

A J W I N T E R S



THE

IDENTITY

SWITCH

An Effortless, Lethal Method  
for Unavoidable Success

# **The Identity Switch: An Effortless, Lethal Method for Unavoidable Success**

By

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The Identity Switch: An Effortless, Lethal Approach for Unavoidable  
Success

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## **The Identity Switch: An Effortless, Lethal Method for Unavoidable Success**

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### **Change Your Life by Flipping One Switch in Your Mind**

If you could change your life by flipping one switch your mind, what would you change?

Would you be slimmer and healthier? Would you develop a better relationship with your family, would you earn more money?

It's time to start turning those dreams into reality...

### **The Secret That Changed My Life – And Will Change Yours Too**

I've always been a dreamer. Sadly, those dreams were often out of reach.

I'd achieve success in one part of my life – maybe getting good grades, or a promotion – only to see negative side-effects, such as weight gain and stress. And that was when things worked out; more often than not, I simply failed to achieve my goals.

Thankfully, all that changed a few years back, when I stumbled across the Identity Switch method.

### **Effortless Alteration**

“No pain, no gain” – it's a mantra that's drilled into many of us. But what if it weren't true? What if achievement weren't a function of blood, sweat and tears – but mere psychology?

In the last few years, a lot of research has been conducted into the power of systems and habits, most recently with the work of BJ Fogg and Charles Duhigg. Good habits alone can improve a person's life. But good habits coupled with key psychological strategies can make a person invincible.

This book discusses the art of making achievement feel effortless, via lethal psychological strategies and habit formation hacks – all rolled into one powerful process, aka the Identity Switch Method.

### **Would You Like To Know More?**

Lasting success doesn't happen without taking the first step: try the Identity Switch Method, and you won't look back.

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## **Table of Contents**

[The Identity Switch: An Effortless, Lethal Method for Unavoidable Success](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

[YOUR FREE GIFT](#)

[Chapter 1: Introduction](#)

[Chapter 2: Misery Via Goals](#)

[Why Goals Don't Work](#)

[The Alternative to Goals](#)

[Unavoidable Success: Giving Up Goals](#)

[Chapter 3: A Quick and Dirty Guide to Habits – And Why They Don't Work](#)

[Chapter 4: The Missing Piece of the Habits Puzzle](#)

[Chapter 5: Applying Baby Steps](#)

[Chapter 5: Why Good Habits Aren't Enough](#)

[Taking Root](#)

[But that's Not Who I Am!](#)

[Growing the Success Tree](#)

[Chapter 6: The Shift That Makes Success Unavoidable](#)

[Chapter 7: Keystone Habits](#)

[Chapter 8: Next Steps](#)

[References](#)

[About The Author](#)

[OceanofPDF.com](#)

## YOUR FREE GIFT

Thank you for purchasing *The Identity Switch*!

Taking the first step is always the hardest, and as a way of saying “Thanks”, I’m offering a free eBook for my readers.

[\*The Productivity Switch: How To Maximize Your Results, Effortlessly\*](#) reveals the secrets of increasing productivity by working smarter, not harder. You’ll learn how to increase your success rates while leading a stress-free, relaxed life.

[>>>Tap Here to Grab \*The Productivity Switch: How To Maximize Your Results, Effortlessly\*<<<](#)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

If you're reading this, chances are you're pretty ambitious.

This is a good thing.

After all, there's no point living a dark and dreary life, devoid of all hope. There are so many wonderful things that life can offer us: good health, loving friends and family, wealth and wisdom.

Unfortunately, for most of us, the pursuit of our ambitions frequently feels like an uphill run. The dream is there at the top – often so vivid that we can taste it – and we run towards it. Sometimes we stumble; sometimes our pace slows. It's difficult, but we don't complain because we were taught that chasing dreams is difficult. If it were easy, everyone would have done it. So we huff and we puff... and we keep trying to acquire that elusive dream.

Too often, we give up before we achieve our dreams. We make excuses such as "work got busier" or "it was the holiday season" or "I had a bout of illness." As each failure piles up, no matter how minor, we become discouraged. "It's a younger person's game," we might say. "Who can live like that?"

Who indeed would want to live through a lifetime of suffering? Phrased that way, most of us would say, "Not me"; only the very brave and foolhardy would say, "But it might be worth it!"

The potential of lifetime suffering is most vividly represented by people who refuse to diet or exercise. "I couldn't live that way," they say. "Who wants to give up chocolate and eat salads forever? Certainly not me. I'm a diehard chocolate addict!"

We're taught that success involves sacrifice. But what if it weren't so? What if success were, in fact, easily achievable? Instead of an uphill run, it would involve an entertaining, gently-paced walk by the stream (while eating delicious chocolate, of course).

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Five years ago, my life was chaotic. I was trying to start a new business, my husband had just lost his job and was desperately looking for a new one, and both of us were stressed out and worried about our lives and our finances. Neither of us could find time to exercise, let alone go to the gym, and though I wanted to eat healthier, I just couldn't find the time or energy to cook or even to plan meals. Most of the time, we had takeout or instant noodle dinners while hunched over paperwork or zoned out in front of the TV. Eventually, we started to lose touch with many of our old friends.

Stephanie was one such friend with whom I slowly lost touch. However, we met for brunch last year, and finally caught up on each other's lives; it had been over a year since we'd last seen each other, so we had quite a lot to catch up on!

After we'd exchanged all the details of our work and she told me about her boyfriend, Stephanie gave me a long look and said, "You look so happy – I guess you're really thrilled with your life!"

I had to laugh. The contrast must have been especially glaring from her perspective. The last time she'd met me, I had been stressed out and miserable. But since our last meeting two years ago, I'd started meditating regularly, exercising four times a week, and waking an hour earlier each day. I had also achieved a nice chunk of career success and almost eliminated processed foods from my diet. From an outsider's perspective, the effects of all those things – the lack of stress and the extra energy from

changes in my diet and exercise – translated into looking happier and healthier.

Stephanie, on the other hand, was frazzled. She had quit her most recent diet and had stopped going to the gym after a few classes; her relationship with her boyfriend was on the rocks; and she hated her job and wanted to quit, but the job market was so bad that she didn't have the guts to do so. She used to love playing the piano, but she hadn't been able to make time for playing because she felt like she never had enough hours in the day.

I wanted to tell Steph that there was some kind of magic bullet – something that would solve all her problems at once. But there wasn't.

I shared a few tricks with her – things I'd learned as I'd overhauled my own life. When I told her about developing good habits, and the “Baby Steps” trick I'd thought had saved my life, Steph smiled.

“That *sounds* good,” she said. “But I've tried most of those things, and they didn't work for me. Even when they did work, I couldn't keep doing them, and I just never managed to develop the habits. I mean, I did join the gym last month, and I forced myself to go twice a week. But I couldn't keep it up. I hate exercising.”

I nodded in sympathy. I used to be just like her – exercise was a four-letter word. And yet, my husband and I were exercising four times a week, and we loved it so much that we couldn't imagine skipping a session. What had changed?

And then it struck me – my light bulb moment: the reason why some people seem to get everything they want so effortlessly, while others keep struggling and failing.

The Identity Switch method was born – and I immediately shared it with Stephanie. As we talked it over, it became clearer to me not just how to

use this method, but also *why* it worked.

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I caught up with Stephanie last month. She was sporting a massive engagement ring, she'd lost weight, and her stress-related acne had cleared up. Her new "side" business had done so well that she'd just handed in her resignation letter. She glowed with life and energy.

Like me, Stephanie had read her fair share of self-help books and productivity guides, but nothing had clicked until our talk over brunch months prior. Since then, things had fallen effortlessly into place for her. She'd shared my Identity Switch strategy with a few more of her friends, and although the evidence was anecdotal, she urged me to share it.

"You're a writer," she said. "I'm sure you want to write about it."

She was right. I did want to write about it! And so I did; this book is the result of that effort. Hopefully, the Identity Switch Method will benefit all its readers.

This book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Chapters Two to Five, I discuss why traditional goal-setting doesn't work and what you can do instead. We'll take a look at the reason conventional habit-creation advice doesn't work and identify the missing piece of the puzzle.

The second part of the book discusses why good habits are not enough and what else is required. This section introduces the concept of the Identity Shift and its application in conjunction with Baby Steps. It is this two-pronged approach which makes the Identity Switch so lethal.

While I can't *guarantee* that the Identity Switch method will work for you, I do, understandably, have high hopes! The power of good habits combined with the power of our identity can lead to incredible things. If only you'll allow it to.

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## Chapter 2: Misery Via Goals

The problem with ambition is that it implies our lives aren't good enough.

While it might be true that our lives could use some improvement, it is also often a depressing thing to admit.

A goal, theoretically, is something that would make our lives better, maybe make us happier. Paradoxically, having a goal actually makes us a little bit more miserable.

For instance, consider the situation of someone wanting to lose weight – whether ten or twenty or two hundred pounds. A person with such a goal might be overweight, but admitting admitting every day that you need to lose weight because you think that you're fat isn't much fun.

Many people think that the stress and unhappiness which comes with having goals will be worth it once the goal has been achieved. Unfortunately, worthwhile goals are very difficult to achieve. Just ask anyone struggling to lose weight, earn more money, or find love and settle down. If it were *that* easy, the media tells us, everyone would do it.

And yet, if we look around, there's at least one person in our lives who achieves things effortlessly. Often, they're good at one single thing, and the rest of their life is mediocre. Maybe they always got good grades despite not "studying hard" or maybe they're "naturally skinny" and never seem to exercise. If things can come naturally to one person, why not to you, too?

### Why Goals Don't Work

Goals make our lives more difficult – the optimist might replace the word “difficult” for “challenging.” But the fact is that goals demand things from us: our time, our effort, maybe our money.

Chasing goals is exhausting. You need to carve out time in your day and maybe find some extra money and effort.

For instance, if your goal is to lose weight, you might start off, like Steph did, by joining a gym. You might shell out money for the gym fees, but then you would need to find time in your day to go. Maybe you’ll decide to go early in the morning or after work; whenever it is, you’re sacrificing time that you could have spent doing something else. Probably something much more fun than slaving over a treadmill or elliptical machine.

Finally, goals demand effort. We all have limited reserves of energy. We spend most of it at work, and what little else we’ve got left over, we ration into other activities. Forcing yourself to go to the gym after a hard day’s work is much less preferable to chilling out on the couch while watching tv.

And what about when we achieve the goal? We all know that friend – the yoyo dieter. She goes on one strict diet, drops a dress size, and then goes back to eating fast food five days a week. She balloons up a few sizes and goes on the latest low-carb/low-fat/low-sugar/low-something diet until she loses enough weight to be happy; afterwards, she goes back to her old habits and her old weight and starts the cycle all over again.

Achieving a goal feels like victory – but what then? After you’ve lost the ten or twenty or two-hundred pounds that you wanted to lose, what motivates you to keep struggling? For most people, the answer is “nothing,” which is why most people back-slide after a major win. They achieved what they wanted, and then they find themselves feeling a little aimless. They

don't have any motivation left to keep struggling and sacrificing, so they go back to doing whatever they prefer, forgetting about their old goal.

## **The Alternative to Goals: Inputs and Outputs**

Most of us wouldn't mind earning a little extra cash.

What would you do with an extra \$20,000? Buy a new car, some new clothes and gadgets, or maybe put it towards your mortgage or start a kids' college fund?

It's nice to dream, but what would you do if I told you to earn an extra \$20,000 this year? Most likely, you'd panic. \$20,000 is such a big chunk of money to have to come up with all at once; the sheer size of the goal is overwhelming.

Business schools and productivity experts alike recommend chasing an audacious goal and breaking it up into parts. In order to earn an extra \$20,000, you would need to break it up into a few parts, beginning with smaller increments, such as an extra \$2,000 a month. It's still a big amount, but it's more manageable. That sounds doable, but it's still intimidating.

However, what if I told you to forget all about the goal? What if I told you that the money would come naturally? Hopefully, you'd laugh in my face and be forever immune to the snake oil salesmen! After all, money doesn't come from nothing, nor are worthwhile goals achieved by doing nothing.

The irony is that the easiest way to successfully earn an extra \$20,000 this year (or to achieve any goal) is to actually forget about the goal completely and focus on something else. This method doesn't involve doing "nothing", but it does involve a lot less stress and a lot more fun.



When it comes to any ambition, the “goal” is the output – what we hope to achieve. In the case of earning extra money, the output is the amount of money involved. In the case of getting in shape, the output is the amount of weight we want to lose. These are all the results we hope to achieve.

A better approach to achieving things is to focus on the inputs – what we bring to the table, what we do.

In the case of earning more money, for instance, our focus would shift to devising a plan for doing a little bit of freelancing work every day. You might spend an hour every day writing on an article for a client or for your blog that earns ad revenues. In the case of your weight loss goals, you’d forget about losing weight and focus on the exercise you do, deciding, for instance, to go for a half-hour walk every day.

This focus from goals to actions shifts the locus of control from the external world to ourselves. We can’t control results or other people or the future, but we *can* control our own actions.

If we forget about goals, we can focus on ourselves and what we need to do.

Needing to earn an extra \$20,000 is reframed from being a big, overwhelming problem to being a lifestyle: you spend an hour writing every day. That’s just who you are. No biggie.

However, people often reframe their goals as systems to follow or inputs and things to do. And yet, they still often fail. What’s going wrong?

## **Unavoidable Success: Giving Up Goals**

If you think of your ambition as something to achieve, you face a very high chance of failure simply because of the amount of work and effort

involved. Superhuman amounts of uphill struggling are only possible when we're extremely motivated, such as when a deadline is right upon us. Since most of us have long-term hopes and dreams that don't involve immediate deadlines, thinking of ambitions in terms of goals to achieve usually doesn't work.

If you think of your ambitions in terms of goals, you need to constantly push yourself to do that extra bit of work. Whether it's writing a few extra articles or going to the gym, there's a lot of effort involved in trying to pursue a goal. We all have limited amounts of energy, and there's only so much we're able to do each day – so very often, goals remain unpursued.

The first step to achieving effortless success is to stop thinking about your ambitions in terms of goals. Instead, start thinking of them as part of your everyday life. Reframe your goals into actions that you do every single day and you'll find that the massive burden of carrying around huge goals has been lifted off your shoulders.

This book will talk about internalizing those actions that lead to success so that you can perform them without any hesitation, effort or difficulty. Doing things by rote makes life easier, and the output is the same regardless of how hard it was for you to complete that action.

Consider the idea of eating healthy foods. You gain the same amount of calories irrespective of how much you enjoy the meal. Someone who longs for a 200-calorie salad and devours it eagerly will have consumed the same amount of calories as someone who is miserable, forcing themselves to chow down lettuce and tomatoes while fantasizing about burgers. Wouldn't it make sense to be the first person? They're definitely having more fun!

The easiest way to break down an ambition into tiny actions that you perform every day, with little to no effort, is to create a habit around your ambition. For instance, an ambition to lose weight is reframed in terms of the habit of a daily walk; an ambition to have a loving relationship is reframed in terms of paying your partner three compliments every day.

Changing your life is not about changing your ambitions. Changing your life is about changing your habits: changing what you do on a day-to-day basis.

You are the sum of your habits. Sure, you might do things differently once or twice, but it's what you do every day that really matters. A Duke University study concluded that 45% of our behavior is from habit.<sup>1</sup>

Consider this:

How clean your teeth are depends on whether you brush and floss regularly.

How much you weigh depends on what you eat every day.

How much you earn depends on what work you do every day.

As you can see, your life is not determined by the grand, one-off goals that you pursue but by the habits you practice.

People with entrenched habits have an easier life. They never have to go through difficult decision making every day; they never have to “psych themselves up” to get something done; and they never have to sacrifice or choose the harder option.

Unfortunately, most people find it very difficult – if not impossible – to consistently develop and maintain new, good habits. Habit formation is difficult mainly because of the way the human brain is wired; luckily, there are some ways around these difficulties.

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## **Chapter 3: A Quick and Dirty Guide to Habits – And Why They Don't Work**

A habit is something that we regularly do without thinking, each time in pretty much the same way. Pursing your lips when thinking is a habit; biting your nails when nervous is a habit.

Habits occur in the absence of thoughts. The nail-biter doesn't think about biting his or her nails – it just happens.

The magic of habits lies in their effortlessnes. If you always munch on chips when watching a movie at home, you don't think at the start of the movie, "Gee, I really should munch some chips. Chips would make my life so much better. Dammit, I should have some chips. Even if the chips aren't tasty, they'll be good for me." No, you just head to the pantry, grab a packet of chips, and munch during the movie.

Wouldn't it be great if you could apply that kind of effortlessnes to other parts of your life?

Going to the gym wouldn't be an effort. You'd somehow wind up there and find yourself in the middle of a round of pushups. No thinking, effort or motivation involved.

Eating healthy foods would be automatic. At the end of the day, you'd discover that you'd somehow eaten nutritionally-dense meals that suited your lifestyle. No guilt, cravings or sacrificing involved.

In order to harness the power of good habits, it's important to first understand how habits work and how they're created.

Habits are formed in the brain by neurons firing over and over again. They're neural pathways in the brain which require no conscious thought in order to work.

For instance, if you always bite your lip when you don't understand something, you don't think, "Gee, I don't understand what that person is saying. I better bite my lip." Instead, when you don't understand something, the "bite lip" neurons fire, and you automatically bite your lip.

The longer you practice a habit, the deeper the neural pathway in your brain becomes. This means you need less thinking in order to perform that habit; it becomes so ingrained that you'll often have completed it without realizing.

This is also why newly formed habits are easier to change; the neural pathway is not as deep. When you first try to create a new habit, the neural pathway is easy to ignore or override. On the other hand, those habits you have practiced for a long time seem to be an ingrained part of who you are. The neural pathways are so deep that they're very difficult to override.

Thinking about habits in terms of neural pathways makes our life easier. The existence of neural pathways means that in order to create a habit, all we need to do is repeat it. The more we repeat an action, the deeper the neural pathways become and the more automatic the behavior.

## **Stupidly Efficient vs Slowly Thoughtful**

The brain loves efficiency and being able to do something without thinking – how to tie our shoelaces, how to open a door, or how to unwrap a candy bar. These habits were all learned when we were toddlers, and it certainly makes life easier to know how to do simple, everyday things without stopping and having a deep think every single time we need to tie a shoelace.

However, the brain resists change,<sup>2</sup> making changing old habits and creating new habits extremely difficult. Unless, of course, there's sufficient

reward involved. In this latter case, the brain will have a think about it and get motivated enough to complete the difficult new action.

Although the brain can be divided up into many different parts, I'm mainly concerned with two areas that control how we behave: the basal ganglia and the prefrontal cortex.

The prefrontal cortex is the part of our brain that actually does some deep thinking. It considers the future, cause and effect, and how things could be. Since I'm not fond of medical jargon, I'm going to call the prefrontal cortex the Slowly Thoughtful part of the brain.

The Slowly Thoughtful part of the brain is the part that's responsible for wanting to change the future. It wants us to get fit, earn more and learn French. Slowly Thoughtful reads fitness articles and says, "Hey, you should go to the gym every day and do some crunches. That'll give you nice six-pack abs."

The basal ganglia, or the Stupidly Efficient part of the brain, is the part of the brain that's responsible for recognizing and repeating patterns, unless it's told otherwise. Because the basal ganglia really is, in some ways, very stupid. Unlike Slowly Thoughtful, it doesn't think or consider the consequences; it just wants to repeat patterns and behaviors that it knows. When Slowly Thoughtful says, "You should go to the gym," Stupidly Efficient says, "Nah. I'll just lie here on the couch like I always do and watch sitcoms."

It would be great if the Slowly Thoughtful part of our brain could override the Stupidly Efficient part when needed. And sometimes, it can. Think of the times when you meant to watch a sitcom but then decided you really, really needed to go to the gym. Your motivation levels were running high – maybe you'd just read about a woman who'd lost twenty pounds in two months, or you had a party coming up and wanted to look your best. If

our motivation levels are high enough, we *can* override the Stupidly Efficient part of brain and do what Slowly Thoughtful thinks we should. The trouble is, it's hard to keep up such high levels of motivation.

Most of the time, Stupidly Efficient is a big, hulking brute who just can't be overpowered. The Stupidly Efficient section of our brain is responsible for our habits, and what we do on a day-to-day basis.

Almost everyone, no matter how successful, is dependent on the Stupidly Efficient part of their brain. The difference is that they make Stupidly Efficient work on their side by training it.

Instead of being trained to lie on the couch, Stupidly Efficient learns to go to the gym and learns to prefer doing so. Once Stupidly Efficient is trained to go to the gym, it no longer puts up a fight when it's time to exercise; instead, it puts up a fight when we *don't* go to the gym.

## **Training the Brain**

The key to creating new habits is to get Stupidly Efficient on your side and making it want to take action.

Most people do this by tempting the brain with rewards. If there's a sufficiently nice reward involved, the Stupidly Efficient part of our brain allows us to take action.

For instance, even if you have an entrenched habit of coming home, changing out of your work clothes and flopping onto the couch, you'd probably be thrilled to modify this behavior and head straight to the gym if someone offered you ten million dollars in return.

Unfortunately, most of us don't have benefactors offering us millions of dollars just for going to the gym. So we try to get by with lesser



rewards. The most common way to bribe ourselves is by using treats – an ice-cream after writing that article, for instance.

Turning a one-off action into a habit involves finding a reminder to start doing that action. For instance, get home from work (reminder), change into exercise clothes and do some workouts (routine) in exchange for a million dollars (I wish!). Repeat this a couple of times, and it becomes a habit.

Stanford Professor BJ Fogg and author Charles Duhigg have both written extensively about habits; both have also identified the same sequence for habits: a **reminder** that leads to us performing a **routine** in exchange for a **reward**.



If the reward is sufficiently tempting, the initial resistance provided by the Stupidly Efficient part of our brain will be overridden and the routine performed. The more often we perform this sequence of events, the deeper the neural pathway pertaining to this habit becomes. If this sequence is performed often enough, it'll become an entrenched habit, just like nail biting or chip munching.

When this sequence of events finally becomes a routine, a reward is no longer necessary because of the entrenched neural pathway. The reminder (“feeling nervous” or “home from work”) fires off the relevant neurons (“bite nails” or “head to the gym”) automatically.

The trouble is that it takes a lot of repetition to make a sequence become a habit. In the meantime, the neural pathway isn't strong enough, so we *really* need a reward. And as anyone trying to establish a new habit quickly discovers, the reward stops working as an incentive very quickly.

This reward failure can happen due to a number of reasons.

### 1. **The Reward Negates All Benefits**

The prefrontal cortex might realize that the reward is actually offsetting all the benefits of the routine. For instance, if you reward yourself with a big slice of cake for every workout session, you're consuming all those calories that you just burned off.

### 2. **The Hedonic Treadmill**

The hedonic treadmill is a term used to explain the human tendency to return to a relatively stable level of happiness, regardless of what happens – whether that's a good event or a bad one.<sup>4</sup> When a person improves their lifestyle, they quickly get used to it, so lifestyle improvements don't lead to long-lasting happiness.

The hedonic treadmill affects us when we try to use rewards as a method of habit creation. If you frequently enjoy a reward, it ceases to be a reward and becomes part of your lifestyle. You get so used to it that it's no longer anything special, but at the same time, you really want to keep enjoying it. The slice of cake that you have after every workout becomes a regular part of your life, and your Stupidly Efficient no longer acknowledges it as a reward.

### 3. **Reward Inflation**

Reward inflation can happen when you try to keep Stupidly Efficient happy by increasing the reward: "Ok, I'll have two slices of cake after a workout session. What a treat!" Unfortunately,

reward inflation is a pretty unsustainable lifestyle. It's like being a shopping addict while living on a limited income. At some point, you go bankrupt. Consistently increasing the reward, or coming up with even better rewards, is just not possible.

Rewards are usually insufficient or impractical for maintaining a consistent routine. So when the rewards aren't good enough, how can we tempt our brains to perform the routine?

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## Chapter 4: The Missing Piece of the Habits Puzzle

The secret to transforming a sequence into a habit is to ignore the reward and focus on the routine.

It might seem counter-intuitive at first. After all, the routine is what sets off Stupidly Efficient and makes it all defensive and angry. “No exercise,” it growls. “Lie on couch.”

But what if the routine didn’t set off Stupidly Efficient’s resistance? What if the resistance was negligible or non-existent? In that case, of course, we’d just go ahead with the routine, no rewards needed.

I first learned of the power of resistance (or lack thereof) when I read an article about keeping your house clean. The author argued that if you see a household task that needs to be done and which takes less than a minute to do, do it immediately. Don’t wait. At the time, my house was a pigsty – empty takeout boxes lying around, grit covering the carpet, and candy wrappers on the kitchen counter-top. If you can think of a way to make your place look disgusting, you can be guaranteed that I was doing it.

When I learned the One Minute Rule, I began putting stuff away whenever I saw it. The candy wrapper lying outside? Into the bin. Clean plates in the dishwasher? Start stacking. Mail? Into the designated “unread mail spot.” Over time, my place became less messy, and I stopped referring to it as a pigsty.

These one minute tasks work because they seem so easy that a baby could almost do them, which is why I like to refer to them as Baby Steps. Often, these Baby Steps take nowhere near a minute to complete, but once in a while, you’ll perform a Baby Step that takes longer than a minute, with no resistance from Stupidly Efficient.

When I first started implementing Baby Steps, I didn't have to "clean my house" (\*shudder\*), I just had to do something that would take less than a minute. Every now and then I'd collect coasters and arrange them in a neat pile, or I'd take a minute to wipe down a countertop.

When faced with having to take these Baby Steps, Stupidly Efficient shrugs. "Whatever, dude," it says. It doesn't care about these tiny actions precisely because they're so tiny.

Stupidly Efficient doesn't provide any resistance against Baby Steps, so we don't need to try to overpower it with rewards.

A big task, on the other hand, sets off Stupidly Efficient's resistance. If you decide you'd like to exercise for an hour, Stupidly Efficient kicks up a huge fuss. The resistance manifests itself as excuses ("My leg's sore"), laziness ("Ugh, so hard to get up off this couch") and rationalization ("Morning's a better time for exercise. We'll go tomorrow morning.")

To undertake a big task and overcome huge resistance from Stupidly Efficient, you need some seriously sweet rewards.

A medium-sized action (exercising for a half-hour instead of an hour) reduces Stupidly Efficient's resistance somewhat, but the resistance is still there. Which means that we need to start providing rewards, and once again, we fall into the trap of potential reward failure. This is why even "reasonably easy" sequences (like exercising for a half-hour instead of an hour) ultimately get discarded before they become habits.

Baby Steps shrink the action to minuscule proportions. Stupidly Efficient provides little or no resistance, and the need for rewards is avoided. We go ahead and perform the tiny action, and then keep going on with our lives.

## **Taking Baby Steps Instead of Massive Action**

The creator of the Dilbert comics, Scott Adams, uses something similar to Baby Steps in his life<sup>5</sup>. For instance, he doesn't have a goal to exercise. Instead, he's developed a habit to drive to the gym. That's it. Once he's done that, he can go home without exercising if he feels like it. Of course, most of the time, he ends up doing his workout before he goes home, just because he feels like it.

When I read about Scott Adam's system, I thought I'd try something similar. At the time, I was writing my first romance novel, and I had a hard time doing any actual writing. I decided that I'd sit and write for one minute every day, just to see what happened.

Now, my typing speed isn't that fast. In one minute, I can probably type a sentences or two. But what I found was that I usually continued typing after that one minute was up – until I'd written a chapter or so.

Later, when I learned about Stupidly Efficient and its role in our lives, I began to understand why this technique worked – one minute's worth of typing seemed so easy that Stupidly Efficient didn't bother to resist.

As soon as I had an inkling as to the kind of success that can be achieved by using Baby Steps, I started to use them all the time. Which, in turn, lead me to learn more about these Baby Steps, and when and how they work, and under what circumstances they don't.

## **Why Baby Steps Work**

Stupidly Efficient is a great believer in Newton's first law of motion: an object at rest stays at rest, and an object in motion stays in motion...

When we're at rest, not doing anything, that's exactly how Stupidly Efficient thinks things should be. Getting off the couch to write an article, put away laundry, or exercise, seems like the most horrific thing ever.

However, when we're already in the middle of doing something – whether it's putting away the laundry or exercising – Stupidly Efficient feels like it's too much effort to quit, so we keep going.

The resistance from Stupidly Efficient mainly makes itself known at the beginning of the action – it resists starting. The Baby Steps method is a brain hack for getting started – and once you've started, Stupidly Efficient will usually allow you to stay in motion. This explains why I didn't feel like stopping when I began typing, even though my one minute was up. Essentially, my Stupidly Efficient's resistance was on my side now – it resisted stopping.

When you take a Baby Step, a neural pathway is created in the brain. As you continue to take that Baby Step, the pathway becomes deeper, even if you don't do anything beyond the initial Baby Step. Of course, if you do take any additional action, you get the benefits of that action (exercise, writing, etc) in addition to making the neural pathway deeper and strengthening the practice of that habit.

I've used this trick to successfully maintain an exercise habit, eat healthier and earn more money. Friends of mine have used Baby Steps to improve their relationships, lose weight, and get new jobs.

## **Chapter 5: Applying Baby Steps**

Using Baby Steps is the first part of the Identity Switch method. It's a simple method for getting started and progressing effortlessly towards your objectives. Here's how it works:

### **Identify an ambition you'd like to achieve**

It shouldn't be too difficult to identify one or more things that you'd like to do. All of us have hopes and dreams – whether it's learning French, earning more money, losing weight, having a better relationship with our family or learning to play the piano.

Because the Baby Steps method is dependent on the ease with which we can get started, it's important not to overwhelm yourself by choosing too many ambitions at once and scattering your focus.

I do know how tempting it is to try to do many things at once, but it is best to start off small, and then add more ambitions to pursue after you've gotten some success with your first Baby Steps. Ideally, you'd only pursue one goal at a time. But if you absolutely must pursue more than one goal at once, start with the goals that seem easiest to you, and try to set a maximum number of ambitions pursued to three. Of course, pursuing only one ambition at first would be the best course of action.

### **Break down the ambition into a habit**

The next thing to do for the Baby Steps method to work is to reframe your ambition as something that can be part of your everyday life: a



habit.

If your grand, overarching goal is to drop ten dress sizes, then focus on creating a healthy lifestyle. Consider developing the exercise habit or the habit of eating healthy, nutritious meals. If your ambition is to earn more money, one option is to focus on spending some time each day on a side business.

It might seem like there are some ambitions for which this Baby Steps methodology won't work – project-based goals, for instance. However, with a little tweaking, most project-based goals can also be broken down into habits.

For instance, if you'd like to write a novel, one option might be to develop a habit of writing for one or two hours each day. If you'd like to find a new job, develop the habit of applying to five new jobs each day or calling up an old friend or acquaintance each day to see if anyone in your network knows of job openings.

### **Break down the habit into the smallest part possible**

Once you've decided on a habit that will help you to achieve your ambition, break down that habit into something tiny. If your desired habit is to exercise each day, consider driving to the gym each day. If your desired habit is to learn French, plan to learn one new French word each day.

How will you know if you've broken down your desired habit far enough? After all, some Baby Steps take less than one minute to complete, and some take much longer.

An action is a Baby Step if it meets two criteria: (i) it's the first step of the habit, and (ii) it's laughably easy.

## **Take Baby Steps forward!**

Make sure that whatever small thing you've decided to do each day is just that – small. A Baby Step is simple, easy to complete, and very difficult to resist.

If you consider the routine you've decided to do each day and think, “That’s nothing! How will I ever achieve anything by doing so little?,” then your step is most likely a Baby Step. You’re on the right path!

A Baby Step must also be the very first thing needed to start a habit so that we can break through Stupidly Efficient’s resistant by overcoming inertia. So, for the workout habit, your Baby Step is *not* “do a quick warmup”, if there are steps you need to take before doing that warmup (for me, those steps are – change into workout clothes, clear space to exercise, turn on exercise video). In this situation, a Baby Step could be the very first step of the “quick warmup”, i.e. changing into your workout clothes.

Now that you know the basics of how to apply the Baby Steps method to your life, here are some other important things to consider:

### **Choose wisely**

Imagine you could do anything you wanted to do. What would you do first? What’s most important to you?

The Baby Steps method is all about taking tiny steps, and as I mentioned earlier, I highly recommend that you start with only one. Choose the one ambition that’s most important to you, whether it’s earning more money or losing weight or developing a better relationship with your spouse.

If you're having a hard time picking a habit to start with, I recommend beginning with a keystone habit. Keystone habits are covered in Chapter 7, and you can pick the habit that most appeals to you from a list of choices discussed in that chapter.

### **Why are you doing this?**

To make sure that you're picking your most important goal, always ask yourself why you're doing this. Dig deep into your desires: either you'll discover how badly you want something or you'll learn that you're doing the wrong thing.

For instance, let's say your goal is to earn more money.

You ask yourself why and begin imagining a happy family – your wife loves you, your kids are doing well and you're all spending more time with each other.

In this case, you realize that what you truly want is to have a happy family and that you would be better off by focusing more on the time you spend with your wife and children. You come to the conclusion that you would be more present in your children's lives by cutting back on the hours you spend at work.

On the other hand, a different scenario would be if, when you ask yourself why you want to earn more money, you start thinking about the bills that are piling up. In this case, you're absolutely determined to earn more money, and you can immediately start channeling your energy into starting a profitable side business.

Always ask yourself why you want to achieve something, and ensure that you're going for the objective that really matters to you.

## **Make sure it's not a goal**

Be absolutely sure that your plan revolves around a habit, not a goal. Think in terms of what you can do daily, not what you can achieve. You should think of your habit in terms of concrete actions, not abstract hopes.

For instance, “networking” is not a habit. A habit, or a Baby Step, is to email one old acquaintance every day.

A friend of mine used to want to stay in touch with some of her old friends from college, but it never seemed to happen. However, when she learned about Baby Steps, she decided to take the Baby Step of looking up an old friend's email every Sunday after her family lunch. She didn't have to get in touch with the person – just find their email. Of course, she ended up emailing the person about half the time (once she'd decided she really would like to know how they were doing) and as a result, she managed to get back in touch with many of her college buddies. The key, of course, was not to focus on the end goal (“stay in touch with old friends”) but to keep implementing the Baby Step (“look up email every Sunday”).

## **Break it down**

The most important thing about the Baby Steps method is to break down your new habit into an absolutely tiny Baby Step. Don't pick something that might even remotely seem like a stretch goal; make sure you've broken down your desired habit into an extraordinarily small action.

A Baby Step must be laughably easy. At this stage in my life, I've written over a dozen novels, and when I think of the habit that helped me do so – “write for fifteen minutes” – I don't feel any resistance. I consider writing for fifteen minutes to be a Baby Step. However, if your “Baby Step”

is to write for fifteen minutes, and you've never written anything since high school, it's not a real Baby Step; rather, it's an overwhelming demand.

Choose something so easy that you could do it with one hand tied behind your back. Because you may have to.

## **Consider sub-optimal scenarios**

When you sit down and think about your ambitions, habits, and future Baby Steps, you're probably in a reasonably good mood. And it's easier to take action when your energy levels are high and things are going well.

However, there will be days when things aren't going so well. You might be tired, have a headache, be stressed, have received bad news or have any other kind of disadvantage. These are the kind of days when things fall apart.

All dieters know that it's the day when things go badly at work or they get some bad news or they feel upset for any reason that they reach for the comfort food and forget about the new eating habits. The same goes for any habit; it's harder to do something new when things are going badly. And yet, for a habit to take root and become a deep neural path, you need to perform the action every single day, no matter how bad things are.

When picking a habit and a Baby Step, you must keep in mind those times when things will be going badly for you. Your Baby Step must be something so easy that you can perform it even when you're tired or miserable or angry. It must be something that you can do not just during the best of times, but also during the worst of times.

## **It's all about resistance**

The Baby Steps method focuses on overcoming your initial resistance. This method works because it allows you to circumvent the resistance, so make sure you keep Stupidly Efficient's resistance in mind when planning the Baby Step.

The Baby Step you've identified must be so easy to do that your Stupidly Efficient part of the brain doesn't protest at all.

For instance, if your Baby Step is to change into your workout clothes and you start thinking that might be a bit of a hassle to do each day, then you would modify the step even further; instead of changing into the workout clothes, you just have to take them out of your wardrobe. Or you modify the step to something completely different: your Baby Step becomes driving to the gym. If you feel like doing anything else, you can change into your workout clothes at the gym.

Make sure that whatever Baby Step you pick, it seems ridiculously easy to you.

## **Write it down**

Numerous scientific studies have proven that people who write down their plans are significantly more likely to achieve them.<sup>6</sup> Over and over again, we hear successful people talking about the importance of writing down plans.<sup>7</sup>

I am a huge fan of writing down your dreams and ambitions. The act of writing helps to clarify your thoughts, and when you write down your plans, you're establishing a commitment to yourself. When you write down "I will drink a glass of water first thing in the morning," you feel the commitment more strongly than if you'd just thought of it – or worse if you'd told someone else. (In fact, telling other people your plans often has a

negative effect, and people who tell other people their goals are actually less likely to achieve them.)<sup>8</sup>

There are many ways to write down your commitment. My favorite is to use good old-fashioned pen and paper: I write down everything in my notebooks. I even have a special pen that I use to write down my plans and commitments.

Another popular way to write down your commitment is to use a big calendar. For every day that you'd like to take your Baby Step, write it down. If your Baby Step is to change into your workout clothes every day, write down "change into workout clothes" for every day – and then cross it out when you've done it.

You can also use apps and software to write down your goals, but I'm an old soul and prefer to use physical pen and paper.

## **Tracking**

Productivity experts constantly harp on the importance of measuring things – and with good reason.

If you don't measure something, you won't know where you're at, how much of a task you've completed, and how much is left to do.

Habits are a little bit different, because they're things we do regularly. And Baby Steps are so small and easy to do that at times it feels like there's no point in measuring them.

But measurements help – a lot. Even if you don't consciously think "I did so much!" or "I better do it because I've got to track whether I've done it or not," the fact that a measurement needs to be made will weigh upon your subconscious.

Success rates go up whenever something is measured, so it's important to track whichever habit you've decided to pursue. This is one of the reasons why I recommend practicing daily habits over weekly or monthly habits. They're easier to track.

There are many different ways of tracking your habits. I'm a huge fan of using physical pen and paper for almost anything, and I feel no differently when it comes to tracking habits. My preferred way of tracking my chosen habit is to add it to my to-do list and then tick it off. I love that psychological rush of victory you can enjoy by ticking off an item!

Another popular method of tracking is to use a calendar, and to mark the days when you've completed your habit with an X. This is also known as the Jerry Seinfeld method – keep marking your days with X's, and pretty soon you'll have a chain of X's. All that you need to do is avoid breaking the chain.

There are also a number of productivity apps and websites that can help you to track your habits. These are available for both android and Apple products.

## **Reminders**

Remember that habit cycle we discussed earlier? It was made popular by the work of BJ Fogg and Stephen Duhigg, and goes like this: Reminder -> Routine ->Reward.

The Baby Steps method doesn't follow this cycle precisely; rather, it focuses on overcoming resistance, that invisible barrier before we can perform the routine. However, if you'd like to develop a time-dependent or cue-dependent habit, you'll find it easier to think in terms of reminders.



For instance, if you'd like to drink more water (ambition), you could break it down into a Baby Step to drink one extra glass of water. Your reminder to drink that glass of water could be waking up (drink a glass right after waking) or lunch (drink a glass before or after lunch) or any other such time-based cues.

Alternatively, if you'd like to exercise more (ambition), your Baby Step could be to change into your exercise clothes. It's possible to use action-based reminders for this habit; for instance, after coming home from work, you can change into exercise clothes instead of your usual loungewear. Or, when you wake up, you can change out of your pajamas and into your exercise clothes.

Creating a reminder to perform your routine makes your Baby Step that extra little bit effortless.

I use reminders all the time to make sure I perform my Baby Steps without forgetting, especially if it's a habit that doesn't come to me "naturally." For instance, keeping my home clean and tidy is not something that comes naturally to me, so I tend to worry about clutter and housekeeping chores piling up.

At the moment, one of my Baby Steps is to spend a minute or two clearing the kitchen: removing things from the countertops, loading and unloading the dishwasher, etc. However, I only do this when I'm making tea or coffee. As I wait for the kettle to boil, I perform one small action – maybe I put a few mugs in the dishwasher. Once the kettle's boiled, I stop clearing the kitchen, and get back to whatever I was doing.

This habit of clearing the kitchen while making my tea has become so ingrained in me that I no longer have to worry about my kitchen being a mess; even if it is a mess, I know that I'll have a few cups of tea during the day and the kitchen mess will magically disappear.

## **What's your reward?**

The traditional habit creation method depends quite heavily on the reward. But since resistance isn't always overcome by the prospect of the reward, the importance of the reward is diminished when it comes to Baby Steps.

However, rewards can still make it easier to establish the neural pathways associated with a habit. Rewards make us happy and incentivize us to keep performing the action, even when the resistance is negligible.

There are two types of rewards associated with performing an action: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Extrinsic rewards are external rewards with which we provide ourselves for performing an action. For instance, if you give yourself a slice of cake for each round of pushups, the cake would be an intrinsic reward.

Extrinsic rewards work well to develop habits as long as they aren't at risk of reward failure. For example, your reward for changing into workout clothes might be a delicious cup of coffee; your reward for applying to five jobs that day might be to watch some funny YouTube cat videos.

I like to use extrinsic rewards for some of my habits. One of the most important habits I practice is that of writing (I'm a bestselling novelist under two different pennames). Writing pays the bills for me, but it's too easy to miss a day or two of writing for something "more important." My Baby Step is to write one paragraph every day; my reward for this is to make a phone call to an old friend or family member. I always start the day knowing that as soon as I've completed my Baby Step, I'll be able to have a fun conversation.

Intrinsic rewards come from within us. For instance, whenever you successfully complete a Baby Step, you get a feeling of pride and satisfaction. That's another reason Baby Steps are so easy to keep doing: they're easy to complete, which makes it easy to get a quick hit of an intrinsic reward.

On the other hand, traditional habits like exercising for an hour are difficult to complete, and at the end of the action, you often don't feel that overwhelming glow of happiness and satisfaction. Instead, you feel pain and frustration because of the time the action took and its difficulty.

For instance, an intrinsic reward associated with working out is the endorphins that exercisers experience. However, exercise is also associated with physical discomfort and pain, not to mention the frustration that new exercisers often experience when they are forced to struggle through workouts. Many times, these irritating feelings outweigh the rush from endorphins, negating the intrinsic benefit.

On the other hand, if your exercise Baby Step is to change into your workout clothes or to turn on the exercise video, you can enjoy an unmitigated rush of satisfaction from the completion of your Baby Step.

## **Make it fun**

A Baby Step needs to be so small that you feel no resistance at all in doing it; however, to add some extra oomph and happiness to your life, you need to find a way to make the Baby Step fun.

This isn't often possible, but with some creative thinking, it can be. For instance, if your Baby Step is to drive to the gym, have a fun "driving to the gym" playlist that you look forward to hearing everyday (and don't listen to that playlist at other times).

Try your best to make your Baby Step something that you eagerly look forward to doing – and not just something that “has to” be done.

## **Remove obstacles**

In addition to making your Baby Step fun, another way to ensure that you have a better chance at establishing a new habit is to remove all obstacles in your path.

Consider everything that could possibly go wrong in your attempt to complete the Baby Step, and then make contingency plans.

For instance, if your Baby Step is to change into your workout clothes, consider what would happen if all your exercise clothes were in the laundry hamper. Do you have enough extra sets of workout clothes to be able to perform the Baby Step despite your lack of laundry? What if you can't find your clothes? One possible solution would be to create a designated area in your closet where you keep your exercise clothes.

Or, if your Baby Step is to drive to the gym each day, what happens when you can't find your car keys? In this case, you could keep an extra set hanging near your bedroom door, just in case. What if the car refuses to start? In this situation, one possible alternative could be to taxi to and from the gym and call a mechanic once you get back home.

Having a contingency plan ready means that you know what to do even when things go wrong – as they often do. Of course, a contingency plan won't be able to cover every possible scenario. But it will cover the most common scenarios. And simply by having a contingency plan, you'll be more likely to think your way out of an unplanned emergency if it ever does happen.

## **Improve your environment**

I am a great believer in the power of your environment. The people and objects surrounding us impact us far more than we realize. A negative environment makes it harder to produce good quality work, while an uplifting environment makes all aspects of our lives easier.

Scientific studies have proven that a neat, clutter-free environment helps to increase productivity and improves our mood and energy levels.<sup>9</sup> Taking Baby Steps will be much easier if your environment is conducive to achieving things; a few minutes spent putting things away can help you be much more productive in the days or weeks ahead.

We owe it to ourselves to make our lives easier, and improving the environment we work and live in definitely makes life better.

## **You are an average**

The biggest influences in your environment are the people who surround you. Do your very best to ensure that the people around you are supportive and caring. While it's not possible to interact only with supportive people, there are ways to ensure that most of the people who influence you are supportive and upbeat.

We are the average of the five people we interact with the most.<sup>10</sup> Not the five people we most admire or the five people we most like, but the people we interact with most often. Quantity trumps quality here.

It's kind of shocking to realize that this average applies to more than just mindset: overweight people are more likely to interact with other obese or overweight individuals, and we tend to earn the average of what our friends earn. Married people are more likely to be friends with other

couples, while singles tend to hang out with other singles. Religious people generally interact more frequently with other religious people, and the denomination of the religions doesn't actually matter.

Yes, there are some exceptions to the rule, but it's never a good idea to depend on exceptions. Instead, try to interact more often with people whom you admire and wish to be like.

This doesn't mean that you need to stop being friends with people you don't want to be like. If you're trying to lose weight, you don't need to stop hanging out with your best friend who's overweight – that would just be silly! Instead, try to seek out people you'd like to emulate; for instance, in the case of wanting to lose weight, plan to start frequenting the gym or going to farmer's markets.

You can also try to subtly influence the people you see more often; however, most people don't appreciate unsolicited "help", no matter how minor. Your deadbeat, unambitious friend will most likely not enjoy hearing about that book you just read on career opportunities, and your food-addicted roommate will probably not enjoy hearing you rave about the qualities of whole foods.

Of course, you shouldn't stop being friends with someone just because you don't wish to be affected by one particular trait of theirs; all you have to do is focus on the things you like about them. When it comes to people with whom you want to hang out but don't want to be influenced by, it can be helpful to avoid contentious issues. For instance, if you enjoy hanging out with your unambitious friend, it's a good idea not to bring up work or money and to try to change the topic when he starts groaning about "undeserving rich b\*\*\*\*\*s."

Definitely avoid people of whom you're not overly fond and whom you don't want to be like. Often, people are just there in our lives by

default; it's easy to hang out with the deadbeat friend, even though he's not much fun. It's better to have fewer not-so-close friends who bring you down than to hang out with people just because it's easy. Instead, use the time you gain from culling the "dead wood" relationships in your life to seek out new friends whom you admire. You could also use your newly freed-up time and energy to get better acquainted with people in your network whom you admire but never had a chance to know too well.

The Identity Switch Method will work even if you're constantly surrounded by naysayers and negative influences. However, making positive changes in your life will be a constant battle. To make the most of the Identity Switch Method, I highly recommend that you surround yourself with people whom you admire and who support you in your endeavors.

## **Pitfalls of Baby Steps**

There are a few dangers that can rear their heads when you try to apply Baby Steps. Here are some common ones to avoid:

### **Scorning the Baby Step**

The biggest mistake is to scorn the Baby Step.

Many people think that trying to start a new habit with Baby Steps won't work. We're so indoctrinated to think that we need to take massive action and move forward in leaps and bounds that we ignore the potential of committing to Baby Steps.

Another common mistake is to claim to commit to Baby Steps when deep down we actually commit to doing much more.

For instance, when I first read about Scott Adam's gym-going habit, I decided to set myself a Baby Step target of changing into my workout clothes each day. If I changed into my workout clothes but did nothing else that day, I'd call it a success.

At least, that's what I claimed. Deep down, however, I was determined to do more than just change into workout clothes every day. "Workout clothes," I thought to myself. "Pffft. What good does changing into workout clothes do if you don't do any actual exercise?"

Internally, I was committed to not just changing into my workout clothes but also doing a thirty-minute cardio session. Or at least, *some* kind of exercise – even a fifteen minute abs session or a ten minute upper body strength session.

As you can see, I was committed to much more than just a Baby Step.

Things started off very well: I'd change into my workout clothes, feel jazzed up enough to do something, and exercise a little.

Then one day, I got some unpleasant news in the morning, and I was in a bad mood for the rest of the day. "Why do I have to exercise today?" I moaned to myself. "I hate exercise. Can't I catch a break, just once?"

Of course, I reminded myself that my target was to change into my workout clothes – and nothing else. But I felt a niggling resistance. My brain knew I was trying to trick it. It could just tell. Nevertheless, I changed into my exercise gear and felt a bit of smug triumph. *Ah-ha!* I could do it even when I was feeling down.

But my logical self quickly wiped away my smugness. "That's not enough," she said. "You need to do some actual exercise. Otherwise, how can you call this an exercise habit?"



I felt defeated. I had changed. I'd performed my part of the bargain, but it hadn't been enough. And now I needed to exercise, and I just didn't feel like it. It was awful.

I wound up not doing any exercise that day. I changed out of my workout clothes feeling disappointed in myself, and I never tried to trick myself into "just changing" again. It clearly didn't work. What could have been the start of a consistent exercise habit was flushed down the drain, and all those "exercise habit" neural pathways were overridden.

I share this story to highlight how dangerous it can be to expect too much from ourselves – even when we think we're being sly. At some point, the slyness has to come out into the open, and then the damage is done.

I now know enough about Baby Steps to understand that they work if you commit to *actual* Baby Steps and not an internal stretch goal. Baby Steps work well at establishing a habit even if you do nothing more than the actual Baby Step itself.

One of the reasons Baby Steps work so well is that new neural pathways that are created when you take no more than that simple, easy first Baby Step. We'll get to the other reason they work so well in a minute, but in the meantime, trust this: no matter how ludicrously tiny they seem, Baby Steps are all you need.

## **Celebrate the excess**

When you set the intention to perform a Baby Step, that's all you need to do.

More often than not, however, you'll find yourself doing more than just the Baby Step – and that's great! While you don't want to punish yourself or feel disappointed for not doing more than the Baby Step, it's

absolutely a good idea to celebrate the fact that you're doing more than the bare minimum. If nothing else, you'll get an intrinsic reward from knowing that you've exceeded your expectations. And if you'd like, you can give yourself an extrinsic reward as well.

## **Respect the resistance**

The hardest thing about starting any new habit is the resistance our brains put up.

We all feel this resistance: it's nothing to be ashamed of. Even the most successful person in the world will feel this resistance if asked to start a new habit.

Many self-help books stress motivation, self-discipline and willpower. While they're all good things, I don't like strategies that only depend on things like motivation – an eternally fickle and unreliable emotion. There is absolutely nobody in the world who is motivated every hour of the day; even the most ardent believers have moments of doubt. The same goes for willpower and self-discipline; it's impossible to use them all the time.

Instead, I believe in respecting the resistance and working around it.

If you ever feel moments of resistance or feel that your habit is too difficult, don't feel ashamed. Instead, examine *why* you're feeling that resistance. Often, you'll find that your Baby Step is not really a Baby Step – it's a personal stretch goal. In that case, keep reducing the difficulty of your intended action until it's small enough to be laughably easy.

## **Start rewarding yourself**

Because the Baby Steps method depends on circumventing our natural resistance, you don't absolutely *need* rewards to get started and keep it up. Because we don't need rewards to overpower the resistance, there's no fear of reward failure.

However, enjoying a reward at the end of the routine helps to deepen the neural pathway in our brain, which makes the habit formation much quicker and easier. So it's a good idea to give yourself a reward for completing your Baby Step. Plus, rewards make life much more fun!

A reward doesn't have to be very big or expensive in order for it to work. As I mentioned earlier, my reward for writing one paragraph is to make a fun phone call and my reward for putting away kitchen clutter is to enjoy the tea I brewed while cleaning up.

Rewards are useful and good fun, so try to add one at the end of your Baby Step. Whatever reward you pick, no matter how small, make sure it's something you enjoy. You'll find yourself looking forward to it each time you start your Baby Step.

### **Don't expect excitement**

Many self-help books cover grand schemes. They're full of rah-rah hopefulness and work at getting the readers excited about completing a task or goal.

Habit creation, on the other hand, is unexciting. Sure, a good habit makes your life better and will probably make you much happier overall, but it's not particularly exciting. It's just something that you do, day in and day out, without thinking about it too much.

It's exciting to think about creating a massive, beautiful garden and planting a whole vegetable patch in one afternoon. It's not exciting to water

one plant each day. You can brag about creating a gorgeous garden, but you can't really tell anyone that you water one plant each day: people will wonder what's wrong with you and why you've got such low ambitions/expectations/energy.

If you start practicing Baby Steps with the hope for excitement, you're going to be disappointed. Sure, new experiences are exciting at first, but eventually they become part of everyday life.

Doing something very small each day isn't exciting. But it is effective, and it does make your life much better.

### **Remember it's just a baby step**

There will be times when you may feel exhausted with life and want to give up. At times like that, remind yourself that it's just a baby step – something that won't take more than a minute or two, tops. You don't need to do anything more than your Baby Step to feel satisfied and to have done your bit for the day.

Never push yourself to do more than the Baby Step when you're feeling down. And if you still can't do the Baby Step, make sure that it is, in fact, a Baby Step. Something that's laughably easy.

### **Don't push too hard, too fast**

When you first start seeing success with Baby Steps, it's easy to get overly enthusiastic and want to do more. For instance, your intended habit could be to go for a walk every day, and your Baby Step would be to lace up your walking shoes. If you soon find yourself going for a thirty-minute

walk almost every day, it's easy to want to bump up the Baby Step into going for a short walk daily.

However, one of the easiest ways to fail with Baby Steps is to push yourself too fast. Don't amplify the Baby Step too soon.

I recommend sticking with your Baby Step for at least a month before you try to amplify it. Although a month is not long enough to create a habit, it's long enough to understand how some of the negative events of your day-to-day life can affect an attempt at habit formation. You'll see how swings in your moods and energy levels affect your attempts to do something, and you'll also understand what your common obstacles are.

If a month goes by and you find yourself consistently doing much more than your Baby Step, it can be a good idea to evaluate your habit and see if you can increase the size of the Baby Step. Instead of lacing up your walking shoes, you change your your Baby Step to a one-minute walk.

However, make sure that your new Baby Step is still laughably easy: if you feel any resistance at all, respect the resistance! Remember that your Baby Step is something you need to do each and every day, no matter how bad you're feeling.

Which brings us to the next thing...

## **Complete your Baby Step every day**

The easiest way to ensure that you successfully complete your Baby Step is to do it each and every single day.

Setting a goal for performing an action every day is the easiest way to develop it into a consistent habit. Once you do something every day, you don't have to keep remembering to have to do it. Plus, once you do

something every day, at some point it slides into your daily routine and the Baby Step becomes more and more of a habit.

There are some tasks that feel like one-off things, but it's a good idea to try to mold them or break them up in such a way that you can do them daily. For instance, if you want to grow a nice garden, you might find that you need to fertilize your plants each week. In this case, your Baby Step can't be to fertilize each day: you'll wind up killing your plants! However, a proper routine will ensure that you take good care of your plants. To turn a one-off task into a Baby Step, incorporate it into a broader routine.

For instance, a simple Baby Step is to spend one minute out in the garden – to physically step out next to your plants and stay there. If you do some weeding or watering, that would be an extra action you'd celebrate but not necessarily an action you *have* to do each day. You can have an alarm that goes off on your “fertilizer” day, and your task that day can be to go out and stand next to your plants for a minute – the same Baby Step as always. If you feel like fertilizing, great! If not, it's OK because you still did your Baby Step.

Yes, this will mean that you might miss a day of fertilizing once in a while, but that's fine. It's better than never fertilizing your plants. And it's very likely that you'll find that the next day when you perform your Baby Step of standing next to your plants, you'll want to do some fertilizing. Of course, this is a gardening-specific example, but you'll find that many one-off tasks can be incorporated into broader Baby Steps habits in the same way.

There are also some tasks that seem more inclined to become less-frequent habits. For instance, you don't really want to do a serious workout every single day. Most personal trainers recommend doing strength training

three or four times a week, allowing a few days of rest in between each workout session.

However, infrequent habits can be modified into daily habits. With exercise, for instance, your grand ambition wouldn't be to do a serious strength workout every day but to get *some* activity in each day. So your Baby Step would be to change into your workout clothes each day, with the hope of doing a little bit of activity; the "stretch" ambition would be to do five minutes of yoga that day or even a half-hour of strength training. And, of course, just completing the Baby Step itself (changing into workout clothes) is a victory.

Another way to modify infrequent habits is to relegate them either to the weekend or to the weekdays. So you can modify your exercise ambitions into weekday specific habits only, such as changing into your workout clothes only on the weekdays. There's lower risk of overdoing it.

If it's a habit you don't want to do too often, you can relegate it to the weekends. If you're trying to develop a habit of staying in touch with old friends and acquaintances, you could use the weekend as a time-based reminder to get in touch with someone. For instance, you could decide that your Baby Step is to send someone a one-line email asking how they are, which you perform every Saturday and Sunday.

Finally, you can also try to develop infrequent habits by using time-based cues. This is my least favorite method of developing habits, but it is possible to implement time-based cues to good effect. For instance, if your boss leaves early each Wednesday, allowing you the opportunity to do the same, you can use Wednesday afternoons to catch up with your old friends or your correspondence.

Even a time-based Baby Step is better than no Baby Step at all because it still helps to develop your habit. This, in turn, helps develop your

new identity, which is the focus of the next few chapters.

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## **Chapter 5: Why Good Habits Aren't Enough**

Successfully developing new habits is an extremely efficient way to go about chasing an ambition. Large, giant leaps forward are nice, but they're unsustainable. Sustainable change comes about gradually, and the best way to change your life is to change your life and your daily habits.

Although developing a new habit is a wonderful way to make a positive change in your life, there are some shortcomings when it comes to habit development. The biggest shortcoming is the fact that although habits can make a difference to your life, they are not always sustainable – no matter how small the Baby Step.

In my experience, a new habit can be developed and sustained for weeks, even months. If Baby Steps are used, this new habit will survive minor setbacks such as bad moods, low energy levels and slightly bad news, and might even last a year or two. However, there comes a point with most Baby Steps when something happens and the Baby Steps stop.

For instance, if your ambition is to lose weight, you might choose daily exercise as your habit. Let's say you've decided to dedicate a corner of your garage or your house to all of your workout gear – a mini gym of sorts. You've got an exercise mat, free weights, a rowing machine, and a small TV for playing exercise videos. Your Baby Step is to go to your mini gym each day and stay there. You don't have to exercise; you just have to stay there.

Most days, you go there and actually do some exercise – maybe some rowing, maybe some strength training using the free weights, or maybe you follow an exercise DVD for half an hour.

But at some point, you get sick of it. You start doing only the bare minimum Baby Step, and even that seems annoying and like a waste of time. Or maybe you just quit entirely; “I’ve done enough,” you decide.

Why does this happen? To understand, let’s consider the mindset of our weight-loss hopeful.

This person really wants to lose weight, and they know and understand completely that exercise is important for weight loss. But they don’t like exercising. They’ve accumulated all kinds of things to use when exercising, but they don’t enjoy it. Still, they create a Baby Step around exercising, since they understand just how important exercising is, and they hope that maybe, with time, the exercise habit will be strong enough that it won’t seem difficult. Or maybe the Baby Step will help them overcome the pain they associate with exercising. Maybe a reward helps initially, and they continue exercising.

However, at some point, the pain associated with exercising catches up with them. This is regardless of the fact that all they need to do is a Baby Step, and that they can enjoy a reward after doing that Baby Step (and yes, you can apply this example to just about any habit – not just exercising). It could take days or weeks or months, but ultimately, the pain catches up and they quit the Baby Step

Why does the pain finally catch up? The answer lies in who the person thinks they are.

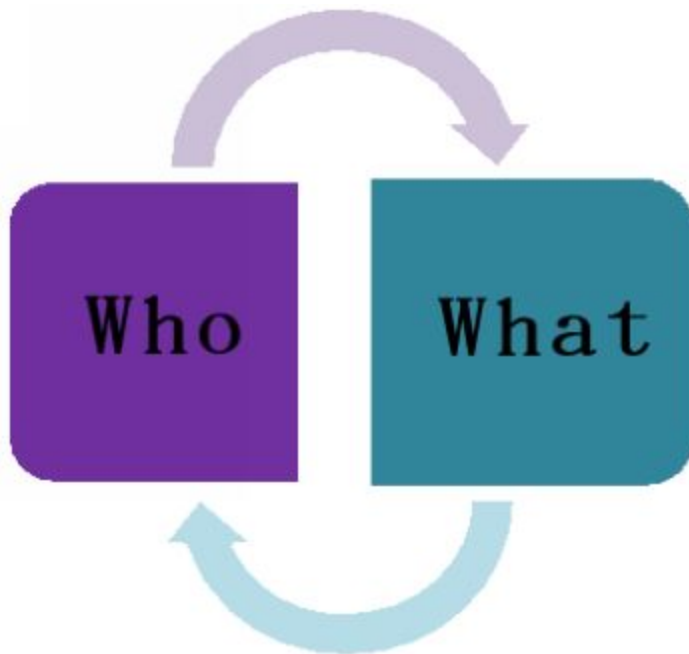
From the very beginning, they define their identity as someone who wants to lose weight. They decide to narrow down their focus from “weight loss” to “exercise,” and they use Baby Steps in an attempt to create an exercise habit. However, in their hearts they always believe that they hate exercise and that Baby Steps will make the exercising habit easier to stick to.

Ultimately, their identity catches up with them. They hate exercise, and they just can't keep trying to develop an exercise habit, no matter how small the Baby Step.

Who you are determines what you believe, which determines what you do.

Someone who hates exercise can force himself to exercise for a little while via Baby Steps. But at some point, they give in to their identity – the belief that they hate exercise – and they stop taking action. They stop taking the Baby Steps and acknowledge that their identity has remained unchanged all along (remember, the brain hates change). The fact that they stopped the Baby Step doesn't come as a surprise to them, because after all, it's just who they are. They're a person who hates exercise because they find it difficult.

And of course, their action backs up their identity. They hate exercise, so they quit exercising.



Who we are determines what we do. But as the graphic above illustrates, what we do also determines who we are. If we quit exercising, we're someone who hates exercise; if we eat cake every day, we love cake; if we nod off during our lectures, we're someone who falls asleep during class; and if we're someone who falls asleep during class, we nod off during lectures.

It's a vicious cycle of the worst kind.

### **Baby Steps to Break Out**

Taking Baby Steps helps us to break out of the cycle because the steps are so small that they don't affect our identity.

The person in the exercise example can hate exercise and find it very difficult to do, but sitting in the home gym for five minutes isn't too bad. They still hate exercise, but they sit in the home gym for a bit. Once in a while, they do some workouts, but they still hate exercise – the workouts that they do don't really count. And besides, the Baby Step is so small that it doesn't change who they are: they still hate exercise even though they sit in the home gym every day.

Baby Steps allow you to take action *despite* your identity.

However, at some point, Baby Steps start to become a habit, and that's around the point when our identity comes into question. You hate exercise, but you've been exercising for twelve days out of the last thirty, and you've spent an awful lot of time in your home gym: this is the point when your brain says, "That's not me."

Baby Steps can help you step out of the identity cycle briefly, but they can't keep you out of it forever. Whenever your identity starts to shift, you're forced back into being your original self – the self who hates

exercise and doesn't really see the point of sitting in the gym for five minutes a day.

## **Crisis Failure**

The Baby Steps model also breaks down whenever there's a real crisis. If your life changes dramatically, you need to react and be true to yourself. In a crisis situation, we only focus on the absolutely important things; there's no time for extraneous attempts at life improvement or habit creation.

Baby Steps can help you continue with your routine when you're faced with a minor setback, like a bad mood or a bad day at work.

But what about when things start to seriously go wrong? What if you have a personal crisis, like someone close to you becoming seriously ill or the breakup of a relationship or the loss of a job? These things are rare (and we hope that they're as infrequent as possible), but they do happen.

And when they happen, we're forced to take stock. There are a few days of crisis mode – running around and trying to get things ok – and there's often a period of mourning, but then we return to our “regular” life.

Baby Steps get forgotten when we're in crisis mode, as are many “ordinary” habits like wasting time watching TV or eating junk food out of boredom. All resources go into managing the crisis.

During the post-crisis mourning period, Baby Steps are also usually overlooked. Most of the time, when we return to our regular life, we leave the Baby Steps behind. The crisis makes us revert back to who we were – the old, exercise-hating, tv-watching, junk food imbibing self.

## **Simultaneous Change**

The way out of this discord with the self is to change both sides of the equation simultaneously.

When we take Baby Steps, we make a slight shift in our behavior.

We can balance out the Identity Equation by simultaneously making a slight shift in our beliefs and our identity. The Identity Switch involves a very minor change in who we believe ourselves to be, but the ripple effects of this tiny change are massive. The modification in our beliefs makes the Baby Steps easier to perform, and the shift in identity makes the neural pathways deeper, making the habit take root more quickly. The new habit is more long-lasting: it can endure boredom and crisis situations, and we now no longer have a behavior/identity misalignment.

For instance, if you want to lose weight and have decided to focus on exercise, you don't just take the Baby Step of sitting in your home gym for five minutes. You also make the Identity Switch of believing something positive about exercise: you can choose from one of many positive beliefs, including:

- I love exercising
- I want to spend more time exercising
- I'm so lucky to have this home gym, and I'm trying to spend more time in it
- I can't wait to try out all those gadgets in my home gym
- Every day, I look forward to the time I spend in my home gym
- Etc, etc...

As you can see, positive attitudes towards your new Baby Step can vary quite wildly, starting from the vague ("I love exercise") to the

incredibly specific (“Every day, I look forward to the time I spend in my home gym”).

When you shift your beliefs and make the Identity Switch, performing the Baby Steps makes even more sense because doing them is a part of who you are! There’s no chance of boredom setting in because there are no extraneous thoughts involved – again, your lifestyle is just part of your identity. Even when you face a crisis, you bounce back quickly and keep performing the Baby Steps – not because you’re trying to make your life better or improve yourself in any way, but because performing the Baby Steps reflects your identity.

Many people sustain a Baby Step over a long period of time, without consciously shifting their beliefs. But in their case, you’ll find that the Identity Shift has happened on its own. Consider the case of a woman who starts running in order to lose weight, but then continues to run every other day, just for fun: she probably started to enjoy the “runner’s high” and chose to enjoy running. If you ask her, she’ll probably say that she now goes running because she enjoys it – not because she’s trying to create a habit of running. Her identity has shifted over and she believes she loves running – so she runs regularly.

I don’t like leaving things up to chance, so it’s important to focus on your identity whenever you want to achieve something or develop a habit. Modifying your beliefs is a critical piece of the puzzle: you cannot sustain an action which is at odds with your beliefs.

There are many ways to modify your beliefs in order to have your identity be congruent with your actions. Some examples are:

- I prefer healthier foods --> I eat one healthy meal consisting of home-cooked proteins, whole grains and vegetables every day

- I like to have a healthy start to my day --> I've switched over to nutrition-dense breakfasts like eggs, buckwheat pancakes and steel-cut oats
- I enjoy having a loving relationship with my partner --> I pay him/her three compliments every day
- I enjoy having a thriving garden --> I spend two minutes out in the garden each day
- I get along with my co-workers --> I spend two minutes every day catching up with someone from work
- I'm developing a profitable side business --> I spend two minutes every morning working on my income-earning blog

As you can see, the Identity Switch method can be applied to just about any ambition.

## **Identity/Belief Incongruity**

But what happens when your beliefs and actions don't line up?

Think of someone who's just read about the power of affirmations. This person is significantly overweight, and every day they look into the mirror and repeat twenty times, "Every day, I am getting slimmer and slimmer."

However, they're clearly not. Every day, they look into the mirror and see the same overweight person that they always were.

Does this mean that changing your beliefs has no impact on your life? No, of course it does – if you allow it to.



If you tell yourself that you're losing weight or are leading a healthy lifestyle or exercising regularly, but you do not take any relevant actions, then your intended beliefs are at odds with your lifestyle. You can't force an identity shift simply by thinking it; you have to take the actions that allow you to keep believing in that identity.

If the overweight person in our example above doesn't take any steps to be healthier, then he or she will have a hard time believing in their new identity. There's a limit to what kind of lies we can tell ourselves, and if we keep telling ourselves that we're getting slimmer when we're obviously not, then the shift in beliefs simply won't happen. And if you can't change your beliefs, you won't be able to achieve your ambitions.

You can't force an Identity Shift: you have to take all the relevant steps involved.

## **Overnight Attempts**

On the other hand, many people try to change their identities overnight. This happens in the case of a previously unhealthy person deciding that they now lead a healthy lifestyle. All of a sudden, they rid their house of all junk food, head to the gym five times a week, and eat only wholesome foods.

As we all know from personal experience – and from watching those around us – such attempts at overnight success rarely work.

Sure, there are the rare individuals who can pull off drastic 180-degree changes, but few people ever achieve that and sustain it.

What happens in most cases is that people suffer from burnout. Doing something radically different involves a huge amount of energy; it also involves combating massive amounts of internal resistance. Few

people can overcome that constant resistance and sustain such drastic change for long.

The trouble is that most people who can manage to keep up all the work – the sudden shift in the diet and the sudden increase in exercising – still face an identity discord. The former sedentary junk food lover who suddenly eats only home-cooked whole foods still thinks of themselves as a fat person trying to lose weight; clearly, a few weeks of intense clean eating and exercise doesn't make them a super-healthy person.

Sudden, incredible personality shifts don't happen in mentally healthy people. So no matter how incredibly intense and different your actions, you won't suddenly start thinking differently about yourself. Your identity will only change slowly, which is another reason why massive habit changes are never really sustainable. It's all a vicious cycle!

## **Taking Root**

It takes a long, long time for a new habit to become permanent. Many self-help bloggers like to refer to the “30 Day Rule” or the “60 Day Rule” of habit change, claiming that it takes a new habit 30 or 60 days to become permanent. This is incorrect.

Scientific studies show that the time it takes to create a new habit can be anywhere from 18 days to 254 days.<sup>10</sup> People have an incredibly large variance in time to create new habits; the time it takes depends both on the individual and on the habit being attempted.

For instance, if you're *already* leading a healthy lifestyle of eating nutritionally-dense foods and exercising regularly, you might be able to pick up the habit of drinking a glass of water every morning in as little as a month or two.

However, if you lead a completely sedentary lifestyle and haven't exercised since high school, it'll probably take you closer to six months or even a year to start working out on a regular basis.

A year! Just thinking about it seems depressing. No wonder most habits never become fully established.

If we're to keep doing something for six months or a year before it becomes a habit, then it needs to be something super-duper easy, something that we face no resistance in doing – i.e., a Baby Step.

In order for the Baby Step to take root and become a habit, we need to change the way we think about our identity. This shift has to be something in which we really believe – no random “I’m a super-awesome person” affirmations that we secretly doubt.

The way we think about ourselves needs to change slowly and gradually if it's to take root. In a way, the shift in our beliefs also needs to be a Baby Step. In the case of the person trying to develop an exercise habit, thinking “I love exercising” might not work if they don't really love exercising. But the belief “I enjoy spending time in my home gym every day” will probably work. In this case, they believe that at least five relaxing or energetic minutes each day should be dedicated to leaving behind all of their cares and worries. Their identity shifts very slightly, and they become someone who likes spending time in the home gym area. After all, these five minutes, according to their Baby Steps, are just five minutes that they need to hang out in the area; they don't necessarily need to do any exercise.

Over time, however, their identity might shift into being someone who really does love exercising, and their Baby Step might move from spending five minutes in the home gym to turning on their favorite exercise DVD and doing one minute of exercise.

Creating and sustaining habits is a long-term process. Slowly changing the way you think about yourself is also a gradual process. But that's ok; it's better to be the person who goes for a five-minute walk every single day than to be the person who goes to the gym for three days, and then doesn't go again for the rest of the year.

### **But that's Not Who I Am!**

One thing I've noticed is that people protest when they first learn about the Identity Switch method or about the concept of slowly changing their beliefs.

"That's not who I am," they say. "I don't want to change my whole personality!"

Applying the Identity Switch method doesn't mean that you have to change who you are. Nor do you have to change your whole personality. All that's required of you is to slowly shift a self-restraining belief that you hold in one area of your life. The rest of you remains unaffected.

Let's say, for instance, that you're a busy wife and mom, and you also work at a full-time job during the day. The one thing you'd really like to do is to lose some weight and maybe lead a slightly healthier lifestyle. But the way things are with your work and your children, you just can't find enough time to do something for yourself.

Now, even if you do lose weight and lead a healthier lifestyle, it won't change who you are. It won't change the fact that you need to work for eight hours a day, and it won't change your relationship with your co-workers. It certainly won't change the fact that your children adore and depend on you.

What it will change, however, is your attitude towards your body. If you spend five minutes after work in your home gym, you won't affect your work-life or your family life. But you will affect your health, and you'll slowly change how you feel about exercise and eating healthier meals.

## **Growing the Success Tree**

One of the incredible things about the Identity Switch method is the fact that not only does it help you create and maintain a new habit, but it also helps you to be more successful overall, even when you attempt an unrelated task or try to establish another, different habit.

This happens because of a process known as increasing self-efficacy.

Efficacy is the likelihood that you will succeed at a particular task or goal. If you tend to be successful more often than not, you have high self-efficacy. But someone who's constantly trying new things and giving up or failing has relatively low self-efficacy. At some point or the other, this is many of us.

The way most people are taught to go about goals or ambitions tends to lead them into low success rate methods. People who jump into things with both feet fail more often than they succeed; usually, that doesn't matter overall. After all, if you try a hundred different things and fail at ninety of them, you've still succeeded in ten of them.

However, low self-efficacy makes you begin to think that you're not a very successful person. So the next time you try something, you think that your chances of success are low – or fifty-fifty at best.

On the other hand, if you're someone with high self-efficacy, you know that you're pretty likely to succeed when you begin a new task. This

confidence can give you an edge over someone else with low or average self-efficacy.

The Identity Switch method ensures that you'll succeed more often than not. Even if all you're doing is the bare minimum Baby Step, you're still successful! Although most of us never think, "Hey, I'm someone with high self-efficacy," the success we see with Baby Steps seeps into our psyche and we begin to realize that we're actually quite successful at what we do.

As you can imagine, this increase in our success rates makes us change our self-beliefs somewhat. Instead of identifying as someone with average rates of success, we start to shift our belief until we think of ourselves as someone with a relatively high rate of success.

Again, as per the vicious cycle of our identity affecting our actions, a person with high self-efficacy soon finds themselves succeeding more and more. "I'm someone who usually succeeds easily," they think. Then they go on to succeed at their next goal, thus perpetuating the cycle.

An example of this would be that person whose goal was to spend five minutes in their home gym – a pretty easy Baby Step. A few months later, they find that they've been achieving their Baby Step every single day. This is pretty awesome in itself, but they've also been getting in some serious workouts each week.

The consistency of their actions makes them feel satisfied with their goal to create a new habit and way of thinking about themselves, which makes them feel pretty successful. Perhaps they'll go on to add a new Baby Step to their life; maybe they've decided to switch out their usual breakfast of a store-bought muffin with a healthier, homemade breakfast like oats with yoghurt, a breakfast smoothie, or boiled eggs. They go in trying this

new habit with an assumption of success. And in most cases, they *will* succeed, which will just increase their self-efficacy even more.

Increasing your self-efficacy and your chances of success at everything is like growing a tree. At first, your self-efficacy is quite small; you have such large goals that you don't succeed very often. But as you start applying the Identity Switch method, you succeed more and more often.

Each successfully created habit becomes a new branch, and as you make the Baby Step slightly more challenging, the branch grows and the tree gets bigger.

Your success becomes a continuous, limitless cycle.

## **Chapter 6: The Shift That Makes Success Unavoidable**

Henry Ford famously said, “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.”

I’m a great believer in those words. What we think is what comes true.

Have you ever met someone who’s constantly down on themselves, constantly thinking that they’re a failure? Maybe this person always blames the world around themselves – it’s their parents’ fault or their boss is unfair.

Most likely, this person follows their own self-fulfilling prophecy: they think they can’t be successful (for whatever reason), and so they never are.

On the other hand, have you ever met someone who’s super-duper successful, or someone who’s even moderately successful in most things in life? How often is it that a successful person is also very negative by being down about themselves and the world around them?

Sure, they might have a bad day sometimes – or often they’ll be modest and downplay their strengths and confidence – but you’ll never meet a successful person who’s completely negative and disheartened. Successful people all believe that they deserve success, and that they can create their own success, however they define it.

### **The Missing Link: Beliefs**

Beliefs are the major factor affecting a person’s life. What we believe is reflected through our actions, which in turn is reflected in the results we get – and those results, of course, affect our beliefs.



Thinking back to our example of the people who try to lose weight by exercising – even if they can develop an exercise habit for a little while, most of these people ultimately give up; if you ask them why, they’ll tell you something along the lines of, “I hated it, I got sick of going to the gym every day.”

On the other hand, people who are incredibly fit and regularly exercise, might describe themselves as “fitness freaks”, “gym rats”, or “running addicts”. I’ve met many people who claim that they’re not really into exercise and fitness, they just love having an active lifestyle – which involves cycling/walking to work, swimming every day for fun, and going on long hikes whenever a public holiday pops up. Clearly, someone who “loves having an active lifestyle” will try their best to carve some activity into their life on a regular basis. Whereas someone who feels obligated to exercise will ultimately find ways to quit exercising.

It was only when I realized the impact that beliefs have on our actions (including the maintaining of Baby Steps and development of habits) that I really began to see results.

For a long time, I was trying to lose weight and develop an exercise habit. There would be months when I’d exercise consistently, but then something would pop up and I’d stop exercising for a few weeks.

Then, one day I asked myself what exercise I liked the best – what would I do even if I didn’t need to lose weight? The answer was obvious. Dance.

So I tried different dance workouts until I settled on one that I found enjoyable and suited my lifestyle: Just Dance on Wii. It was silly, easy to set up, and had a good mix of easy and challenging songs. Pretty soon, I was hooked – doing almost an hour every day. I was never too tired or bored or busy or any other excuse to do a quick dance workout.

The more I danced to those silly songs, the more I craved the rush of adrenaline and the feeling that I had an active lifestyle. Soon, I found myself eagerly signing up for additional strength training and yoga classes, while wondering what other fun exercise I could do.

My experiment with developing an active lifestyle showed me that beliefs drive action, which in turn fuel our beliefs. It's a self-perpetuating cycle, and all you need to do is to find that one belief that will shift your actions the way you want.

For instance, if, like me, you want to be more active, you can start by believing that you enjoy being active. Instead of thinking deep down that you're lazy or tired, you'll find yourself believing that you can't wait for your morning exercise session; and the more exercise you do via your Baby Steps, and the more you see the benefits of exercise via increased energy, and the more you'll look forward to the exercise.

If you'd like to avoid junk food and eat healthier dinners, think of some healthy dinners that you love – stir fried veggies with grilled salmon, for instance, or couscous salads. The more you believe that you look forward to your healthy meals, the more you'll actually eat them with pleasure – and the more you'll believe that you look forward to eating them.

Beliefs and actions are intertwined. To change your actions, you must first change your beliefs.

## **Improving Your Beliefs Through Affirmations**

Affirmations are a system of repeating, multiple times, a sentence that reflects what you want from life. For instance, if you'd like to be more successful, you would use the affirmation, "I am successful," and if you desire to lose weight, you can use the affirmation, "I am losing weight."

Despite the (bad) publicity they've received in recent years, affirmations *do* work, as evidenced by the huge number of people who have benefited from the technique. This includes celebrities ranging from Oprah Winfrey<sup>11</sup>, Jim Carrey<sup>12</sup> and Will Smith, to the creator of the Dilbert comics, Scott Adams.

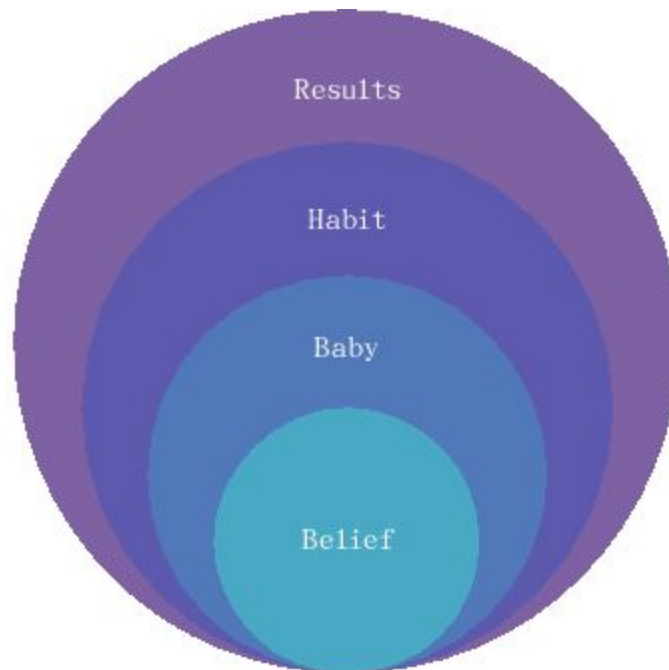
It's hard to explain *how* affirmations work, but in large part, they work by changing our beliefs. Many affirmation techniques claim that you don't have to try to believe your affirmation – that it will happen anyway.

One thing's for certain, though: affirmations are, at the very least, worth attempting. Scott Adams, referring to his own success with affirmations and addressing his readers' skepticism, phrases it this way: "If all of your friends told you that they win money on the slot machines whenever they stick their fingers in their own ears, would you try it? Or would you assume that since there is no obvious reason it could work, it's not worth the effort?"

Personally, I've found great success with affirmations. I write down my affirmations in various notebooks; the other day, I pulled out a notebook from four years ago, and was amazed at how things that I'd written down had come true, often without any real effort on my part.

## **Beliefs = Results**

Affirmations work by changing your beliefs; altering what you believe, no matter how slightly, is the key to creating a sustainable habit. As the graphic below shows, beliefs help to continue with Baby Steps, which leads to a successful habit and eventually to results.



For instance, you might enjoy painting, and your ambition might be to practice your painting a bit more. You'd like to create a couple of watercolors, and maybe become good enough to sell your art via local galleries. However, you're so busy with your work and your family that you hardly ever get time to sit down and paint anything.

You might attempt to pursue your artistic hobbies by taking Baby Steps towards painting more. Your Baby Step could be to wake up ten minutes earlier every morning and sit down with your paints and paper. If you exceed your target, you might end up with some art, but if not, that's ok.

To this end, you might try shifting your beliefs to being more congruent with what you'd like to achieve. You would find it easier to achieve your artistic ambitions if you started to feel more confident in your abilities, and affirmations can help in creating this belief.

However, you can't just force a "belief" on yourself. That is, if you keep telling yourself something but you don't believe in it, then it won't lead to an Identity Switch at all.

For instance, you might try to believe the statement, “I am a famous artist,” and decide to repeat it to yourself ten times daily; however, you’re clearly not a famous artist yet! At this point, you may not even have had a local exhibition, so you won’t be able to believe the statement, “I am a famous artist,” and it will ring false to you.

On the other hand, you could honestly say to yourself, “I look forward to my early-morning art sessions,” – and this statement will help you gradually switch to a belief system where you pay more attention to your art, and you spend more time and effort on your paintings. Whether or not you pursue your artistic hobbies professionally would be a matter of your personal preference, but you’ll definitely find yourself enjoying the results of spending more time on your artistic hobbies.

Your belief in how much you enjoy your art leads you to keep up with the Baby Step, which leads to the development of your habit of daily painting, which leads to the visible results – completed paintings, and maybe an exhibition of your work.

## Chapter 7: Keystone Habits

Some habits have a huge influence on your life beyond the activity itself. These habits are known as “keystone habits”, and they can serve as the basis for improving your life in a variety of ways.

When getting started with the Identity Switch method and habit development, I highly recommend picking a keystone habit to work with; these habits provide the most “bang for your buck,” so to speak, and will lead to positive life changes.

Keystone habits have three benefits:

1. They form the basis of other good habits.
2. They increase your energy levels, which in turn increases your capacity for creating other good habits.
3. They increase your self-efficacy.

Keystone habits can be physical, spiritual, intellectual, social and monetary. A few of these different kinds of habits are discussed below.

It’s hard to pinpoint what the “best” keystone habits are, since they vary from person to person.

For example, a friend of mine decided to take the Baby Step of going to bed a little earlier. Eventually, she found herself waking an hour earlier, and she spent that time exercising and meditating. Pretty soon, she was doing better at work, she got a raise, and she managed to drop four dress sizes.

If you’re having a hard time picking a keystone habit with which to get started, I recommend thinking about what one habit might improve your life the most and going from there.

## **Habits That Affect Your Energy**

The human body is in some ways like a robot: we need fuel to recharge, and some things cause us to short-circuit.

Unfortunately, many ambitious people focus solely on the mental aspect of life and overlook the physical nature of being human. However, at the end of the day, what we can achieve is dependent on our reserves of physical energy.

Try to remember a day when you were busy at work. Maybe you were struggling with a project or maybe your ideas were flowing. Whatever your state of mind, at some point you felt hunger pangs. Although you could ignore them for a little while, you eventually had to give in and get something to eat. Our minds, our work commitments, and everything else pales by comparison when we're faced with the most basic of physical urges: hunger. Even the smartest person in the world will die if he or she stops eating.

Hunger may be the most obvious and immediate of physical reactions, but our performance in just about everything is affected by what we do to take care of our bodies. Physical capacity doesn't always manifest in obvious ways; there are less obvious impacts, such as the reduction of attention spans or alertness caused by sleep deprivation. Most of the time, physical limitations affect our performance without our even noticing it.

Taking care of the physical aspects of your life has a huge impact on all other parts of your life. When you're properly fuelled and recharged, you can work both harder and smarter.

If you'd like to focus on habits that affect your energy levels, you may wish to consider the following:

- 1. Sleep**

Are you getting enough sleep?

Although sleep requirements vary between individuals, most people need six hours of daily sleep at a minimum. Sleep deprivation can have massive negative effects on productivity and stress levels.

If you have trouble getting enough sleep, a keystone habit for you might involve improving the quality of your sleep.

To this end, you might try to take the Baby Step of going to bed a half-hour earlier than usual. Until you get used to falling asleep earlier, you could even lie in bed working/reading as necessary. You could also try to improve your morning routine or cut down on caffeine in order to improve sleep quality.

## **2. Food**

We are what we eat.

Unfortunately, it's very difficult to take control of our food using our logical mind: we're constantly facing pressures from our cravings, emotions and environment. The good news is that even minor changes in our food habits can alter our energy levels.

If your ambition is to eat fewer calories, or less sugar, or maybe less junk food, you can gradually work your way up via some sneaky Baby Steps.

Perhaps your Baby Step could be to replace your post-lunch dessert with fruit, or to stop hitting the vending machine afternoon snacks and instead keep a jar of mixed nuts on your desk. You could also try cooking an extra food and freezing the leftovers, or you could practice opting for healthier protein-based meals in restaurants.

## **3. Exercise**



Exercise is the big kahuna of goals: 80% of people in America don't get the amount of exercise recommended by health experts.<sup>13</sup> It's also one of the most difficult habits to implement simply because of the pain associated with sweating and suffering through a workout.

Doing more exercise has a host of health benefits including reducing your stress levels, increasing your energy levels, and reducing your risk of various diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

The irony is that although exercise is a goal that most people find very difficult to achieve via traditional routes, the Identity Switch method actually makes exercising one of the easiest habits to develop and maintain.

Baby Steps that can help you exercise more include going for a one-minute walk or job each day, turning on an exercise video, changing into your workout clothes, or driving to the gym. As you take each Baby Step, you gradually begin to think of yourself as someone who exercises, and you pursue a healthier lifestyle every day.

#### **4. Drink**

The liquids we put into our bodies affect who we are. It's possible to be healthier simply by drinking more healthy liquids. For instance, I reduced my habit of snacking (I'm a writer – it's what we do!) by replacing my snacks with green tea.

The Identity Switch method can be applied by people wanting to drink more healthy liquids, too, whether it's home-made green juices, or green tea, or simply more water.

You can easily set a Baby Step to pour yourself a cup of water or make some green tea every day; as you begin to think of yourself as someone who has healthy drinks, this habit will quickly take root.

## **Spiritual Habits**

Spiritual habits affect our lives in more ways than we are aware, and we each pursue spirituality in different ways.

Some excellent methods of improving your spirituality are the practices of meditation, gratitude, visualization and affirmations. These methods not only help you to grow as a person, but they also help to shape your positive beliefs, increase your self-efficacy, and achieve success.

If spending a long time each day on spiritual growth seems like a daunting prospect, you can easily pick one or two habits and create Baby Steps around them. For instance, you might choose to meditate for one or two minutes each day or to quickly read your list of affirmations each morning.

## **Intellectual Habits**

Intelligence is an edge that serves us well in just about every sphere of life, and there are never any disadvantages to becoming a wiser person.

Cultivating a life of learning using the Identity Switch method isn't too difficult. All that's required is a slight shift in behavior, from wishing to learn more to spending a little bit of time each day learning something new, and then actually following through.

Reading books, whether fiction or non-fiction; practicing a challenging hobby; or even enrolling in online or local classes or workshops

are all actions that can help you to develop the keystone habit of learning.

## **Social Habits**

A common refrain in the business world is that it's not what you know, but who you know. Everyone feels happier when they have close friends and family to lean on, and it may be worth investing some time into developing a strong social network.

The Identity Switch method can make developing stronger social ties easier, especially if you start thinking of yourself as a friendly or social person. Baby Steps can help you gradually increase your social habits; instead of suddenly plunging into a social life, you can slowly increase the time you spend staying in touch with old friends and getting to better know new acquaintances.

## **Wealth Habits**

The best things in life might be free, but the rest are quite expensive. Most of us have monetary ambitions, and depending on your stage of life, you may be interested in paying off debt, earning more money, saving more or making the right investments.

Financial goals can easily be converted into habits for achieving wealth, and the Identity Switch method can help to make the progress towards wealth easier.

For instance, many financial experts recommend a debt snowball approach to debt repayments.<sup>14</sup> If you automate your finances so that your smallest debt is paid off and work your way up the ladder, pretty soon you'll start to think of yourself as the kind of person who repays their debt.

Before you know it, your debt will be paid off, and then you can move on to the next stage of your wealth creation plan.

Similarly, if you're interested in earning more money, you can take an Identity Switch approach to it. If you'd like your increased income to come about via a promotion at work, you might put in extra effort towards your new project. Or, if you'd like to develop a side business, you might start waking a little earlier and spending that time on your new business; within a few days or weeks, you'll start to think of yourself as someone with a side business.

## **Keystone Habits and Efficacy**

Keystone habits are a great place to begin developing positive habits, and it's always amazing to see the effects that one habit can have in completely unrelated areas of your life.

For instance, when I first began meditating, I had no hopes beyond trying to reduce my stress levels. However, pretty soon I began to see more success at work. I could stay focused and calm for longer, which meant that I had an increased attention span and got more work done. This, of course, meant that my business began to perform better, and that I could take time off to focus on other good habits – like exercising and spending more time with my family.

Keystone habits can lead to unexpected benefits, and can also help you to develop an identity of self-efficacy. As your success with one habit grows, you'll find your confidence levels increasing, which in turn leads to greater success with other habits and projects.

## Chapter 8: Next Steps

The Identity Switch Method is deceptively simple. All you need to do is to choose an ambition, take Baby Steps towards it, and make a slight Identity Shift.

This method doesn't need much willpower, self-discipline or a constant inflow of motivation. All it requires is that you take some simple, easy actions. However, you do need to take those actions.

This book won't help you if you stop reading and forget all about it. The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step, but you do have to actually *take* that first step.

So please, don't just close this book and move on to the next, more urgent thing in your life. You read this book because you wanted to improve your life. Nobody can do that but you.

If you've skimmed through this book hoping to get to the "good bits", you might want to consider re-reading it once. Or, if you're certain that you know how to implement the Identity Switch Method, then it's time to take those first few steps.

Choose a habit (or two, if you're extra-motivated) that you'd like to pursue, or pick an ambition and break it down into a habit. Break down that habit into a Baby Step, and follow the advice in Chapter 5 to make sure that you're setting yourself up for success.

Next, try to think of an Identity Shift that would help you get closer to achieving your ambition. Begin to shift your beliefs slowly, and, if you'd like, take advantage of the power of affirmations and visualizations so that your Identity Shift happens much more smoothly.

Once you've taken these steps, you should find that pursuing your ambitions becomes effortless. The Identity Shift Method isn't a quick-fix, but it is a lifestyle choice. And it's a lifestyle that's filled with success and happiness.

The more you delay implementing the Identity Shift Method, the longer you delay your success. So, good luck with your implementation!

If you'd like to read more about success and productivity hacks, you can follow me at my blog, [ajwinters.com](http://ajwinters.com). If you face any trouble implementing the Identity Switch method, please feel free to get in touch with me through my blog. I'm committed to seeing your success, and if you need any help, I'll be there for you. And, of course, if you achieve massive success using this method (as I'm sure you will!), I'd love to hear from you as well! Please leave a comment on my blog, on Amazon, or get in touch with me via social media (the links are on the next page).

Now, it's time for *you* to take the reins and take control of your personal transformation.

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## **About The Author**

AJ Winters is fascinated by the ways in which we can increase our levels of success. She has an unhealthy obsession with researching methods of improving productivity, happiness, wealth, and fitness.

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## Message from the Author

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