

Day 2: Habits



5 Day Reset

with

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Day 2: Habits

Hey everybody, it is day two of the five day reset, and we are talking about the habit cycle. First off, congratulations, you did day one. That's awesome. And now here we are on day two, and this is all about understanding the habit cycle.

I will tell you, this piece will shift everything for you because once you can start to see how a habit is created, you can start to understand how to unwind them, and that's what we're trying to do. Unwind the habit that you created.

Now, a habit is just an automatic and unconscious behavior that you're able to do, right? So your brain is able to do things without thinking. And habits aren't bad. Habits are incredibly useful. They're why humans are so efficient. They save our brain a ton of energy. The only problem is that the brain doesn't care if habits are good or bad.

Your brain just wants to be efficient. And so what will happen is that you will find yourself with a habit that's not serving you. The problem is that nobody ever teaches you how to change a habit, how to unwind it, how to even understand what goes into the making of a habit.

Now, remember, habits are things you most often create unknowingly, but you can unwind a habit on purpose. You can do that on purpose. Once you start to bring awareness to it and you start to plan ahead of time to purposely unwind the habit, you can do that.

Now, the habit cycle requires three things. The first thing is a reward. We talked about that yesterday. Rewards are things that give your brain dopamine. So any action that delivers dopamine to your brain is part of how your brain remembers to do it. That reward is really important.

Now, you're not going to be surprised to learn that actions that deliver big rewards, actions like drinking that flood our brain with a ton of dopamine, the brain tends to memorize faster. So the bigger the reward, the more quickly you will develop a habit. So that's one thing that you need to understand for the habit cycle.

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The second is repetition. In order to create a habit, you need to repeat the action over and over again. Think about it. Your brain is learning. You don't just do it once. Your brain is learning how the habit works, and so you need repetition.

Now, just think about this. Think about all the times that you have repeated drinking when you get home from work, when you go out with friends, at a restaurant, at a bar, at a birthday, at a party, at a networking event. All of these moments where you have done the repetition to start to build the habit.

Now, I want to be really careful here because what a lot of people will say to me when they hear this piece about repetition is, "Oh my god, I mean, I've been doing this for years, if not decades. And so it's going to take years, if not decades, to unwind." And here's the thing that I can tell you, which is so amazing about habits. It won't.

You know, the ability to change our habits is not a one to one ratio. It's not how much time you put in creating the habit you have to put in the same amount of time unwinding the habit, and here's why: because we created our habits unconsciously. We created them unknowingly.

Most of the time, we were not doing it on purpose. You weren't purposely sitting back and thinking, "I really want to create a habit so that whenever I walk through the door at 6pm my brain automatically goes to the fridge and gets out a beer." Right? You weren't trying to do that on purpose.

So when you bring consciousness and awareness and start to unwind the habit on purpose, awareness is what helps you be able to do this so much more quickly. So it's not a one to one ratio. You don't need to worry that if you've been repeating this for years, that it's going to take years to unwind.

So the habit needs a reward, the habit needs repetition, but what we're going to really talk about on today's video is the final piece of the

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habit cycle: the cue. Your habit needs a cue. Your brain needs a cue to start the habit, right? Your brain has to know, "Oh, when do I do this activity?" Otherwise, it would be starting the habit at all the wrong times.

And so your brain is paying attention to what's happening in the environment. We talked about this a little bit yesterday, how your brain, especially when it's getting a big reward, is paying attention to what's happening, so it can remember and do it again, so it can repeat the action.

You need to pay attention to what your specific cues are. What are you specific signs that your brain understands as a sign to start the habit? And now, a cue can be anything. It can be a time of day, it can be an event, an object, a smell, a sound, a person. Your cues can be a whole host of different things, but one that I think is incredibly important to pay attention to is emotion.

An emotional state can also be a cue, a sign for your brain to start the habit. And so you know, you may be thinking, "My cue is it's five o'clock, it's dinner, I'm cooking, I'm out with my best girlfriend." Whatever it is, but how you feel before you start drinking can also be a cue for your brain. So if you are feeling stressed, or anxious, or lonely, or bored, and you repeatedly drink when you feel these feelings, your brain will start to understand that feeling stressed, or anxious, or bored, or lonely, or whatever your specific emotional cue is, is a sign to start the habit.

Now, I say this all the time. Drinking is a really quick and easy way to change how you feel, and that's why you have to pay attention to your emotional state before you start drinking. Now, if you are one of those people that says, "I don't think that's me, I just drink because I enjoy it. I'm not drinking because I'm trying to get rid of an emotion." Let me ask you this: what would happen if you went to a sporting event, or you went to a party, or you went to a restaurant, and you weren't drinking? How would you be feeling?

That emotion, whatever it is, if it's insecure, or awkward, or bored, whatever it is, that is the emotional state that has become a cue for you.

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Whatever you are trying to take the edge off of, whatever emotion that is, that is often your cue.

So when people do learn about the idea of cues, what happens is that most of you will start to think, "So my cue is what causes my desire", because you will notice, "I'm cooking, and when I'm cooking at home I always have the desire to drink. So cooking must be what's creating my desire."

Here's the thing. Your cues do not cause your desire. Whatever they are for you, and remember, they can be a time of day, an object, a smell, a person, an event, an emotion. They are not causing your desire. They are just a signal to your brain to start the habit cycle. And what that means, what that signal is, is for your brain to think the thought that creates the emotion the drives the action so you will go ahead and drink.

Now, most of us, when we start to understand our habit, when we start to try to change it, we say, "There's no thought there. This was just so fast, I'm not thinking anything. It just happens automatically." But that's what happens when you create a habit, is that it becomes very automatic and very fast. And this is the beauty of taking a break.

This is why taking a break is so amazing, because when you decide to take a break, when you decide not to fulfill the habit, what that will do is give you access to what you are thinking. It will give you access to the beginning of the habit cycle, and that is always a thought. So you'll get greater awareness of your cues, you'll start to really understand what your specific cues are that start the habit cycle, because for everyone they're very different, but you'll also start to get really important awareness about the thought that starts the habit for you.

Now, think about it this way. A lot of people will say, "I just went out to a restaurant and the waiter or waitress said what do you want to drink, and before I could even think, my drink order came out of my mouth." Now, there's no problem with that, right? What just happens there is that it's just so automatic. You've been asked so many times by a waiter or waitress,

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"What would you like to drink?" and given a response for what you would like that it just became a habit.

But now that you're in this break period, you can start to understand how that is a cue, someone asking you, "What would you like to drink?" is one of your potential cues, and now start to see what's the thought behind it, because now you're in this break period.

What most people end up doing with cues, which will not work, is they start to notice what their cues are, and they decide that they're going to hide from their cues. Do not do this. The only reason people think they need to hide from a cue or avoid a cue is if you think the cue is what causes your desire. But the cue never causes your desire to drink. Your desire to drink is always caused by a thought that you're having. So you don't need to avoid the cues, and you don't need to isolate.

And frankly, this is really great news, because if you are like me, you don't want to isolate. You don't want to hide out and avoid every possible cue for the rest of your life, and frankly, it's not very realistic. You will encounter your cues at some point or another, and encountering them is actually incredibly useful when you decide that you want to change the habit.

So when you encounter a cue, remember, it's not the cue that's creating your desire. It's the automatic, unconscious thought that you're having that right now, you probably haven't even noticed because that habit is so fast and so automatic.

I want you to really spend time paying attention to what your cues are. Remember, they can be anything. It can be seeing a wine bottle, seeing a wine glass, it can be the time that you get home, it can be the people that you usually drink with, the events that you usually drink with, it can be a smell, it can be a sound, a particular song, it can be a place, it can be a person, it can also be an emotional state.

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Your cues can be anything, and what we're going to do in the exercise today is really understand what your unique cues are so that you can start to harness your cues to actually change the habit cycle, and that is what is so mind-blowing. That you can actually use these cues to understand how the habit is working, and then actually change the habit.

So here's how today's exercise is going to work. Again, you're going to be answering a series of questions. Write them down. Don't do this in your head. Make sure you're writing this out. It is really important that you are spending time not only being thoughtful, but putting pen to paper, because that is what is starting to teach your brain something new.

The very first question is I want you to list all the situations where you feel the desire to drink. Really think about it. Everything that you can come up with. Might be events, might be days of the week, it might be when you're with certain people, it might be when you're feeling certain emotions. I really want you to pay attention and list all the situations where you feel the desire to drink.

Second, list the emotions that you use a drink to take the edge off of. Now, this one's really important because a drink is a really quick and easy way to change how you feel, but it's not particularly sustainable. And if you want to start to understand this habit differently, you have to understand what your emotional state is before.

So pay attention. I want you to list what are the emotions that you use a drink to take the edge off of. It could be anxiety, stress, overwhelm, annoyance, frustration, insecurity, awkwardness, boredom, loneliness. The list goes on. I really want you to pinpoint what are those emotions that you have got in the habit of using the drink to take the edge off of.

And then finally, look at all your cues. You now have a whole list of cues that are specific to you and your habit. I want you to look at that list, and for every cue, see if you can identify the thought connected to the cue. Now look, you might have to take a guess, that's totally fine. But when you encounter the cue, what are you thinking?

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It could be thoughts like, "That looks good", "I want that", "That's tasty", "I want to join in", "I need a break", "This will be fun," "It's a party", whatever it is, try to identify what you are thinking when you encounter the cue.

Now, you may discover later on that what you thought the thought was, is actually different. That's okay. What you're doing right now is building the muscle of awareness. You're paying attention ahead of time and thinking, "Okay, what are my cues? How are they connected to the habit? And what am I thinking?"

This piece is so important. Rewards, repetition and cues is what make the habit cycle go, so you need to start to unpack all of that. We talked yesterday about the reward piece, and today is really about understanding your cues, so take your time to really go through these three questions. List everything possible that you think can be a cue. Try to identify what your thoughts are, and now you're going to have this real different awareness as you're moving through, trying to change the habit, and as you're moving through this five-day break.

So with that, I will see you tomorrow, and good luck with this exercise.