

Habit? How to Make It Stick

With a new year comes a reset button. The slate is wiped clear and we step into a fresh dream of how our ideal life could be. This year I will... (fill in the your desire here). By January's end our resolutions are gathering dust. You may find yourself snoozing instead of hitting the gym, or you start to give in on that 2 glass of wine rule and have an extra one before bed (just this one time...right?)

But some people seem to have so much more staying power. You know, "Perfect Patty", your co-worker who seems to be on a roll with her daily lunch of healthy salads and taking the stairs. What actually makes the difference to those who keep on track with a new goal and are successful?

When our shiny new resolutions begin to slip, it's easy to think things like, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I do it? Do I just need more will power? Do they just want 'it' more than I do? Do they have more support? What if I had more money to hire a fancy personal trainer? Or an assistant to manage my crazy schedule? THEN I will be successful!"

I work with people to make lifestyle changes, and when we are successful, these changes make big positive impacts across their lives, deepening a sense of purpose and building a strong foundation to go forth and be even more awesome. I want to make that difference with people so, of course, I am always nerding it up on new brain science around habit, routine, structure, and what we are now finding about why we do what we do and why we don't. Here is what I found.

Willpower Is So Yesterday

Put down the bat of self disapproval and shame. Turns out, what was once thought of as low will or being lazy is just lack of planning. Planning can be packing our lunch the night

before rather than in the a.m. as we rush out the door. It can also look like a new schedule or bringing the gym shoes to the office so we have no excuses. We are either setting up our environment for success or we're just mindlessly going with what was already in play. We can plan and create an atmosphere that is physically conducive to making the changes we desire.

Make a Plan for Success and Failure

Plan for what will you do when it fails. When you oversleep (or umm push snooze 5 times), or you have a sick kid, or a deadline that is dropped in your lap, what is your plan for that? What we often define as failure (relapse, falling off the wagon, repeating old patterns we are comfy in that cause us to feel miserable) are all part of what being successful looks like. It teaches us how to dust ourselves off and keep going. Most of life will not go as planned, so having the "oh sugar backup" is where it's at to getting our well-deserved success.

Track It To Change It

Powerhouse digital companies know this about us, we need a lot of cues to change our behavior, so they are coming up with resources to help us win. Seems everyone is wearing a smart device that measures, track, time and measure our efforts. Tracking can be helpful to show us how we are failing and well, that's successful. We no longer use the power of will but now can use consistency and accountability.

Remember, a new habit is new and you are in fact learning. There is a curve to this, so allow for it. We can measure it with complicated technical devices or use a pencil and paper, it really doesn't matter. The key is consistency. How you create the consistency is what will bring you the results you desire.

Again and Again

So if it's not really willpower, then what is it? Turns out it's simple, a matter of repetition. We are what we repeatedly do, says Aristotle. What we all want is to turn our new habits into automatic action without thought. What can I do to have automaticity alive and well in my life? According to top scientists and the wisdom of sages throughout history, it's all about consistency.

Let It Sink In

Give it time. How much time? How much time does it take before a new habit becomes hardwired? Some say a mere 21 days. I have read and heard everything under the stars from the range of 21 days to 180 days. So what is the magic number, really? And why? When you are giving everything you've got to making change, it would be nice to know when you can expect your payoff. Just like everything else in life, it depends on the individual and the depth of dive or habit complexity for you. Simply adding a fruit to your daily diet maybe be child's play for some, while exercising consistency could take a bit more effort. So allow for your own timing to come forth and enjoy the journey.

How To Make It Stick

Plan it. Measure it. Then repeat it and let it sink in. Soon you will have a new habit you don't even have to think about. Now that is awesome.

Further Reading:

- *Keeping Your New Year Resolutions*
- *Beat Unhealthy Habits and Live Better in 2015*
- *Developing an Attitude of Gratitude Can Help You Live a Longer, Happier Life*

- *What to Expect When You Hire a Personal Trainer*