

INTEGRATIVE LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONAL

“Helping individuals and organizations become integrated.”

Lessons on the Path

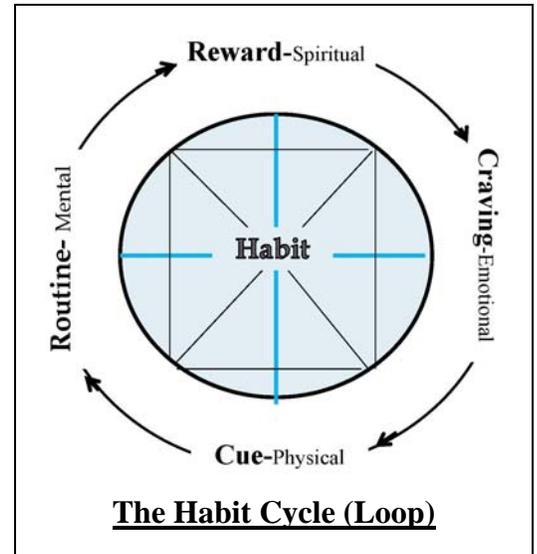
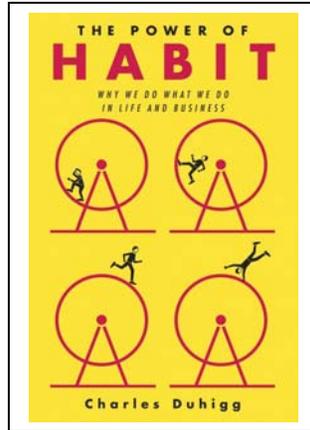
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“The Power of Habit”

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OBSERVATION: EXPERIENCE

This spring, I went for my annual check-up. Afterwards, looking at all the tests, my doctor suggested that I was border line on a number of issues, but there was nothing wrong that losing 50 or 60 pounds wouldn't fix. In the past seven years, I ignored his annual suggestions to seek well-being and a balanced life citing to myself and others that I was too busy, focused on my work, traveled internationally and didn't have the time to make a meaningful life change. But this time, I heard him and I felt I had the desire, time and support necessary to bring meaningful change into my life.



So over the course of the spring, I began reflecting and investigating the whole idea of habits; what are they, where did they come from, are they good, bad and ugly, and how does one change them?

Habits are unconscious memory patterns of behaviour that have been programmed along neuronal pathways in our brain by our repetitive actions. A study in 2006 suggested that over 40% of our daily decisions are made out of habit, and not real and thoughtful decisions. Phillipa Lally, in her research at the University College London (2009) suggested “Habits are behaviours which are performed automatically because they have been performed frequently in the past. This repetition creates a mental association between the situation (cue) and action (behaviour) which means that when the cue is encountered the behavior is performed automatically. *Automaticity* has a number of components, one of which is lack of thought.”

Charles Duhigg in “The Power of Habit” (2012) identified a cycle of habit that is applicable to individuals, businesses and society. This cycle is comprised of four elements: a “Cue” (situation), “Routine” (pattern of mind and behaviour), “Reward”, all fuelled by a “Craving” or desire. [Note: I have re-interpreted Duhigg's Habit Loop within our integrative model as shown in the figure on the upper right, aligning it with the four domains of intelligence: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.]

Duhigg presents a series of case studies in his book that illustrates the power of habit in his four step process. For example, Charles Hopkins, the legendary adman for Pepsodent in the 1930's, used this process to help make tooth brushing a habit for the majority of Americans. Film on the teeth was the **Cue**; tooth brushing was the **Routine**; Whiter and brighter teeth was the **Reward**; and a touch of alcohol and mint for that fresh taste after brushing stimulated the **Craving** or desire to keep brushing.

Another example was Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which is the largest, best known, and most successful habit changing organization in the world. AA's success was to change the habit loop by changing the **Cue** (don't visit bars or hang around people who drink) and replacing the drinking **Routine** (do have meetings and companionship with sober people), with the **Reward** of living a useful, purposeful and productive life. The **Craving** and desire for companionship and purpose, with repetition, overtook the desire for drink and reinforced the positive habit loop.

So to break a 'bad' habit, at least one of the four elements associated with the habit loop must be changed. One of the easiest to change is the old routine or pattern of mind and behaviour and substitute it with a different pattern of your choice.

How long does it take to change a habit pattern? From Maxwell Maltz and his book “Psycho-Cybernetics” (1960), habit change could take from 21 to 28 days of repeating behaviours that could change an attitude or deeply held belief. Lally’s more recent research, however, would suggest as low as 18 and as high as 254 days, with a median of 66 days are required to crystallize a new habit in our body, hearts and minds. Still others suggest that through hypnosis, application of willpower, or cultivation of a strong heart’s desire, the habit change can happen much more quickly.

My ‘bad’ habits that got me where I am today involved a lack of exercise, eating and drinking improperly, and too much head work. To help me transform these ‘bad’ habits into good ones, my doctor recommended a program at the University of Calgary called “Trym Gym” (*see Information below*). The program focused on education and experience, blending weekly exercise, advice on diet and nutrition, with life style and behavioural counselling to help me create new habits. The first phase would last 60 days from July 2nd to early September at which point in time, my new habits would have been reinforced through repetition. After my review of the information, I enrolled.

We all have a mixture of good and bad habits. Bad habits cause suffering and fragmentation. Good habits serve us in our path towards freedom and integration. Our work is to help release the power siphoned away and used to fuel our bad habits and transform and redirect that energy to reinforce our good habits. In this way, we can take the power of habit and use it on our path of recreating ourselves with the hope of becoming our highest, most noblest Ideal Self.

What habit are you wanting to change that will lead you towards your Ideal you?

APPLICATION: Pick an area in your life: health and fitness, finances, order and organization, your spiritual life, time management, leadership and relationships. Start by setting one to three new habits you would like to imbed and habituate in your life in the next 30 days in one area, and resolve not to break your commitment to yourself and others.

INSPIRATION: “We become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous action. We are what we repeatedly *do*. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” *Aristotle*. “If you do not pour water on your plant, what will happen? It will slowly wither and die. Our [bad] habits will also slowly wither and die away if we do not give them an opportunity to manifest. You need not fight to stop a [bad] habit. Just don’t give it an opportunity to repeat itself.” *Swami Satchidananda, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. “Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” *Jim Ryun*. “Nothing so needs reforming as other people’s habits.” *Mark Twain*. “Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.’” *2 Peter: 2: 22*. “If you believe you can change -- if you make it a habit -- the change becomes real.” *Charles Duhigg*.

*The word manifests as deed;
The deed develops into habit;
And habit hardens into character.
So watch the thought and its ways
with care,
And let it spring from love,
Born out of concern for all beings.*

The Buddha

INFORMATION: (1) Duhigg, Charles (2012). “The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do in life and business.” Random House. Duhigg suggests Four Steps to Habit Change: (i) *Become aware of what is the cue? Become aware of the routine? Become aware of the reward? What is the plan you have for change?* (ii) *When you sense the cue, then insert another routine, one that you want, and not one that you have done in the past.* (iii) *Substitute different rewards for your need or craving.* (iv) *Once in place, keep practicing, staying aware, until the new behaviour becomes a habit* (2) Uof C Trym Gym: <http://www.ucalgaryrecreation.ca/trymgym>. (3) Lally, P., Van Jaarsveld, C., Potts, H., Wardle, J. 2009. European Journal of Social Psychology, 40(6), 998-1009. DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.674.

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