

7 My Habits and Attitudes

Labor Saving or Anchors Holding Me Back?



OVERVIEW

There is a great advantage to being able to rely on our habits. We don't need to stop and think about how to do many routine things. However, when those habits keep us stuck in a rut, underliving our potential, we need to see about changing them. In the same manner, our attitudes can limit our achievements. The good news is that habits and attitudes can be changed.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, I will understand:

- my habits are formed by repetition upon repetition at the conscious level, and then turned over to my subconscious for instant response to situations.
- that in order to change a habit, I first need to realize where I act on autopilot.
- an attitude simply reflects the direction in which I am leaning – toward (positive) or away (negative) – in my thinking.

Keep the goal – just change the habits and attitudes.

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KEY CONCEPTS

Attitude: A consciously held belief or opinion; easiest to visualize if we picture ourselves leaning toward those things we like (positive) and away from those things we dislike (negative).

Habit: A learned act; a pattern of activity that has, through repetition, become automatic, fixed, and easily and effortlessly carried out.

EXERCISE: My Habits Inventory

List five (5) Habits that you have developed “by accident,” without conscious awareness:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

List five (5) Habits that you have developed “on purpose,” deliberately, and by intent:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

List five (5) Habits that, if developed consciously (by intent) would guarantee your success in education:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

List five (5) Habits that, if developed consciously (by intent) would guarantee your career success:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

EXERCISE: Changing the Habitual Flow...

Think of a class that has you concerned. Work from the bottom up. Now, raise what you expect of yourself, whether it be the final grade, content you will learn, skill you will acquire. What would the belief need to be? What would the attitude need to be? What habituated behaviors would match the new Attitude, Belief and Expectation?

EXAMPLE CHART: Math

Is this sanity?		Is this sanity?
Low Probability of Success	Subject: Math	High Probability of Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skip class • Arrive late • Blow off homework • 	4 - Habits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the repeated, subconscious behaviors that you intend to apply to this math course? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend • On time • Ask questions • Do homework • Read/Do practice problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative • Leaning away from, avoidant, “have to” 	3 - Attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your attitude toward math that matches? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive • Leaning toward, engaged, participative, “want to”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No value • No relevance • Not important • Can’t do it! 	2 - Beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your belief about the math course that matches? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has value • Has relevance • Is important • Can do it!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low • Boring, too hard, just hope to pass, get out without killing my GPA 	1 - Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you expect of yourself going into the math course? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • To learn, to use these skills in my career • Master the concepts • Get an “A”

Depending upon your level of expectation, your creative subconscious works to line up your habits, attitudes and beliefs appropriately. When faced with a subject or course where you have a history of poor grades or performance, consider how you might consciously adjust your behaviors (upper right box) to more align with a high probability of success.

EXERCISE: Changing the Habitual Flow...

DIRECTIONS: Choose a current class and work through your Expectations, Beliefs, Attitudes and Habits for Low and High Probability of Success.

YOUR CHART:

Low Probability of Success	Subject: _____	High Probability of Success
	4 - Habits	
	3 - Attitude	
	2 - Beliefs	
	1 - Expectations	

EXERCISE: Lifeboat

IMAGINE that the cruise liner on which you have been having the holiday of a lifetime has just sunk, following a devastating explosion in her boilers. With very little time available to save yourself, you now find you are adrift in a lifeboat with other survivors, miles from the nearest land and without the means of contacting the outside world to summon help.

Your lifeboat is totally alone and contains other survivors like yourself. The lifeboat, however, is not quite full and has the capacity to take four more survivors and no more. As time goes by, the lifeboat comes across the following survivors in the water:

- Mother & Child (count as one)
- Liner's First Mate
- 16-year-old boy (High-dependency drug user)
- 86-year-old woman
- Winner of a reality TV show
- Nurse
- 80 year old survivor of the Asian tsunami disaster
- Secondary-school teacher
- Lone parent
- Foreign national
- Prostitute
- Head of an organized drug consortium

NOTES

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After you have completed your choices, please answer the questions on the following page.

SUMMARY: Fundamentals

Habits can emerge outside our consciousness, or can be deliberately designed. In other words, we develop habits by accident and intent. When a habit is created outside of conscious thought, you do it by accident, like cracking your knuckles, chewing your nails, playing with your hair when you are nervous, or using “um” as a transition when speaking. When a habit is created by intent, it is a deliberate action, like athletes, artists, dancers, musicians. How did their actions develop to the point of free-flowing? By the willingness to practice, practice, practice, repeat, repeat, repeat until the action became automatic at a very high level.

Driving a car starts off on the conscious level, and then through repetition and repetition, you turn it over to your subconscious. You don't even think about what you're doing. When you first started driving, probably in the parking lot, you were frozen.

As you learned, everything was sequenced. The right skills, repeated over and over again, allowed you to flow. Even though you couldn't get out of the parking lot, now you can drive down the road, one hand on the wheel, the other one around a girlfriend, looking for people on both sides of the street and looking for cops out of the rearview mirror. You are listening to the radio, you can do it all. There was a time when you couldn't do it all. That's what habits are good for, they let you free flow.

How was it possible for them or for us to create the habit? By having a clearly defined goal, a vivid image of the intention, and a high expectation of the result. Think of all the habits we have in our lives that we have developed by intent: riding a bike, driving a car, playing video games, or mastering the countless apps on our smartphones. Because we desire the result, we are willing to put in the work. So we practice, practice, practice and repeat, repeat, repeat. When we approach behaviors with a want to, choose to, I like it, I love it frame of mind, it is easy to muster all the drive, energy, passion, and motivation we need to develop the habit. Our brain creates it for us because we want it that way.

As the pilot of our lives, we have assimilated feelings, viewpoints, and tendencies in all areas of our lives towards people, places, foods, sports teams, certain subjects in school, things we like, things we don't like. These habituated thought patterns that were repeated over and over until they became automatic, became the attitudes with which we guide our lives.

Have you ever been told you had a bad attitude? Yes? Now, do you know what an attitude is? An attitude is just your emotional history. Remember that perception, association, evaluation and decision making I told you about the conscious level? You see something, and you have a negative attitude. Now, negative doesn't mean bad or wrong; negative means avoidant. Positive doesn't mean good. Positive means you seek out, and try to possess.

The best definition of an attitude I ever found was airplane terminology, like pilots use. If my arms were the wings of an airplane, stretching out to my sides, the attitude of an airplane is just the direction in which the airplane is leaning in relationship to a fixed point like the horizon. So if you just remember, an attitude is just the direction in which you lean.

It all has a lot to do with the emotion that's inside of you. You picked up some emotions when you were three, seven, or 17. You are picking up emotion about what you like and what you don't like about food, about people, about work. With your mind, you're going to perceive something. You associate, "Have I seen anything like this before," and how did I feel about it? Then you say to yourself, evaluative, "What is this probably leading me to?" If it's hurtful, going to embarrass you or make a fool of you, you subconsciously engage in avoidant behavior.

A negative attitude just means moving away. It doesn't mean you're wrong or bad, it just means you move away. If you have a negative attitude about talking in front of people, about certain kinds of classes, or a negative attitude about certain kinds of work or jobs, when you perceive the opportunity to engage in it, you subconsciously figure out why you don't like it. You subconsciously tell yourself why you can't do it. You start to procrastinate, putting it off. When you have a negative attitude, it just makes you take longer to do your homework or do your work.

If you have a negative attitude, you even get yourself sick. You'll want to avoid, subconsciously.

You don't do this consciously. It is that emotional history. When it comes up and it's negative, you get procrastination. Or, you get creative avoidance, and find stuff to do that doesn't need to be done. Instead of doing the stuff you need to do, you find stuff that doesn't need to be done.

Why? Because you don't want to do what you're supposed to do. It's procrastination, creative avoidance, and you just can't get yourself to do it.

Do you know what most people do? They give up on their goal, because they can't get themselves to do the schoolwork or do what's necessary – talk to the people, whatever it might be. You just can't get yourself to do it, and you can't understand why. You might say to yourself, "I was born this way." Well, you may have been born this way, but I doubt it.

Don't give up on what you want you want. Change your attitude.

If the thought of the new goal elicits negative attitudes, we must change the attitude in order to smoothly move into our goal. Therefore, you may want to ask yourself, "Is my present attitude toward attendance, or logging in to my online class, or doing homework, or reading the course materials or participating in class discussion, taking me toward my goal of graduation or away from it?"

SUMMARY: Application

In six years of primary school, three years of middle school, three years of high school, four years of undergraduate study, 2.5 years of graduate study, five years of doctoral work, and having spent the better part of the last 25 years working with academic institutions, it's very clear to me that there is one habit that trumps all others when it comes to completing an education. If graduation is important; if you truly desire the new life, the new opportunities that your education will bring to you; there is one habit beyond all others that is paramount to your success. I hope you are very intentional and deliberate about creating it. Whether you are an online or on-ground student, its importance to your success is the same. It is Attendance.

Attendance will make you or break you. Attendance is the ultimate soft skill; it is not a hard skill. It doesn't take aptitude or IQ to decide to show up. Attendance needs to be routinized. It needs to become a habit on the way to your goal of graduation. Attendance needs to become a behavior that you repeat and it doesn't take a conscious decision on your part to make it happen.

Here's the best part: You don't have to keep that picture in front of you forever; just long enough for the habit to take hold. Then, your brain will take over and you will free-flow.

For this example, let's think of a task, the task of reading and how our attitude has everything to do with the release of our potential. How do you feel about reading your assignments? You will get plenty of things to read during the course of your education. When you get a reading assignment, if you like reading, you enjoy it. Your attitude is working for you. It releases your potential to read and your attitude isn't in the way. Because you like it, you keep doing what you need to do until you understand the material and complete the assignment.

However, if you have a negative attitude toward reading, your picture is very different. You don't enjoy it. You don't like it. Reading feels more like a have to, rather than a want to. Because of your negative attitude, you find yourself engaging in creative avoidance, finding all kinds of chores and other things that need to be done instead of reading. Or, if you do "force" yourself to read, you don't get much out of it. It isn't because you aren't capable, but more likely you are wrestling with your negative attitude.

So, how often do you read every day? How many emails, text messages, tweets, Instagrams, websites, and any other electronic communication, magazines, newspapers, etc. might you read during your day? You probably read thousands, if not tens of thousands, of words every day. What releases your potential to read them? Your attitude. Once you are capable of reading, then it is your attitude that has everything to do with the release of that potential.

When we stay focused on our goals, and we keep in front of us the reasons why we intend to do something, it is easy to influence our attitude. If not, we are stuck with the one we have and it may not be taking us in the direction that we intend.