

February 2007: How to Break Bad Habits

## How to Break Bad Habits

*What are your bad habits? Smoking? Talking too much? Drinking? Untidiness? We've all got them. Within this article are 5 simple reasons for breaking a bad habit.*

Whether it's a perpetual pile of clothes in the corner you're waiting for 'someday' to be neatly packed away, a self-proclaimed disability which renders you unable to refrain from interrupting, or a knack for timing your exit so that someone else is continually left to pick up the dishes, now's the time to extinguish these habits before they reduce your happiness. Why?

**1. It's not fair to others:** One of the great universal laws ruling our wonderful planet says that you get back what you put out there. Want others to be kind and considerate to you? Then start putting the considerate, kind vibes out there and pick up your clothes, your dishes, and stop interrupting (or whatever you or a collective "others" define as a bad habit).

**2. It's not fair to you:** I'm sure you're a nice person, and you pride yourself on having generous, warmhearted traits. So, it's not fair to you that this simple, little, annoying thing you do can wield such power. These tiny culprits have been known to ruin marriages, friendships, and cause the downfall of many a mighty person. Plus, with it gone, you'll feel better about yourself.

**3. Your success depends on it:** Bad habits have a funny way of scope and context creep. First they only happen in certain situations, and the next thing you know, you're at a business function boring the next person with your constant talking. Put an end to it now before situations that require your utmost polish become tarnished by these terribly annoying little habits.

**4. You probably don't like it when others do the same thing:** Think about it. If someone did the same thing to you, would it bother you? Be honest. Sometimes all it takes is a simple exercise in empathy to find the motivation to quit whatever it is we could benefit from stopping.

**5. List your own reasons.** But be sincere: What is it costing you to perpetuate these habits? Is it a moment of peace taken

from you, seemingly perpetual nagging, or anxiety resulting from anticipation of the next blow-up or negative comment? In any case, you owe it to yourself to commit to your ongoing personal development, and to the elimination of any behavior whose costs far outweigh the benefits.

So how does one begin? Just like breaking a smoking habit, bad habits have a way of creeping up on us and slowly over time becoming somewhat akin to an appendage - i.e. they're hard to get rid of. Here are some tips for breaking these bad habits:

**Start small:** While it might not be reasonable to expect that you can just stop whatever you're doing overnight, identify what might constitute as a small step in the right direction. Write down what that step is and carry it out over the next 30 days. For example, if you are smoking 40 a day, cut that down to 20 for the next 30 days. Make that behaviour a habit before you cut that down to 15 for the next 30 days and then 10 and so on.

**Commit:** Promise yourself you'll make this shift, and if reinforcement and punishment works - use it! Figure out how you might reward yourself for making the change. Or, figure out how you might penalize yourself if you don't. For example, put the money you would have spent on the cigarettes in a jar and at the end of the 30 days add it all up and buy yourself a treat. Also, write two lists: a) the reasons why you are doing this, and b) the things that you will miss out on if you keep your bad habit.

**Identify alternatives:** What are some alternatives to the behavior you are demonstrating? Is there a quick fix or solution that might help provide an alternative - e.g. counting to five before you start talking and pause between sentences?

**Get help:** Ask someone to help keep you accountable. If they've been victims of this bad habit, they'll most likely be pleased you asked!

**Ask for feedback:** Because human nature dictates that we will only complain when you offend, rather than amend, ask for feedback frequently. Don't assume, no news is good news, but be sure to get praise when praise is due.



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Rewarding for me and reinforced what I've been doing over the last 8 months - **J. Triffet**

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