

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business Study Guide

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg

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Plot Summary

"The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business", is a book written by Charles Duhigg, a journalist who became interested in why people develop certain habits, and how those habits can be changed. Each chapter of the book focuses on a certain aspect of habits, and is filled with examples from the lives of individuals and businesses demonstrating how habits arise, why they appear to be so difficult to change, and, most importantly, how it is in fact possible to change them. With each chapter building on the knowledge and understanding gained from the previous chapters, it rapidly becomes apparent that habits are far more influential in daily life than was previously considered by the reader, and that this reality is in fact one of the reasons that habits are so powerful—they are, in every sense of the word, automatic, excluding the ability for people to exert willpower and make a change unless certain steps are taken to ensure success. When a person first forms a habit, for example, that person's brain shows that decision-making faculties are very active during the first several times they engage in the routine, but that the decision-making activity is automatically stopped after the pattern of behavior has been learned completely. This process is active in everything we learn, from the ability to recognize someone's face to sports performance or successful business ventures. Habit-form, argues the book through several chapters, is the primary reason we are unable to consciously direct ourselves toward change. Instead, the pattern of behavior must be identified and understood so that it can be changed or replaced. The book moves on to explore how important habit is to businesses and corporations who depend on customers making their products into habitual purchases. Marketing campaigns, training programs, and business models are all examined, with successful ones demonstrating the power of habits and how to shape them. Finally, the role of habit in mistakes and larger tragedies is explored carefully, as the book makes clear that habits can be every bit as devastating as they are powerful when they do not serve the people who adopt them well. Finally, the book introduces a very modest strategy to the reader suggesting how habits may be successfully changed. Habits, argues the author, are all different, and all need a different way to be changed. Since the ability to change a person's habits will differ from person to person, the book outlines several general steps that must be taken and walks the reader through a basic example of how to change a habit.

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business

Summary and Analysis

This book examines the ways in which habits form in peoples and societies across the world. It explains that even very different-seeming habits develop in essentially the same ways, and goes on to discuss ways in which habits may be changed. The point of this book is that any habit adopted by anyone, anywhere, can be changed profoundly by several specific steps.



Prologue: The Habit Cure

Prologue: The Habit Cure Summary and Analysis

Lisa Allen spent much of her early life as a smoker, and she also battled obesity and was deeply in debt by her twenties. However, in a small number of years she managed to turn her life around completely. A number of social and behavioral scientists have taken great interest in her ability to profoundly change her life. She's given up smoking, lost weight by taking up running, is studying for a Master's degree and owns a home. She explains that her life changed when she had a mental breakdown while visiting Cairo. She decided that she needed a reason to live, and resolves to return to the same place next year to travel through the desert. Neurologists who have studied her brain discovered that her new habits have overridden and overpowered her old ones. Her brain-centers in self-discipline have grown much stronger, because she has rebuilt her life around a new habit. This principle is applicable to corporations and other groups just as much as it is to individual people.

This book examines why habits exist. It consists of three sections. The first looks at how habits develop for people in the first place. The second part examines habits of successful collectives like companies. The third part looks at societal habits and how people have managed to successfully change those. The central point of each chapter is that it is possible to change any habit adopted by a person or group of people.

The author was a news reporter who covered the Iraqi war. He became interested in changing habits because the military was interested in this same idea, especially when they discovered that angry crowds could be prevented by keeping food cars out of the area.



1. The Habit Loop

1. The Habit Loop Summary and Analysis

In 1993, Eugene Pauly, after suffering a serious bout of viral encephalitis and nearly losing his life, suffered through the loss of functioning in regions of his brain, even though all of its basic functioning remained intact. Eugene stuns researchers by recovering rapidly, but he still can't remember people very well. One researcher, Larry Squire, recognizes that the damage is very similar to another patient he once studied, H.M., who had part of his brain removed to prevent serious seizures. This procedure rapidly alters his memory, leaving everything before the operation accessible to him, but preventing him from being able to form new memories. Squire notices that Pauly, unlike H.M., has the ability to lead conversations. Squire questions him, and discovers that while Pauly is able to find his way around the house, he is unable to draw a map of it or explain how he does so. One morning, Pauly leaves the house, and his wife becomes frantic, and goes out to look for him, but when she returns, he's in the living room. Pauly begins to walk every morning, and often returns with strange objects, such as a wallet and a puppy. Squire begins to understand that Pauly is able to form new habits even though he can't consciously remember anything.

The Brain and Cognitive Sciences Department and MIT houses structures that resemble miniature surgical theaters. Here, researchers perform procedures on rat-brains that allow them to learn more about habit-formations. They test these rats on mazes to discover that mental activity associated with habit formation decreases each time these mazes. This is possible because of the activity in the basal ganglia. This structure resides within the brain, and undergoes a very complicated procedure which allows us to form habits, freeing up the use of the brain for other functions.

Habits can be changed, but the important discovery that researchers have made recently is that when they are formed in the brain, the brain stops using its decision-making power in those particular situations. Damage to those areas can cause difficulties in completing very basic tasks, such as recognizing facial expressions.

Larry Squire reasons that since Pauly can still use his basal ganglia, he can still learn new routines. This turns out to be the case, as researchers test his ability to form new habits, and find that even though he's not consciously aware of learning anything, he's developing new skills. Many of his emotional responses also lasted beyond his ability to remember why he had them in the first place. He would, for example, often be angry or upset without knowing why.

Routines and rewards take many shapes and forms. Habits can become so ingrained, in fact, that they are difficult not to follow. Additionally, we are often unaware of when a new habit is being formed. Fast food companies have taken solid advantage of this fact. And yet, these habits may be easily overridden. Pauly was able to develop new skills and habits because his basal ganglia still functioned, but this ability eventually becomes



a problem for him, since he was unable to control his eating habits. Eventually, Eugene has a heart-attack. Later, he falls and breaks his hip, and winds up in the hospital. His team of doctors are worried that he will be afraid inside the hospital, but he behaves well and stays happy, eventually dying there.



2. The Craving Brain

2. The Craving Brain Summary and Analysis

In the early 1900s, advertising genius Claude C. Hopkins is approached with a new toothpaste and asked to promote it. His knowledge on habit-forming has been important in all sorts of areas of society. Toothpaste represents a serious challenge to businesses to sell because virtually no one brushes their teeth. Hopkins doesn't want to agree to the deal, but he's offered a huge sum and decides to take the job. This results in a tooth brushing revolution across the United States. The secret to his success has been duplicated in industries everywhere. He focused on a highly arbitrary function of toothpaste in order to sell it so well. In fact, selling any product hinges on the establishment of a new habit, which according to Hopkins involves predetermined cues, and simple rewards for following through. There is also a third principle that must be recognized, which is far more difficult to pick up on.

In 1996, a team of advertisers in Procter and Gamble led by Drake Stimson, suffered enormous difficulties trying to sell Febreze, which was originally called HPBCD. The company knew it had a gold mine with the product, but could not figure out how to sell it. They introduce the product in a few test markets. All the data suggests that they can make billions on the new product, but sales are so small that the team quickly realizes it has a serious problem. The corporation nearly cancels the product, but Stimson pleads with management to have another chance to figure out what has gone wrong. His team of researchers discovered that people with smelly homes don't even realize that it smells because they have grown completely accustomed to the smell. This meant that the people who needed the spray the most were almost guaranteed not to use it. This data left Stimson stunned, and he still had no idea how to sell the product.

Wolfram Schultz devotes his neuroscience career to determine what parts of the brain are responsible for new actions. He notices that many of his monkeys like apple juice, and some like grape or other kinds, and begins studying why this is the case. He has monkeys pull levers that dispense juice they prefer. He discovers a massive spike in the brain activity during this task, which results in the formation of a new habit. The spikes also represented the brain's pleasure response, and the spikes begin arriving before the juice, in anticipation of the reward. Schultz began manipulating the game so that sometimes the juice was diluted or didn't arrive at all, and he discovered the brain's response turned into one of craving and disappointment. Similar findings have been discovered in other labs. Identical procedures take place inside human brains.

Researchers at New Mexico State University studied new exercise habits, discovering that most people begin them spontaneously and develop them into habits as a result. The author asks Schultz how to control overeating urges, to which the scientist responds that everyone has those urges, and that these same urges allow people to have good habits as well.



Stimson's team desperately tries to determine how to sell their product. They finally find a woman who loves to use Febreze, and asks her why she uses it so often. They observe how she uses it and learn that she sprays it at the end of every cleaning routine. They suddenly realize they can sell Febreze by placing it at the ends of everyone's cleaning routine. Doing this pairs it with the experience of pleasure that follows such a routine. They also added a scent to the product and release a new ad campaign based on this idea of it being a habit. The product finally takes off, and Stimson is heavily rewarded for his success.

Hopkins used this idea while selling toothbrushes, though he didn't realize it. His toothpaste had a minty, rewarding feel to it, which is a big reason people continued to use it. This provides everyone with the basic habit-creating formula. This always includes a specific reward. This reward should be chosen carefully and strongly desired. All habits are driven by such cravings.



3. The Golden Rule of Habit Change

3. The Golden Rule of Habit Change Summary and Analysis

Tony Dungy was the head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and managed to take the team from being one of the worst teams in football to being extremely successful and eventually winning the Superbowl. Dungy had wanted to be a coach for a very long time, but many teams turned him down because his central philosophy was all about changing the habits of the team. Dungy understands that if you use the same cue and give the same rewards, you can change the middle routine. He does this, and the Buccaneers transform into an incredible team.

Dungy watches his team play against the San Diego Chargers. They are slightly behind. He has taught his team a single play, but tried to make them do it incredibly fast. The players have been challenged by this, but are showing signs that they are about to make a breakthrough. The team is doing well, but always falters the moment they start thinking about what they are doing. Their quarterback begins reacting automatically, and suddenly the team starts succeeding immensely on the field.

Bill Wilson, a serious alcoholic, picked up his habit just before the first world war. The addiction ruined his life until one day he met with an old drinking buddy of his who has since become sober. His friend tells Wilson that he has found religion, and that has kept him sober. Wilson goes to a treatment center and receives an infusion in the hopes that it will remove his desire to drink. The infusion causes hallucinations. During this painful affair, Wilson experiences the sensation of bright light, and the pain suddenly stops. He never drinks again, and begins to promote Alcoholics Anonymous. AAs techniques provide ways to undercut the habits that alcoholics have developed as drinkers. The program is not supported by scientific research, but is highly successful just the same.

AA functions the same way that Dungy attempts to improve his team. The group urges its members to search for the rewards they receive from drinking. They attempt to maintain these rewards while changing the central behavior of drinking.

One study actually focused on inhibiting the craving centers in the brain. This was only partially successful, as some study participants relapsed. Only those who dealt with stress in a new and positive way were able to quit drinking alcohol. These were the ones that managed to find an alternative routine are able to change their habits.

In 2006, Mandy, a habitual nail-biter, sought treatment for her habit. The therapist asked her questions about her nail-biting, then sent her home with the task of keeping track of her urges to bite her nails. The next visit, she was assigned the task of keeping track of the urge, and of when she was successfully able to avoid it. Using this method, the habit rapidly disappeared. It is always important to identify the reasons we engage in behaviors that we wish to eliminate. Some habits also require beliefs in order to change,



as in the performance of Dungy's team. Dungy recognized that the errors his team was making were mental. During this time, sports experts made fun of him for his methods, but he slowly gains credibility as players improve. However, the team still had a tendency to fall apart if the game became stressful. They are unable to make the Superbowl as a result, and Dungy is fired.

John tells his story at an AA meeting. He picked up his son one day while he was drunk, and crashed his vehicle and broke his son's arm. He got treatment, and he was okay, until his mother got cancer, at which point the alcoholism returned with severity and his marriage fell apart. He gets into a serious accident and is arrested for DUI. He throws himself into the AA program and the belief in a higher power. AA works by doing more than just reprogramming people's habits. The belief in a higher power is very important to the success of the program. Most participants would do well in the program until faced with some kind of stress, and then revert back to drinking. Only those with faith in a higher power would succeed. The belief was what made the difference.

Dungy is hired on by the Colts as head coach and adopts the same plan as he had with his previous team. The Colts improve, and Dungy's fame increases, even though the same problems arise within the new team. Then, tragedy strikes as Dungy's son dies. The team suddenly changes, wanting to help their coach. They begin believing in him. It is often the case that people are able to change after tragedy, but just as often that no tragedy occurs and the changes get underway just the same. Instead of tragedies, some people rely on social groups. The Colts perform magnificently the next year, eventually defeating the Patriots, then going on to win the Superbowl. Habits must be replaced, not eliminated. Changing habits requires replacing the routine, finding a support group, and believing the change will stick.



4. Keystone Habits, or the Ballad of Paul O'Neill

4. Keystone Habits, or the Ballad of Paul O'Neill Summary and Analysis

October, 1987—Wall Street investors meet the new CEO of the Aluminum Company of America. This company has made blunders throughout the last year that has resulted in loss of profits. Paul O'Neill arrives, confusing his audience by talking about worker safety, not mentioning profits at all. O'Neill insists that the companies' profit problem rests in safety. Investors are furious, and many sell their stock immediately. The company hits record profits inside of that year. This happened because O'Neill recognized that he could change the whole company by attacking and changing a core habit. O'Neill had a long history of restoring order to institutions, including healthcare spending, NASA, and the CPA. The emphasis on safety at Alcoa brought about a dramatic improvement in habits and communication throughout the company. These habits even spilled out into its employees' lives.

Michael Phelps is an excellent example of someone whose habits have been perfected through the development of a simple keystone habit. This was done by his trainer, who targeted behaviors of Phelps' and shaped them to suit the needs of a master swimmer.

In 1970, the American Library Association's task force on Gay Liberation was able to significantly advance the Gay-Rights movement by having the library of congress reclassify books on homosexuality out of abnormal sexual relations. This victory served as a massive inspiration.

Ingrained habits can be powerful. At one point, Phelps' goggles leak during a race, but he is so habituated to his routine that he does not stop, and goes on to win the gold medal in that race.

At Alcoa, things are going steadily when suddenly a young man dies in an accident. This sparks a massive change in the company and O'Neill becomes wildly popular. Improvements are seen in ever aspect of the company. O'Neill was also able to reduce infant mortality in the US by discovering that teachers needed better training about nutrition. Other experts have found similar ways of changing obesity. Keystone habits form the basis of organizations. O'Neill eventually becomes secretary of the treasury, then moves on to improving hospitals.



5. Starbucks and the Habit of Success

5. Starbucks and the Habit of Success Summary and Analysis

Travis Leach was raised by drug addicts, and had a very difficult childhood. He dropped out of high school at sixteen, got small jobs he found difficult to keep because he has great difficulties getting along with people. Finally, he gets a job at Starbucks, and after a short period of time becomes very successful. Starbucks' training courses are extraordinarily good.

An experiment conducted with children presented them with a marshmallow. The kids were told they could have two marshmallows if they waited to eat the first. The ones that managed to wait showed much more success later on in school and life. Researchers studied willpower after this study. One of these researchers, Mark Muraven, realized that willpower fluctuates from day to day. He presents hungry graduate students with a bowl of cookies and of radishes, then gives them an impossible puzzle. The cookie eaters spent far more time trying to figure out the puzzle than did the students who ate the radishes. More research in this same area reveals that willpower is in fact like a muscle that can become exhausted. It affects every area of a person's life. Starbucks focuses on instilling self-discipline in its workers through the use of this idea. One related study looked at recovery times for difficult surgeries and discovered that those who set goals towards recovery were much faster at doing so. Participants became very specific in listing the steps that they needed to take in order to recover. Willpower is most likely to evaporate when faced with unexpected difficulties. Starbucks targets those situations specifically. Howard Schultz, the one behind Starbucks' massive success, was very similar to Travis Leach. As a young man, he borrowed money from everyone that he knew in order to buy the coffee company and it became successful very quickly. His mother taught him to think through situations. Research revealed that some people were better at developing habits, and it was discovered that this stemmed from a person's sense of control.



6. The Power of a Crisis

6. The Power of a Crisis Summary and Analysis

Rhode Island Hospital was once highly reputable, but fell into disarray after disagreements between nurses and doctors. Some doctors were so difficult to deal with that the nurses had to develop an elaborate system for dealing with them and their mistakes. One elderly man, suffering from a subdural hematoma, but there is no indication on his charts as to which side of the head it is on. A nurse protests before the surgeon operates on the wrong side of his head, but she is told to be quiet. The patient ultimately dies as a result.

A pair of economists have written a book, *Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*, which revolutionizes the business world. They have discovered that organizational routines are critical to businesses everywhere. Routines and truces keep people in a business cooperative. This explains the tragedy at Rhode Island Hospital, since the system nurses had was unbalanced. More is needed than a simple series of habits adopted to cover for others' mistakes in order for an organization to be successful.

One day, Philip Brickell, a ticket collector for the London Underground, was told of a burning tissue below some escalators. He puts the fire out quickly, but doesn't investigate the incident further. The tissue turns out to be just a small part of a very large problem, as a fire is starting nearby. A safety inspector fails to call the fire department even after he notices it, but a police officer spots the trouble and calls. Passengers for the next train continue to head down towards the fire to board the trains. No one at the station understands how to operate the sprinkler system, and the fire rapidly spreads out of control. The organizational hierarchy of the Underground is so dysfunctional that the fire goes unnoticed for a half-hour, and by then, it is too late, and an explosion occurs in the escalator. The blaze takes six hours to extinguish, and thirty-one people are killed as a result. This all happened because divisions of the subway system guarded their responsibilities so jealously that no one knew how to deal with the fire at the station because no one from that department was present.

Often, when tragedies like these occur, organizations look at what caused them. Rhode Island Hospital continues to make massive surgical errors until finally, Dr. Mary Reich Cooper, speaks up and forces massive changes to occur in the ways in which the doctors and nurses communicate. Crises are also opportunities to look at how to improve situational performance. It had been known for years, for instance, that fire safety was a serious concern in the London subway system before the fire happened. An investigation uncovered a leadership which had been actively ignoring these warnings. A public inquiry ensues and forces the organization to change dramatically. A similar change happens at the Rhode Island Hospital.



7. How Target Knows What You Want Before You Do

7. How Target Knows What You Want Before You Do Summary and Analysis

Andrew Pole is a statistician with target who developed models that helped predict which of the companies' customers is pregnant. Unfortunately, his model was so successful it offended women and angered them. Companies never even used to hire people like Pole, but they caught on recently that this kind of thinking can drastically raise profits. Habits play a critical role in shopping, and companies like Target spend large amounts of money tracking individual purchases. This data is handed over to statisticians like Pole who make predictions about customers. Habits in these settings tend to change drastically during important life events such as marriage and divorce. Pregnancy is the most dramatic of these events, and the most profitable to retailers. These models are fairly effective, but many view it as invasive if the companies are too obvious about it.

Polyphonic HMI, an artificial intelligence group, has constructed a program called Hit Song Science, which analyzes how likely a given song is to be a big hit. However, it predicted Outkast's "Hey Ya" would be gigantic, and it fails commercially because it is too different from what people want to hear. Lots of money and energy is spent on trying to make and find hit songs. To save the song "Hey Ya," it was necessary to change the way it was perceived.

During World War II, meat became very difficult to get ahold of in the United States. Organ meat was still available, but very unpopular. The committee on food habits changes this perception by releasing recipes and familiarizing people with organ meats, and this dramatically shifts people's eating habits. In fact, this is the only government led food campaign to ever change people's eating habits effectively.

For "Hey Ya," researchers determined they needed to put the song in-between two existing hits. This eventually works, and "Hey Ya" becomes very popular.

Target begins mixing the pregnancy-related ads with regular ads in order to minimize the sense that people's privacy has been violated. This principle, making something previously unpopular into a routine or habit by pairing it with accepted and established routines, works everywhere. YMCA is presently working on ways to keep people at their gym location.



8. Saddleback Church and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

8. Saddleback Church and the Montgomery Bus Boycott Summary and Analysis

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was begun by Rosa Parks, and changed the nature of the civil rights movement. She was not the first person jailed for refusing to give up her seat, however. Parks was a very respected woman in her community, and had friends in many different organizations and social circles. Her imprisonment brought the community together and inspired them to boycott the bus system.

A related study of how men found their employment discovered that they often found employment from friends of friends, or, as the study called them, "weak ties."

Nine years after Rosa Parks' arrest, hundreds of young people travel to help register black voters in the South. Some of them are killed, and many who were accepted into the program decline to actually go. The reasons why some attended the program and others did not were studied more carefully in the 80s. It turns out that social connections with others was the largest determining factor, and that people with social groups oriented towards promoting the project were far more likely to go.

Martin Luther King Jr. was only twenty-six when Parks was arrested, and agrees to use his church as the meeting location for discussing the boycotts. The meeting convinces all black ministers present to go along with the boycott, and the movement spreads rapidly from there, and King is able to turn the boycott into a successful habit.

Rick Warren uses similar methods to create a very successful church in Orange County, CA. Warren focuses on social habits, and gives people a sense of personal responsibility and investment in the church. Despite suffering through a massive depression, Warren built the church by grouping his congregation and having them meet at each others' homes.

The bus boycott grew very difficult to maintain as authorities continued to threaten and harass its participants. A bomb goes off on King's front porch. King prevents a riot by preaching nonviolence. This recasts the civil rights movement as part of God's plan. People once afraid of being arrested now looked forward to it as a sign of their participation.



9. The Neurology of Free Will

9. The Neurology of Free Will Summary and Analysis

Angie Bachmann became a stay at home mom and began to suffer from perpetual boredom. She becomes a gambler. Years later, her parents develop lung disease, and she goes to take care of them, but when she returns she is even more bored and lonely. She becomes an expert gambler, but suddenly finds herself in debt. She does not think she is to blame, however.

One morning in Wales, in July of 2008, Brain Thomas calls the police to say he has accidentally killed his wife during an incident of sleepwalking. It turns out he was experiencing a sleep terror. It appears as though Thomas is not alone, and that people commit terrible crimes during sleep terrors.

Legally, Thomas was found not responsible for his crimes. Bachmann was, however, eventually sued for a large sum of money successfully, even though her brain was using many of the same routines as Thomas. Bachmann's parents die and she inherits a large sum of money. She uses much of it to relocate and get away from her habit, but is unsuccessful. Casinos have sophisticated ways of tracking patrons and encouraging them to spend more money. She begins getting exorbitant offers to return and gamble, and despite her best efforts, she keeps returning to casinos and losing huge amounts of money.

Cognitive scientists have studied this problem and discovered that the brains of pathological gamblers are different in that they experience a reward feeling when they almost win. Bachmann eventually gambles away all of her money, and is sued by the casino when she is unable to repay her debts.

The reason, argues the author, that Bachmann should be held accountable, is that she knew she had a terrible habit, and did nothing to prevent her own financial ruin.

William James, one of the most important American psychologists in history, went unaccomplished until his thirties, and felt utterly desperate, nearly committing suicide. Instead, he decided to try an experiment in which he would simply believe that change is possible. By the end of that time, he had become very successful, and he established himself as an authority in psychology.

Appendix

Appendix Summary and Analysis

The methods for changing habits are different for each person and each habit. However, a reasonably detailed framework can be provided for changing them. The first step is to identify the routine. Once this has been done, the second step involves experimenting with rewards that will stop the behavior. This may take time, as the purpose is determining what the behavior rewards one with specifically. After that, isolating the cue is necessary. The cue acts as a trigger to the behavior. This can be difficult because we cope with a lot of information all of the time, so determining a single cue requires eliminating other possibilities. The five categories cues fall into are: location, time, emotional state, other people, and immediately preceding action. Once this information is collected, a plan may be formulated to change the habit or routine.



Characters

Eugene Pauly

Pauly was an elderly gentleman who suffered a very serious viral attack of encephalitis, which destroyed many areas of his brain including his memory centers. Despite a rapid recovery from the virus, Pauly was permanently without the ability to form new memories, which meant that he was constantly forgetting new material introduced to him. Some of his recent memory had also been destroyed, and he had no idea where he lived, nor did he know how his house was laid out. Although he could not consciously remember any of this material, he was still able to find his way around his house. He could not explain how he did this when doctors questioned him. One morning, he shocked his wife by disappearing. Panicked, she searched the entire neighborhood to try to find him, only to return home and discover that Pauly had returned home and was quietly watching television. Pauly, of course, had no memory of his walk, and could not explain why he had left the house. He did, however, begin to disappear routinely, and would return with strange objects, usually pine cones, but once he returned with a puppy. Pauly never had any memory of these events, and could never successfully tell researchers where he lived. However, it was discovered he had the ability to make new habits because his basal ganglia—the system inside the brain responsible for automatic behaviors—was still fully functional. In fact, upon further tests, it was determined that Pauly could learn new skills and habits, even though he could not explain how he did it.

The ability to form new habits turned out to be a curse just as much as it was a blessing. As he grew older, he grew more fragile, and the doctor's warnings that he be more careful were never remembered, so he suffered numerous injuries. He was also unable to change his diet, and would often eat breakfast four or five times a day because he was responding to cues in his environment that it was time to eat. He eventually suffered a massive heart-attack, and died peacefully at the hospital from a hip injury shortly thereafter.

Claude C. Hopkins

Hopkins was an advertiser in the early 1900s responsible for the widespread use of toothpaste today. When the company approached Hopkins with the chance to sell a new brand of toothpaste, he was highly skeptical. At that time in the United States, nobody used toothbrushes, so toothpaste was a very difficult sell. It was common back then for door-to-door salesmen to sell toothpaste, but the product never did well. Although he initially declined the offer, Hopkins eventually agreed to take it on when the company offered a gigantic sum of money. Over a short period of time, Hopkins was able to turn toothbrushing into a nationwide habit, and he did so by providing the consumer with a simple reward. First, Hopkins picked an arbitrary function of toothpaste, namely, the fact that it eliminates the film that develops on teeth. This is not important in terms of hygiene, and, in fact anything as simple as eating an apple can



eliminate the film. The important aspect for Hopkins, however, was that it demonstrated an aspect of toothpaste that made one's teeth feel clean. Moreover, Hopkins had the company add a mild stimulant to the paste that created a minty, tingly feeling. This, according to Hopkins, signaled to the consumer that the toothpaste had, in fact, worked, and provided them with a clear reward for brushing their teeth. Hopkins had been successful with many products in his lifetime precisely because he understood why people develop habits.

Tony Dungy

Dungy was a football coach who began his coaching career with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996. When he began, he was highly unpopular due to his methods, which most other sports professionals viewed as simplistic and ineffectual. Most football teams practice all sorts of different plays, and when on the field, the individual players have to make decisions about how to proceed. According to Dungy, however, the most successful football team would be a team that performed a single play, but performed it well. Players who had practiced all kinds of different plays, according to Dungy, suffered lost time and ability while trying to make difficult snap decisions. Dungy's idea was to habituate players to a single technique, and then all they would have to do in order to win was do it faster than anyone else.

His coaching career continued, and slowly, Dungy's popularity began to rise. The Buccaneers made it to the playoffs, but when things became highly stressful for the players, they began reverting back to thinking too much on the field and making mistakes. Under Dungy's leadership, the team never made it to the Superbowl, and Dungy was fired despite the massive advances he had brought to the field for the Buccaneers. He was quickly hired on by the Indianapolis Colts, where he was again very successful, but found his team running into the same problems as they had previously. When games got too difficult or stressful, players would fall apart and start relying on old habits. Tragedy struck when Dungy's son died, and this tragedy made the players want to help Dungy in any way that they could. They began truly believing in his coaching method, and eventually the Colts won the Superbowl under Dungy's leadership.

Paul O'Neill

O'Neill was a corporate and governmental organizational specialist who, in 1987, became CEO of Aluminum Company of America. He infuriated investors by focusing on worker safety, but within a year the company was showing record profits and continued to prosper and grow. O'Neill knew that, by focusing on what he called "keystone habits," he could transform the entire corporation, which he did very well. O'Neill is also responsible for many drastic improvements in governmental services, such as healthcare, and was even able to discover that the key to lowering infant mortality rates in the US was to give high school teachers better training and information about nutrition. O'Neill had a very keen eye for detail, and often worked a problem all the way



back to its source, which is how he was able to identify workplace safety as a critical factor for operations across the entire company. In fact, he even went so far as to fire one CEO who had failed to report a number of serious accidents. To most companies, this would have been a difficult decision, but for the Aluminum Company of America, it was well understood that any CEO guilty of such transgressions would have to be fired. The corporate culture had been formed around ideas that the CEO violated directly. O'Neill eventually went on to become the Treasury Secretary of the United States.

Lisa Allen

Lisa is a girl who spent her early adulthood as a smoker. She was obese, and heavily in debt, but thanks to the determination to change just a single habit about herself, was able to turn her life around in a short number of years. In almost no time at all, Lisa was a serious runner, she was working on a Masters degree, and owned her own home.

Larry Squire

Squire is the researcher who determined that Pauly could still learn new skills through habit alone, because his basal ganglia, the structure responsible for habit formation, was still intact after Pauly's illness.

Michael Phelps

Phelps is a professional swimmer and the record-holder for number of gold medals won at the Olympics. He was able to do this thanks to a small number of habits he developed, which eventually expanded into a highly disciplined activity.

Travis Leach

Leach had a very difficult childhood. Both of his parents were addicted to heroine. As a young adult, Leach had difficulty keeping small jobs, until he wound up at Starbucks. The training program there changed his life and within very little time he was managing several Starbucks and was very successful.

Howard Schultz

Howard Schultz is the man behind Starbucks' popularity. He grew up very poor, but his mother always had him think through tasks and understand how and what he needed to do in order to succeed. At a very young age, Schultz borrowed money from everyone he knew in order to buy the Starbucks company, which back then only had six stores. He was able to turn it into the coffee giant it is today.



Andrew Pole

Pole is the statistician who was able to allow Target to predict which of its customers were pregnant. He did this by analyzing large amounts of data and understanding that shopping was all a series of habits. Many women were outright insulted when Target was able to find out that they were pregnant before they had even told anyone else, but this rapidly disappeared when Target changed its technique to including the pregnancy ads along with the regular coupons people would receive in the mail.

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a civil rights activist who was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. She had deep ties everywhere in the community, and as a result, her arrest caused the black community in Montgomery, Alabama, to organize in her defense and to repeal the bus laws.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

King was the most prominent civil rights activist, who was able to build on Rosa Parks' arrest by enforcing the idea that participation in the bus boycott was God's work. People viewed participation in the movement and nonviolent protest as a duty and a blessing rather than the burden and hardship it was previously thought to be.

Angie Bachmann

Angie Bachmann was a stay at home mother who, out of boredom, began to gamble. Her habit grew steadily out of control, to the extent that when her parents died, and left her a large sum, she moved to a new state in order to stop her habit. This did not work, however, as gambling companies constantly called her with offers to fly her out to their casino where she would gamble. Eventually, she lost everything and wound up deeply in debt. The casinos sued her and won, on the grounds that there was a national database she could enter that would prevent her from being allowed to gamble at casinos.

Brian Thomas

Brian Thomas was a man from England who, one night, accidentally strangled his wife. Thomas suffered from sleepwalking, and apparently killed his wife in the midst of a sleep terror, in which he thought another man had broken into their trailer and was attacking his wife.



Objects/Places

Cairo

A large city in Egypt. Lisa Allen made the decision to change her life while visiting Cairo.

MIT

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is responsible for a great deal of research on how the brain works in terms of habit-formations.

New Mexico State University

New Mexico State University published research that discovered even a small amount of exercise could provoke large changes and increased discipline in someone's life.

Rhode Island Hospital

Rhode Island Hospital was once highly reputable, but fell into chaos when its nurses felt too threatened by doctors to communicate with them effectively.

Cigarettes

Cigarettes and smoking are the most common habits people seek to give up.

Exercise

Exercise is a habit many people try to add to their lives.

Toothpaste

Toothpaste serves as the perfect example of how habits come to be. Almost no one brushed their teeth at the beginning of the twentieth century, but clever advertisers were able to change this profoundly.

Febreze

Febreze was a product designed to eliminate bad odors. Marketers had a very difficult time selling the product, before they learned that the way to do it would be to integrate the product into people's cleaning routines.

Casinos

Much like smoking, casinos and gambling is a habit many people try to get rid of.

Alcohol

Alcohol is addictive, and highly habit-forming.

Themes

Habit-Formation

The entire book centers on what habits are, how they form, and the impact that they have on our lives. People commonly tend to think of habits as something brief and minor, but in actuality habits are very nearly all-encompassing. Habits, argues the author, are formed when a person undergoes the same routine many times. A person engages in a habit as a result of some end reward, and once this pattern of behavior establishes itself, it occurs almost automatically, and the doer has very little say in the matter, since conscious thought no longer plays a role. This does make habits difficult to change in that a person can easily become discouraged by deciding to change something through an act of willpower alone, then failing when the change does not come about. However, a careful examination of the habit soon reveals ways to change it, most importantly by finding a different way to get the same reward.

Habits are far more powerful than most of us are aware. For example, very few of us would consider the way in which we put on clothes in the morning to be any kind of habit, nor would we consider brushing our teeth to be a significant habit, but both of these events are driven by the very same centers in our brain that control things like drinking, smoking, exercising, and eating. Habits are changeable, however, and many people have built up self-discipline in order to transform their lives.

Business

A very important point of "The Power of Habit" is the way in which habit-formations affect business, in all aspects. From selling a product to training staff to making sure co-workers cooperate with maximum efficiency, habits are critical to the success or failure of organizations everywhere. Good habits are formed when everyone knows exactly who is in charge, but is also given a voice and a sense of personal responsibility in the well-being of the company or endeavor. Entire corporate cultures can be changed by focusing and changing basic habits in just a single category, as when Paul O'Neill was able to make the Aluminum Corporation of America flourish under his leadership by focusing on worker safety.

Conversely, when a company develops bad habits or methods of communication, it is destined to fail, especially in times of crises. Much of the book is geared towards examining large crises in organizations of people and business and explaining the bad habits that went into their creation. The book is clearly geared towards business professionals in particular, as there is no end to the number of corporate leaders seeking for ways to grow their profits. It is important to note that the author does not criticize this objective in the least, and, in fact, makes careful note of how these successes often spill into other areas of people's lives.



Rewards

Rewards are a critical aspect of habit-based behavior, primarily because all habits are geared towards the collection of some type of reward. Rewards can come in all kinds of forms, ranging from positive feelings to different kinds of foods to various sensations, and no habit forms without them. When looking to change habits, it is very important to keep the reward the same, because that is exactly what the brain expects to receive. An example in the book is with smoking; many people smoke to be stimulated, and encounter higher rates of success quitting when they take in caffeine in the afternoon. However, rewards can be tricky to identify, because whenever one engages in a habit, the reasons why are never accessible to the conscious mind. This means that people are typically searching for a reward they do not even know that they want. Fast Food companies are experts at taking advantage of this fact, and use it in order to make people eat at their restaurants more commonly than they would otherwise. Rewards can also come about by re-framing something that was once considered unpleasant, as when Martin Luther King Jr. was able to make the Montgomery Bus Boycott something that people wanted to participate in because it is their duty to do so. In this way, something that was once a heavy burden, becomes a sacred duty and a privilege.

Free-Will

The book deals with free will in a powerful way; by explaining what habits are and how they affect our behavior, it describes the role of free will in combating habits and routines that we know are dangerous. Since habits can be changed, we, argues the author, are responsible for identifying dangerous habits and making an effort to change them, since changing them is in fact within our power. The idea is also that free-will, or willpower, bears strong similarities to a muscle, in that only a certain amount may be used before a person's reserves become exhausted and he or she reverts to old patterns of behavior. However, certain habits are also very effective at improving one's willpower, and there are methods one can use in order to make ordinarily difficult situations more easy to deal with, such as coming up with plans for difficult situations in advance. The more control a person has over a situation, and the more he or she understands the situation, the better a person can control oneself. In this sense, free-will is simply another aspect of habits, in that one can choose to adopt the habit of fostering stronger and more effective decisions. One is, however, always responsible for the way in which one deals with any habits. If a habit or routine is harmful, a person is entirely responsible for themselves to stop that habit.



Style

Perspective

"The Power of Habit" is generally written in third-person, with occasional interruptions in first-person as the author explains details from his life that reflect the significance of the material. The author was originally a news reporter, trained to make stories appear compelling and appealing. He first became interested in the phenomenon of habit-formation when he spoke to commanding officers in Iraq about riot control. He was surprised to discover that the U.S. military was able to suppress riots by depriving the areas of food-carts after a certain time. This worked in stopping riots because people would commonly gather about, and would be able to sustain their presence by eating food available only through the presence of the carts. When the carts got moved, people got hungry after a short time and simply left the area. The author is very convinced that all behavior is ultimately habit-driven, and commonly uses extreme examples from areas of addiction or psychosis to explain his arguments. These examples, while effective, don't necessarily address how someone could address a simple habit change. These habits are far more common, and since they are rarely ever more than nuisances in life, lack the component of motivation from tragedy the author views as so important many times to effect a change. While the author's arguments are compelling and motivating, they are not necessarily accurate, and he admits openly in several occasions that habit-changing was not the only aspect of the change which made it possible.

Tone

The author's tone can easily be described as motivating and compelling. Each of the stories used is designed to demonstrate the power that habit and routine can have in a person's life, and while the stories themselves are true enough, the author's intent is to captivate his audience with the strength of his examples and convince them they are capable of changing their own habits. The author appeals to a broad range of people, from individuals looking to get rid of a single pesky habit, to corporations looking to overhaul their entire business system. With this in mind, examples from all areas of life are used to show what habits do—and, more importantly, do not do—for people and organizations. The author even tends to get dramatic about the events he describes, often using direct quotes from people involved, as he investigated many of the examples he used personally. This gives the work a sense of being in the present that serves the tone further, as when Dungy watches his teams playing against opponents and begins to finally see important signs that they are improving. The book itself was designed to be a self-motivational work, and as such, it is served very well by the tone, which is often aided and never disrupted by brief explanations of scientific findings or other technical concepts.

Structure

"The Power of Habit" begins with a prologue, ends with an appendix, and contains three larger sections, each with three chapters apiece. Each of the three larger sections is headed by its subject matter. The first section looks at what makes habits in the first place. The second looks at the habits of successful people and how those people or businesses managed to build them. The third section examines the habits of societies and how they are able to change from time to time. There is a great deal of overlap in-between chapters and sections however, and each of the chapters relies on information provided to the reader by earlier chapters. Each of the individual chapters has a title and a subtitle pertaining to the content therein, and many of these chapters contain smaller breaks marked with roman numerals. Each of the chapters is roughly twenty pages in length, giving the entire work a very structured and uniform feel. The prologue and appendix are very brief, and the appendix provides a framework for approaching and changing habits in one's life.

The book is extremely well-crafted in that it continues to build on information and gains momentum as it progresses. Its examples become more profound and pertinent, but would not make sense in later chapters without the information in earlier ones already having been explained.



Quotes

"Everyone in the study had gone through a similar process. By focusing on one pattern—what is known as a "keystone habit"—Lisa had taught herself how to reprogram the other routines in her life as well." Prologue, p. 10

"Toward the center of the skull is a golf-ball-sized lump of tissue that is similar to what you might find inside the head of a fish, reptile, or mammal. This is the basal ganglia, an oval of cells that, for years, scientists didn't understand very well, except for suspicions that it played a role in diseases such as Parkinson's." Chap. 1, p. 25

"Throughout his career, one of Claude Hopkins's signature tactics was to find simple triggers to convince consumers to use his products every day. He sold Quaker Oats, for instance, as a breakfast cereal that could provide energy for twenty-four hours—but only if you ate it every morning." Chap. 2, p. 39

"When other companies discovered what Hopkins was really selling, they started imitating him. Within a few decades, almost every toothpaste contained oils and chemicals that caused gums to tingle." Chap. 2, p. 57

"The alcoholics only permanently changed once they learned new routines that drew on the old triggers and provided a familiar relief. "Some brains are so addicted to alcohol that only surgery can stop it," said Mueller. "But those people also need new ways for dealing with life." Chap 3, p. 69

"O'Neill believed that some habits have the power to start a chain reaction, changing other habits as they move through an organization. Some habits, in other words, matter more than others in remaking businesses and lives." Chap. p. 90

"The participants started looking through their habits and finding patterns they didn't know existed. Some noticed they always seemed to snack at about 10 A.M., so they began keeping an apple or banana on their desks for midmorning munchies. Others started using their journals to plan future menus, and when dinner rolled around, they ate the healthy meal they had written down, rather than junk food from the fridge." Chap. 5, p. 106

"For Starbucks, willpower is more than academic curiosity. When the company began plotting its massive growth strategy in the late 1990s, executives recognized that success required cultivating an environment that justified paying four dollars for a fancy cup of coffee." Chap. 5, p. 114

"...It may seem like most organizations make rational choices based on deliberate decision making, but that's not really how companies operate at all. Instead, firms are guided by long-held organizational habits, patterns that often emerge from thousands of employees' independent decisions." Chap. 6, p. 138



"A series of experiments convinced marketers that if they managed to understand a particular shopper's habits, they could get them to buy almost anything." Chap. 7, p. 157

"Each expectant mother handed over her name, her spouse's name, and her due date. Target's data warehouse could link that information to the family's guest IDs. As a result, whenever one of these women purchased something in a store or online, Pole, using the due date the woman provided, could plot the trimester in which the purchase occurred. Before long, he was picking up patterns." Chap. 7, p. 164

"Rosa Parks wasn't the first black passenger jailed for breaking Montgomery's bus segregation laws. She wasn't even the first that year. In 1946, Geneva Johnson had been arrested for talking back to a Montgomery bus driver over seating." Chap. 8, p. 182

"People are attracted by a sense of community and the weak ties that a congregation offers. Then once inside, they're pushed into a small group of neighbors—a petri dish, if you will, for growing close ties—where their faith becomes an aspect of their social experience and daily lives." Chap. 8, p. 198

"The behavior of people in the grip of sleep terrors are habits, though of the most primal kind. The "central pattern generators" at work during a sleep terror are where such behavioral patters as walking, breathing, flinching from a loud noise, or fighting an attacker come from." Chap. 9, 212

"Each chapter in this book explains a different aspect of why habits exist and how they function. The framework described in this appendix is an attempt to distill, in a very basic way, the tactics that researchers have found for diagnosing and shaping habits within our own lives." Appendix, p. 229



Topics for Discussion

Why do habits exist? What happens inside the brain while they are being formed?

Numerous people featured in the book changed their habits, turning their lives around and meeting with success. List three people who did this and briefly explain how they were able to do so.

What is similar about the ways in which all habits develop? Are there any differences in how societal habits develop versus individual ones? Explain.

In the book, the author uses several addictions as examples of habits. What information does the author provide that helps explain why this is the case. What is it that habits have in common with addictions?

Explain the importance of so-called "keystone habits," and list at least three that might be useful to individual people.

Why was it so difficult for Proctor and Gamble to sell Febreze initially? What did they have to do to change that?

How was Martin Luther King Jr. able to popularize the Montgomery bus boycott amongst a population that found it burdensome?

The final chapter presents two people who have both done horrible things. The author argues, and the legal systems agree, that one person was responsible for her mistakes, while the other was not. Briefly explain why this was the case.