

Creating Productive Habits

This worksheet will help you create and maintain habits that are designed to help you meet your goals. General recommendations:

Start one habit at a time. It takes time to move a behavior change from the prefrontal cortex—the conscious, decision-making part of the brain—to the basal ganglia, where habits live in semi-consciousness.

Keep your habit as simple as possible. Simple behaviors that happen frequently are easier to repeat often enough to lock them in.

The Habit Loop:



Cue



TIPS FOR DESIGNING RELIABLE CUES INTO YOUR HABIT:

Implementation planning: Answer the questions WHEN and WHERE to write an "If...Then..." statement.

A cue based on a specific situation or a recurring event is more reliable than one based only on clock time.

The cue for this new habit:

When the behavior will be performed: _____

Where the behavior will be performed: _____

If _____,

Then _____.



Routine

TIPS FOR DESIGNING SUCCESSFUL HABIT ROUTINES:

Less is more: make the routine as simple as it can possibly be to accomplish the goal.

If a routine must have multiple steps, a checklist can become a one-step routine.

Your routine:



Reward

TIPS FOR DESIGNING REWARDS THAT WORK:

Rewards let the brain know what behavior is worth repeating.

True habit formation requires internal rewards.
Chain external rewards to internal.

What rewards will you use to remind you (or your team members) of the importance of the new routine?



Lock-In

TIPS TO HELP YOU LOCK IN YOUR NEW HABIT:

Lock-in has occurred when the brain registers the "reward" at the same time as the cue.

Remember the Jerry Seinfeld technique: your goal for lock-in is to keep the new behavior going! The more regularly you perform your new routine following your reliable cue, the faster your new habit will be locked in to run by itself.

How long will it take to lock in your new habit? It depends mainly on two things:

How simple or complicated the routine

How frequently the cue/routine can be completed

Based on a study of 96 people who attempted to establish daily habits, the average time to lock in a habit was 66 days. It will take time, and each repetition until you've achieved lock-in will require energy. This is why it's best to create or change only one habit at a time.

How will you practice your new habit? How often can you practice?



Context

TIPS TO HELP YOU DESIGN THE ENVIRONMENT:

Find ways to take willpower and self-control out of the equation.

What would make it easy when people are most depleted? (Study retailers and marketers: they specialize in depleted shoppers.)

Post reminders, position items you'll need for the routine to make them readily available.

Start designing an environment that makes it easier to run the routine than not:

Changing an Existing Habit

Typically, the best way to either change or stop an existing habit is to replace it with a new habit. You've likely practiced your existing habit so many times that it's running before you even know it's started.

DISCOVER THE EXISTING CUE

What starts the habit routine running? Is it an internal cue, like low blood sugar or boredom or wanting someone to talk to? Is it an external cue, like seeing a snack food, a book, your computer, an Internet page?

WHAT IS THE REWARD FOR THE EXISTING HABIT?

If a habit is running, there's a reward! It might not be in sight, but look for it. Do something different when the cue appears and see what's missing in your experience. A reward can be a sense of satisfaction, a release of tension, a surge of adrenalin. You'll want to make sure you can get that same reward or something better when you lock in your new routine.

DESIGN A NEW ROUTINE THAT USES THE SAME CUE

Make your new routine as simple as possible:

Use awareness tools to help you notice the cue when it appears

Rearrange the physical space to make it easy to run the new routine and difficult to run the old routine (hide things, post reminders, post checklists, etc.)

Use visualization to "practice" running your new routine on cue

Remember: if you use a different, external reward, be sure to congratulate yourself every time you run the new routine. Notice the good feeling you get from making this difficult change. Don't sabotage your change with self-criticism or by telling yourself it should be easy.

Because of the unconscious nature of habits, all habit change is difficult.

Treat every successful effort with the respect it deserves!