

# What I've Learned in 10 Years of Zen Habits

Unbelievably, this month marks 10 years since I started Zen Habits. I've had an amazing decade, and I'd like to reflect on those years today.

I've seen so much change in the last 10 years that I can't possibly reflect on all of it.

Just a few examples of how my life has changed:

- **Zen Habits became my career.** I had a full-time job (and was a freelance writer) when I started the blog in January 2007, with no idea it would change my life. A few months in, I decided that Zen Habits could be my calling, and I went into it full bore. By the end of the year, I quit my day job and never looked back. It has been amazing and gratifying.
- **I published numerous books.** By the end of 2007, I had my first book deal, and I published the *Power of Less* in 2008. I've also published numerous ebooks (some of which I've taken off the market) and self-published the limited-edition Zen Habits book and then *Essential Zen Habits*. Last year I published several ebooks. It's one of my favorite things, writing and publishing a book. These past 10 years have made me so happy as a writer and book lover.
- **I launched Sea Change and numerous courses.** I've had the honor of starting my membership program, *Sea Change* with so many amazing members changing their lives. In addition, I created a number of other video courses (including an upcoming course called *Dealing with Struggles*). I've been so happy to be able to teach this way.
- **My kids grew up.** When I started the blog, I had kids who ranged in age from under 1 year old to 13. Today, I have three grown kids and one who's almost 18. It's been quite a decade watching them turn into their beautiful grown selves.
- **I traveled, a lot.** When I started the blog, I'd barely traveled anywhere outside of Guam except the west coast of the U.S. Since then, I've traveled all over the world, and it's been an incredible journey so far. I still have a lot of places I want to visit, but I feel awfully lucky to have been able to go where I've gone, and meet people from so many cultures.
- **I learned a lot about habits and mindfulness.** I thought I knew a bit about mindfulness and creating habits, but I've learned about a hundred times as much through my own experiments and teaching habits and mindfulness to thousands of others. I've written books recently on what I've learned.
- **I moved from Guam to San Francisco and then Davis.** When I started the blog, I'd never lived anywhere else as an adult but Guam (I lived on the U.S. west coast). But we made the huge move from Guam to San Francisco in 2010 with our six kids, and it was quite an adjustment and learning experience for all of us. We went car-free and

explored California. We absolutely loved it, and yet we missed our home and family tremendously. Today we live in Davis, California, completely changed because of our moves.

- **Eva & I became vegan.** I became vegetarian shortly before starting the blog, and Eva slowly transitioned to vegetarian by 2010. In 2012, we both went fully **vegan** for ethical reasons (not wanting to participate in animal cruelty) and we have never been happier.
- **I made great friends, and lost one.** While I had wonderful family and some really good friends on Guam, when I moved to the Bay Area I formed some of my closest friendships. While we no longer live near each other, I still see many of them regularly and I love them with all my heart. One of those friends, Scott Dinsmore, died tragically in 2015, and I miss him dearly. He was a brother to me.
- **I lost two fathers, gained some family.** My father died in the beginning of 2015, and Eva's father died last month. These were terrible losses for our family. They still hurt to this day. That said, I gained some gorgeous nieces and nephews, and brothers-in-law, and I love them all deeply.

That's just the start of the changes, and I'm sure I'm forgetting a bunch of big things. Honestly, I'm a completely different person and my life would be unrecognizable now to my 33-year-old self. Life changes all the time, but for me it has felt like accelerated change.

This has been a decade of growth, loss, learning, fatherhood, loving, service and joy.

## **What I've Learned in 10 Years**

It's been a decade filled with learning for me ... too many things to put into one post. But as I've been reflecting on it all, I have a dozen or so notes I'd like to share with you.

Some of the things I've learned, starting with personal lessons and ending with lessons about my business:

1. **Focus on intentions rather than goals.** As you might know, I experimented with giving up goals after being very focused on goals for years. It was liberating, and it turns out, you don't just do nothing if you don't have a goal. You get up and focus on what you care about. [Read more here](#). Instead, I've found it useful to focus less on the destination (goal) and instead focus on what your intention for each activity is. If you're going to write something ... instead of worrying about what the book will be like when you're done, focus on why you want to write in the first place. If you are doing something out of love or to help others, for example, then you are freed from it needing to turn out a certain way (a goal) and instead can let it turn out however it turns out. I've found this way of working and living to be freeing and less prone to anxiety or procrastination.

2. **Small actions really add up.** By focusing on getting out and going for a run each day, I ran several marathons and eventually an ultramarathon. By writing a blog post or part of a book chapter every day, I've written well over a thousand blog posts and many books, articles and courses. Small actions every day can really add up to a mountain.
3. **Working resistance is the key to habits.** What I've learned in working with others is that most people fail at habits because of resistance. When the time comes to meditate or exercise or write, resistance arises and we procrastinate. I've written a whole book on overcoming this resistance, but until you start to face your resistance and become mindful of it, you won't be able to overcome it.
4. **Working with attachments is the key to happiness.** What gets in the way of happiness? Frustrations, anger, anxiety, feeling down, disappointment, procrastination, self criticism, getting caught up in our stories. The root of all of this is attachment to something — what we want, the way we want things, the way we think others should act. If we can let go of those attachments, we can be happier. I've been working for years to get better at being mindful of my (many) attachments, and letting go when I can.
5. **Mindfulness is the key to everything.** If working with resistance is the key to habits, and working with attachments is the key to happiness ... then mindfulness is the key to both of those things. And more. The deeper I dive into mindfulness, the more I find that you can't really work with anything important without it. Check out my [Beginner's Guide to Mindfulness](#) for more.
6. **Health can be made simple.** I've done all kinds of experiments to get fit and healthy, and they were all really interesting ... but in the end, I've learned that only a few things really matter. Eat whole foods — my favorites are vegetables, beans & legumes, nuts, fruits, whole grains. And be active — my favorites are strength training, running, hiking, yoga, cycling and sports. I just pick one of these to do practically every day. In addition, floss, meditate, sleep. Each of these might seem hard, but if you just gradually work towards these simple things, you'll get healthier over time.
7. **Consumerism & distractions require vigilance.** The pull of distractions and urges to buy things (to solve problems or give us pleasure) is incredibly strong. Consumerism pulls on us every day, every time we watch TV, read online, see friends or strangers using products ... and results in us owning too many possessions and getting too deep in debt. Distractions are a constant pull on our attention as well, pulling us away from what's most important, taking attention away from the present moment. How do we overcome these powerful attractions? Constant vigilance: notice when you're buying too much or becoming too distracted, and start becoming more conscious every day.
8. **Life is incredibly precious.** The deaths of loved ones, and the growing up of young ones, are powerful reminders of how short life is. And how important it is to appreciate this gift we've been given. I really believe life is a miracle, and to take it for granted is kind of a crime. I do my best to realize the preciousness of life every day, and appreciate as many moments as I can. I try not to take my loved ones for granted,

because I have no idea how many more moments I have with them.

9. **Focus on one small project at a time.** I often have a bunch of projects on my radar, but I usually focus myself on one small project. A short ebook, a lesson for a course, the redesign of a website. If a project is too big, I make it smaller or focus on just one part of it. I like projects that take less than a month, and ideally just a week or two. Any longer, and it becomes overwhelming. By focusing on small projects, I stay focused, have lots of energy, and feel accomplished as I get things done. Btw, I know that this might seem contradictory to the goal-less method I mention above, but I honestly don't focus too much on the goal (I hold loosely to them) and try to focus more on my intention.
10. **Copyright isn't necessary.** One year into doing this Zen Habits blog, I uncopyrighted the blog and all my books. It was a scary and liberating move, as no other bloggers or authors that I knew of were doing it at the time. But I really believe in the open-source software movement, and decided that none of the ideas that I write about are my original ideas — I steal them from people before me like everyone else. And though I don't try to control my work through copyright, I can still sell my books and membership program. I've found that people appreciate the uncopyright, and seem happy to support me.
11. **Focus on what matters to the readers.** I've learned that a lot of things that people seem to focus on for blogs, websites and businesses don't really matter that much. For example, people track all kinds of visitor stats, focus on how many followers they get, and try all kinds of promotional tactics (like popup subscriptions). These don't really matter. What matters most? Helping your readers/visitors. I got rid of blog stats and comments and advertising and most social media, and I just focus on writing articles (and books) that help my readers. This has freed me from obsessions and other distractions, and instead I have the happiness of trying to help people.
12. **My readers are incredible.** These last 10 years have been a true wonder for me. Not only have I gotten to make a living doing what I really love, but I've learned so much from all of you. The kind emails I've gotten, the notes of sympathy or joy, the feedback and suggestions ... it has meant the world to me. I can't express how grateful I am for all of you. It has been a true joy writing for all of you, hearing from you, being your friend. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I could go on all day about what I've learned, but these are some of the ones that have mattered most to me. I can't wait to see what the next 10 years will bring!

## Tenniversary Gifts

I thought about creating a gift for all of you on the 10-year anniversary of Zen Habits, as a thank you. But I just haven't had the time, with our monthlong Guam trip (necessitated by the funeral last month). I am creating a new course called Dealing with Struggles that I

think you will all love, but it's not quite ready yet.

Instead, I will highlight my best offerings, as a hope that you will consider them a gift, or at least consider supporting me in some way:

1. **My Sea Change Program.** I have worked for years to create the content in this program, and each month I offer a new monthly challenge with course content to accompany the challenge. I hope you'll check it out.
2. **My best books.** In the last couple years, I've created a handful of books that I think will help most people in a powerful way. Check them out [here](#).
3. **A plea to try veganism.** I know many of you truly love animals, and a wonderful gift to me would be to try to be vegan for 7 days. It's not hard, and I would be deeply grateful. As would the animals!

Thank you all for being a huge part of my journey for the last 10 years. Your love and support has brought me to my knees.