Small Habits, Big Year

A 12-week guide to habits that last



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YOUR NAME

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PART ONE

Start Small

CHAPTER

1

Why Small Beats Big

EVERY JANUARY, MILLIONS of people make the same promise in slightly different words. Run every morning. Read a book a week. Stop scrolling after ten. Learn Spanish. By the second week of February, most of those promises have quietly gone back in the drawer.

It is tempting to blame that on weak willpower. It is also wrong. The people who give up are not lazier than the people who keep going. They simply started with a plan that only works on good days, and most days are not good days.

This book is about building habits that work on ordinary days: the tired ones, the busy ones, the ones where the kids are ill and the train is late. The method is simple enough to fit on a sticky note. Start smaller than feels useful, and let time do the heavy lifting.

The problem with big starts

A big start feels good. Signing up for the gym, buying new trainers and planning five sessions a week gives you a rush of progress before you have done anything at all. That rush is the

problem. It is borrowed from the future, and the future has to pay it back.

Big starts fail for three predictable reasons:

1. They depend on energy. A forty-minute workout needs a good night's sleep, a free evening and a decent mood. Take away any one of those and the habit is the first thing to go.
2. They make missing expensive. If the plan is five sessions a week, missing two feels like failing the whole week. Most people respond to that feeling by abandoning the plan.
3. They hide the real work. The hard part of a habit is not the effort on day one. It is showing up on day forty, when nothing feels new any more.

None of these has anything to do with how much you want the result. They are design problems, and design problems can be fixed.

What small actually means

When this book says small, it means smaller than you think is worth doing. Not twenty minutes of reading, but one page. Not a run, but putting your trainers on and stepping outside the front door. Not a tidy house, but clearing one surface before bed.

Most people resist this. One page feels pointless. But the goal of the first weeks is not the result. The goal is to become someone who does this thing every day, even on the worst day. Once that is true, growing the habit is easy. Until it is true, nothing else matters.

> **THE TWO-MINUTE TEST**
> Write down the habit you want. Now shrink it until it takes less than two minutes and needs no preparation. If you could do it while exhausted, with a cold coming on, it is small enough.

Why small adds up

Small habits have a quiet advantage: they survive. A habit that survives for a year beats an impressive habit that lasts three weeks, every time.

Take reading. One page a day sounds like nothing, but most people who read one page keep going for a few more. Even if you never read more than one page, that is a full-length book every year or so. Ten pages a day, which is where many readers end up after a couple of months, is well over a dozen books a year.

The same thing happens with exercise, saving, writing and learning. The small version keeps the habit alive long enough for it to grow on its own. You do not have to force the growth. You only have to protect the streak.

What it looks like in real life

Picture someone who has tried to start running four times. Each attempt began the same way: a training plan from the internet, three runs in the first week, two in the second, and then a busy fortnight that ended the whole thing. Each restart felt harder than the last, because each one came with the memory of quitting.

Now picture the fifth attempt done differently. The habit is not running. The habit is putting on running shoes after the morning coffee and walking to the end of the street. That is all. Some days it stays a walk to the corner and back. Most days, once the shoes are on and the door is open, it becomes a short jog. On the worst days it takes ninety seconds, but it still counts.

Six weeks later, this person has not missed a single day. They are not yet fit, but they have something they never had before: proof. Proof that they are someone who goes out every morning. From there, adding distance is a small decision, not a heroic one.

Three myths that keep people stuck

- “I need more motivation.” Motivation comes and goes, often within the same afternoon. A good habit is designed to work when motivation is missing.
- “If it’s easy, it doesn’t count.” The easy version is the foundation. Nobody judges a house by how impressive its foundations look.
- “I’ve failed before, so I’m bad at habits.” You were using a method that fails for almost everyone. That says something about the method, not about you.

If any of these sound familiar, notice them, and then set them aside for the length of this book. You will have plenty of chances to test them against your own results.

The three rules of this book

Everything in the chapters that follow comes back to three rules. Keep them in mind and you can adapt the method to any habit you choose.

- Make it tiny. Start with a version so small it feels almost silly.
- Make it automatic. Link it to something you already do every day, so you never have to remember it.
- Make it forgiving. Plan for missed days in advance, so one bad day never becomes a bad month.

Chapter 2 helps you choose one habit and shrink it properly. Chapter 3 shows you how to attach it to your existing routine. Chapter 4 covers tracking, Chapter 5 deals with the days you miss, and Chapter 6 turns everything into a twelve-week plan you can start on Monday.

Before you turn the page

Pick up a pen. Not your phone, a pen. Answer these three questions in the margin or on a scrap of paper:

1. Which habit have you started and stopped more than once?
2. What did the first day of that habit look like?
3. What is the smallest possible version of it you could do tomorrow?

Keep your answers. You will need them in the next chapter, where we turn that smallest version into a habit with a start date, a trigger and a plan for the days that go wrong.