

The Power of Habit

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.” –Will Durant

I’ve been reading a lot about habit-building, and I’ve discovered a problem with me: I’m great at identifying big things that need to change. I mean, *great* at it!

I’m a world-class goal-setter. But I lack the attention span to institute wholesale changes in my life. I really need bite-sized goals that can be done repeatedly over the long haul. These sorts of stepping stones to change are more achievable and less soul-crushing should I—gasp!—fail for a day or a week or entirely. So as I’ve identified the bigger things I want to accomplish or change, I’ve tried to break them down into micro habits that feel doable and will still feed the larger goal. I’ve been amazed at the effectiveness of this system so far. Here’s an example of one I recently mentioned on Facebook that generated a lot of emails and questions and led to this post:

Big Goal: Eliminate Clutter (It’s a *really* big goal for me! I’m super cluttery.)

Micro habit: I will wear the very first outfit I put on in the morning for 21 days.

The thing is, I really love clothes and I have too many options. It is not an exaggeration to say I sometimes change five to 10 times (I know), which means my bed was always piled high with the mess of rejects and who has time to hang all those up when you’re trying to get out the door? This one bad habit was creating six days of clutter in about 15 minutes, which I was coming home to at the end of a long day. It also created stress. The more I changed, the more I felt my blood

pressure rising from frustration and insecurity with my decision-making abilities. Finally, this one little habit was breeding discontent. I had trained myself to believe my first choice couldn't be the best choice, which created a nagging dissatisfaction with a perfectly good wardrobe and worse, with myself in general.

So I did it. I made the micro habit an essential part of my day and, as I mentioned, it was hard. It was especially difficult on days when I was speaking and felt the pressure of the big screen weighing heavily on my outfit choice. But I stuck with it and you know what I discovered? Once I left the house, I never really gave my outfit another thought and, here's the bigger piece, *neither did anyone else!*

No one pointed or laughed or told me I should have taken another crack at it. Turns out, at the root of my clothes-changing addiction is an unhealthy self-focus. (You probably figured that out like three paragraphs ago, but I'm a slow processor.) I wouldn't have called it pride before; I would have called it insecurity, but they're really just two sides of the same coin. Here are the wins from this micro habit:

- I have a new awareness of the role clothing plays in my identity. I needed a wake-up call there and didn't realize it.
- I make more intentional decisions about what I will put on in the first place, which is leading to greater levels of intentionality in other areas as well.
- I have more peace and am less *frantic* in the mornings, which means this is good for the boy who shares my home as well.
- Remember when I said, "I love clothes and have too many options"? Yeah, that became the subject of my next micro habit which I may write about soon.
- There has been so much improvement in the clutter situation—and I'll remind you this was the *only* reason I started this experiment in the first place. Turns out, I

got so much more beauty than I bargained for!

Have I stuck with the habit? Yep, pretty much. I still have relapses, but I always notice them and recognize the negative things they produce and I think that's a win as well. Overall, I'm thrilled with the results of this one tiny, little, baby step. So enough about me—are there any new micro habits in the works in your life? How's it going?

With hope for powerful habits,

Bo

PS: Books I read and really enjoyed on this topic:

The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg

The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor

Before Happiness by Shawn Achor

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