

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



343 Easy Way to Establish Habits

We all have habits. Some good ones, and some that may not be so good. I'm Jerry Roberts and today we look at a way to create new and positive habits, in an easy, almost automatic way. That's next, on The Extra Point.

Most of the things we do each day are based on habits. The order we eat the food on our plate, the route we take to and from work, the path we take in the grocery store every time, which teeth we brush first — the uppers or lowers, and is it the left or right side? It's all a matter of habit.

It's okay, don't worry. Doing things on auto-pilot is necessary or we'd be forced to make a lot more decisions on a conscious level.

The kind of habits we want to break are those that are destructive. We may try to do so and find that we can't, that the habit is too strong and we're unable to get rid of it. Why? Science tells that the brain creates sets of neurons around repeated behaviors, and those neural connectors fire in sequence, running us through the habit from start to finish. Further, the more often we perform the habit, the stronger those connections become.

When we try to break a habit it's like we're trying to re-wire our brain. Some experts will say that the brain fights the change, and that's why we often fail to climb above our habits.

So, how can we win? From my readings and my personal experiments, there are three steps involved. First, we have to admit the habit is hurting us, or someone, and that we really do want to change. Second, what we want that change to be, or what the new habit would be. Finally, we need a trigger and a reward.

Let me give you a simple example. I wanted to do an exercise routine in the morning, but felt I had to eat first to generate the energy to do it.

The problem? I'd eat and then figure I might not have enough time to exercise, so I very often didn't. I recognized this was hurting my fitness, but found it hard to exercise before I ate.

I found a program called Tiny Habits, created by B.J. Fogg, head of Stanford University's Behavior Design Lab, which had me choose what I wanted to do. In my case it was pushups, to start the exercises. I set the event which would trigger those pushups, and it was going into the bathroom for a couple of minutes to handle my business, then I immediately hit the floor and did pushups. When I was done with the exercises, my reward was feeling I had accomplished something good, and then I ate. Interestingly, I ate less than I would if I'd eaten before exercising. Gradually, it became a habit. Wake up, go to the bathroom, do pushups and the other exercises, then breakfast.

This tiny habit, combining the trigger of going to the bathroom, doing the exercises, feeling rewarded for completing them, then eating — replaced the prior habit of eating and then often not exercising, which I don't do any more. Did I break a bad habit or replace it with something better? It doesn't matter, does it?

Looking to break or replace a habit, or just make a new one? You might try the Tiny Habits method. It's free at tinyhabits.com. I hope it works for you.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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