

The Secret to Success Mini-Habits by Stephen Guise

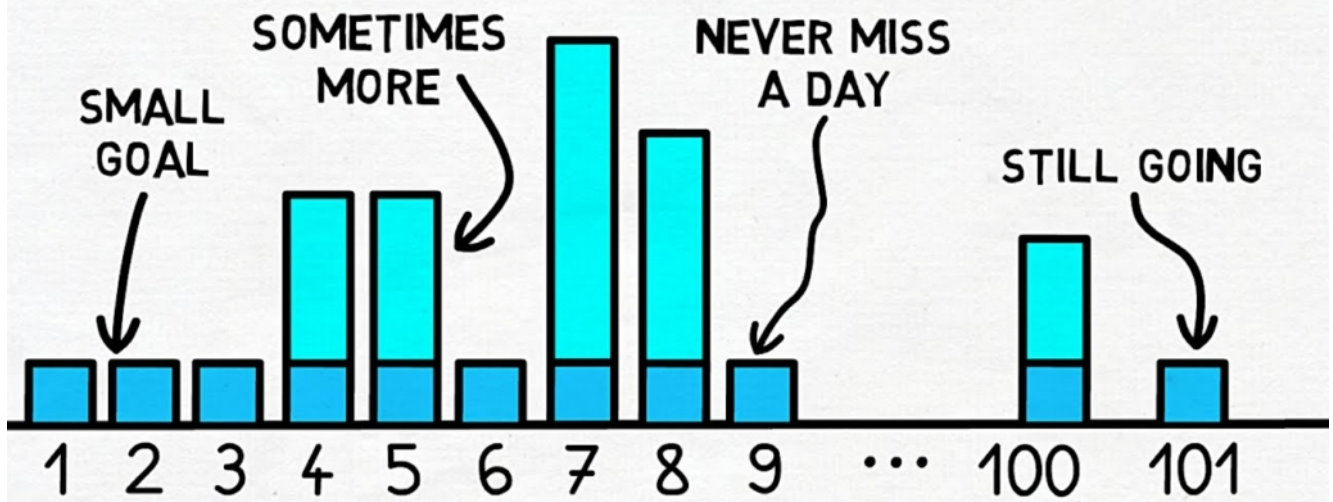
Habit formation, positive behavior, neuroplasticity, productivity, focus, attitude, results, goals.

Source: Mini Habits by Stephen Guise | selfgrowth.com

Mini Habits it is a must read book that explains how we can change habits of thinking and doing, how we can basically rewrite our software and reboot better results. Neuroplasticity has been confirmed by science, mini habits allow us to rewrite our brains. Change is not the problem, it is the solution, and we are gifted with brains that can adapt, grow and evolve. Neuroplasticity may be one of our most important gifts, and one that is far too often overlooked.

It is time to make mini habits part of our personal and professional success toolbox. I remain passionate about the topic because enabling faster behavioral change, confidence, communication and collaboration is what my work is all about and it is work that starts with the application of mini habits. Enjoy the summary. Buy the book and if you need help with behavioral change, communication, collaboration and inspiring that important step forward, reach out because I am happy to help!

MINI HABITS



Source: InspireCastTV

A mini habit is a very small positive behavior that you force yourself to do every day; a mini habit's "too small to fail" nature makes it a powerful superior habit building strategy. You can achieve great things without the guilt, intimidation, and repeated failure associated with such strategies such as "getting motivated," resolutions, or even "just doing it." To make changes last, you need to stop fighting against your brain. Mini habits show you how to do – lasting change isn't so hard.

- 1. Every great accomplishment rests on the foundation of what came before it: one small step that started it all; a mini habit is a much smaller version of a new habit you want to form.**

Writing 3,000 words daily becomes writing 50 words daily. Thinking positively all the time becomes thinking two positive thoughts per day. Living an entrepreneurial lifestyle becomes thinking of two ideas per day (among other entrepreneurial things).

Doing a little bit every day has a greater impact than doing a lot on one day. How much greater? Profoundly so, because a

little bit, every day is enough to grow into a lifelong foundational habit, and those are a big deal, as you'll see. Yes, small intentions are better than big intentions. Feeling stuck, trying to change, and failing are all the results of working against your brain; the results of not taking small positive and important steps that work.

- **When you repeat a behavior over time you retrain your brain.**

Repetition is the language of the (subconscious) brain. The goal of creating habits is to change your brain with repetition. But the brain will resist change unless it is rewarded it handsomely. The two keys to change are repetition and reward.

Your subconscious brain loves efficiency; this is why we have habits. When you repeat a behavior over time, your brain learns to automate the process. It's more energy efficient to automatically do something than to manually weigh your options and decide to act the same way every time.

When you make a decision very quickly, it is probably from habit, even if you think you're actively deciding. In a way, you made the decision a while ago. Choosing your favorite ice cream flavor is one example.

Your brain, our brains, are idiot savants. We are stimulus response creatures, and the best example is continuing to smoke without considering lung cancer while you smoke or the perks of great abs before you exercise. Worse, this is the strong part of your brain that usually gets its way long term. It recognizes repeat patterns until told otherwise. It's called the basal ganglia.

There is another section of your brain; however, that is really smart. It's called the prefrontal cortex, and it's located behind your forehead. It's the "manager" that understands long-term benefits and consequences, and

thankfully, it has the ability to override the basal ganglia. It handles short-term thinking and decision-making too.

The prefrontal cortex has the ability to override the basal ganglia because it focuses on what could be. It handles short-term thinking and decision-making too. The prefrontal cortex is the conscious part of your brain that tires out easily. Perhaps more accurately, because its functions are so powerful, it's an energy hog that tires you out. And when you tire out the repetitious part takes over.

The basal ganglia aren't conscious or aware of higher-level goals that are unique to humans. But it is an efficient pattern-repeater that saves us energy. So, while it may not be "intelligent" like the prefrontal cortex, it is an incredibly important part of the brain. And once we train the basal ganglia to do positive behaviors automatically, we're really going to love it.

Although the smart prefrontal cortex has less stamina than the thoughtless, repeating basal ganglia do, but it's actually brilliant when you know how to work it. How do clever weaklings ever overcome their dumb, strong counterparts? It's not through brute physical force. I'm sure you already know that, perhaps, because you are now recalling the failed attempts of your conscious mind to control your subconscious mind by brute force or willpower. The answer, of course, is to employ smart strategies to overcome the prefrontal cortex's natural weaknesses.

- **If getting motivated is your strategy, you can't build habits.**

We know that habits require consistent repetition. Don't get this concept wrong. Motivation is an important feeling with many benefits. But think of it as a bonus, something nice when it appears but it is often unreliable.

Motivation is based on how you feel, and human feelings are

fluid and unpredictable. Many things can alter your feelings: an event, blood sugar levels, depression, chemical fluctuations, hormones, health, external stimuli, energy levels, beliefs. In other words, anything can alter your feelings. Motivation is like building a house on liquid.

Why Mini Habits Beat Motivation

There are three reasons why forcing yourself to take action with willpower is far better than trying to get motivated.

- Mini habits are reliable. Unlike motivation-based techniques, willpower is extremely reliable. If you force yourself to do something small towards your goal no matter what, that's dependable.
- Unlike motivation, willpower can be strengthened like a muscle. Leading self-control researcher Professor Roy Baumeister found in 1999 that students who had exercised their willpower to improve their posture for two weeks, "showed a marked improvement on subsequent measures of self-control" compared to those who hadn't worked on their posture
- Willpower Strategies (small habits/tasks) Can Be Scheduled. If you rely on motivation, you will have a difficult time sticking to a schedule. When it's time to write, who knows if you'll be motivated or not? Setting your intention, making a decision to take one small but powerful step at a certain time in your daily calendar can be life changing.

The Mini Habits strategy is forcing yourself to take 1-4 small strategic actions every day. These actions are too small to fail or skip. Mini habits work because they require very little willpower and help you rewrite ingrained patterns of thought and behavior. Mini habits will also get you started because you have made the commitment to take one small step, whether you feel like doing so or not.

Using Willpower, the Mini Habits Way

There was a study on ego depletion that found some correlation between believing willpower is limited and willpower becoming limited. Those who didn't believe their willpower had a limit appeared to last longer in ego depletion activities.

Mini habits require very little actual effort. You're going to be doing one push-up, writing 50 words, reading two pages, or other very easy tasks. The initial effort requires hardly any willpower. Mini habits require very little effort and setting mini goals is the best way to retrain your brain and drop the perceived difficulty of any project.

Once you start and are free to continue, your perceived difficulty will be much lower due to the psychological impact of having already started. Just like in physics, the greatest inertia comes before the start of motion. Once you're in motion, everything gets easier as a result of momentum (and increased motivation).

Subjective fatigue

This is an interesting one, isn't it? It doesn't say fatigue; it says subjective fatigue, implying that we're not completely objective in our assessment of our own fatigue. It turns out that willpower is a battle of the mind, and according to some of these top willpower drainers, the battle appears to be between the perception of your strength relative to your task.

Nothing can completely take away subjective fatigue, but mini habits mitigate it very well. In relation to your mini goals, you may feel a sense of empowerment and energy.

Mini habits thankfully come with a mini amount of subjective fatigue. Subjective fatigue depends on many factors, and a big one is how you see yourself stacking up against your goal.

Glucose (sugar) is your primary energy source. If you have low

glucose in your blood, you're going to feel very tired. If it's dangerously low, you can even pass out. Your blood sugar levels are determined by genetics, diet, and lifestyle.

As for mini habits, they are independent of your blood sugar, but they can help to preserve it by being the most efficient way to spend your willpower energy. It is far more mentally energy efficient to break things down into small components that are easily "mentally digested" and less stressful.

• How can this system improve habit development and personal growth over traditional methods? These are fair questions to ask, so here are the answers.

Mini habits can compete with your existing habits. The brain resists big changes. Have you ever heard of people saying that you just need to get your foot in the door for employment opportunities?

Mini habits are that same concept, but instead of getting into a company, we're talking about your brain. I think of the prefrontal cortex as having a spending allowance before the automatic part takes over. For every task, the subconscious brain looks at what you're asking of it and charges your willpower to get into the control room. You're only allowed to ask for so much manual control per day, but once you're in, you're in. Mini habits are low willpower Trojan horses that can leverage their easy access into the brain's control room into big results.

Small steps & willpower are a winning team.

The perfect team in personal development is small steps and willpower. As long as you have enough willpower for an action, you can take that action. Small steps require little to no willpower. So, it's like having unlimited willpower. You can get yourself to do just about anything if you guide yourself along in super small steps. Try it.

Other methods will tell you it's ok to let up too soon.

The common myth is that you can establish a habit in 21 or 30 days. Some books are wholly based around this false concept. The truth is a bit uglier and harder to predict – 18 to 254 days until habit formation, depending on the habit and the person.

Mini habits don't have a specific end date because we don't know how long it will take to form the habit. Instead, we'll look for signs that the behavior is a habit.

Self-efficacy helps us achieve goals and create habits, but Psychologist Albert Bandura clarifies that "Expectations alone will not produce desired performance if the component capabilities are lacking." Believing in yourself isn't enough. Lacking the baseline self-efficacy required for success, however, is extremely common in people who suffer from depression, weak willpower, and repeated failures. If you expect to fail, positive results are hard to come by.

Mini Habits are a self-efficacy-generating machine. Your daily successes will train you to have high self-efficacy. How can you not believe in your ability to do one push-up per day? Mini habits double as training for believing in yourself.

Here is a step-by-step application guide to creating your mini habits and plan.

Step 1: Choose your mini habits & habit plan.

Make a quick list of habits that you'd like to have at some point. The important ones will come to mind quickly. This will be your reference list for step one.

Step 2: Use the why drill on each mini habit.

Drill's drill. That's what they do. And the author calls the following the "why drill" because the simple question "why?" is the best way to drill down and accomplish anything. Once

you've listed your habits, identify why you want them.

Honest answers are absolutely necessary for this to work, so dig deep. There will be more than one answer to these questions, so try to pick the most relevant ones.

Step 3: Define your habit cues.

The two common habit cues are time based and activity based. In a time, based cue, you'll say, "I'm going to exercise MWF at 3 PM." In an activity-based cue, you'll say, "I'm going to exercise MWF 30 minutes after I take my last bite at lunch."

People with 9-5 jobs have very structured schedules, so time-based cues tend to work well for them. Those who have a lot of flexibility in their schedule might benefit more from an activity-based cue that lets them keep a solid, yet flexible schedule. The cue to use will depend on your (desired) lifestyle.

Step 4: Create your reward plan.

What do you think would happen if you tried to make a new habit of sticking your face in the dirt and eating some of it? (Let's assume that you wanted to build this habit.) You couldn't do it. The obvious reason is who would want to do that? But the brain's reason is there's no reward. It's more like punishment. Your brain would be very adamant against this. Rewards encourage repeat behavior, and also restore our willpower.

Step 5: Write everything down.

Writing something down instantly elevates it above all of your other thoughts. One study found that all thoughts (positive or negative) held greater prominence in the mind when written down on paper. The same impact has not been found for typing. You've got to handwrite it to amplify it.

Here are some strategies for tracking your progress. In

whatever strategy you choose, the author recommends that you check off your success before you go to sleep. If you check off your task early in the day, the sense of completion might make you feel less motivated to do “bonus reps.” Also, it’s a good habit to check it off before bed so that you don’t forget.

Step 6: Think small

Why are we making these habits so small when we could aim higher? And what if you stop at your small goal? Is it still useful? Yes, and it has to do with willpower.

The advantage of willpower is that it can be strengthened. Very disciplined people are those who have strengthened their willpower. But that’s only to get them started. The extremely fit people you see in the gym don’t have to force themselves to exercise anymore. They don’t actually need willpower anymore because exercise has become their brain’s first preference.

When you develop a habit, you’ll say, “Brain, we need to exercise,” and your brain will reply, “I was already on my way to the treadmill. Try to keep up.”

We want to do three things on the road to habit formation:

- Strengthen our willpower.
- Make progress in the present moment.
- Not exhaust our willpower

Step 7: Meet your schedule & drop high expectations.

Expectations are a tricky thing in life. It’s helpful to have generally high expectations for yourself because it increases your ceiling. In other words, if you don’t believe you can be in good shape, you never will be (as shown in the self-efficacy study). It’s not that belief increases your ability to do things – it increases your willingness to try. If you

never try to get in good shape, it's not going to happen!

Step 8: Watch for signs of habit but be careful not to jump the gun.

This step is another reminder of patience. The Mini Habits strategy works, but if you drop a behavior before it's truly habit and go on to add your next set of habits, then you're going to risk dropping everything like an unskilled juggler.

Signs that it's a habit:

- No resistance: it feels easier to do the behavior than not to do it.
- Identity: you now identify with the behavior and would feel completely confident, saying, "I read books" or "I'm a writer."
- Mindless action: you'll engage in the behavior without making an executive decision.
- You don't worry about it: starting out, you might worry about missing a day or quitting early, but when behavior is a habit, you know that you'll be doing it unless there's an emergency.
- Normalization: habits are non-emotional. You're not going to be excited that "you're really doing it!" once it is a habit. When a behavior makes the transition to normalcy, it's a habit.

If you are struggling to make progress with your mini habits, it's probably because you're breaking one of the rules.

- **Never, ever cheat**

There are a few ways to cheat the Mini Habits system. The first, most common way to cheat is to give yourself a mini habit such as one push-up per day, but secretly require that you do more than the single push-up. The reason why you need to be really, really careful not to do this is because every extra ounce of requirement you put on yourself is going to

require more willpower to meet.

And while you can likely handle that extra willpower load, you may be pursuing multiple habits at once, and we want to guarantee success, not toe the line of success and failure. You are always allowed to do extra, so let the extra reps come from you, not your requirement. If you want to do more in any session but feel resistance, set additional small requirements after your Mini Habit.

- **Be happy with all progress.**

Being happy with small progress is different from having low standards. There's a quote by Bruce Lee that sums it up: "Be happy, but never satisfied." Bruce Lee did more with his limited lifetime of 32 years than two typical people do with 80 years each, so listen to him.

Mini habits are a pretty simple brain trick at the core, but also a life philosophy that values starting, letting action precede motivation, and believing that small steps can accumulate into giant leaps forward.

When you complete a mini habit, celebrate all progress.

- **Reward yourself often, especially after a mini habit.**

What if rewards themselves were rewarding? That is, what if there was a benefit to receiving a reward other than the reward itself? We typically think of rewards as things we get for doing something good, but rewards can give back too. When you complete a Mini Habit and reward yourself – whether it's with food, a fun night out, or a monologue in the mirror about how amazing you are – your reward is going to pay you back by encouraging you to perform your mini habit again. When you complete a mini habit and reward yourself it will encourage you to perform your mini habit again.

- **Stay level-headed.**

A calm mindset is the best mindset for building habits because it's steady and predictable. You may get excited as you make progress, but don't let that excitement become your basis for taking action. This shift to a reliance on motivation/emotions is what foils many personal development plans!

- **If you feel strong resistance, back off & go smaller.**

Willpower is limited, and if you're pushing beyond your means now, it means you're going to crash and burn later. When you feel resistance to any task, make it smaller. Problem solved.

- **Never think a step is too small.**

If you think a step is too small, you're approaching this from the wrong angle. Every big project is made of small steps, just like every organism is made from microscopic cells. Taking small steps keeps you in control over your brain. Small steps are sometimes the only way to move forward if you are having a lapse in willpower.

If you're sitting down, and you want to exercise but you really don't feel like it, there's intense resistance. What do you do? In this scenario, you don't want to wrestle your brain if you can coax it into doing things your way. Suggest progressively smaller and smaller tasks until the resistance you feel is minimal.

Conclusion

Mini Habits is more than just a system to teach you how to develop healthy new habits, it is a way for you to rewrite patterns of thinking and doing that no longer work for you. Use these techniques for any situation in which you want to take action. The better you get at mini habits, the more success you'll have!

Remember, change is not the problem it is the answer and it is an answer that empowers the cognitive and emotional dexterity

we need to create, communicate, collaborate in building a better tomorrow. Helping clients make that powerful shift forward is what my work is all about. I welcome your comments and thank you for your support.