Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones

Some books you read. Others you devour.

While much has been written on the topic of habits recently*, Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones* by bestselling author James Clear is the gold-standard. He sets the hook with this opening statement: *"…it doesn't matter how successful or unsuccessful you are right now. What matters is whether your habits are putting you on the path toward success. You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results."* From there, Clear marks the trail on how to leverage the power of your habits. In a sure-makes-sense manner, he invites you to think differently about the pathway to productive habits.

Take a look at these **Book Notes** to see why you just might want to move this book to the top of your reading list.

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life

Title: ***Atomic Habits:*** *An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*

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Book Description:

No matter your goals, *Atomic Habits* offers a proven framework for improving—every day. James Clear, one of the world's leading experts on habit formation, reveals practical strategies that will teach you exactly how to form good habits, break bad ones, and master the tiny behaviors that lead to remarkable results.

If you're having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn't you. The problem is your system. Bad habits repeat themselves again and again not because you don't want to change, but because you have the wrong system for change. You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. Here, you'll get a proven system that can take you to new heights.

Clear is known for his ability to distill complex topics into simple behaviors that can be easily applied to daily life and work. Here, he draws on the most proven ideas from biology, psychology, and neuroscience to create an easy-to-understand guide for making good habits inevitable and bad habits impossible. Along the way, readers will be inspired and entertained with true stories from Olympic gold medalists, award-winning artists, business leaders, life-saving physicians, and star comedians who have used the science of small habits to master their craft and vault to the top of their field.

Atomic Habits will reshape the way you think about progress and success, and give you the tools and strategies you need to transform your habits–whether you are a team looking to win a championship, an organization hoping to redefine an industry, or simply an individual who wishes to quit smoking, lose weight, reduce stress, or achieve any other goal.

Book Quotes:

A habit is a routine or behavior that is performed regularly—and, in many cases, automatically. LOCATION: 144

Changes that seem small and unimportant at first will compound into remarkable results if you're willing to stick with them for years. LOCATION: 157

We all deal with setbacks but in the long run, the quality of our lives often depends on the quality of our habits. With the same habits, you'll end up with the same results. But with better habits, anything is possible. LOCATION: 158

The backbone of this book is my four-step model of habits—cue, craving, response, and reward—and the four laws of behavior change that evolve out of these steps. LOCATION: 193

Why do small improvements accumulate into such remarkable results, and how can you replicate this approach in your own life? LOCATION: 245

It is so easy to overestimate the importance of one defining moment and underestimate the value of making small improvements on a daily basis. Too often, we convince ourselves that massive success requires massive action. Whether it is losing weight, building a business, writing a book, winning a championship, or achieving any other goal, we put pressure on ourselves to make some earth-shattering improvement that everyone will talk about. LOCATION: 247

Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. The same way that money multiplies through compound interest, the effects of your habits multiply as you repeat them. They seem to make little difference on any given day and yet the impact they deliver over the months and years can be enormous. It is only when looking back two, five, or perhaps ten years later that the value of good habits and the cost of bad ones becomes strikingly apparent. LOCATION: 261

Making a choice that is 1 percent better or 1 percent worse seems insignificant in the moment, but over the span of moments that make up a lifetime these choices determine the difference between who you are and who you could be. Success is the product of daily habits—not once-in-a-lifetime transformations. LOCATION: 277

That said, it doesn't matter how successful or unsuccessful you are right now. What matters is whether your habits are putting you on the path toward success. You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results. LOCATION: 280

Your outcomes are a lagging measure of your habits. Your net worth is a lagging measure of your financial habits. Your weight is a lagging measure of your eating habits. Your knowledge is a lagging measure of your learning habits. Your clutter is a lagging measure of your cleaning habits. You get what you repeat. LOCATION: 284

Time magnifies the margin between success and failure. It will multiply whatever you feed it. Good habits make time your ally. Bad habits make time your enemy. LOCATION: 289

Breakthrough moments are often the result of many previous actions, which build up the potential required to

unleash a major change. LOCATION: 318

We often expect progress to be linear. At the very least, we hope it will come quickly. In reality, the results of our efforts are often delayed. It is not until months or years later that we realize the true value of the previous work we have done. This can result in a “valley of disappointment” where people feel discouraged after putting in weeks or months of hard work without experiencing any results. However, this work was not wasted. It was simply being stored. It is not until much later that the full value of previous efforts is revealed. LOCATION: 342

All big things come from small beginnings. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision. But as that decision is repeated, a habit sprouts and grows stronger. Roots entrench themselves and branches grow. The task of breaking a bad habit is like uprooting a powerful oak within us. And the task of building a good habit is like cultivating a delicate flower one day at a time. LOCATION: 347

Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results. LOCATION: 359

If you want better results, then forget about setting goals. Focus on your system instead. LOCATION: 369

Goals are good for setting a direction, but systems are best for making progress. A handful of problems arise when you spend too much time thinking about your goals and not enough time designing your systems. LOCATION: 370

Achieving a goal only changes your life for the moment. That’s the counterintuitive thing about improvement. We think we need to change our results, but the results are not the problem. What we really need to change are the systems that cause those results. When you solve problems at the results level, you only solve them temporarily. In order to improve for good, you need to solve problems at the systems level. Fix the inputs and the outputs will fix themselves. LOCATION: 384

The purpose of setting goals is to win the game. The purpose of building systems is to continue playing the game. True long-term thinking is goal-less thinking. It’s not about any single accomplishment. It is about the cycle of endless refinement and continuous improvement. Ultimately, it is your commitment to the process that will determine your progress. LOCATION: 402

If you’re having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn’t you. The problem is your system. Bad habits repeat themselves again and again not because you don’t want to change, but because you have the wrong system for change. LOCATION: 405

You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. LOCATION: 407

By now, you’ve probably realized that an atomic habit refers to a tiny change, a marginal gain, a 1 percent improvement. But atomic habits are not just any old habits, however small. They are little habits that are part of a larger system. Just as atoms are the building blocks of molecules, atomic habits are the building blocks of remarkable results. LOCATION: 409

There are three layers of behavior change: a change in your outcomes, a change in your processes, or a change in your identity. LOCATION: 437

Outcomes are about what you get. Processes are about what you do. Identity is about what you believe. LOCATION: 444

Behind every system of actions are a system of beliefs. LOCATION: 463

It’s hard to change your habits if you never change the underlying beliefs that led to your past behavior. You have a new goal and a new plan, but you haven’t changed who you are. LOCATION: 471

The ultimate form of intrinsic motivation is when a habit becomes part of your identity. It’s one thing to say I’m the type of person who wants this. It’s something very different to say I’m the type of person who is this. LOCATION: 480

The more pride you have in a particular aspect of your identity, the more motivated you will be to maintain the habits associated with it. LOCATION: 482

True behavior change is identity change. You might start a habit because of motivation, but the only reason you’ll stick with one is that it becomes part of your identity. LOCATION: 486

The more deeply a thought or action is tied to your identity, the more difficult it is to change it. LOCATION: 507

Good habits can make rational sense, but if they conflict with your identity, you will fail to put them into action. LOCATION: 509

Becoming the best version of yourself requires you to continuously edit your beliefs, and to upgrade and expand your identity. LOCATION: 513

Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become. LOCATION: 539

Putting this all together, you can see that habits are the path to changing your identity. LOCATION: 543

The first step is not what or how, but who. You need to know who you want to be. LOCATION: 576

Building better habits isn’t about littering your day with life hacks. It’s not about flossing one tooth each night or taking a cold shower each morning or wearing the same outfit each day. It’s not about achieving external measures of success like earning more money, losing weight, or reducing stress. Habits can help you achieve all of these things, but fundamentally they are not about having something. They are about becoming someone. LOCATION: 580

Habits are mental shortcuts learned from experience. In a sense, a habit is just a memory of the steps you previously followed to solve a problem in the past. LOCATION: 631

Conversely, when you have your habits dialed in and the basics of life are handled and done, your mind is free to focus on new challenges and master the next set of problems. Building habits in the present allows you to do more of what you want in the future. LOCATION: 647

The process of building a habit can be divided into four simple steps: cue, craving, response, and reward. Breaking it down into these fundamental parts can help us understand what a habit is, how it works, and how to improve it. LOCATION: 649

First, there is the cue. The cue triggers your brain to initiate a behavior. LOCATION: 655

Cravings are the second step, and they are the motivational force behind every habit. Without some level of motivation or desire—without craving a change—we have no reason to act. What you crave is not the habit itself but the change in state it delivers. LOCATION: 662

The third step is the response. The response is the actual habit you perform, which can take the form of a thought or an action. LOCATION: 669

Finally, the response delivers a reward. Rewards are the end goal of every habit. The cue is about noticing the reward. The craving is about wanting the reward. The response is about obtaining the reward. We chase rewards because they serve two purposes: (1) they satisfy us and (2) they teach us. LOCATION: 674

In summary, the cue triggers a craving, which motivates a response, which provides a reward, which satisfies the craving and, ultimately, becomes associated with the cue. Together, these four steps form a neurological feedback loop—cue, craving, response, reward; cue, craving, response, reward—that ultimately allows you to create automatic habits. This cycle is known as the habit loop. LOCATION: 692

How to Create a Good Habit. The 1st law (Cue): Make it obvious. The 2nd law (Craving): Make it attractive. The 3rd law (Response): Make it easy. The 4th law (Reward): Make it satisfying. LOCATION: 760

Whenever you want to change your behavior, you can simply ask yourself: How can I make it obvious? How can I make it attractive? How can I make it easy? How can I make it satisfying? LOCATION: 773

Your habits are shaped by the systems in your life. LOCATION: 780

The ultimate purpose of habits is to solve the problems of life with as little energy and effort as possible. LOCATION: 783

If you're still having trouble determining how to rate a particular habit, here is a question I like to use: "Does this behavior help me become the type of person I wish to be? Does this habit cast a vote for or against my desired identity?" Habits that reinforce your desired identity are usually good. Habits that conflict with your desired identity are usually bad. LOCATION: 879

Pointing-and-Calling raises your level of awareness from a nonconscious habit to a more conscious level by verbalizing your actions. LOCATION: 899

The punch line is clear: people who make a specific plan for when and where they will perform a new habit are more likely to follow through. LOCATION: 927

When it comes to building new habits, you can use the connectedness of behavior to your advantage. One of the best ways to build a new habit is to identify a current habit you already do each day and then stack your new behavior on top. This is called habit stacking. LOCATION: 971

Environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior. Despite our unique personalities, certain behaviors tend to arise again and again under certain environmental conditions. In church, people tend to talk in whispers. On a dark street, people act wary and guarded. In this way, the most common form of change is not internal, but external: we are changed by the world around us. Every habit is context dependent. LOCATION: 1062

Here's the punch line: You can break a habit, but you're unlikely to forget it. Once the mental grooves of habit have been carved into your brain, they are nearly impossible to remove entirely—even if they go unused for quite a while. And that means that simply resisting temptation is an ineffective strategy. It is hard to maintain a Zen attitude in a life filled with interruptions. It takes too much energy. In the short-run, you can choose to overpower temptation. In the long-run, we become a product of the environment that we live in. To put it bluntly, I have never seen someone consistently stick to positive habits in a negative environment. LOCATION: 1219

Instead of summoning a new dose of willpower whenever you want to do the right thing, your energy would be better spent optimizing your environment. This is the secret to self-control. Make the cues of your good habits

obvious and the cues of your bad habits invisible. LOCATION: 1233

You can download a printable version of this habits cheat sheet at: atomichabits.com/cheatsheet LOCATION: 1258

Scientists can track the precise moment a craving occurs by measuring a neurotransmitter called dopamine. LOCATION: 1320

When it comes to habits, the key takeaway is this: dopamine is released not only when you experience pleasure, but also when you anticipate it. Gambling addicts have a dopamine spike right before they place a bet, not after they win. LOCATION: 1337

It is the anticipation of a reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action. LOCATION: 1341

The fact that the brain allocates so much precious space to the regions responsible for craving and desire provides further evidence of the crucial role these processes play. Desire is the engine that drives behavior. Every action is taken because of the anticipation that precedes it. It is the craving that leads to the response. LOCATION: 1360

Temptation bundling works by linking an action you want to do with an action you need to do. In Byrne's case, he bundled watching Netflix (the thing he wanted to do) with riding his stationary bike (the thing he needed to do). LOCATION: 1371

We imitate the habits of three groups in particular: The close. The many. The powerful. LOCATION: 1455

Nothing sustains motivation better than belonging to the tribe. It transforms a personal quest into a shared one. LOCATION: 1484

The shared identity begins to reinforce your personal identity. This is why remaining part of a group after achieving a goal is crucial to maintaining your habits. It's friendship and community that embed a new identity and help behaviors last over the long run. LOCATION: 1487

This is one reason we care so much about the habits of highly effective people. We try to copy the behavior of successful people because we desire success ourselves. Many of our daily habits are imitations of people we admire. LOCATION: 1529

If a behavior can get us approval, respect, and praise, we find it attractive. LOCATION: 1548

This all happens in an instant, but it plays a crucial role in your habits because every action is preceded by a prediction. Life feels reactive, but it is actually predictive. All day long, you are making your best guess of how to act given what you've just seen and what has worked for you in the past. You are endlessly predicting what will happen in the next moment. LOCATION: 1599

You can make hard habits more attractive if you can learn to associate them with a positive experience. Sometimes, all you need is a slight mind-set shift. For instance, we often talk about everything we have to do in a given day. You have to wake up early for work. You have to make another sales call for your business. You have to cook dinner for your family. Now, imagine changing just one word: You don't "have" to. You "get" to. You get to wake up early for work. You get to make another sales call for your business. You get to cook dinner for your family. By simply changing one word, you shift the way you view each event. You transition from seeing these behaviors as burdens and turn them into opportunities. LOCATION: 1624

Reframing your habits to highlight their benefits rather than their drawbacks is a fast and lightweight way to

reprogram your mind and make a habit seem more attractive. LOCATION: 1633

If you want to master a habit, the key is to start with repetition, not perfection. You don't need to map out every feature of a new habit. You just need to practice it. This is the first takeaway of the 3rd Law: you just need to get your reps in. LOCATION: 1730

Habit formation is the process by which a behavior becomes progressively more automatic through repetition. The more you repeat an activity, the more the structure of your brain changes to become efficient at that activity. LOCATION: 1733

There is nothing magical about time passing with regard to habit formation. It doesn't matter if it's been twenty-one days or thirty days or three hundred days. What matters is the rate at which you perform the behavior. You could do something twice in thirty days, or two hundred times. It's the frequency that makes the difference. LOCATION: 1770

Habits are easier to build when they fit into the flow of your life. LOCATION: 1841

Redesign your life so the actions that matter most are also the actions that are easiest to do. LOCATION: 1908

Researchers estimate that 40 to 50 percent of our actions on any given day are done out of habit. This is already a substantial percentage, but the true influence of your habits is even greater than these numbers suggest. Habits are automatic choices that influence the conscious decisions that follow. Yes, a habit can be completed in just a few seconds, but it can also shape the actions that you take for minutes or hours afterward. LOCATION: 1927

Every day, there are a handful of moments that deliver an outsized impact. I refer to these little choices as decisive moments. The moment you decide between ordering takeout or cooking dinner. The moment you choose between driving your car or riding your bike. The moment you decide between starting your homework or grabbing the video game controller. These choices are a fork in the road. LOCATION: 1938

The idea is to make your habits as easy as possible to start. Anyone can meditate for one minute, read one page, or put one item of clothing away. And, as we have just discussed, this is a powerful strategy because once you've started doing the right thing, it is much easier to continue doing it. A new habit should not feel like a challenge. The actions that follow can be challenging, but the first two minutes should be easy. What you want is a "gateway habit" that naturally leads you down a more productive path. LOCATION: 1961

The ultimate way to lock in future behavior is to automate your habits. LOCATION: 2152

You can download a printable version of this habits cheat sheet at: atomichabits.com/cheatsheet LOCATION: 2187

Stories like these are evidence of the Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change: What is rewarded is repeated. What is punished is avoided. LOCATION: 2240

The first three laws of behavior change—make it obvious, make it attractive, and make it easy—increase the odds that a behavior will be performed this time. The fourth law of behavior change—make it satisfying—increases the odds that a behavior will be repeated next time. It completes the habit loop. But there is a trick. We are not looking for just any type of satisfaction. We are looking for immediate satisfaction. LOCATION: 2242

Every habit produces multiple outcomes across time. Unfortunately, these outcomes are often misaligned. With our bad habits, the immediate outcome usually feels good, but the ultimate outcome feels bad. With good

habits, it is the reverse: the immediate outcome is unenjoyable, but the ultimate outcome feels good. The French economist Frédéric Bastiat explained the problem clearly when he wrote, “It almost always happens that when the immediate consequence is favorable, the later consequences are disastrous, and vice versa…Often, the sweeter the first fruit of a habit, the more bitter are its later fruits.” LOCATION: 2273

Put another way, the costs of your good habits are in the present. The costs of your bad habits are in the future. LOCATION: 2278

Thankfully, it’s possible to train yourself to delay gratification—but you need to work with the grain of human nature, not against it. The best way to do this is to add a little bit of immediate pleasure to the habits that pay off in the long-run and a little bit of immediate pain to ones that don’t. LOCATION: 2296

The first three laws of behavior change—make it obvious, make it attractive, and make it easy—increase the odds that a behavior will be performed this time. The fourth law of behavior change—make it satisfying—increases the odds that a behavior will be repeated next time. LOCATION: 2337

In summary, one of the best ways to ensure your habits remain satisfying over the long-run is to pick behaviors that align with your personality and skills. Work hard on the things that come easy. LOCATION: 2743

Genes do not eliminate the need for hard work. They clarify it. They tell us what to work hard on. LOCATION: 2750

The greatest threat to success is not failure but boredom. We get bored with habits because they stop delighting us. The outcome becomes expected. And as our habits become ordinary, we start derailing our progress to seek novelty. LOCATION: 2817

Variable rewards or not, no habit will stay interesting forever. At some point, everyone faces the same challenge on the journey of self-improvement: you have to fall in love with boredom. LOCATION: 2835

Habits + Deliberate Practice = Mastery. LOCATION: 2876

Mastery is the process of narrowing your focus to a tiny element of success, repeating it until you have internalized the skill, and then using this new habit as the foundation to advance to the next frontier of your development. LOCATION: 2880

The holy grail of habit change is not a single 1 percent improvement, but a thousand of them. It’s a bunch of atomic habits stacking up, each one a fundamental unit of the overall system. LOCATION: 3011

Gradually, though, as you continue to layer small changes on top of one another, the scales of life start to move. Each improvement is like adding a grain of sand to the positive side of the scale, slowly tilting things in your favor. Eventually, if you stick with it, you hit a tipping point. Suddenly, it feels easier to stick with good habits. The weight of the system is working for you rather than against you. LOCATION: 3015

Happiness is the state you enter when you no longer want to change your state. LOCATION: 3071

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.