long-term reward to accumulate over time. If you're trying to lose weight, then obviously the immediate reward shouldn't be a slice of cake!

Use a HABIT TRACKER and don't break the chain!

No one expected much from a typical 23-year-old stockbroker in Abbotsford, Canada, but then he made outstanding progress. Each morning he placed two jars on his desk – one with 120 paper clips and one that was empty. Every time he made a sales call he moved one paper clip into the empty jar and he continued until he transferred all 120 of them. The next day he would empty the full jar and repeat this. Within a short time, he was bringing millions of dollars into the firm.

This strategy, which provides *immediate* satisfaction while waiting until the long-term benefits kick in, uses a **HABIT TRACKER**. It's just a simple way to record success with habits. You could use Xs on a calendar or a list. Jerry Seinfeld uses a tracker for his goal to write a joke every day and aspires to "never break the chain." Benjamin Franklin had a list of personal virtues and recorded his progress in a booklet (virtues such as "Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful" and "Avoid trifling conversations.")

Research shows that people who track their habits are more likely to make progress. Maybe that's because a **HABIT TRACKER** satisfies several laws of behavior change at once – it makes the behavior obvious, attractive and satisfying. By recording your behavior, that makes it *obvious*. When you see your progress on a habit tracker you become more *motivated* to continue. Clear says that the most effective form of motivation is progress – now that is *attractive*! Finally, checking off each day you complete your routine can be satisfying in and of itself. Rather than focusing on getting six-pack abs, you're focused on a much more short-term goal: the checkmark and keeping the chain unbroken.

Never miss twice. If you fall off the horse, just don't do it a second time.

It's important to be able to recover quickly when your habits break down, because inevitably they do – you have an emergency or your family needs you. Keep this rule in mind when you end up eating an entire pizza or missing a workout – "never miss twice." Missing twice can lead to a downward spiral. Clear puts it well, "Missing once is an accident. Missing twice is the start of a new habit."

Create a negative consequence: Get an accountability partner and set up a HABIT CONTRACT.

One way to reverse the 4th law, that is, make the habit *unsatisfying*, is by creating an immediate negative consequence. The threat of a painful or unwanted experience can influence our habits. This is what happens when a plumber does a good job to *avoid* a bad public review. Or we pay our bills on time to *avoid* a late fee. In this way, we are relying on punishment to influence our behavior. One great example in the chapter describes a man who set a goal of waking each day at 5:55am. If he didn't get up, he set it up to have a tweet automatically sent that said, "It's 6:10am and I'm not up because I'm lazy! Reply to this for \$5 via PayPal (limit 5)."

Another way to set up a negative consequence is through a **HABIT CONTRACT**. One man, Bryan Harris, created a very detailed contract to help him lose weight. One part of his goal was to write down all food he ate and weigh himself daily. If he failed to do this, he had to pay his trainer \$200 for his own use. Another punishment in the contract included wearing the hat of a rival sports team every day for the rest of the quarter. Bryan's wife and trainer served as accountability partners by helping him clarify his goals and signing the contract. Even without a contract, having an accountability partner motivates you to know that someone is in it with you.

Advanced Tactics – How to Go from Being Merely Good to Being Truly Great

I'm going to leave the summary here for brevity. If you'd like to read the final section in the book, Clear discusses:

- How your genetics and personality dispose you more for certain habits than others. What this means is that you should choose the habits that most **work for you**. Don't feel compelled to work on the habit that everyone else is building.
- How to stay motivated to do your habits by following the **Goldilocks Rule** – make sure they are not too easy and not too hard.
- How to incorporate **reflection and review** into your habit so you don't get stuck on autopilot and stop paying attention to errors.

Conclusion

Now that you've read this book summary (or the entire book!), you have tools and strategies to help you build helpful habits and dismantle destructive ones. If and when you run into difficulties, remember what Clear said in the beginning of the book, "If you're having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn't you. The problem is your system." Examine the four laws of behavior change to find the sticking point. Maybe you need to make the habit more *obvious*. Perhaps it's not *attractive or satisfying* enough. Often you simply need to make it *easier*. At any rate, by continuing to tweak your habits and make small changes, you have the power to see remarkable results. Good luck.

THE MAIN IDEA's Build a Better Habit Challenge

The strategies in this book will help you whether you want to build better *personal* habits (run three times a week) or *professional* habits (observe three teachers a day). Whichever you choose to focus on will help you as a leader. Yes, even the personal habits. Going to bed earlier or doing yoga will support your physical and mental health which in turn impacts your role as a leader.

Below you will find a worksheet. First you will choose a habit you'd like to build. Then, for each Law of Behavior change there is a *menu of strategies* you can pick from to try with your habit. Choose one strategy for each law.

You can certainly do the activities below on your own, but consider offering a build better habits *challenge* to anyone on staff who would like to join you. Or do it with an accountability partner.

PREP WORK: Choose a habit you want to start or stop.

Before thinking about a specific habit, consider who you want to be, that is, think about your *identity*. James Clear says that “true behavior change is identity change.” To truly establish a running habit, rather than just aiming to run for a month, the goal is to *become* a runner. So, start by thinking about who you wish to become – a good listener? A mindful decision maker? A healthy person?

MY GOAL IS TO BECOME: _____

Next, become aware of your current habits. Examine a typical day and write down your regular behaviors. Do you go to the bathroom and check your emails first thing? Do you make a cup of coffee and scan the news headlines? Do you listen to a specific radio station on the way to work? Do you have a regular morning meeting with staff?

Now, examine your daily behaviors and look at the identity change you've written above. Try to identify a habit from your daily list you would like to *stop* or find a place to insert a *new* habit that would help you become the type of person you want to be.

Two other tips to keep in mind before finalizing your choice of habit change. First, make sure it's a habit that **works for you**. Perhaps your friends are in a fiction book club and you feel you *should* read more fiction, but deep down you prefer to use your reading time for work (reading books like *Atomic Habits*!) Perhaps your husband rises at 4am to run each morning and you're just not a morning person. Don't feel pressure to choose habits just because they suit other people!

If you can, choose what Charles Duhigg (*The Power of Habit*) calls a **keystone habit**: one that has the power to influence a range of other habits. For example, a mindfulness habit might influence your listening skills, your sleep, your physical health, etc.

THE HABIT I WANT TO WORK ON IN THIS CHALLENGE IS: _____

Now, to make that habit ACTIONABLE...

STEP 1: Make it obvious – the 1st law of behavior change.

Research shows that all habits have a *cue* that triggers your brain to begin a behavior. In this step, the goal is for you to choose an obvious cue that will help you reliably *start* your habit. Below are two strategies to choose a cue. *Pick one* to use:

- **Create an intention with HABIT STACKING.** To do this, you attach a new behavior to an existing one. The formula is: After [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT]. Ex: “After I turn on my computer, I will map out my day before I jump into work.”
- **Set up the environment for good habits.** Give yourself visual cues to remind you to do your habit. For example, to drink more water, leave water bottles around you home and office. To run in the morning, set out your running clothes the night before (my husband puts his in the bathroom so he can't say to himself, “I don't want to wake Jenn so I'll skip my run this morning.”)

HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR CUE FOR YOUR NEW HABIT OBVIOUS? _____

STEP 2: Make it attractive – the 2nd law of behavior change.

Making your new habit attractive is about creating a *craving* that supplies the motivation to get you to do it! Below are three strategies from the book to make it attractive – choose one.

- **Use TEMPTATION BUNDLING.** This is similar to HABIT STACKING. With this technique, you take something you crave (like checking Twitter or drinking a cup of coffee) and you promise it to yourself after you do the new habit. The formula is: After [HABIT I NEED], I will [HABIT I WANT]. For example, “After I write the agenda for my staff meeting, I will get a cup of coffee.”
- **Join a culture where the desired habit is the norm.** If you want to do more professional reading, join a book study group (or join Jenn’s Mastermind group!) If you want to do yoga, join a class. If you want to play more music, join a band.

HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR NEW HABIT ATTRACTIVE? _____

STEP 3: Make it easy – the 3rd law of behavior change.

We tend to think that *motivation* is the key to habit change, but humans are wired to conserve energy. We prefer the easier path. So what can we do to make a habit *easy* to do? Below are two techniques – pick one to try for your new habit!

- **Prime the environment to make your habits easier.** In step one, you used the environment to create a cue to start your behavior. Here, the idea is to shape the environment to make it easier to complete the habit by adding or removing friction.
 - To improve your diet: Chop and store a ton of fruits and vegetables in containers in your fridge.
 - To decrease your TV watching: Unplug it after each use. To make it worse – take out the batteries from the remote as well.
 - To improve work efficiency: Put your phone in another room when you work.

- **Use the TWO-MINUTE RULE to start your habits on a small scale.** It’s hard to start a habit of doing 100 push-ups daily, but you can *start small* by doing just a few each day (get it, *atomic* habits...) Almost any habit can be broken down. Try this with yours:

Very Easy	Easy	Moderate	Hard	Very Hard
Write 1 sentence	Write 1 paragraph	Write 1,000 words	Write a 5,000-word article	Write a book
Yours:				

HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR NEW HABIT EASIER? _____

STEP 4: Make it satisfying – the 4th law of behavior change.

Humans are primed for immediate satisfaction. However, the rewards of good habits (like healthy eating) often take a long time to produce results. It will help if you can get an *immediate* reward from doing your habit. Choose one of these strategies for your habit:

- **Reward yourself for the habit *immediately*.** Find ways to give yourself immediate satisfaction. Want to develop a 30-second hand washing habit to stay safe? Consider buying nice smelling, extra foamy soap so the experience is pleasurable. Want an immediate reward for skipping happy hour or dessert? Set aside a jar and put money in to save for a special leather jacket each time you skip.
- **Use a HABIT TRACKER and don’t break the chain!** With this technique you record your progress with habits on a calendar or a chart. It’s a bit like a “keystone” strategy because it satisfies several laws of behavior change – it’s satisfying to check it off, it’s a visual and obvious reminder, and it increases motivation, thereby making it attractive! You just need a chart (can be an app, a computer document, or just a piece of paper) and start checking off each day you do the habit.
- **Create a negative consequence: Get an accountability partner and set up a HABIT CONTRACT.** Why do we (or at least some of us) pay our bills on time? To avoid the negative consequence of a late fee. With this technique you create a contract with an accountability partner and promise a negative consequence – like wearing an opposing team jersey or paying a sum of money – if you do not complete your habit regularly.

HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR NEW HABIT SATISFYING? _____