

Change ignition: A simple method to integrate changes as part of who you are

Change is an essential part of our lives. Without noticing it, we change and evolve naturally, along with circumstances, events, practices, and interests.

We are learning beings; even unintentionally, we learn. Naturally, we evolve without thinking about it.



What if we take charge of the change and are intentional about it?

Changing habits is one way to transform our lives through new skills and cause new behavior, without needing a special event to occur.

When we change our behavior, we provoke change in our lives. If we do it with intention on a limitless timeframe, we can activate lasting changes.

Methodology

Step 1: Define a goal for your life.

For example: Be in shape

Step 2: Break it down into smaller behaviors that are needed to reach that goal, to never stop.

This is the component that will integrate the change forever.

You define your new standard.

Don't be overwhelmed; you only write it down as a map, you don't need to integrate it all at once.

To continue on the example of "Be in shape."

- Start a routine exercise
- Eat healthy
- Stop drinking soda

Step 3: Define habits that are linked to the new behavior as a starting point from where you are.

Here you can list everything that you want to do. You can choose the easiest at first. As a practice, it is always better to start with the easy things, be motivated by the results, and keep going.

For example, if you never exercise, start with a walk for 20 minutes every day. You lock it into your calendar, and you do that for the next 3 months.

And then assess where you are at and update.

Maybe 20-minute walks two times a day would feel good for the next 3 months. Or maybe you want to follow a specific class to learn a new exercise; it is up to you.

Do things that make you happy every day, things you are looking forward to in the long term.

I suggest committing strongly for 3-6 months before deciding you don't like this new practice. First, we are never motivated; we build motivation through discipline, and when we see the results.

Step 4: Take just one thing.

It is important not to overwhelm yourself because you may drop out of all the efforts, thinking it is too hard. Practice doing new things slowly and for a long period of time to integrate them into your life.

You'll see what makes you fall off, and you'll have the capacity to absorb the chaos life throws at you and recalibrate your efforts.

When you are comfortable, think of a deeper layer of this practice or work on integrating a new habit you need to move toward your goal with a lifetime perspective in mind.

If you want to implement several new habits at the same time, try to pair them.

Some bad habits are linked together or call on another, like: eating junk food and drinking soda, drinking alcohol and smoking, taking drugs and drinking alcohol. So do good habits.

Good habits to pair: exercise and eating healthy (you enjoy exercising better when you eat healthy, as you have more energy), exercise and improve sleep (usually when you exercise regularly, you also sleep better, so it helps to set a new routine) ...etc

Once you have your habit, turn it into a simple step to integrate a little bit every day or several times a week, consistently.

Step 5: What to do when you fall

It is happening to all of us. Sometimes you will forget, life will get in the way: your kid's school celebration, after-work drinks, or work events, getting sick yourself, or someone in your family... It is ok, and in those moments, it is important not to judge yourself.

Observe it and think consciously about what you can do to get back to the routine you love and feel good about.

Resilience is built when you train yourself to constantly go back to your routine, no matter what happens. Training means that you need a lot of repetitions, that's all.

My story with integrating exercise back into my life after pregnancy and moving overseas

When I started my running routine, I started with 5 minutes, 3 times a week. I was exhausted from sleep deprivation (the joy of working with a newborn 😊), so I didn't want to push myself too much. Also, I have a tendency to drop out when it is too hard physically, and I feel like I will never make it.

The times per week were mandatory to me, no matter if I could run for 5 minutes or if I had walked for 5 minutes.

And then when I felt more comfortable, I started to lengthen the duration of my run: 10 minutes, 15 min, 20 min.

After 3 years of running consistently every week, I run for 40 minutes 2-3 times per week. I reached the time that feels good for me, I integrated additional forms of exercise that I can do every day: Qigong, walking, Tai Chi.

For my running, I now measure my speed. I notice that I am getting better and better within the 40 minutes; I am faster and run a longer distance. I don't push myself too hard; I am just consistent, and it is a part of me.

When I miss several runs in a row, my body and mind are missing it, as moving every day is my natural state now.

I am now like those people I used to admire when I watched them running on a sunny Sunday morning when I was hungover 😊.

The essence of new habits

Habits are linked to a circle or virtue; good ones attract good ones, bad ones attract bad ones, so the most important thing is to start implementing without judging yourself. Don't tell yourself, it is not enough. I don't do enough workouts, and it is not intense enough.

I want to stop eating sugar, but I still eat one sweet treat per day, while you reduced your intake of sugar at every meal and snack. Which is a big improvement.

Every step counts.

In habit integration, it is very important to notify the successes and the changes that are durably implemented, even if they are not perfect. Realize that it will never be perfect, because there are layers, and there is always another step.

You get to choose when you are satisfied. Whether it is for a year or 10 years.

Also, drop the comparison to other people. You're comparing your inside to their outside. It is essentially a biased comparison. So, stop and compare to yourself, where you were a month ago, 3 months ago, a year ago. There lies the progress, but are you aware of it? Can you see it?

The power of habits

Habits are a reflection of our unconscious beliefs: the ones we've been educated in, society, gender...

They are also linked to how we cope with certain situations: emotional eating, binge drinking when stressed out, or a way to sabotage ourselves, overworking, and burning ourselves out...

Part of habit change is also about recalibrating these behaviors; it can also be an introspection practice to really look at what you are doing every day and what lies underneath these habits.

Doing something consciously to prove ourselves can provoke a feedback loop to our unconscious.

As we now have proof that we are strong enough to eat healthy 3 times a week (for example), which means the next layer could be 5 times a week...etc.

It is important to focus on each step to not function in automated mode and fall into the old pattern.

Also, time is a very important variable here. Take time to implement a new habit and not rush too fast in your idea of perfection, as it will change along the way.

I would recommend that if you observe that you are often falling into the old pattern when something gets in the way (even a small thing), keep practicing until the habit you are working on is rooted deeply and you built more resilience.

It doesn't happen in one day, but it does happen as you keep going.

The value of replacing a bad habit with a good one

Sometimes, a little trick to our mind does the job of helping us implement a new habit. Instead of doing a new thing and needing more time to implement the new habit, you just swap it with an existing habit that can be reduced or removed from your life.

Example: I love binge-watching series on Netflix. I always find something to watch. But I realized that I was spending a lot of time, and that this time could be a benefit somewhere else. But I was using it to relax, so I had trouble letting it go.

I set this in place: instead of watching a show every night, I swapped it for reading a fantasy book that I love. I love immersing in stories, so this did the trick for me.

In addition, studies show that reading for 5-10 minutes of something you enjoy significantly reduces your stress levels. And when you read, and you're tired, it is easier to go to bed than stop to watch the show. Also, it was good for my bedtime routine. So, this decision led to better sleep and less stress. Muy bueno!

By doing this, I gained more resting times that my body and mind needed. My brain benefits from reading more than watching shows too late at night. I noticed it helps me regulate my emotions better as well.

We can do the same for added sugar. Instead of eating a cake or chocolate, you can swap it for fruit: fresh or dried. We can also work on lowering our stress levels to reduce sugar cravings.

I am not saying that it is easy every time, and that when you just decide to swap things, you integrate a new habit instantly.

But it helps greatly to start setting new systems in place, and then you can operate the same way for anything you want to achieve.

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