

Habits 1

Welcome to Habits Under construction, a primer on changing habits.

Whether you want to establish a new, positive habit, or get rid of a troubling one, this workshop can give you ideas about how to get started, build your motivation to change and be persistent as you head towards your habit change goals.

Habits 2

What is a habit?-habits are things you do consistently over an extended period of time.

****OUR INCLINATION IS TO NOT DO THINGS THAT ARE UNPLEASANT, AND THEN TO JUSTIFY OUR DECISION. –Does that sound like you?**

People who *do* the unpleasant parts have learned to focus more about the LONG TERM, POSITIVE OUTCOMES rather than the immediate sacrifice.

This is a good idea to start practicing right away;

Take a moment to think of something annoying that you need to get done. (pause)I'll bet you are focusing on how miserable it will be when you finally **have to** do it. Now, shift your thinking towards the gains you will get from taking care of the task. Imagine how it will be when you are through with it. Doesn't that feel different already?

How can you keep your mind on the potential of benefits to come?

Habits 3

You may notice this definition of will power is different from how we usually define it. Remember the popular phrase JUST DO IT? This alternative view shows that there is a trick to will power and discipline. You can develop it by having a plan and methods to go with it.

This attitude presents a different perspective on goal achievement. Instead of big changes that start dramatically and usually end abruptly, this idea gives a more manageable way to reaching habit goals. .It emphasizes modest steps, repeated on a regular basis.

Habits 4

Sometimes fear of an urgent future loss triggers the need for change. For others, undergoing an ordeal motivated their decision to live differently.

What is making you interested in change?

Habits 5

Motivation is the foundation of change. Little lasting change occurs without sturdy motivation.

What factors combine to make motivation?

Clear Goal Planning; First, you must invest some time and effort to identify clearly what your goal is. That task includes deciding what you will recognize as signs of progress.

Keeping the Goal Alive: means keeping the reason you want to change in the front of your mind, each day. It helps some people to make up a metaphor or visualization to represent their goal, and then incorporate each day's efforts towards change as a contribution to the goal.

For example, one student's goal is to perform well in school, so he eventually can afford to build his dream home. He views each class attended, study session in which he participates, each assignment completed as bricks he is adding to the foundation of his new house.

Another student makes a point to think each day about the sacrifices her mother made in order for her to attend college. A daily reminder of how good it will feel to be able to return the favor in the future helps the student stay interested in her goal to stay in school.

Habits 6

This example from Peele's work demonstrates the *placebo effect*.

Another variable in motivation that is under the control of the mind is *internal* or *external* motivation to take action. One simple explanation of the difference between internal and external would be a person doing something to please another, versus a person doing something to please himself. Most people tend to be moved more in one of these directions. Which way will best help you build your willingness to change?

Harness these powers of the mind, as another tool to help you stay motivated to work towards your goal.

Habits 7

How you talk about your change goal makes a subtle, but significant difference in your attitude.

Can you think of an example of using a positive term instead of a negative one? Here is one. Speak about your goal in terms of the positive change you are making, instead of the negative behavior you are replacing. Say "I'm living smoke-free these days" in place of "I'm stopping smoking." Make sure your language describes movement towards the new habit.

Self efficacy is the belief in your ability to do something. Show your growing confidence in your self efficacy with a statement like "I am becoming a healthy eater", vs. "I am trying to quit eating junk food."

Sometimes it is hard for us to accept the fact that change is our responsibility. It is not up to your friends to protect you from someone passing around drugs at a party. They may give you moral support to stay on track with your goal, but ultimately it is up to you to make it happen. You have to be the one to do something different.

Habits 8

Cognitive refers to thinking

Dr David Burns, an expert in cognitive therapy, has identified several automatic negative thoughts that can prevent people from changing. 3 in particular may reduce your confidence in changing. They are;

Overgeneralization, "Fortune Teller error" and Screening out the Positive.

- Overgeneralization means "if it happened once, it will always happen."

- Fortune teller error is predicting a failure or catastrophe.

- Screening out the Positive is dismissing your accomplishments and focusing solely on the negatives.

Here are some common examples of these distorted thoughts in action:

Overgeneralization-“I didn’t stop with 2 beers at Jamie’s house, like I said I would. I am such a loser- I will never be able to go to a party without ending up drunk!”

Fortune Teller error-“I know I am going to blow my O-Chem test this week. Why spend all this time studying. There’s no point in even trying.”

Screening out the Positive-“I only got through my paper without smoking because I ran out of cigarettes and was too lazy to go to the store.”

Habits 9

Small Steps Consistently is the basis of forming a new habit.

Consistency is key. Think of training a dog. If you use several variations for the same command, the dog gets confused and doesn’t learn correctly. Practice the new behavior at each opportunity that arises.

While building up your consistency, beware of intermittent reinforcement. This classical behavioral principle means that occasional returns to the old behavior makes it stronger, thus setting you back in your efforts to change. Let’s return to the dog training world for an example; If you are working on stopping your dog’s begging at the dinner table, each time you give in and toss him a treat off your plate, you are sending it a message that it is ok to keep begging. After all, if he does it long enough, he may get a pay off. The same principle applies to us, when we are attempting to install a new habit in our routine.

Remember, small changes can be very effective. If you want to develop the habit of keeping your apt cleaner, start with something ridiculously small, like picking up the living room or unloading the dishwasher only during commercials on TV. You will be surprised how much you can get done in a 3.5 hour football game!

Habits 10

You can’t build a new habit unless you remember to work on it. Be proactive in helping yourself to remember to practice.

Here are some ideas that have helped other students;

- Set aside a brief time each evening to prepare for the next day.

-Leave yourself a text or phone message or alert.

-Put the new behavior on a task list on your computer or organizer

-The old school way- write a list.

Memory triggers can often help. A memory trigger may be another activity you already do, that is paired with the new behavior. A variation would be to put the new behavior into your regular morning, after school, or getting ready to go to bed routine.

Other people like memory triggers that they can see; for example, putting a colored sticker on their steering wheel in their car, or being prompted to do the new behavior each time they check their watch.

Habits 11

Dr Stephanie Burns emphasizes that you know when you have established a new habit, because you don't have to talk yourself back into it each day!

Once you have committed to a habit, you do it every time you planned for it; for instance, if you have committed to running 5 mornings a week, then you do it every specified day, as soon as you wake up, with no reopening the negotiations with yourself.

Habits 12

We often believe, incorrectly, that new habits should be easy to establish and maintain, and that something must be wrong when it is not. The reality is that it takes lot of work and follow through.

New things that you do often will become habits quicker than things you do less frequently.

Can you think of an example of making your new behavior easy to do?

One person who had committed to working out each morning, decided to sleep in his workout clothes. He only had to add shoes to be ready to go when the alarm went off.

How can you make your new behavior hard not to do? If you pack a nutritious lunch and leave your money and credit cards at home, it is hard not to eat a healthy lunch at school.

The old saying "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." still applies.

Habits 13

More tips on practicing persistence;

-Do whatever it takes the first few weeks. It doesn't have to be pretty or perfect, but it does have to get done.

-Being accountable could involve calling or emailing your appointed accountability person each day, attending a live or on-line group where members commit their goals to the whole community, or posting a progress report on a blog daily.

-Let others know what you are doing.

Research shows people are more motivated by rewards and praise rather than punishment. Reward often- don't keep postponing it until "the end".

Habits 14

Make the bad stuff hard to get to and the good stuff easy. Some of the classic strategies still work well, such as;

-not bringing the cigarettes/other substances, problem foods, etc into the house;

- Putting the things you have decided are acceptable to consume or use in the most convenient places and vice-versa.

-Limit the time you spend in places where the unwanted habit has frequently occurred in the past. Find somewhere else to go.

-Let your friends and family know your intentions to do things differently, so they can begin to adjust their expectations for you.

-Many people distract themselves with electronic entertainment. If reducing procrastination is your goal, perhaps you can set up some kind of "technological lock" to be put on your equipment, or arrange your programs so that someone else has to open them for you. Some people even take a more extreme step and sell, give away or put their tempting belongings in storage, until they believe they can control their usage better.

You probably realize when you are headed towards the bad habit you want to stop. Try calling a designated support person to discuss your decision before you start the undesired activity. If

you decide to go ahead with the bad habit, you can still work towards change by postponing the start of the behavior by a few minutes. When that time is up, you can make a new decision whether to engage in the activity or postpone it again. If you do engage in the old behavior, you can disrupt the pattern; vary the sequence of the routine.

Habit 15

Almost everyone will have lapses, and relapses are common. It's important not to get sidetracked into an extended period of self recrimination. It's just another distraction and will require more effort to get your motivation built back up.

To get back on track;

- Take action, do something towards your goal everyday
- look for evidence that you are getting better
- Celebrate positive changes in your condition

Dr David Burns reminds us that the desire to be perfect is based in fear, so "Aim for success, not perfection."

Habits 16

If you have gotten off track, it is important to keep your thinking realistic and reasonable.

Not being able to take a lot of action is not a good enough reason to take no action.

-You may be too sick to go to class, but you can probably still do some assigned reading between naps.

Not being able to take any current action is never a good enough reason to abandon all future action.

-How many times have you heard people say; "I stopped working out because my job hours changed": or "I couldn't afford my gym membership anymore", or "I didn't want to run into my ex in the spin class" or "I didn't have time."

Every problem has a solution. What obstacles do you anticipate on the way to your goal? It can be useful to be prepared with some potential fixes, in case your plan breaks down temporarily.

Let's face it-Time will pass by, whether you do anything or not. What do you want to report about your change goals 6 months from now?

-In most cases, whatever the life event that interrupted your action towards your goal eventually will just be a blip on the radar.

Habits 17

-Setting a restart date moves your habit goal work from "future" status back to 'active" status.

-Visualize yourself going through your goal routine successfully. Also, imagine how it will feel to be securely back on track.

-You can do things in preparation to work towards your goal again, such as going to the store to stock up on healthier snacks, organizing your class assignments and papers and other things associated with your goal.

Habits-18

Getting back on track doesn't mean you have to start over completely. Remember what worked for you before and put it into action, baby step by baby step/

-At first, do only what is essential

-acknowledge being able to take small steps again

-Remember it is normal to struggle again, if there has been a long break since you were working towards your goal.

-Embrace your original goal. Now is not the time to question the value of it.

Habits 19

Having a Relapse Prevention plan can help you avoid or put the brakes on a slip or lapse.

-Be Real- it can and likely will happen to you

In their extensive work on relapse prevention, Marlatt and Gordon advise -Having a plan ahead of time. Keep it on a card in your wallet or backpack.

On your relapse prevention plan, list high risk situations, and identify several different choices you can make in those situations. What can you do to take your focus away from the urge to engage in the old, negative habit, or buy you some time to think things through?

-You are encouraged to use a support system. List the people who you trust to help you while you struggle with staying aligned with your goal.

Be careful of making “APPARENTLY IRRELEVANT DECISIONS.’ Marlatt and Gordon tell the story of a recovering gambling addict, who refrains from gambling while on vacation in California, but decides to drive through Nevada on his way home. They list all the points which were reminders that he was putting himself into a high risk situation, and thus were opportunities to make an alternative decision. Some of these were his wife’s protest about taking that particular route home, the state border signs announcing he was entering Nevada, a rest stop, several u-turn locations, a scenic bypass of Lake Tahoe, gambling billboards, highway signs for Reno, and the Reno city bypass route on the highway. Unfortunately, this person ignored all the warning signs and chose the decisions that would place him in further danger. As might be expected from his choices, he did succumb to the urge to gamble and went on a binge.

Among the numerous lessons from this story is a major point; it is rarely too late to change your mind and stop the unwanted behavior. A slip does not have to go further.

If your temptation to abandon your habit change goal is high, you can also make a pros and cons comparison. List the immediate and long term consequences of staying with your program vs. getting off of it. Make sure you include both sides.

Habits 20

Let’s review some of the techniques that you can use to manage temptations;

Urge surfing is waiting it out knowing that you will come in to shore and the wave will recede.

-As mentioned earlier- putting off acting on your urge for a set number of minutes, then reviewing if you still want to do it. You can repeat this process multiple times. It breaks up the sequence of the old habit pattern and gives you time to think about the pros and cons. This lessens your feelings of deprivation or need to resist. You will still make your own choice about what and when to do it, but it is more under your control.

Some people will plan a slip, so they can put their relapse plan into effect and fine tune it. This can also increase your sense of control over the behavior. Planned lapses are best done after your new habit is comfortably established. It is not useful to test yourself too soon.

This is the end of the Habits under Construction workshop. We hope it has been helpful. Should you want more information about this topic, please contact the UTD Student Counseling Center at 972 883-2575/SU 1.608. You may proceed to the quiz.