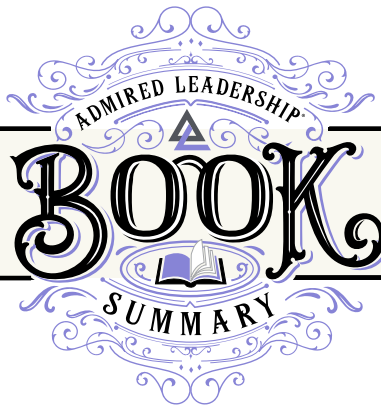




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



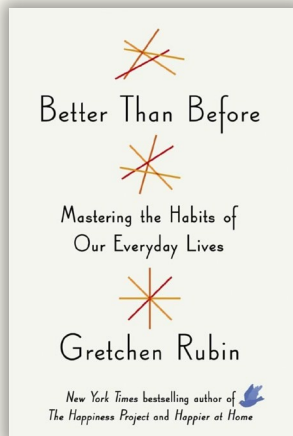
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Better Than Before

What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits

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How do late risers become early risers? How does one actually follow through on a commitment to leave the office at a reasonable time? How does a person transition from never exercising to working out five days a week? In her book **Better Than Before**, bestselling author Gretchen Rubin attempts to answer the basic question underlying all of these questions: **How do we change?** Based on comprehensive research, Rubin explains that rather than attempting to simply mirror the habits of other successful people, we must pick specific strategies and modify them so that they work for each of us as individuals. In her book, Rubin lists and describes a set of strategies to create habits to improve our lives.

Key Quote

“Habits are the invisible architecture of daily life” (p. xv). — Gretchen Rubin

KEY POINTS

Self-Knowledge

We must first know and understand ourselves before attempting to change ourselves.

Virtually everyone falls into one of four tendencies, which are Rubin’s framework for understanding each person’s relationship style:

Upholders “respond readily to both outer expectations and inner expectations.”

Questioners “question all expectations, and will meet an expectation only if they believe it’s justified.”

Obligers “respond readily to outer expectations but struggle to meet inner expectations.”

Rebels “resist all expectations, outer and inner alike” (p. 16).

When attempting to persuade people (including ourselves) to change a habit, we will be more successful if we consider people's natural tendencies (p. 27).

Below is Rubin's list of top strategies to choose from to help with adopting new habits.

Strategy of Monitoring

"If we want something to count in our lives, we should figure out a way to count it" (p. 45).

We will increase the chance of bettering ourselves if we find a way to quantify the steps needed to achieve a successful result and then effectively track that metric.

One good example of this is in the management of diseases such as diabetes. Until recently, Rubin's sister – who has Type 1 diabetes – tested her blood sugar by pricking her finger. She then changed to a new tracking method, using a device inserted under her skin to monitor her blood sugar continuously. Even though the device simply provides a continuous record of blood sugar and doesn't administer insulin, Rubin's sister has found that it causes her to better maintain her blood sugar level (p. 47).

Strategy of Foundation

When pursuing self-improvement, many people begin by attempting to adopt a habit that "won't deliver much payoff in return for the effort required." Instead, we should start with the habits that can "help us to: 1. sleep, 2. move, 3. eat and drink right, [and] 4. unclutter" (p. 59).

"Foundation habits tend to reinforce each other – for instance, exercise helps people sleep, and sleep helps people do everything better." The mutual benefits of exercise and sleep make them a "good place to start" (p. 59).

Strategy of Scheduling

"Habits grow strongest and fastest when they're repeated in predictable ways." And "for most of us, putting an activity on the schedule tends to lock us into doing it" (p. 74).

And frequency reinforces priority. "What I do every day matters more than what I do once in a while" (p. 80).

Even scheduling time for activities that aren't tangible tasks can be useful. For example, Johnny Cash created "Things to Do Today" lists, on which he always wrote "Worry" as one of the list items. According to Rubin, "although scheduling time to worry sounds odd, it's a proven strategy for reducing anxiety. Instead of worrying continually, a person saves the worry until the appointed time, and then worries until the time is up" (p. 86).

Strategy of Accountability

When we believe that we may be held responsible for our actions – even when we're responsible only to ourselves – we tend to demonstrate more self-control (p. 91).



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Strategy of First Steps

A challenging task at hand can often lead to what Rubin calls “tomorrow logic,” which causes us to procrastinate and allows us to deny that our current behaviors conflict with our intentions (p. 104).

Many of us can succeed in adopting a new habit by keeping our initial steps small and manageable. This allows us to “gain the habit of the habit, and the feeling of mastery” (p. 105).

Strategy of the Clean Slate

Oftentimes, our circumstances change in a way that makes a fresh start possible – but only if we’re ready for the opportunity.

For example, at a new job, you should decide when you think you should leave the office, and leave at that time every night for the first week (p. 117). This will help you create a foundation for the habit.

Strategy of the Lightning Bolt

While repetition can create a habit, a sudden new experience or understanding can also transform our behavior (p. 122).

Rubin’s friend was frequently late when dropping her child off at events, until her son said, “You’re always late dropping me off because it doesn’t affect you, but you’re always on time to pick me up because you’d be embarrassed to be the last parent at pick-up” (p. 124). Rubin’s friend was never late again.

Strategy of Abstaining

Often, it’s “far easier to give something up altogether than to indulge moderately” (p. 136).

“One way to deprive oneself without creating a feeling of deprivation is to deprive oneself totally” (p. 136).

Strategy of Inconvenience

Creating inconvenience around a behavior can help us avoid bad habits. The more difficult it is to do something, the more difficult it is to do it habitually (p. 155).

Examples of using the strategy of inconvenience include increasing the amount of physical or mental energy required to do something (e.g., leaving your cell phone in another room or banning smoking inside a building) and raising the cost of an activity (e.g., increasing the cigarette tax and imposing a congestion charge for passenger vehicles to enter the center of a city).

Strategy of Loophole-Spotting

A key to good habit formation is noticing when we are in the act of invoking a loophole. Loopholes occur when we allow ourselves to be fooled by the seeming acceptability of engaging in a negative behavior because we are planning to engage in a positive behavior afterward (e.g., consuming large amounts of food and drinks today and planning to exercise tomorrow, or hanging out with friends today and planning to buckle down and get to work tomorrow) (p. 172).



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If we can practice successful loophole-spotting, we will be more successful in maintaining good habits.

Strategy of Distraction

Purposeful distraction can “help us resist temptation, minimize stress, feel refreshed, and tolerate pain, and it can help us stick to our good habits” (p. 184).

A good tactic is to set up a distraction before submitting to temptation. For example, one of Rubin’s friends decided that if she wanted to purchase an extravagant item while shopping, she’d allow it, but only if she first finished picking up the items she had on her shopping list. She found she rarely went back for the item, and only if she truly did want it (p. 184).

Strategy of Rewards

It may seem counterintuitive, but we should avoid giving or receiving rewards for practicing habits. “A reward obstructs habit formation” (p. 192).

“One study showed that children who got a reward for coloring with magic markers – an activity children love – didn’t spend as much time with markers, later, as children who didn’t expect a reward” (p. 193). Additionally, children who expected rewards produced poorer quality drawings (p. 194).

Strategy of Pairing

We should couple activities – one that we like and another that we don’t want to do – to get ourselves to do both (p. 211). For example, one person wanted to motivate herself to go to the gym, so she allowed herself certain TV shows while she was at the gym – and only while she was at the gym. The initially hard task of going to the gym became hugely appealing to her (p. 212).

We can also use pairing to stop harmful habits. For example, we may pair eating with sitting down at a table. This can prevent us from eating directly from a container or straight from the fridge (p. 214).

Strategy of Clarity

“Two kinds of clarity support habit formation: clarity of values and clarity of action” (p. 223). “The clearer I am about what I value, and what action I expect for myself – not what other people value, or expect from me – the more likely I am to stick to my habits” (p. 224).

Two of Rubin’s acquaintances went to marriage counseling because they were constantly fighting about whether a clean home or additional leisure time was more important. They kept arguing until they had the clarity to quit marriage counseling to spend that money on a cleaning service (p. 225).

Strategy of Identity

If we want to change a habit that conflicts with our identity, we’re going to have to rethink our identity first (p. 238).



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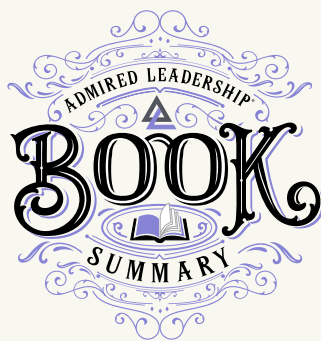


For example, if you view yourself as a workaholic, it may be very difficult for you to avoid checking your work email on weekends. To get to a place where you're able to control this behavior, you may need to change your view of yourself as a workaholic.

"Changing a habit is more challenging if that new habit means altering or changing an aspect of ourselves" (p. 239).

"Research shows that we tend to believe what we hear ourselves say, and the way we describe ourselves influences our view of our identity" (p. 239).

Rubin, G. (2015). **Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits**. New York: Broadway Books.



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