

Finding the Happy In-Between: Building Healthy Habits for a Healthier You

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One of my favourite audiobooks I've listened to during my drives around our beautiful province has been *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Clear's writing offers a unique way to conceptualize building healthy habits for change from his own perspective in his own journey—the inspiration of this book.

I've bookmarked a few ideas that stood out in the hope they might resonate with you too.

"It is easy to get bogged down trying to find the optimal plan for change: the fastest way to lose weight, the best program to build muscle, the perfect idea for a side hustle. We are so focused on figuring out the best approach that we never get around to taking action. As Voltaire once wrote, 'The best is the enemy of the good.'" This quote inspired the title of this article. So often we consider happiness as a destination; something we aspire to and continue in our day-to-day in another state of mind. What if we find contentment/happiness/joy along the way?

"When you fall in love with the process rather than the product, you don't have to wait to give yourself permission to be happy. You can be satisfied anytime your system is running. And a system can be successful in many different forms, not just the one you first envision. The implicit assumption behind any goal is this: Once I reach my goal, then I'll be happy. The problem with a goals-first mentality is that you're continually putting happiness off until the next milestone."

What if you approached your goal setting in the following way "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become. No single instance will transform your beliefs, but as the votes build up, so does the evidence of your new identity. This is one reason why meaningful change does not require radical change. Small habits can make a meaningful difference by providing evidence of a new identity. And if a change is meaningful, it is actually big. That's the paradox of making small improvements." The idea of progress is progress no matter how small; focus on the direction of your actions, not their completion.

Consider some ingredients of building healthier habits. One of them is novelty. You may have heard the term "dopamine menu" recently connected to folks who live with ADHD. Briefly, this concept refers to a series of activities in varying sizes that folks can access, depending on their state of mind. Something that is novel, or that can change your current mindset to something more positive.

"The greatest threat to success is not failure but boredom. We get bored with habits because they stop delighting us. The outcome becomes expected. And as our habits become ordinary, we start derailing our progress to seek **novelty**."

"The ultimate form of intrinsic motivation is when a habit

becomes part of your **identity**. It's one thing to say I'm the type of person who wants this. It's something very different to say I'm the type of person who is this."

When we think of our identity, it can seem either fixed or an ever-evolving concept. What if you explored the connection between your behaviour (habits) and your identity? What would you discover? What do you think about what the author suggests above about considering your identity in the process of changing your habits?

"It's hard to change your habits if you never change the underlying beliefs that led to your past behavior. You have a new goal and a new plan, but you haven't changed who you are."

Changing who we are might seem like a daunting and overwhelming task. Sometimes the word change is taken in a negative context. What if you flip that script and see it as an opportunity to reflect and redefine some aspect of your life experience? What opportunities for contentment/happiness/joy might that offer?

In the following quote, Clear offers a look into what that balance could look like, in terms of viewing your identity and the idea of changing it not because something is 'wrong' but instead keeping what works and building on what doesn't—yet.

"The more pride you have in a particular aspect of your identity, the more motivated you will be to maintain the habits associated with it. If you're proud of how your hair looks, you'll develop all sorts of habits to care for and maintain it. If you're proud of the size of your biceps, you'll make sure you never skip an upper-body workout. If you're proud of the scarves you knit, you'll be more likely to spend hours knitting each week. Once your pride gets involved, you'll fight tooth and nail to maintain your habits." Do you agree? Are you open to trying? Think of one habit that might have come to mind while reading this. Think about what could happen if you considered a possible change or shift following Clear's approach.

"Some people spend their entire lives waiting for the time to be right to make an improvement." Stop waiting. Explore doing.

There is no perfect time to start. Starting creates that perfect time. Starting is hard. However, if we redirected our "not yet" energy into starting energy, think about what could happen. "Be the designer of your world and not merely the consumer of it."

When I first read the title, *Atomic Habits*, I saw the word atomic as in "blowing up" my current mindset. I invite you to see Clear's concept of this term he shares in his book. Whether you are the recipient of this Well Teacher giveaway or decide to invest in this read yourself, reach out and let me know your thoughts and how you approached developing atomic habits.