

Insights from *Atomic Habits* by James Clear

If you've failed to adopt a healthy or productive habit you either failed to make your new behavior **obvious, easy, attractive, or satisfying**.

These are what author James Clear calls '**The Four Laws of Behavior Change**'. Failing to abide by any one of these laws means you'll fail to adopt a new behavior.

- Don't have an obvious daily cue to exercise? You'll forget about your new healthy habit and stick to your old daily routine.
- Don't have an easy exercise routine? You'll perform an easy and familiar routine instead (like watching TV).
- Don't find exercise appealing (i.e. exercise isn't attractive)? You'll resist exercise enough to avoid doing it consistently.
- Don't get immediate satisfaction after exercise? You'll lack the motivation to exercise it consistently.

Here are two strategies to make every new healthy and productive behavior (i.e. exercising, cooking, writing, reading, etc.) obvious, easy, attractive, and satisfying so that it may turn into a daily habit.



Stacking & Starting

You've probably used '**habit stacking**' to build new hygiene habits without realizing it. As a child, you stacked the habit of flushing the toilet with the habit of washing your hands. Flushing the toilet became the cue for your hand washing habit.

Habit stacking involves using an old and reliable daily habit as the trigger for a new habit. When you stack a new habit on an existing habit, you use the momentum of the old habit to make the new habit easier to initiate. I think of it as riding a bike down a hill to build up enough speed to get up the next hill with minimal peddling.

But if the hill of your new habit is too daunting, the momentum of the old habit won't be enough. That's why you need to reduce your new habit to an easy two-minute '**starting ritual**'.

James Clear: "**Even when you know you should start small, it's easy to start too big. When you dream about making a change, excitement inevitably takes over and you end up trying to do too much too soon. The most effective way I know to counteract this tendency is to use the Two-Minute Rule, which states, 'When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.'**"

- "Read before bed each night" becomes "Read one page."
- "Do thirty minutes of yoga" becomes "Take out my yoga mat."
- "Study for class" becomes "Open my notes."
- "Fold the laundry" becomes "Fold one pair of socks."
- "Run three miles" becomes "Tie my running shoes."



Syncing & Scoring

Ronan Byrne, an electrical engineering student in Dublin, Ireland knew that he should exercise more, so he used his engineering skills to synchronize his stationary bike with his laptop. He wrote a program on his laptop to play his favorite Netflix shows on the TV in front of the stationary bike when he cycled at a certain speed. If he slowed down, Netflix would pause, and he'd need to cycle harder to finish the episode he was watching - binge-watching Netflix meant burning calories.

Like Byrne, if you only allow yourself to enjoy your favorite experiences while executing a healthy and productive new habit, you'll find the new habit is something you look forward to doing.

- Entrepreneur Kevin Rose only allows himself to play his favorite video game on the treadmill.
- I only allow myself to enjoy my favorite protein cookie if I'm at the gym.
- I only allow myself to listen to my favorite DJ (Deadmau5) while I'm writing the scripts for my videos.

When you synchronize an experience you crave with a new habit you dread doing, the craving will counteract the resistance to executing the new habit and allow you to get started.

Synchronizing is a great tool for building a new habit, but to make a habit stick the habit must become inherently satisfying. And to make a habit inherently satisfying you must keep **score**.

Imagine on January 30th you look up at your wall and see 27 red check marks, on 27 of the last 30 days. Each check-mark represents a successful workout. That calendar is visual proof that you are someone who cares about their health. You should take pride in that fact!

If you take time to score the completion of a habit in a habit tracker (ex: calendar on your wall, app on your phone, or physical habit tracking notebook), you'll start to see a pattern of behavior that proves you're becoming the type of person you've dreamed of being. The immediate pride you experience after using a habit tracker provides the satisfaction you need to return to the habit over and over until the habit sticks.