

# Creating habits which stick

It's February and like every year, our New Year resolutions have slowly faded into oblivion. That yoga mat you bought in January is probably tucked into some dark corner and your new treadmill has been turned into a clothes rack.

It probably hits us youngsters the most – an initial spark of focus and motivation that sends us dreaming about becoming a famous artist or a programmer or maybe a master violinist. However, more often than not, the spark ebbs as the days go by until our dreams are discontinued lessons and unfinished drawings. No matter how much we want to turn our lives around completely, it seems like some hidden force is always pulling us back to our lazy old self.

## START SMALL, EXCEEDINGLY SMALL

Probably the number one reason why most resolutions fail is because they often consist of some drastic, 'life changing' goal ("this year I will become bald and start living like a monk"). Very soon, we get scared by our own lofty expectations and slowly slide back to where we started or even further behind.

Researchers have found that "dreaming big", in the most basic sense, is an effective method to aid self-discipline. However, to achieve goals it is essential to balance them with your day to day activities. This does not

result in quick, dramatic changes, but will eventually bring change over time.

The best remedy is to set macro goals and micro quotas. The goals are your dreams, the big picture, which you want to accomplish someday. On the other hand, the quotas are very small amounts of work you have to finish every day to accomplish your goals. Quotas make sure that our goals do not become daunting. As they are small steps toward a goal, they are more approachable and, in turn, make the goal more achievable.

I don't think you understand exactly how small you can start. I will give you an example: Stanford University psychologist B.J. Fogg achieved his flossing habit by committing to floss one single tooth every time he brushed. He could floss them all if he wanted to, but he had to floss one tooth. Eventually he started flossing all of his teeth! So from now on, dream big but start really small.

Mindfully reduce 'Abandon Ship!' moments

You are at a party and the dessert table is right there. You stare at those delicious laddus and think "one won't hurt!" or worse: "this diet is not worth the effort!"

Stop and think at these moments!

Research has shown that even such minor setbacks and tiny frustrating moments kill

habits by giving us excuses to think that it is okay to abandon the whole thing when we mess up.

The best way to tackle these situations is mindfulness. Focus on what is causing you to think it is okay to give up your goal. Think about the thoughts and answer these questions: How many of such thoughts did you have without realising? How powerful were they? How often do these kinds of thoughts act on you? Learn to become comfortable with discomfort and let these thoughts go. They do not determine your life.

However, if you do mess up, focus on the number of days you have completed your quota. Self-blame is often counterproductive as it is discouraging; forgive yourself and complete the habit the next day. Also, it is essential to create balance, so do indulge yourself from time to time (very rarely)!

## PLAN B

Once we fall off the habit bandwagon, it's often very difficult to pick ourselves up. It is incredibly common for people to continue their habit for a week or so, face a disruption, and never start again. To get into the habit of re-starting when you falter, get a Plan B: accountability.

This can involve asking someone to slap you if you did not complete your habit two days in a row. As a more drastic measure, promise your friend/significant other that

you will pay them Tk 100 (adjust according to the importance of your habit) if you miss your habit. Then double that amount for every single day you miss in a row after that.

It is said that missing three days in a row means that your habit is done for. So do not let it get to that; try your absolute best and take even more drastic measures if necessary!

## WHEN BEING BORING IS A GOOD THING

No matter how adventurous we like our lives to be, the truth of the matter is that when it comes to creating habits, the most effective way is through repetition. In fact, when you have an overabundance of options, you can get demotivated.

That is exactly why Steve Jobs wore the same outfit – a black turtleneck, jeans and sneakers – every single day. Now, I am not asking you to wear the same thing every day! However, making too many decisions about mundane details in life depletes your mental energy.

If not clothes, find other shortcuts and ways to routinise processes, to prevent you from having to use decision-making and willpower. This will allow you to preserve your mental energy which is essential for committing to new habits.

By Maisha Rumelia Rahman

FYI

# The art of feng shui

Feng shui to some is the art of living; to others an ancient Chinese superstition. So what is Feng shui really?

It is a form of architecture, décor, or just the correct placement of objects in the correct places.

What does it do?

The ancient Chinese believed that by proper placement of furniture, mirrors and so on, 'chi' or life force can flow through one's house, allowing one to dwell in good energy. This would help them become

motivated, feel refreshed and have a state of harmony and peace.

Now although this is an old method and a lot of people dislike or do not believe in it, some do follow it religiously. It is not a 'must do', but for those of you looking to get a little motivated or those in search of tranquillity, you can give the art of feng shui a try.

Lucky for you this art does not require too much, but little placement changes around the house, for instance, the setting of the mirrors.



We all have a few hanging around the house, just maybe in the wrong places. Mirrors are designed to reflect, and here they reflect energy. We should place them accordingly so that they do not reflect the energy out of the house.

Avoid mirrors close to beds and entryways, especially the main entryway as it will reflect all energy trying to enter the house. Avoid putting any clutter or waste in front of mirrors; conversely, placing food and light in front of mirrors can be refreshing.

Now for the main part of the house, the entryway: it is where most, or all, of the 'chi' will be entering from. The ancient Chinese used to hang gold coins or such objects along the entryway or on door handles as it symbolised wealth and bringing it in. They would also hide gold coins under doormats to attract good luck, but any other such metal would also work, such as brass.

The entry should be designed as such that personal spaces such as bedrooms and offices cannot be seen directly by entering guests. Obviously in some cases it is not possible to change the architecture of the house, in which case it is wise to keep the doors closed.

Bright-coloured walls are preferred as it allows the 'chi' to flow faster. Yin and yang – that is creating balance. Balancing colours, structures, textures and mixing it up can feel different than just sticking to one type.

Lastly, feng shui does not have to be ancient or involve putting up superstitious objects or symbols. It can be done anywhere in any style. One does not have to move away from their choice of décor, but only place them accordingly.

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Photo: Collected

