

# ***Help Me Form this Habit!***

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**Live well in the face of eternity**

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## *Help Me Form this Habit!*

The greatest gift you can give yourself is the development of your own character. And the best way to do that—when you're ready enough go from thinking to doing—is to first discern your core values and sense of purpose in life.

Second, discern your perspective on eternity, your motives, and your big-picture vision for your life.

Third, work on one focused area and determine your goals to achieve growth in that. And then form daily habits to turn those goals into reality.

### *Starting Questions*

- Why is this new area of growth, \_\_\_\_\_, important to you? Has the pain of not changing become greater than the pain of changing? (This is about motive, on which everything that follows will depend. Consistent action needs a strong *why*. Otherwise when you're weary, status quo will invariably creep back in.)
- What specific act will you do to set yourself up for success in \_\_\_\_\_? (To be effective, it must be clear, identifiable, and countable or measurable.)
- What specific daily habit will you practice to continue success in this area? (This must be equally clear, identifiable, and countable or measurable.)

### *Life-Integrating Factors*

*In writing, realistically and honestly (and knowing you may change as you grow):*

- Identify your *core values* in life.
- Identify your primary sense of *purpose* in life.
- Identify your perspective on *eternity*, namely the unseen world and life after death.
- Identify your *motives*, as in the Starting Questions.
- Identify your big-picture *vision* for your life, along with any specific visions.
- Identify your *goals* that will bring that vision to reality.
- identify your consistent, *daily habits* by which you will achieve those goals.

*Any of the above may also be areas in which you could grow and change.*

## ***Three Elements of a Habit***

Science and cognitive research explains that every habit is made up of three elements: a cue, routine, and a reward. The cue is whatever triggers your brain to go into automatic mode. The routine is the behavior, whether something you think, say, or do. The reward is the result you get from the habit or your brain's response that determines if you should continue the habit in the future.

So if you want to change a habit—start a replacement habit—start not with the habit itself but with the **cue**. What triggers the habit? Change your response to the trigger. Or create a new cue altogether. That will enable you to change the habit. This usually involves changing something in your environment.

Then find if your new **routine** starts to work or not. If so, keep going. If not, go back and rework the cue or the environment.

Then pay attention to the **reward** and consciously give yourself positive response to strengthen the pattern.

## ***To Successfully Form New Habits***

- Make your habit clearly identifiable—nothing vague will do.
- Make your habit as measurable as possible—nothing vague will do.
- Start with small, simple actions.
- Do them every day. Or at least six days a week.
- Commit to the long term.
- Eliminate situations and triggers that set you up for failure.
- Substitute bad habits with good ones.
- Articulate a clear, attainable, measurable goal or ideal. Commit to it. Visualize yourself succeeding.
- Celebrate your progress. Don't stress over failures. Keep going. The habit itself becomes its own reward.

## ***Effective Goals***

- ***Challenging yet Realistic*** — Make your goal reachable—but only if you stretch. If the goal is not difficult, it's not a goal worth having. On the other hand, if you try to impress yourself with a goal that's unrealistic, you'll only slow and discourage your progress.
- ***Measurable*** — How will you identify your progress or attaining the goal? Measure by numbers, dollars, time, amounts. Even for qualitative goals, if you can put a meaningful measurement on it, even if it feels artificial, that can exhibit your degree of progress and be a motivation.

- **Dated** — By when will you do this? Deadlines create a sense of heightened awareness, even urgency, and thus make a huge in getting things done. Make deadlines for both the big goals and for the smaller components of the goals however is most appropriate for you— whether yearly, quarter, monthly, weekly, or daily.
- **Specific** — Be as exact as possible in your goals; no vagueness here. Instead of “Be nice to my wife,” have “Do one act of kindness toward my wife.” Or instead of “Be positive,” have “Five minutes of positive affirmations.” The specificity forces us to do the acts that bring desired results—rather than vaguely or theoretically presuming.

## ***Visualize Both Habits and Tasks***

When you visualize something, you stimulate the same area of the brain (primarily the occipital lobe at the back of your head) as when you actually perform the action. This especially happens when your visualization is big on sensory feelings and includes emotion because these make the visualization more real to the brain. If you do this effectively, your brain does not discern much difference between a sensory-rich visualization and something actually occurring.

Repeat the visualization often in order to reconfigure your neural networks until the visualization becomes realistic and natural to you. When this happens, your brain accepts the visualization as being real, which turns the actual performing of a challenging task into something natural. And this leads to your success.

Visualize yourself

- successfully performing new habits or eliminating old ones.
- living your ideal life.
- doing what it takes to achieve your ideal life.
- overcoming fears, failures, or abuses.
- being healed and restored from emotional/psychological wounds.

I recommend this article, and Google will have others for you.

<https://entrepreneurs.maqtoob.com/4-scientific-reasons-why-visualization-will-increase-your-chances-to-succeed-5515ef2dbdb7>

## ***Recommended Morning Habits***

- Write down three good things of the previous twenty-four hours.
- Practice intentional gratitude.
- Read something spiritual or uplifting. I read the Bible every morning, and I use a reading plan that keeps me going and on track. What would you read?
- Pray and/or meditate. And if you pray, remember to pray for others too.
- Review and act on, or commit to acting this day, identifiable areas for personal growth.
- Identify and plan to do the one single most important thing you can do today for your main

- purpose/vision/goal—or for each of two (but no more than that).
- With eyes of faith, visualize doing the important things you will do this day. Train the mind God gave you to successfully follow through on what you feel called to do.

## ***Recommended Daytime Habits***

- As often as you can—lunch break & other break times—review your daily goals and your daily habits.
- Always be mindful of the beauty and potential of every moment—live in the moment. This is one basic element of mindfulness.
- Remind yourself, or even set notifications on your smartphone, that who you intend to become is greater than who you used to be.

## ***Recommended Bedtime Habit***

When you sleep, your conscious mind goes dormant, but your subconscious mind stays active and, along with processing things all the bodily functions it does, the subconscious mind will also process things it often doesn't while awake—because while awake, the brain focuses on needs and tasks at hand. During sleep the subconscious is free to run wild in dreams or in free association regarding conscious thoughts. This is why people thinking through a challenging issue will often “sleep on it” as part of finding the answer. And it works.

- So right before you sleep you may occasionally want prepare your mind for its subconscious work. Think through a question to probe, a problem to solve, a challenging job to follow through, or something for which you will mentally prepare yourself. If you pray before you sleep, you can do so before, during, or after this exercise.

## ***When you can't get yourself to take that first action step...***

If any of these areas seems too difficult, or if you're dragging and just can't get yourself started, that's understandable. We can be so conditioned to being the way we are, that to change becomes more monumental than it appears. So don't beat yourself up.

The key is to do *something*—even the tiniest little thing. Just doing something, small as it may be, can be a bridge to move you toward the first real step. If this is where you're at, pull back from that first step and consider what might seem trivial or even silly, some small action unique to your life, that would nudge you forward to take an initial action step.

## ***When you have a hard time starting daily tasks...***

Here I'm not talking about starting or maintaining habits; I'm talking about your job or the tasks you are to complete that day.

Normally, I will recommend that you go right into your first main task of the day and finish it as early as possible.

But you may have days when you struggle to get going in the morning, even after your positive morning routine and a cup of coffee. This happens especially if you're your own boss, and it happens whether at a computer or doing physical labor. The main task may seem overwhelming, or you might not feel the needed energy or focus.

A good solution to this is in line with other simple solutions to productivity (and the reliable ones are always simple).

- Predetermine what you will do before it happens. You can do this either when you go to bed the night before, or when you wake up and go through your early-morning positive routine.
- Write down one, two, or three simple, easy-to-do tasks. Do them before you tackle your main one or two primary tasks for the day. Because they're easy and simple, you can do them however you feel. And when you do them, you'll develop a bit of momentum to keep you going into the big tasks.
- And if you still stall, break down the big task and choose a small, easy-to-do task. Do it. Then another. And another.
- If you are physically, mentally, or emotionally tired, you may need a rest to recharge. Willpower is like a rechargeable battery that does not have a long life. Use your willpower wisely for the most important things first. Take a nap during the day, even ten minutes on a break time. Or get enough sleep.

## ***Habits Serve You—Don't Serve Habits***

Don't just check off a goal with the aim of checking it off. The discipline of habits is not to benefit the habit; habits are to benefit you. Put another way: Habits serve your goals—but they're not your goals and you don't serve them.

## ***It's Okay to Take a Break***

The Bible first said people should take a break every seven days. More recently, articles in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* have done the scientific research and concluded that, indeed, the human body needs, and is designed to need, a break every seven days.

Some habits are best done without taking a break—like eating right and being kind.

But if you are feeling tired of a habit, or just feel that you want a break from it, take a break for a day—but preferably not longer than that. Or change it up with some variety of where or how you do it.

A habit should be life giving. If it feels burdensome, give yourself permission to take a break once in a while. Find what's best for you, but I do not recommend taking a break of more than one day in seven. After all, habits are part of your life, who you are. Then assess yourself: Did taking a break from my habit take me off track or induce laziness? Or did taking a break help renew my vitality when I went back to the habit the next day?

## ***If You Fail***

If you fail, don't beat yourself up too much. Even when you stumble or fall down on a habit, the degree to which you have successfully done it will lift you back up. That is, because you've already been practicing the habit, you'll easily be able to get back into it again.

## ***Using Evernote***

I recommend using the program/app Evernote in tandem with your goals. It's the best and most widely used digital organizational system available. Evernote can be used for free on two of your devices. That means you can have it on your smart phone for handy use and on your laptop or desktop computer for when you may write or add substantial content.

Most of the content I use in life coaching I create and store on Evernote.

## ***Using Apps***

Your smartphone can be your best friend in forming habits because you always carry it, and you can find many apps specifically designed to help you start and maintain good habits. If you're like me, you'll use your smartphone for personal growth more than for anything else.

Coach.Me is on the simple, straightforward, and free end of a spectrum. On the other end is Habitica, also free, which is designed for young people who play video games, and gives points and bonuses to the participant as it turns the formation of good habits into a fun game. In between them are numerous apps for starting and maintaining good habits and employ various degrees of graphics and colorful designs, and most of which come with a subscription price after a free trial or a low level of use. They're all well regarded and used by people with different interests and preferences.

## ***The Slight Edge***

I recommend *The Slight Edge: Turning Simple Disciplines into Massive Success & Happiness* by Jeff Olson. This is the book that got me going on developing good daily habits. Here are some quotes from the book:

“You could call these ‘little virtues’ or ‘success habits.’ I call them *simple daily disciplines*. Simple production actions, repeated consistently over time. That, in a nutshell, is the slight edge.”  
“The slight edge is always working. Whether for you or against you, the slight edge is already at work in your life and always will be, every day, every moment.”

“The simple things that lead to success are all easy to do. But they’re also just as easy *not to do*.”

“If you learn to understand and apply the slight edge, your life will become filled with hundreds of thousands of small, seemingly insignificant actions.”

“The difference between success and failure is so subtle, so mundane, that most people miss it. . . . What you do today matters. . . . What you do every day matters. . . . Successful people are those who . . . choose to do things that seem to make no difference at all in the act of doing them, and they do them over and over and over until the compound effect kicks in.”

“Every decision you make is a slight edge decision. What you’re going to do, how you’re going to act, what you’re going to read, who you’re going to chat with on the phone, what you’re going to eat for lunch, who you’re going to associate with. How you’re going to treat your fellow workers. What you’re going to get done today.”

“No matter what has gone on before, you can begin fresh and new anytime you choose.”

“In my experience, in three to five years you can put virtually anything in your life solidly onto the right track.”

## ***Habit Forming is Biblical***

- Romans 12:2 — re-align your neural networks
- Philippians 4:8–10 — Christian reprogramming of attitude
- Romans 8:5, 12–15 — it’s our choice, always our choice
- Joshua 1:8–9 — daily meditation on God’s Word leads to prosperity and success
- Psalm 1:1–3 — continually meditation on God’s Word nourishes fruitful prosperity
- Lamentations 3:22–23 — new every morning
- Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 22:39 — even Jesus practiced habits