

THE POWER OF HABIT

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New Year! New goals, new resolutions, new hopes, new dreams...same old behavior??? Many of us jump into the New Year with lots of enthusiasm or at least a hope that we will make this next year better than the last, or at least as good. New exercise plans, new diets, new work projects, new, new, new!

Great intentions, unfortunately too often succumb to habit. Plain, old, habit. We know we want to remember to schedule time to work out today, but what do you know...? It's five o'clock and all we did was work all day without even thinking of when we would go for that walk, swim, bike ride, etc. Habit dies hard.

When habit reasserts itself do you get discouraged? Do you give yourself a hard time about how weak your character must be if you can't even follow through on a few simple promises to yourself to make your life better? Lots of times, the very act of berating ourselves for "failing" just makes even more certain that we will not change our behavior and adopt the new habit we are attempting to acquire. Why even go there? The heck with it, I give up!

Lots of health clubs say that they get three-quarters of their new membership enrolling in January. They also say that three months later the use of the facility is back down to normal with the vast majority of the new members rarely showing up, if at all.

Don't underestimate the power of habit! Once we have adopted a new behavior there are actually neural pathways set up in our nervous system related to this behavior. Our habits are part psychophysiological! Our bodies, as well as our minds, are "in the habit" of reacting a certain way, so no wonder changing a habit is not as simple as making a resolution.

Coaches work with people to help them make the changes they really want to make in their lives. We help people change their habits all the time. The habits may be physical, like the ones we've used as examples here, or they may relate to actual behavior on the job or in one's own business.

New, good habits really work for people. Stephen Covey made millions and millions helping people realize how positive habits, particularly "Seven" of them can bring us success. (Stephen Covey - *The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*).

Here are some QUICK TIPS FOR CHANGING HABITS

1. Practice patience. Research tells us that it takes as much as 180 days to truly drop an old habit and adopt a new one. So stay with it.
2. No beating yourself up! Patience right? Don't put yourself down because you find yourself engaged in the old habit. **REPEATING THE OLD HABIT JUST SHOWS THAT YOU ARE TRULY DEALING WITH A HABIT!**
3. Celebrate catching yourself! Take the repetitions in stride. Realize that despite the old habit showing up again, you are committed to changing the habit. Instead of beating yourself up, ("There I go again!") celebrate the fact that you managed to "catch" yourself and become aware of it. As you catch yourself earlier in the practice of the old habit, you'll have even more to celebrate!
4. Use "structures" to help remind you of the new habits you want to adopt. Structures are little physical reminders that help you remember your goals. They may be little signs you print up for yourself reminding yourself to: "Wait to answer the call after 2 rings, not sooner!"; "Breathe!"; "Call a friend today!"; "30 min. of writing every day". Structures can also be objects or photos that remind you of greater goals. I once coached a Japanese manager to have a photo of an orchestra conductor by his desk. Whenever he looked at the photo he reminded himself to BE the orchestra conductor when working with his supervisees, and to not keep trying to be the "one-man band". Another hint about structures...move them around, change the look of them so they don't start blending in with the background again (out of habit!).
5. Involve other in your goals. Let co-workers, friends and family know what you are working on changing. Enlist their support and possibly their awareness and feedback to help you stay engaged in the habit changing process.
6. Something you'll usually see in these columns is this next tip. **GET A COACH!** Working with a coach gives you someone to: help you get clear about what behaviors you really want to change; give you support in the process; hold you accountable to do what you say you will do to change the habits. I'm always amazed at what people get done when they tell me that they will do it, and know that I'll be asking next week to help them make sure that they did!

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