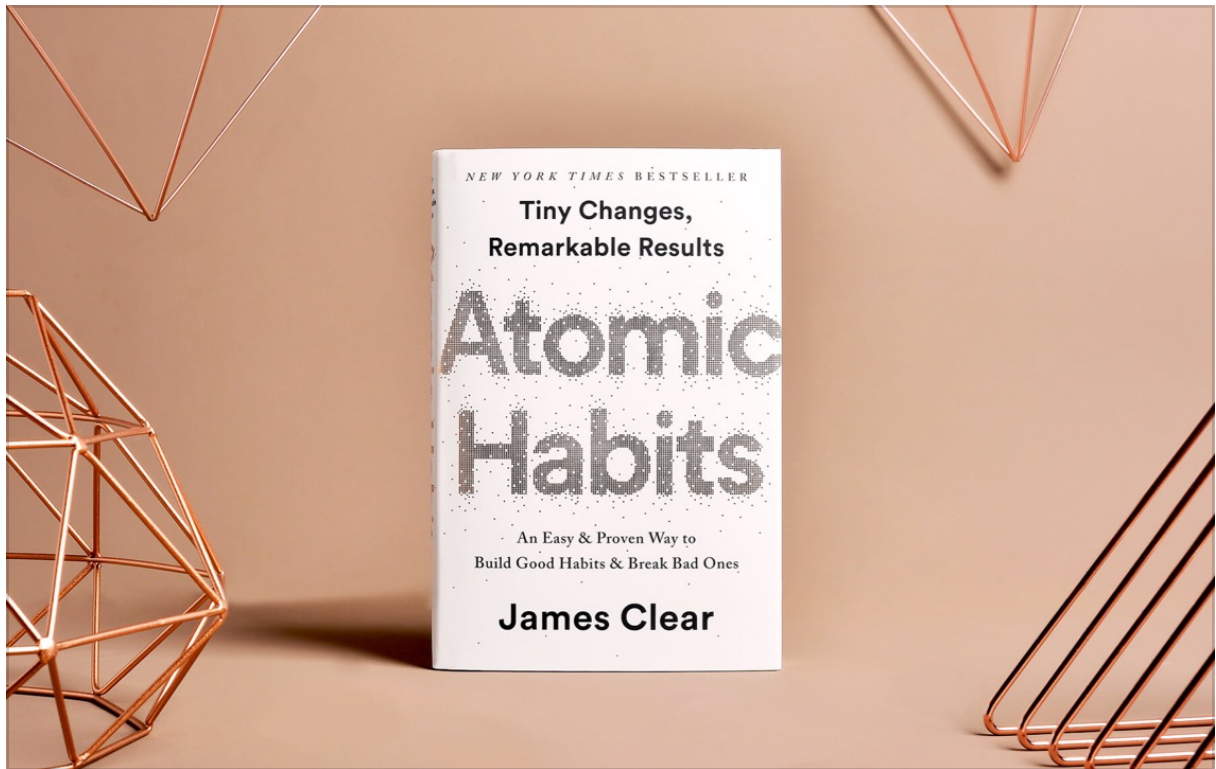


#97: Atomic Habits

#books/date/2019/08

#books/type/non-fiction

#books/rating/★★★★



Overview

There has been a lot written about habits. A lot. The psychology of habit formation. How we can break bad habits. How to quickly form new ones. If there is one takeaway, it's that people are desperate for quick fixes, and the appetite for self-help here is strong.

Atomic Habits doesn't break any new ground per-se. But it did have a couple of ideas that I'll take with me as I think about forming new habits and breaking old ones:

Compounding effects

If you just get 1% better each day, you'll be 37% better by the end of the year. Conversely, if you get 1% worse, you'll be down to 0 by the end of the year. Compounding matters with habits, just like it does with money.

And as Charlie Munger points out, "The first rule of compounding: Never interrupt it unnecessarily." (pg. 201) This is probably one of my most important lessons—not giving up

too easily.

“This is a distinguishing feature between winners and losers. Anyone can have a bad performance, a bad workout, or a bad day at work. But when successful people fail, they rebound quickly. The breaking of a habit doesn’t matter if the reclaiming of it is fast.”

Systems over goals

“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.”

Focus on systems and processes that help you make forward progress. By not focusing on goals/outcomes, you can be happy without seeing immediate progress.

“New identities require new evidence.”

“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 want’s this. It’s something very different to say I’m the type of person who is this.”

Repetition over perfection

“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.”

2 Minute Rule

This isn’t the GTD 2 minute rule (although I like that one too). Basically make sure you show up, even if it’s just for two minutes.

“If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it’s just for two minutes—you are casting votes for your new identity. You’re not worried about getting in shape. You’re focused on becoming the type of person who doesn’t miss workouts. You’re taking the smallest action that confirms the type of person you want to be.”

Overall a nice, quick read, with very practical advice.

Book Notes

INTRODUCTION

- “In the pages that follow, I will share a step-by-step plan for building better habits—not for days or weeks, but for a lifetime.” (pg. 9) 😊

CHAPTER 1 - THE SURPRISING POWER OF ATOMIC HABITS

- Compounding effects
 - “If you can get 1 percent better each day for one year you’ll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you’re done. Conversely, if you get 1 percent worse each day for one year, you’ll decline down to zero. What starts as a small win or a minor setback accumulates into something much more.” (pg. 15)

1% BETTER EVERY DAY

1% worse every day for one year. $0.99^{365} = 00.03$

1% better every day for one year. $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

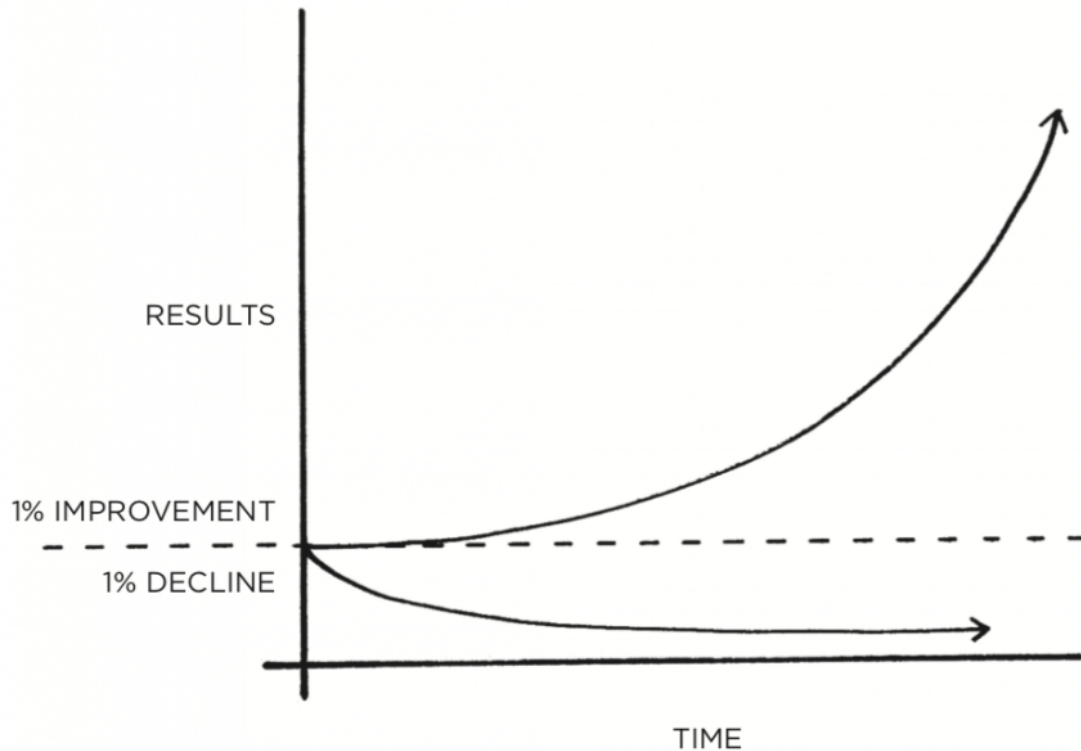
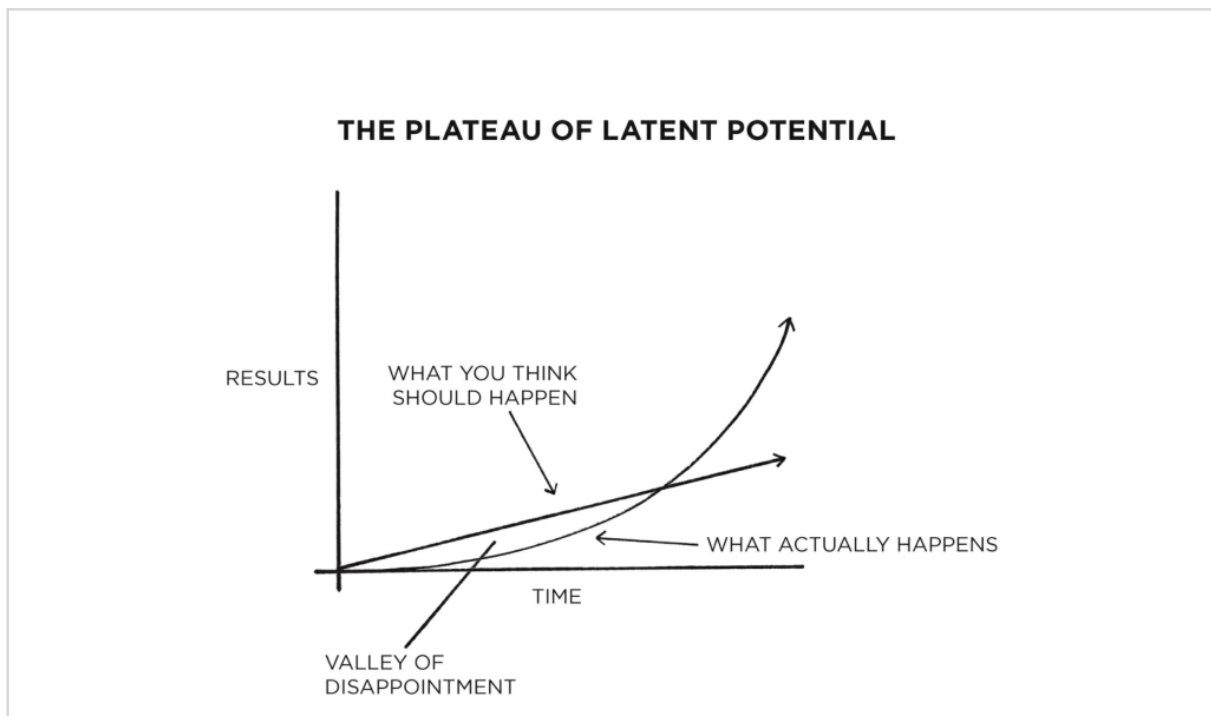


FIGURE 1: The effects of small habits compound over time. For example, if you can get just 1 percent better each day, you'll end up with results that are nearly 37 times better after one year.

- "If you want to predict where you'll end up in life, all you have to do is follow the curve of tiny gains or tiny losses, and see how your daily choices will compound ten or twenty years down the line. Are you spending less than you earn each month? Are you making it into the gym each week? Are you reading books and learning something new each day? Tiny battles like these are the ones that will define your future self." (pg. 18)
- *Plateau of Latent Potential* - progress isn't linear you need to persist to break through this plateau to see meaningful progress (pg. 21)

"When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know that it was not that last blow that did it—but all that had gone before." - Jacob Riis (pg. 21)



- “The score takes care of itself.” - Bill Walsh
 - “The same is true for other areas of life. If you want better results, then forget about setting goals. Focus on your system instead.” (pg. 24)
- A system’s first mentality helps you enjoy the process and not focus on the goal
 - “When you fall in love with the process rather than the product, you don’t have to wait to give yourself permission to be happy.” (pg. 26)
 - **“Focusing on the overall system, rather than a single goal, is one of the core themes of this book.”** (pg. 27)
 - **“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.”** (pg. 27)

CHAPTER 2 - HOW HABITS SHAPE YOUR IDENTITY

- “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 want’s this. It’s something very different to say I’m the type of person who is this.” (pg. 33)
- **“New identities require new evidence.”** (pg. 39)
 1. Decide the type of person you want to be
 2. Prove it to yourself with small wins

CHAPTER 3 - HOW TO BUILD BETTER HABITS IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS

- “Habits are, simply, reliable solutions to recurring problems in our environment.” - Jason Hreha (pg. 45)

- Four questions (pg. 54)
 1. How can I make it obvious?
 2. How can I make it attractive?
 3. How can I make it easy?
 4. How can I make it satisfying?

CHAPTER 4 - THE MAN WHO DIDN'T LOOK RIGHT

CHAPTER 5 - THE BEST WAY TO START A NEW HABIT

- *Implementation Intention* - a plan you make beforehand and when and where to act.
- The two most common cues are **time** and **location** - "I will [BEHAVIOR] at [TIME] in [LOCATION]" (pg. 71)
- *Diderot Effect* - a new possession often creates a spiral of consumption that leads to new purchases (pg. 73)
- **Habit Stacking** - "After [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT]"

CHAPTER 6 - MOTIVATION IS OVERRATED

- *Suggestion Impulse Buying* - triggered when a shopper sees a product for the first time and visualizes a need for it. "Customers will occasionally buy products not because they want them but because of how they are presented to them." (pg. 83)

CHAPTER 7 - THE SECRET TO SELF-CONTROL

- "*Disciplined* people are better at structuring their lives in a way that *does not require* heroic willpower and self-control. In other words, they spend less time in tempting situations." (pg. 93)
- "Bad habits are autocatalytic: the process feeds itself." (pg. 93)
- Inversion of first law: instead of making it obvious, make it invisible

CHAPTER 8 - HOW TO MAKE A HABIT IRRESISTIBLE

- *Supernormal stimuli* - trigger that elicits a stronger-than-normal response (e.g. salt, sugar, fat, etc.)
- "Dopamine is released not only when you experience pleasure, but also when you anticipate it."
- "It is the anticipation of the reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action." (pg. 106)
- "Your brain has far more neural circuitry allocated for *wanting* rewards than for *liking* them." (pg. 108)

CHAPTER 9 - THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN SHAPING YOUR HABITS

- “One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior.” (pg. 117)

CHAPTER 10 - HOW TO FIND AND FIX THE CAUSES OF YOUR BAD HABITS

- “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.” (pg. 131)
 - “Many people associate exercise with a challenging task that drains energy and wears you down. You can just as easily view it as a way to develop skills and build you up. ‘I need to go running in the morning’ vs. ‘It’s time to build endurance and get fast.’”
 - “I am nervous” vs. “I am excited and I’m getting an adrenaline rush to help me concentrate” (pg. 132)

CHAPTER 11 - WALK SLOWLY, BUT NEVER BACKWARD

- **Photo experiment where students were graded on quality (not quantity)** (pg. 141)
 - “All the best photos were produced by the quantity group.”
- “The best is the enemy of the good.” - Voltaire
- “The difference between being in motion and taking action” (pg. 142)
 - **Motion:** planning, strategizing, and learning. Good things but they don’t produce results.
 - **Action:** behavior that delivers an outcome.
- “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.” (pg. 143)
- *Long-term potentiation* - the strengthening of connections between neurons in the brain based on recent activity. (pg. 143)
- *Learning curves* - habits form based on frequency, not time (pg. 145)
- “One of the most common questions I hear is, ‘How long does it take to build a new new habit?’ But what people really should be asking is, ‘How many does it take to form a new habit?’ That is, how many repetitions are required to make a habit automatic.” (pg. 146)
- “The most effective form of learning is practice, not planning.” (pg. 147)

CHAPTER 12 - THE LAW OF LEAST EFFORT

- *Principle of least action* - the path followed between any two points will always be the path requiring the least energy. (pg. 151)
- “One of the most effective ways to reduce friction associated with your habit is to practice environmental design...habits are easier to build when they fit into the flow of your life.” (pg. 153)
- **Addition by subtraction**
 - “When we remove the points of friction that sap our time and edge, we can achieve

more with less effort.” (pg. 154)

CHAPTER 13 - HOW TO STOP PROCRASTINATING BY USING THE TWO-MINUTE RULE

- Ernest Hemingway’s writing advice: “The best way is to always stop when you are going good.” (pg. 165)
- “If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it’s just for two minutes—you are casting votes for your new identity. You’re not worried about getting in shape. You’re focused on becoming the type of person who doesn’t miss workouts. You’re taking the smallest action that confirms the type of person you want to be.”
- “We rarely think about change this way because everyone is consumed by the end goal.” (pg. 165)
- *Habit shaping* - “scale your habit back up toward your ultimate goal. Start by mastering the first two minutes of the smallest version of the behavior.”

CHAPTER 14 - HOW TO MAKE GOOD HABITS INEVITABLE AND BAD HABITS IMPOSSIBLE

- “The best way to break a bad habit is to make it impractical to do.” (pg. 172)
- “Civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them.” - Alfred North Whitehead (pg. 174)

CHAPTER 15 - THE CARDINAL RULE OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

CHAPTER 16 - HOW TO STICK WITH GOOD HABITS EVERY DAY

- *Paper Clip Strategy* - moving one paper clip from one jar to another as a counter (sales calls, etc.) (pg. 195)
- “This is a distinguishing feature between winners and losers. Anyone can have a bad performance, a bad workout, or a bad day at work. But when successful people fail, they rebound quickly. The breaking of a habit doesn’t matter if the reclaiming of it is fast.” (pg. 201)
- “Too often, we fall into an all-or-nothing cycle with our habits. The problem is not slipping up; the problem is thinking that if you can’t do something perfectly, then you shouldn’t do it at all.” (pg. 201)
- “The first rule of compounding: Never interrupt it unnecessarily.” - Charlie Munger (pg. 201)
- “This is why the ‘bad’ workouts are often the most important ones. Sluggish days and bad workouts maintain the compound gains you accrued from previous good days. Simply doing something—ten squats, a push-up, anything really—is huge. Don’t put up a zero. Don’t let losses eat into your compounding.” (pg. 201)

- "It's not always about what happens during the workout. It's about being the type of person who doesn't miss workouts." (pg. 202)

CHAPTER 19 - THE GOLDBLOCKS RULE

- *The Goldilocks Rule* - "humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities. Not too hard. Not too easy." (pg. 231)
- On the difference between the best athletes and everyone else...
 - "At some point it comes down to who can handle the boredom of training every day, doing the same lifts over and over and over." (pg. 233)

CHAPTER 20 - THE DOWNSIDE OF CREATING GOOD HABITS

- Annual review
 1. What went well this year?
 2. What didn't go so well this year?
 3. What did I learn?
- Yearly Integrity Report (pg. 246)
 1. What are the core values that drive my life and work?
 2. How am I living and working with integrity right now?
 3. How can I set a higher standard in the future?