

The Action Habit: Put Everything Into the First Step

The things that stop us from taking action are all-too-familiar:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Fear
- Not knowing where to start
- A habit of procrastinating and doing easier things

It's easy to get into a mode of inaction, but building the Action Habit can be a lot more difficult. The reason is that the feedback loops in our lives are set up the wrong way: it's easier to put things off than to act, it's easier to seek comfort than to push into discomfort, fear and stress.

So how do we start taking action in our lives: changing fundamental health and productivity habits, getting out and looking for a job, putting our creativity out there in the world, taking steps to finally work on that project you've been wanting to start?

The answer lies in a simple method for creating the Action Habit:

1. Pick one positive action
2. Make it tiny and easy
3. Set up positive feedback
4. Put everything you have into it
5. Repeat

This might sound too simplistic for some people, and you might be tempted to skip this and go read something else. This is a mistake — try this method and see if you can create the Action Habit today.

Pick One Positive Action

Yes, I know that you have a thousand things you want to do, in all areas of your life. But thinking about all the things you need to do can be stressful and overwhelming, and lead to inaction. You can't do it all right now!

Instead, focus on something you *can* do right now.

But how do you choose among all the things you want to do? Try this:

1. Make a list of the main things you want to do. Feel free to make a second list of the smaller tasks and errands you need to get to as well. Don't get stuck on this step — if

you are overwhelmed by this, just think of the biggest things you need to get done.

2. Mark the top 3 things on your list — what feel most important to you right now? If you can't decide, ask someone else to decide for you.
3. Pick the No. 1 thing in your top 3. If it's too hard to choose, make a random choice — it's better to make a slightly less-than-optimal choice than to get stuck in indecision.

Once you have your No. 1 thing you want to get done (let's say, "Write a book" or "Get in shape"), then you need to pick one small action you can get done on this project in the next few minutes.

What about the other projects or tasks on your list? You'll get to those later, but worrying about everything all at once is counterproductive. Pick one thing on the list, and get moving with it. After that, you can re-evaluate and pick the next thing on your list to get moving on. In this way, you're getting in the habit of taking action rather than getting stuck.

Make It Tiny & Easy

Now that you have something you want to focus on, ask yourself, "What tiny action can I take right now?"

For "Write a book" it could be as simple as "Open a document and write down a few ideas." For "Get in shape," you might choose something like, "Go out for a short walk," "Do a few pushups," or "Send an email to my sister to go for a run tomorrow."

You don't have to do the whole project right now. Just one tiny step. Once you get into the Action Habit, you'll be able to do the other steps later. But for now, just focus on one tiny step. This is how you create the habit.

Make it as ridiculously easy as possible, so that you can't really say no.

Are you tempted to put it off? Then make it even easier — 30 seconds of working out is so easy that anyone can do it.

Thirty seconds of working out is not going to get you in shape, but the Action Habit is about removing barriers and getting moving.

Set Up Positive Feedback

If you get one or two people into an accountability team, you'll make it much more likely that you'll succeed. That's because with accountability, you get negative feedback for not doing the actions (a bit of embarrassment) and positive feedback for doing the actions (a bit of pride in your accomplishment).

It's simple:

1. Ask one or two friends to be on your team. This is as easy as sending an email or text message.
2. Tell each other what tiny steps you're going to do today towards important long-term goals.
3. Check in at the end of the day, or when you're done with your three tiny actions.

If you'd rather not have a team, then simply put up a list on your wall (or somewhere very visible) of your three top tiny actions for this morning, and allow yourself to check them off once they're done. It's rewarding to be able to check the off.

Positive feedback means you're going to enjoy taking the tiny actions, rather than seeking comfort in putting them off.

Put Your Entire Being Into It

Once you have your accountability set up, and a tiny action chosen, then it's time to take action!

Now put your entire self into *starting* the action.

All you have to do is start.

Act as if your life depends on it.

Act as if nothing were more important than keeping your word to yourself.

Act as if this one tiny action were the entire universe.

All you have to do is get moving — open a document, start an email, write one item on a list, put on your running shoes. Devote yourself single-mindedly to starting this tiny movement.

Repeat, to Create the Habit

Doing your first tiny action is amazing. Now focus your entire being on the next tiny action. This is how you create the Action Habit: by doing it repeatedly.

If you've taken a tiny action on an important project, congratulate yourself! Check it off your list, report it to your accountability team, feel gratitude that you got moving. Now ask yourself what is the next small step you can take on this project. Can you take it right now? One small step at a time, you're getting some momentum on this project.

Or perhaps there's nothing else you can do right now. Look at your Top 3 list, and see if

there's another project you can take a tiny action on right now.

If not, maybe one of your other important items. Or maybe you take action on your smaller tasks (though don't let yourself use this as a way to put off the hard stuff). Do the hard stuff first if you can, but you need to get to the small stuff sometimes. The trick is, you're turning the hard stuff into the small easy stuff.

Just repeat this method, re-evaluating your list once a day or so, taking tiny actions all day long, with breaks in between. This is how you form the Action Habit, and it will be incredible.