

INTRO PAGE FOR INCOMPLETE DRAFT - TO BE REMOVED  
WHEN THE BOOK IS COMPLETE

Hi there,

You are reading a very early and incomplete version of a book I'm writing. I'm regularly updating this draft. You can find it at:

<http://www.habitcircle.org/download/habitcircle.pdf>

This work in progress is meant to get some feedback, so that I can make this the best book possible.

Please send any feedback you may have to:

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Thanks for helping out!

All the best,

Henk

Last updated: Tuesday, April 04, 2017



## THE HABIT CIRCLE



# The Habit Circle

Henk Devos

The Habit Circle

ISBN xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

[www.habitcircle.org](http://www.habitcircle.org)

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# Contents

Introduction.....	1
PART I .....	3
Chapter 1: How Habits are Formed .....	5
The three R's.....	5
Creating your cues.....	6
Replacing bad habits .....	7
Just say “later” .....	7
Count .....	8
Falling off the wagon.....	8
Routines.....	8
Your contract.....	9
Chapter 2: Small Wins.....	11
Coaction.....	12
The stages of change.....	12
Mastery.....	13
Chapter 3: Experiments.....	15
More choices than you think .....	15
Do Something Different.....	15
Grab opportunities.....	16
Chapter 4: The Self Help Group.....	17
Forming a Habit Circle.....	17
Chapter 5: Your journal.....	19
Exercises .....	19
24 hours .....	20
Chapter 6: Get Organized .....	21
The to-do list.....	21

The agenda.....	22
Capture everything.....	22
Review.....	22
Info dump .....	23
Backup .....	23
PART II .....	25
Chapter 7: Authenticity.....	27
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) .....	27
Your heroes.....	28
Your life story.....	28
The FIRO system.....	29
The FIRO test .....	30
Chapter 8: A Growth Mindset.....	31
Praise effort.....	32
Changing your paradigm.....	32
An abundance mindset.....	33
Circle of influence.....	33
Always think solutions .....	34
Chapter 9: Setting Goals.....	35
Different terms.....	36
Make your goals explicit.....	36
Review your goals .....	36
Your bucket list .....	36
Living your dream.....	37
Chapter 10: Generosity.....	39
Random Acts of Kindness.....	39
Reciprocity .....	40
Gratitude .....	40

Chapter 11: Green Habits.....	41
Defensive behavior .....	42
Early warning system.....	43
Chapter 12: Building Relationships .....	45
Staying in touch .....	45
Deepening relationships.....	45
Listening .....	45
Inventing stories .....	46
Bias .....	46
Win-Win .....	47
Emotional bank account .....	48
Communicate expectations.....	49
Your personal board of directors.....	50
Chapter 13: Healthy Eating.....	51
Government advice.....	52
Food dating.....	52
Balanced eating.....	52
Regular eating.....	53
Avoid high GI food .....	54
Full grain products .....	54
Avoid sugar .....	55
Avoid saturated fat.....	55
Use less salt .....	56
Portion control .....	56
Add color to your plate .....	57
Variation .....	57
Drink water .....	57
Chapter 14: Healthy Lifestyle.....	59

Move enough.....	59
Strength training.....	60
Sleep enough.....	61
Be outside.....	62
Make your well-being a priority .....	62
Chapter 15: Know Yourself.....	65
Activity History.....	65
Chapter 16: Balance your Life .....	67
Chapter 17: Mindfulness.....	69
Stop worrying .....	70
Taming the monkey mind.....	70
Chapter 18: Happiness.....	73
The hedonic treadmill.....	74
Positive thinking doesn't work.....	74
So what does work? .....	74
PART III.....	77
Week 0: Forming a circle.....	79
How to meet.....	80
Week 1: Personalities .....	81
Preparation.....	81
The meeting .....	83
Week 2: 10 Years .....	87
Preparation.....	87
The meeting .....	88
Week 3: Heroes.....	91
Preparation.....	91
The meeting .....	92
Week 4: Relationships.....	95

Preparation: Firo B.....	95
Preparation .....	95
The meeting .....	96
Week 5: Defenses .....	99
Preparation .....	99
The meeting .....	104
Week 6: Awesome .....	107
Preparation .....	107
The meeting .....	108
Week 7: Opportunity.....	111
Preparation .....	111
The meeting .....	112
Week 8: Core values .....	115
Preparation .....	115
The meeting .....	116
Week 9: Strengths .....	119
Preparation .....	119
The meeting .....	121
Week 10: Mission.....	123
Preparation .....	123
The meeting .....	125
Week 11: Bucket List.....	127
Preparation .....	127
The meeting .....	129
Week 12: Celebrate.....	131
Preparation .....	131
The meeting .....	132
After Week 12: Your next steps .....	133

Part IV .....	135
The Habit Library .....	137
Green Habits .....	137
Eating healthy .....	140
Energy and focus .....	144
Productivity.....	147
Health .....	149
Physical activity .....	152
Financial freedom .....	153
Relationships.....	154
Happiness.....	156
Authenticity.....	158
Personal development .....	159
Make an impression .....	160
The Experiment Library .....	161
The Goal Library .....	165
The Action Library.....	167
Further reading .....	169

# Introduction

There has been a lot of research, and many books written, about ways to improve our lives. This includes many various topics, ranging from diets to having career success, and covering topics such as improving work/life balance or growing more online visibility. They all promise to change your life, but let's be honest: You've read many of them and very few actually changed your life.

What I'm trying to do is bring the most useful things I've learned together in one simple book, and provide a simple method to actually sticking to them in a sufficient way to have a profound impact on your life.

The secret, as I've been learning for some time, is in changing your habits. Changing your habits is not difficult, if you only have a system in place for doing so.

This system exists, and I call it The Habit Circle. The idea is based on the Working Out Loud Circle, a concept by John Stepper. I've taken his circle idea, but broadened what you can do with it.

The habits which you will learn are the best habits taken from many sources. You will be given a library of habits to choose from. What's essential is that you choose the ones which are right for you. You have to be authentic, and become the person you want to be, not the person others expect you to be.

But there are also a number of habits which are good for everyone.

If you will follow this system, you will embark on a twelve week journey that will dramatically change your life. You will become healthier, happier and more successful.

What I'm promising is a lot, but it is possible because it brings so many things together in an easy to follow system that requires no extraordinary willpower or discipline. You will learn to naturally do what you want to do and what you are good at.

This book starts out with some theory, which is very useful as background information. The first part describes the process used to form habits, the second part a number of good habits that everyone should adopt. The third part gives you practical guidelines to follow in a group with 2 to 5 people. The fourth part is a library of habits that you may want to adopt, goals you may want to achieve and experiments you may want to try.

Warning: Reading this book is pretty useless by itself. The true value comes only from practicing the system that it describes. I ask you to take the effort and form a Habit Circle. If you do, your life will never be the same again.

# PART I

THE METHOD



# **Chapter 1: How Habits are Formed**

*Choices are the enemy of mental toughness.*

*Jeff Haden*

Everyone has heard of Pavlov's dog. Every time when Pavlov rang a bell, the dog was fed. After some time, the bell resulted in salivation.

This type of conditioning is typical for how our brain works, and if you want to form habits, you need to condition yourself the same way. The new habits you want to form have to happen automatically. This way they don't require any willpower, perseverance, or extraordinary qualities. Instead, they are in everyone's reach.

## **The three R's**

This automatically brings us to the three R's of habit change, as James Clear calls them:

1. Reminder (the trigger that initiates the behavior)
2. Routine (the behavior itself)
3. Reward (the benefit you gain from doing the behavior)

If you want your new habits to stick, you have to attach them to something you are already doing. There are many things you do every day which you can use as a Reminder (or Cue).

As an example: When I go to the bathroom, I drink a glass of water first. We all need to go to the bathroom, and linking the glass of water to it makes it easy for me to drink a lot of water throughout the day, which is a healthy habit.

Instead of adopting the habit of drinking x glasses of water per day, I adopted the habit: When I go to the bathroom, I drink a glass of water first.

The reward is like the food for Pavlov's dog. Conditioning works best when there is a reward. The reward has to be immediate.

Some rewards will come automatically. When your new habit is eating a piece of fruit, the reward is the tasty fruit itself. When the new habit is doing something that you enjoy doing, the reward is the new habit itself.

But it's not always so simple. You also want to adopt habits that are less enjoyable. In that case, it's important to give yourself some reward. The reward can be simply positive self-talk. Tell yourself out loud that you did a good job. This, by itself, is a new habit that you can adopt.

You could also carry a piece of paper around where you will write down what you did, or simply put a mark. Then one time per day you could look over the piece of paper, and allow yourself something that you enjoy only if a certain condition is met. For example: If I did my workout, I can celebrate with pizza.

Alex Liang uses his favorite music as a reward. You can keep certain songs or playlists to listen to only when you successfully followed your cue.

In his book “The Productivity Habits”, Ben Elijah proposes the following questions for thinking about habits to change:

- What is the behavior you want to introduce?
- What will it give you?
- How often should you perform it?
- In what context?
- Which cues could trigger the routine?
- What are your cravings in that cue? For example distraction, progress, order, completion.
- What reward will the routine give you that'll satisfy the craving?

### **Creating your cues**

Sometimes it can help to add cues into your life that you will respond to. Visual cues can be great for that.

A classic example is the calendar with X's on it for things you want to do once per day. Maybe you want to read 10 pages in a book each day. Maybe you want to do a daily workout. Or maybe you want to eat a piece of fruit each day. For any such things, you can hang a calendar on the

wall, and cross the date every day. The calendar is your visual clue, and crossing the date is your reward.

For things that you want to do a number of times per day, you can create a counting visual clue. Marbles work great for this. Take a full box of marbles and an empty box. Each time when you do the desired action, move a marble from the full box to the empty one, until the full one became empty and the empty one full.

You can do this for example to drink eight glasses of water per day, or to send five emails per day for job applications, or to call twenty potential clients per day. Again, moving the marble is your reward.

But the cue doesn't need to be visual. You can put a daily reminder on your phone, or a reminder that is triggered 2 times per week. You can put an activity on your calendar. Be creative in inventing your own cues and see what works best for you.

## **Replacing bad habits**

We all have bad habits which we don't want to keep. But losing bad habits is not easy. But it can be done. I've quit smoking, stopped eating a number of unhealthy things, stopped drinking soda, and many more.

The trick is replacing the bad habits with good ones. When you get the cue for your bad habit, do something new instead.

This also goes for social behaviors. Getting angry or upset is a habit just like drinking soda is. When you get the cue to feel angry, do something else: take a deep breath, or count to 10. The reward will simply be that you've overcome a bad habit.

The process of replacing bad habits with good ones, or in general of replacing a negative response to a stimulus by a positive one, is called counterconditioning.

## **Just say “later”**

When it gets difficult not to perform your bad habit, postpone it. You feel like eating a chocolate, but are trying to stop that bad habit? Tell yourself that you will wait a half hour and eat the chocolate then.

Chances are that after a half hour you will forget. Even if you don't, you will be learning to be more conscious about your behavior, and the postponing is a great first step in eliminating the bad habit completely.

## **Count**

When you have bad habits, but you don't see how you can get rid of them or replace them on the short term, one thing that can help is counting how many times you do it. How many cigarettes do you smoke per day? How many chocolates do you eat per day? How many hours per day are you mindlessly surfing the internet?

When you start counting, it will help to write it down as well. You may even want to start drawing charts.

This will raise your awareness, and help you get more motivation to change your habit or to move to real action.

## **Falling off the wagon**

When you've set yourself the goal to change a habit, either adopting a new habit or replacing a bad one, there will be times that you will fail. You will forget to do what you promised, or you will have a weak moment. That's perfectly normal and it's not a problem.

When this happens, just go back immediately to doing what you promised. Don't make a big deal out of it. But keep it at this one time.

It's very easy to say: "I was eating something unhealthy today. Well, now it's alright to eat something else unhealthy, and I'll go back to eating healthy tomorrow." This is a really bad idea. Return immediately to the behavior you want, and don't use failure as an excuse for more failure.

## **Routines**

The most powerful system in habit forming is creating routines. A typical example is the morning routine. You do a number of predefined actions in a predefined order. You perform them exactly the same each time. This makes them go automatically and form a routine. This has a number of advantages. First of all, you will do a lot of things in a very short time.

If you would have to think about each step, it would go much slower. Second, since it's all going automatically, you can use this time to think about something else. Third, you can super-optimize your routine by evaluating every detail. As an example: In my morning routine, I shave with foam, but don't wash the foam off my face, because this will happen automatically later when I take my shower. I rinse my mouth with mouthwash before the shower, but spit it out and rinse with water while taking my shower. These simple optimizations save me a few minutes per day.

But I've kept the most important advantage for last. When you perform a routine, you don't have to make any decisions. Everything has been decided in advance. This saves your mental energy for more important decisions that you can make later during the day.

Routines are liberating, but at the same time routines are limiting. You should have as many routines as possible, and be on auto pilot so much as you can. But at the same time, it's important that you have the correct routines for you. You perform your routines without thinking, but you should think about your routines a lot. Routines should not be cast in stone. Each day, think about how you can improve your routines, how they are limiting you, how they can be optimized. Take continuous action to improve your routines and to make them follow your evolving priorities and personality.

## **Your contract**

One aid to changing your habits is writing down what you will do in a contract and signing it. Even better if you sign it together with witnesses. This way you show a strong commitment. Put the contract on a visible place to remind you. For example, you can hang it on the refrigerator.

In the contract; you specify what you will do, and a fallback in case you fail. For example, if you want to go to the gym two times per week, you specify that you will do some exercises at home in case you can't make it. Say clearly that you are committed and that you will not accept failure or excuses.



## Chapter 2: Small Wins

*I've come to discover that small things, when applied consistently and over long periods of time, have the ability to change your life. Small things, applied consistently and over long periods of time, also lead to massive success. In addition, they can help you achieve health and happiness. And indeed, they can help you change the world.*

*James Citrin*

Rome wasn't built in one day. It's easy to get carried away by stories of people who did amazing things in a short time. But if you want to compare yourself to that, you're setting yourself up for failure.

Have you ever followed a diet where you lost more than 20 pounds in a couple of months? I have. Needless to say, it was just a matter of time until I gained my original weight back.

What I had to do instead was change my mindset. I started making small changes to my diet which had a positive impact on the long term. Things which are as simple as eating light cheese instead of regular cheese. As simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

These small steps are called Small Wins. Make a small change in your life which is lasting. Change a habit and make sure to keep the new one.

There is no dramatic impact, just a small positive change. But when you put sufficient of these small changes together, they have a vast and lasting impact on your life.

BJ Fogg, a Stanford University Professor, puts it like this:

*"If you plant the right seed in the right spot, it will grow without further coaxing. I believe this is the best metaphor for creating habits.*

*The "right seed" is the tiny behavior that you choose. The "right spot" is the sequencing — what it comes after. The "coaxing" part is amping up motivation, which I think has nothing to do with*

*creating habits. In fact, focusing on motivation as the key to habits is exactly wrong.*

*Let me be more explicit: If you pick the right small behavior and sequence it right, then you won't have to motivate yourself to have it grow. It will just happen naturally, like a good seed planted in a good spot."*

—BJ Fogg

## **Coaction**

As you begin to change some of your behaviors, and you are successful in doing so, the likelihood of changing other behaviors increases. This phenomenon is known as coaction. So even if you start out by making very small changes in your behavior, this is the beginning of changing those behaviors which seem much more difficult. As an example: People who were successful in losing weight are much more likely to quit smoking.

## **The stages of change**

According to the Trans Theoretical Model of Behavior Change, changing habits always happens in the following stages:

1. Precontemplation: not intending on taking action in the foreseeable future.
2. Contemplation: intending to make a change in the future, but not right now.
3. Preparation: intending to take action in the next month.
4. Action: modifying behavior, experiences, or environment in the past six months to make a change.
5. Maintenance: sustaining change for more than six months.
6. Termination: sustaining change for five years or more.

It is important to realize that you have to go through all these stages. Start out by changing those habits for which you are really ready. While working on things you are ready for, you can move to the next stage for other behaviors: Move from the contemplation phase to the preparation

phase on a difficult to change behavior while you are in the action phase of an easy to change behavior. Once you are in the preparation phase, the difficult to change behavior will seem less difficult to change after all.

Unfortunately, it is not only possible, but even very common to fall back to earlier stages. Once you are in the action stage, you can quit your new behavior and go back to contemplation or precontemplation. Usually, the first six months are crucial. Once you can maintain the desired behavior for six months, chances of falling back are getting much smaller.

## **Mastery**

When you take small steps towards your desired behavior and celebrate small wins, you get a feeling of mastery. You get the feeling that you got this, that you can do this. This feeling of mastery will motivate you to continue on your journey.

In order to be successful at something big:

1. Break it down in small steps
2. Complete small steps
3. Celebrate your success.
4. Focus on past successes.
5. Understand that you can really succeed at something big.
6. Be motivated to complete even more small steps, until you've done something really big.

When it comes to changing habits, the same goes. Start out with making small changes in your life, your routine, your work...

Once you've done that, and you see the effect of small changes, you will want to make more small changes, until they add up to a totally different lifestyle.

Of course, you will also encounter failures. When that happens, think about which positive outcome you have from what you've done, and what you can learn from it. See failure as something positive as well. I will go into this further in Chapter 8: A Growth Mindset.

When you expect obstacles, think of a strategy to overcome them.  
Because of your feeling of mastery after completing some small wins, you will feel confident that you can do that.

## Chapter 3: Experiments

*If you want to change, if you want to evolve, if you want to grow, you have to do something different.*

*Alyssa Milano*

If you want to change your habits, you will need to try new things. Otherwise how will you ever know what you like? You have to break existing patterns. Remember that you learn most when you are out of your comfort zone.

### **More choices than you think**

Do you think that you can control your life, and predict your future because you can make it? Or do you think everything is the result of the circumstances you live in, and that you cannot change a thing?

People who believe they can make their life and their future are mobilized while those who think they have no control are paralyzed. The belief that we can change our own life and our own future, a feeling of empowerment, makes us happier and more successful.

When you think about it, there are many choices that you make that affect your life. This includes the choice to do nothing, which often comes from thinking that we cannot change anything.

How we make small everyday decisions reflects how we make big decisions. By doing experiments, you will be more aware of small decisions that you are making every day, and understand better that you have more choices than you think. This will affect how you look at the bigger decisions. You will understand that you have more choices, and explore them more. You will also understand that doing nothing was simply a choice you made, even if you were not aware.

### **Do Something Different**

There is a cool service called Do Something Different. They call themselves the most advanced habit changing system in the world. They

try to change your habits by inviting you to experiment. In the morning, they send you a “Do” that you have to complete. They do this about three times a week for a couple of weeks. The Do’s are based on your personality and include such things as:

- ❖ Take a different way home
- ❖ Sit at a different place
- ❖ Say “Thank you”
- ❖ Ask someone for help
- ❖ Try a new vegetable

Their list of experiments is as varied as the habit library in this book. I’ve followed a number of their programs and always got something out of it.

Just by doing something different, you see new possibilities. Obviously you don’t just try things at random. Your choices have to be purposeful. But by doing such experiments you always end up improving yourself.

### **Grab opportunities**

If you've ever seen the movie “Yes Man”, you understand how interesting things can get when you just grab the opportunities that present themselves.

Again, you don't have to make it a random process as in the movie. But when an opportunity or challenge presents itself, don't think too much about it and just take it, especially if it's out of your comfort zone.

So the next time your boss asks who can do something, volunteer for it, even if you don't know exactly how to do it. Or the next time you see a job opening, a volunteer opportunity, an advertisement for a hobby club...

## **Chapter 4: The Self Help Group**

This idea is coming from John Stepper, and it's really the foundation of my method. This is what makes Habit Circles different from any other self-improvement method you've used.

If you want to change your habits, and you want to do it on your own, it can be difficult, and it's easy to give up.

But how about doing it together with other people?

This has a number of advantages:

1. You state your goals very clearly to other people. Sharing your goals with others makes it much more likely that you will succeed in reaching them. This is a matter of commitment, and more specifically public commitment.
2. You are held accountable in some way. You will share your progress with others, and that's a motivator. You want to be able to share a positive update. This is sometimes referred to as accountability partners.
3. You get support when you need it. There will be times when things get difficult, or when you fail. Just being able to share that with others can do wonders.

So that's why you should form a group of two to five people who make the journey together. Just this in itself is a wonderful experience. You will connect with these people in a new way.

The group should meet one time per week. Everyone discusses what happened since the previous week and which plans they have for the coming week. There are some exercises to be done and some guidelines to follow. If you don't follow these to the letter, that's quite alright. What counts is the support of others and the intensive way of connecting.

### **Forming a Habit Circle**

So what does this mean?

If you want this method to work for you, you have to form a group of two to five people. The group will meet one time per week for one hour. In this group, you will discuss your goals, and you will discuss which habits you want to change. You will also talk about progress you are making, and about problems and setbacks you are facing.

But besides that, you will also tell the group about yourself, and share many things with them. Everyone in the group will really get to know each other in a new way.

## **Chapter 5: Your journal**

When I followed the Total Leadership program with Stew Friedman, one of the things we had to do was to keep a journal. I am not naturally fond of keeping journals, but I did it anyway.

One year later, I had to prepare for a job interview. The best way to prepare I could think of was reaching back to my Total Leadership journal, reading the things I discovered about myself, and thinking about how to use these in the interview.

And it's from this experience that I concluded that keeping a journal is really a must. Even if you are not eager to do it, there will be a time when you will want to reach back to it, to understand who you really are, or to see how you have changed throughout the program.

Personally, I started off keeping my journal in a Word document, but later, when I started studying for Life Coach and Weight Counselor, and had to take notes and keep a journal, I started to use Evernote. The advantage is that I can get to my notes from anywhere, including my phone.

Of course, you can choose any way you want. You can keep a paper journal, or notes that you type on your tablet or phone. You can use a word processor or a note keeping application such as OneNote or Evernote. So long as you can reach back to it later.

While participating in the Habit Circle, you will also read entries from your journal to other group members.

Preparing your journal will be one of the first actions you will take when forming a Habit Circle. You will have to start writing in it before the first meeting takes place. So please start thinking about it now.

### **Exercises**

Before each Habit Circle meeting, you will have to complete exercises. You should plan for one hour of exercises per week. You will write your exercises down in your journal.

## **24 hours**

The Habit Circle will be spread over 12 weeks. Each week, you will have one hour of exercises and a meeting for one hour. This means that I'm asking you to invest a total of 24 hours into this. That's one calendar day of your life, or three working days. That's the time it takes to change your life dramatically. I ask you to make a commitment to take the necessary time and to spend the whole 24 hours on it.

# Chapter 6: Get Organized

*Most people are wandering through life like they wander on the internet, reactively scrolling their newsfeed and landing on the random pages that appear.*

*Benjamin P. Hardy*

There is a whole lot to be said about getting organized, and different readers will be at different levels. The very minimum that you have to do is using a to-do list and an agenda.

## The to-do list

If you don't do so yet, it is essential that you start using a to-do list. During the exercises that you will have to do, you will often have to put things in your to-do list.

You will have to decide where you want to keep your to-do list. While it would be possible to keep this on paper, I believe that a computerized to-do list is much better. Best to choose a tool that you can use on your main device for performing work (laptop, desktop, tablet) and on your phone or another device that you always have with you. It's also handy if you can integrate your to-do list with your email in a way that one click puts an email message in your to-do list.

Your to-do list should contain everything that is related to your goals, as well as diverse tasks that you have to complete. It is generally considered better to use one system for work and private items, rather than keeping separate lists for those.

Once you have your list, you may want to organize it, using tags or folders, by the context in which you can best perform them. Contexts could be: At work, at home, on the train, when I have to wait for something, during my focus time. You can create extra contexts and reserve time for those in your agenda. This is a very powerful tool if you want to get certain things done.

## **The agenda**

Everyone needs an agenda. If you don't use one, start now.

As with the to-do list, it would be possible to keep your agenda on paper, but a computerized system is better.

You may already use an agenda at work. If this is the case, start using it for your private appointments as well, rather than keeping separate agendas. However, it's important that you can access your agenda from everywhere, so better to sync the agenda with your phone.

## **Capture everything**

When you have an idea, write it down. Make it a habit to do this always. The type of stuff to write down varies widely. This includes remembering that you still have to do something, getting a brilliant idea for a project you work on, or thinking, "Hey, I didn't hear from my friend for some time. Let's give her a call."

Many such things keep popping in our head all the time, but we forget them again later. If we really don't want to forget something, we spend mental energy on remembering it. Writing all these things down thus helps us in two ways: it keeps us from forgetting, and it keeps us from worrying about not forgetting it.

Whichever method you choose to write something down, make sure that it's easy and fast. It doesn't have to be in the final form.

## **Review**

At least one time per day, you have to review the things that you use to get organized. Go through the things that you wrote down, and move them to the correct place if necessary, for example to your to-do list or to a document where you keep all ideas for your project.

You should also go through your to-do list. For each task, if it's less than 2 minutes work, do it right now. For other tasks, decide what to do with them: plan them in your calendar, delegate them to someone else, delete or archive them, postpone them.

## **Info dump**

You should have a place where you dump all information that you no longer need at this time, but that may come in handy at a later time. This has to be a computerized system, and it has to have sufficient searching and tagging functionality.

The information you want to store there can include: Emails that you want to keep, articles you've read on the internet, things that you wrote down in your capture tool that you will not act upon at this time, tasks from your to-do list that you will not perform right now but could revisit at a later date, notes of conversations that you had, notes that you made while reading a book, exercises you did while following a course, things you wrote down in your journal, everything that you used to work towards a goal that you've already reached (plans, to-do lists, drawings, notes), invoices and tickets, photos and so much more.

After some time, keeping an info dump like that leads to having your own private internet, where you can search for information and get things back which are really relevant to you.

## **Backup**

Always make sure that you have a backup of everything you use for organizing yourself, especially your to-do list, your agenda and your info dump. These things will get increasingly important in your life as you learn to use them more, and losing them could have increasingly severe consequences.



# PART II

**The Lifestyle**



## Chapter 7: Authenticity

*There's only one way of life, and that's your own!*

*The Levellers*

If you want to improve your life, you have to understand who you are and who you want to be. All our life, we are trying to be the person others want us to be. The result is not a happy life.

You can be the person you want to be. Everyone can.

If you want to be good at anything, you have to do it with passion. At work, most people are not passionate about their job, and they are not engaged. This way you will not feel happy and you will not have a successful career.

This is not only valid for your job, but for all aspects of your life. Your friends may expect you to go to the gym, because that's supposed to be a good habit. But is that what you enjoy to do? If it's not really you, then drop it and do something else instead that you can be passionate about.

Over and over again, people say that being authentic is the key to their happiness and success. When people make a change in their life to be more authentic, the results are truly amazing.

But first, you have to find out who you want to be and what you want to do with your life. Most people never do. But if you don't know what you want, how could you expect to get it?

### Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

From Wikipedia:

*"The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an introspective self-report questionnaire designed to indicate psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions"*

This is used a lot by HR professionals. If you've ever had to do a personality test when applying for a job, this was probably it. The test

divides people in sixteen different personality types, based on preferences in four different domains.

If your future employer finds it important to know your personality type, don't you think you should know it yourself? Still most people have no idea.

If you've never done so, take the personality test [online](#). There are several web sites offering the test, and it takes just a couple of minutes.

Then read what is said about your personality type. You will find an explanation of your personality type on Wikipedia and on many other web sites. You will also find a list of celebrities who share your personality type.

### **Your heroes**

Who do you admire most of all in the world? It can be a close friend, a family member, a celebrity, or even a historical or fictional figure.

What do you admire most about this person? Thinking about that will help you to think about yourself. What you admire most in this person is probably a quality that you would like to have yourself.

When you really think about why you admire certain other people, it's amazing how much you learn about yourself. Do you want to be more like them? In which way? The answer to these questions will guide you in selecting your goals and choosing your new habits.

### **Your life story**

Did you ever notice that successful people always want to tell you their life story? Did you also notice that their story is always inspiring?

Telling an inspiring life story is something you have to learn. You will set your first steps during the Circle Habit meetings.

You will have to think about the events in your life that really defined who you are. I call these the Life Changing Events. They are different for everyone, but everyone has them, and they are the key to who you are. Telling other people your story has an amazing effect, both for them and

for you. People see you as a real person. They sympathize with you, and they are inspired by you. And you, by telling your story, are making yourself vulnerable.

## The FIRO system

The FIRO system defines three dimensions that are relevant to your interaction with others: Inclusion, Control and Openness.

Inclusion is related to socializing, and is influenced by the feeling of significance and the fear of being ignored.

Control is related to leadership and responsibilities, and is influenced by the feeling of competence and the fear of being humiliated.

Openness is related to affection and intimacy, and is influenced by feeling likable and the fear of being rejected.

For each dimension, there are two directions: giving and receiving. For each direction, there is the desired value and the actual value. Each of these are measured in a number from 0 (low) to 9 (high).

Let's take inclusion as an example. The directions are how a person includes others and how others include the person.

A person may want to include others at a level of 4, and want to be included at a level of 6. But the person is including others only at level 3 and is being included at level 4.

The first important remark to make is that there are no good or bad values. People are different, and not everyone wants the same level of socializing. Note, however, that increased Openness will usually result in a better relationship and improved collaboration.

However, a discrepancy between the desired value and the received value may indicate a problem, and it is interesting to think about what it means. This may be positive, as in the person is working on being more inclusive, or it may be negative, as in the person is struggling with inclusion.

Comparing the levels of two people will say a lot about their interaction. Optimally, the level in one direction for the first person should match the

level in the other direction for the second person. But this is not usually the case, and it can be important to understand this and think about the consequences.

And this brings us back to inventing stories. When someone doesn't want to socialize with us, we may feel that this person is ignoring us. But the reality could simply be that the person doesn't want to include people at the same level as we would want to be included. Being aware of this will help us improve the relationship.

A difference in the levels in itself is not necessarily a problem, as long as there is enough flexibility. If you prefer a level of 3; but a level of 6 is needed in the given relationship, it is important to be flexible enough to adjust to level 6. An inability to do so is usually caused by a fear of being ignored, humiliated or rejected.

### **The FIRO test**

The FIRO test is a list of questions that you have to answer. These answers are then scored and interpreted.

There are many organizations that offer FIRO testing, sometimes combined with MBTI. The cost of these tests varies widely.

If you do a search on the internet, you may also be able to find the questionnaire and the scoring guide online, for example on SlideShare. Even if you are not qualified to interpret the test, scoring your own questionnaire should give you some insights.

## Chapter 8: A Growth Mindset

*No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.*

*Heraclitus*

If this is something that you are currently not aware of, then I want you to pay extra attention, because what I'm trying to explain in this chapter could be the most important lesson in your life. It took me quite some time to fully grasp this myself, so I hope that my explanation can be clear enough.

The basic idea is that there are two ways to look at yourself, your life, your environment and the world. Some people see those as static. They accept things the way they are and understand that they cannot change them. They are born with certain talents, and try to make the best of what they were born with. They have a fixed mindset. But other people look at it differently. They see their skills as things they can change and learn, something they can work with. They see that they can grow. They have a growth mindset.

There has been a lot of research on this topic lately, and there is overwhelming evidence that a growth mindset is essential for being successful.

One of the major differences between the two groups is how they see success. For people with a fixed mindset, what they look out for is winning, getting the correct answers, finishing their task. When children with a fixed mindset finish a puzzle, they will prefer to solve the same puzzle again because they will certainly be successful. People with a growth mindset, however, see success mostly in learning and growing. When children with a growth mindset finish a puzzle, they will try a more difficult one. They may not get to the end, but they are growing.

Closely related to this is, of course, how failure is perceived. When people with a fixed mindset fail at something, they are disappointed, see this as something negative, and avoid this as much as they can. People with a growth mindset, however, see failure as an opportunity to learn.

They are willing to risk failing, because even if they do so, the experience can still be positive and seen as growth.

Knowing that this is scientifically backed makes platitudes like “never let a good crisis go to waste” and “there are no problems, only opportunities” more relevant than ever before.

### **Praise effort**

One famous finding is related to experiments on children. Don’t worry, they are harmless psychological experiments.

In the experiments, two groups of children were praised for their success. One group was praised for being smart, the other group was praised for doing an effort.

The first group would hear: “You did very well on the test. You must be so smart.”

The second group, on the other hand, would hear: “You did very well on the test. You must have studied very hard.”

The first group was pushed into a fixed mindset, while the second group was pushed into a growth mindset.

Even if you haven’t heard of these studies before, I’m sure you can guess the result already. The group which was praised for their effort, rather than for their smartness, consistently had better results.

### **Changing your paradigm**

If you truly want to change your life, you have to change your paradigms. Change your basic beliefs about yourself.

Recently, I read a story of a woman who was so obese that she didn’t fit in any attractions of a park she visited. She was obviously depressed, but rather than feeling a victim and thinking that she was simply that way, she decided to change her paradigm. She understood that being obese was not her identity, but who she turned into because of her lifestyle. She decided to start exercising and eating healthy, lost 80 pounds, and started

to look gorgeous. Believing that this is who she can be made it possible to change her behavior and live the way she believed she could be.

If you want to have a growth mindset, you have to understand that you can change your paradigms. You have to be willing to question your beliefs about yourself.

If you believe that you are not able to do something, every effort towards it will fail. If you believe you are the person you want to be, and start living like that person, you become that person.

### **An abundance mindset**

Closely connected to the growth mindset is the abundance mindset, as it was named by Stephen Covey. When interacting with other people, there are two ways to see the world. Most people have a scarcity mindset. They believe that there is only one cake, and that every piece of the cake that gets eaten is gone forever. If someone else eats a piece of cake, they can never get that piece themselves. If someone else gets the position they were after, they can never get that position themselves. If someone else is successful, they will not be successful themselves. If someone else wins, they lose.

But people with an abundance mindset see things differently. They believe that they can enlarge the cake. They believe that if someone else wins, they can also win.

I will get back to this subject in later chapters.

### **Circle of influence**

When you develop a growth mindset, you will understand that you can change things. One important skill is understanding what you can change and what not. Also from Stephen Covey is the concept of the circle of influence.

We all have a circle of influence and a circle of concern. The circle of concern contains everything that we care about, including the weather. We cannot influence most of these things. The circle of influence is that

part of the circle of concern that we can influence, including, for example, our job or our health.

If you want to grow, you have to focus on your circle of influence and ignore the rest of your circle of concern as much as you can. As you grow, your circle of influence will expand.

This means, for example: If you are driving, don't get angry about the driving style of others. This is outside your circle of influence. Don't get worked up over taxes you have to pay. They are outside your circle of influence. What you can do is expand your circle of influence so that you can influence the policy makers. It's only at this point that thinking about the taxes you have to pay makes sense.

### **Always think solutions**

As you have a growth mindset, you understand that you can change things. As you work on your circle of influence, you understand what you can change. An important step to take is to make the changes.

Many people like to complain about a lot of things, and point out everything they think is wrong. Using your growth mindset and your circle of influence, when you notice a problem or something that you think is wrong, you should always try to come up with a solution. Pointing out problems without thinking about a solution is called nagging. Don't be a sorehead.

## Chapter 9: Setting Goals

*If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.*

*Lewis Carroll*

How do you know which direction to go if you don't know where you are going? You need some type of map for your life. Your goals form this map.

Did you know that studies show that people with clearly defined goals in their life live longer?

You don't just have one goal. You may want to start a family, have a good career, have a hobby, play a role in the community, develop yourself and be healthy, all at the same time.

Everyone will tell you that your goals have to be very specific. That is true, because that's the only way to know you are moving in the right direction.

On the other side, it's a bad idea to have a very specific deadline. If your goal is to lose 20 pounds in 3 months, not reaching this goal means failure. If your goal is, instead, to exercise 2 times per week and stop eating candy bars, you're changing your habits in such a way that you will continue moving towards a healthy weight.

If you set specific goals with a specific deadline, it is vitally important that the goals and deadlines are realistic. They should be sharp enough to stretch you, but not so sharp that you cannot reach them.

If it does happen that you don't reach your goal, as we've seen before, you have to apply a growth mindset and see the failure as a learning experience.

You have to know yourself to understand which goals are the right ones for you. Your goals can give you a sense of purpose, and can make you move towards the things you are passionate about.

Scientific studies have shown that people who have goals in their life live longer. Even if that was not the case, having a sense of purpose will generally make you feel happier.

## **Different terms**

You should define goals on the short, medium and long term. Short term goals are what you want to achieve in the next days or weeks. Medium term goals are what you want to achieve in one year time. Long term goals are what you want to achieve in five to fifteen years.

## **Make your goals explicit**

It is important to write your goals down. You can write them in your journal, but it's best to keep them separate. Choose the way that suits you best, be it on paper, in a word document, on your phone, or any other way.

Writing goals down makes it more likely that we will reach them. Showing them to other people makes it even more likely.

## **Review your goals**

Every day, review your short term goals and think which actions you can take towards your goal. Write them down in your to-do list.

Every week, review your medium and long term goals. Think of short term goals that would bring them closer and add them to your short term goals.

## **Your bucket list**

You should create a list of things you want to do in your life. Write them down and review them regularly, and try to get them done. Most such bucket lists contain around one hundred items.

I found that the best way to keep your bucket list is as a separate folder or category in your to-do list.

## **Living your dream**

There is a difference between a dream and a plan. A dream is not something you expect to become a reality, it is rather some vague hope for what might happen. In contrast, a plan is something that you expect to happen, and towards which you are taking steps.

If you want to live your dream, you have to turn your dream into a plan, and follow your plan.



## **Chapter 10: Generosity**

Generosity can be defined as the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly.

Research shows over and over again that generous people are happier. Generosity means that you are good to other people without expecting something in return. This can be done in many forms. When you are generous, you will find that many people are generous towards you as well, and that's how generosity is paid back.

Generosity doesn't have to be expensive. It can mean that you make large financial donations for charities, but it can also mean that you choose small gifts carefully, are that you are verbally generous. Paying compliments, thanking someone, offering or asking for help or simply listening to someone and offering support are simple, effective forms of generosity.

The good thing is that all these forms of generosity are habits that can be learned just like any other habits.

### **Random Acts of Kindness**

Random acts of kindness just means being kind to people when the opportunity presents itself. This can mean, for example, when you're shoveling snow or mowing the grass, that you do it for your neighbor as well. This can mean helping elderly people cross the street. This can mean giving up your place on the bus for someone who needs it more. Maybe you see someone with a flat tire and stop to help. Or you simply hold the door open for someone.

Whenever you engage in such a selfless kind act, you become healthier and happier. But what's more, the same goes for the people who experience these acts, and even for those who witness them. Furthermore, the kindness can become infectious and people experiencing or witnessing kindness may want to pay it forward.

Without expecting anything in return, generosity and kindness will make you happier and healthier and will have a positive impact on the people

around you. It has also been shown that people who routinely behave in a kind way live longer.

## **Reciprocity**

You should always be generous and nice without expecting anything in return, just because doing so will make you happy and healthy, and it helps you make the world a better place.

However, we have a very strong rule dictating that people who receive your acts of kindness should repay you. This rule is fundamental to human nature.

You should never be kind and generous because you expect something in return. Such behavior would not be genuinely kind and generous. There will be many instances in your life when you will be kind and generous and will not be reciprocated. You should never worry about that and not be in any way disappointed or angry.

However, what you can expect is that in general, people will like you more, and some people will reciprocate in an unexpected way, and that the total reciprocations will be a great help to you.

Don't ever do something kind or generous because you expect something in return. But you can build the habit of being generous and kind, not only because it makes you happier and healthier, but also because you know that some people will reciprocate and that it will help you in the long term.

## **Gratitude**

Being grateful helps us to be happier. When you are grateful, you are simply happy to have the things that you have. Telling people that you are grateful is a good example of generosity and can mean a lot to the people you are telling.

First of all, it is important to make it a habit to say “Thank you!” to everyone who is doing something for you. But besides that, you should also make it a habit to think about what you are grateful for, and which good things you have in your life to be grateful for.

## **Chapter 11: Green Habits**

The idea of a green zone and a red zone in a work environment was introduced in the book Radical Collaboration by James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet. On their web site, they describe it like this:

*“RED ZONE Approach to Conflicted Situations*

- *Low trust-high blame*
- *Threats and fear*
- *Guardedness*
- *Hostility*
- *Withholding energy*
- *Risk avoidance*
- *Attitude of entitlement*
- *Cynicism and suspicion*
- *Work is painful*
- *External motivation*

*GREEN ZONE Approach to Conflicted Situations*

- *High trust— low blame*
- *Mutual support*
- *Dialogue and shared vision*
- *Honesty and openness*
- *Cooperation*
- *Risk taking*

- *Sense of contribution*
- *Sincerity and optimism*
- *Work is pleasurable*
- *Internal motivation”*

You will understand that green zone behavior is better than red zone behavior. People in the green zone are happier and more productive than people in the red zone. But unfortunately, red zone behavior is contagious. When someone talks rude to you, it's very difficult to answer in a friendly way. On the other hand, green zone behavior is much less contagious, but if you will keep it long enough, others will take it over.

I found that the concept of what I call green habits and red habits is not only valid in the work environment, but in all social interactions.

An environment is never entirely green or red. There is always a mix of green and red habits.

If you want to become happier and more successful, one of the essential things you have to change is replacing red habits by green habits.

Typical examples are: Don't get angry. Don't blame people. Be friendly and respectful.

These behaviors are simply habits that you can learn, just like drinking water, not smoking or working out.

## **Defensive behavior**

The most common cause of red habits is defensive behavior. That's why it's important to understand your defense mechanisms and how to control them.

Your defensive behaviors stem from your childhood. When you were a child, you defended yourself with certain tactics that were valid at that time. Maybe you didn't want to hear your parents arguing and closed yourself down, or you became aggressive against bullies. As an adult,

when we are unconsciously reminded of those childhood events, the same responses can be activated all over. Of course, in our adult life, these reactions are no longer adequate.

Such defensive reactions always find their origin in fear. We are afraid of certain feelings and use our defense mechanisms to avoid experiencing them. The best way to get over them is to confront our feelings.

Such defensive mechanisms usually involve the belief that the person you are reacting to thinks that you are insignificant, incompetent or unlikable. This belief is unfounded, and acknowledging that this is not the case will make it easier to unlearn the red habits

### **Early warning system**

First, you will have to identify your defense mechanisms. We will do this in an exercise in week 5. Once you've identified them, you have to learn to control them.

If you want to learn to control your defense mechanisms, you will have to understand them better. You have to think about where they are coming from, but also learn to recognize them early.

When your defense mechanism kicks in, what is the first thing that happens? You will have to look out for that. Then, the next time when you see it happening, you will understand that your defense mechanism is kicking in. Then you can do something to stop it early. For example: You may want to take a timeout, or take a few deep breaths. You may just tell yourself to let it go. Find an action that is triggered by an early warning that your defenses are kicking in, and that will prevent the defense mechanism from developing further.



## **Chapter 12: Building Relationships**

*If you want to travel fast, travel alone. If you want to travel far, travel together.*

*Dr. Jane Cox, after an African proverb.*

Adopting green habits and being authentic will have a great influence on your relationships. But that's not enough. You have to keep contact with the people that matter to you, deepen your relationships and make you and the people that matter to you know what you expect from each other.

### **Staying in touch**

Did you ever get a phone call from someone you hadn't heard of for a long time? Do you remember how pleasant it was?

Why not make it a habit to stay in touch with more people? They will also be happy to hear from you.

### **Deepening relationships**

When we fill our conversations with a lot of meaningless chitchat, our relationships never really flourish. What you learned about being authentic and telling your life story will help you to deepen your relationships. Besides that, learn to listen to other people.

During the twelve weeks of your habit circle, you will have to do a number of exercises that will help you with that.

It's exactly these two habits, sharing things, and listening, that will help you deepening your relationships.

### **Listening**

Truly listening to someone is easy and has a wonderful effect on the speaker and the listener alike. To be a successful listener, there are a number of rules to follow.

When listening to someone, make sure that you can give the speaker your full attention. When that is not possible, for example you have other things on your mind, ask to reschedule.

Let the speaker speak. Don't form your opinion before the speaker has finished. Don't ask questions. Don't give advice. Just listen.

Feedback the summary of what the speaker is saying. Do this regularly to make sure that you understand. This also confirms to the speaker that you understand. Do this in your own words, not the words of the speaker. Don't include just the verbal content, but also the non-verbal content. For example, if the speaker seems sad (or upset...), you can add: "... and this makes you sad".

## **Inventing stories**

We are not usually aware of it, but we are all constantly inventing stories about other people. The stories can be about their intentions or emotions, or about their attitude towards ourselves. For example: Someone doesn't pay attention to what we are saying. We automatically assume that this person doesn't find what we are saying very interesting. But it's possible that this person just had bad news, or is preoccupied or busy.

This happens even much easier with text messages or emails. We can easily assume that the writer is angry. But maybe that is not the case at all.

Trying to be aware of these unchecked assumptions is invaluable. When you understand that your assumption is unchecked, your emotions will be less strong, and you will not have an inappropriate reaction. You can consider asking whether your assumptions are correct.

## **Bias**

One of the hardest things to overcome is bias. When we meet someone, we automatically start making assumptions about them based on very superficial impressions. Bias is not only about gender, age and race. It goes much deeper than that.

Let me give you an example. One time, when I was eating lunch, I overheard a conversation. One of the people sitting at that table was a man with long hair. Someone else asked: “You are probably a drummer? Do you play in a band?” But the long haired man was not at all interested in music.

This is the kind of thing that we do all the time unknowingly. When someone has an accent, we may assume that they are from a certain country based on their accent. We make assumptions based on how people are dressed, the fact that they have tattoos (or don’t), their body type (muscular, skinny, overweight,...), their voice, their complexion, their features, their glasses, the color of their hair and so on. The list is endless.

Even when we do this all the time, our assumptions are usually wrong.

To improve your relationships, it is necessary to understand which assumptions you are making about people, and to remind yourself that they are wrong. When you notice that you make assumptions about someone, test the assumption. Ask yourself if it is really correct. Only believe it after you’ve proven it to be right.

## **Win-Win**

When you interact with others, an important skill to learn is to look for a win-win. This is not an easy change to make, but it will transform your relationships. Coming to a win-win usually involves enlarging the cake: put something extra on the table so that all parties can win.

Let me give you an example. Not long ago, my sister moved to her new house. After I helped her move and was coming home, I told my wife that I would have to go back the next week to put some furniture together.

My wife’s immediate reaction was: “No way! I will not alone with the children again!”

When someone answers “No!”, it’s important to understand that they mean “No!”. Most people seem to think that they simply have to explain again until the other person agrees. That is quite pointless. The other

person disagrees because it's not a win-win, but a win-lose: win for you, lose for someone else.

So what was my reaction? I didn't try to explain how important it was, that my sister could not move in otherwise, etc. Explaining is not needed, what's needed is a win-win. So I told my wife: "Would you agree if I will take the children with me and you can go shopping during that time?" Suddenly, my wife was enthusiastic about my plan. Before, there was a lose on the table for her: she would have to look after the children while I'm gone. But after enlarging the cake, there was a win for her: she could go shopping and be free of the children.

Let's look at the different parties involved:

Me: I can help my sister, and improve family relationships. Win.

My wife. She can go shopping, relax and be free from the children. Win.

My sister: I can come to help her. Win.

The kids: They can go play with my sister's daughter, which has a similar age and is the best friend of my daughter. Win.

You can get a lot of practice coming up with win-win solution when working with children. Are two children fighting for the same toy? Giving the toy to one of them is a win-lose solution. Instead, find a game that they can play together, give them both a different toy to play with, or tell the older child to give the younger one another toy, so that the younger child is happy to release the toy being fought over. In doing so, not only will you learn to come up with win-win solutions yourself, but you will also teach the children to do so.

### **Emotional bank account**

The emotional bank account is a concept that was introduced by Stephen Covey.

For each person that you have some form of relationship with, you have to imagine that they are a bank, and that you have an emotional bank account with them. You can make deposits and withdrawals. You have to make sure that your balance stays positive.

Deposits are made by doing things that make people trust you. Examples are: keeping your promise, sincerely apologizing, listening and showing real interest.

Withdrawals are the opposite.

As long as your bank account is positive, you can get away with some things. Small mistakes will simply be a withdrawal from the emotional bank account, but the balance is still positive.

When you analyze your deposits and withdrawals, you can see what the state of your bank account is and know where to invest more.

The emotional bank account is similar to the marble jar rewarding system that is used in some US schools.

### **Communicate expectations**

Most relationships are troubled by a misunderstanding of expectations. This is an easy trap to fall into.

Do you know exactly what other people expect from you? Do other people know exactly what you expect from them?

The truth is, we usually fabricate stories about what others expect from us, instead of simply asking.

How about making this all more explicit? Have a conversation with the people you know. Write down in advance what you expect from them, and what you think they expect from you. Then, during the conversation, ask what they expect from you and what they think you expect from them. You will usually see a big discrepancy.

So, if you thought someone expects you to do a number of things, and it turns out you were wrong, what does that mean? You can simply drop that. It was unnecessary. But if, on the other hand, the others expect things from you that you were not aware of, you can now start to deliver on that.

## **Your personal board of directors**

When you need advice, who do you turn to? If you would lose your job, who would be the first person you would want to call? When you need to make a difficult decision, do you know a couple of people who can point you in the right direction?

And then think about a related question: If you would lose your job, and you would call this first person that came to mind, how would this person react? When would have been the last time you talked to this person? Would they expect your call, because you talk with them regularly? Do you keep in touch with them even when you need nothing from them?

A good idea is to select a group of around five people who you think can be your trusted advisors. You can call this group your personal board of directors. These are the people you will turn to when you need advice.

Note that it is vitally important to make sure that you keep in touch with these people when you don't need anything from them. As we've seen in Chapter 10: Generosity, you should always be ready to help these people. When the time comes, they will be happy to help you.

Candidates for your personal board of directors could be: your spouse, your parents, your siblings, your former boss, your mentor, your coach, your grandparents, your friends, former business partners, colleagues, and so on. One thing to keep in mind is to keep your personal board of directors as diverse as possible.

When you are faced with an important decision, consult your personal board of directors. It doesn't have to mean that you consult all of them. Certain decisions may require input only from a subset.

There are many resources to be found on the internet regarding the personal board of directors.

## **Chapter 13: Healthy Eating**

Did you also always think that healthy is an antonym of tasty when it comes to food? That's what I always thought, until I found out that there are healthy foods that I like to eat.

One problem with healthy eating is that it is quite difficult to understand what is healthy or not. There are many diets which will make you thin in a short time but are not healthy at all.

There are also many marketers who would have us believe that the products they are selling are healthy, while the science contradict them. A typical example of that is spelt, which has exactly the same nutritional values as wheat, while those selling it created stories of extraordinary health advantages.

But much worse than that, we've also learned from government sources that we should take the majority of our calories from concentrated starch sources. This advice is in part responsible for an epidemic of obesity and diabetes. Of course, this advice was valid at the time when it was first put forward, in the post-World War II times, when food was more scarce than today and when the major food related health problem was malnutrition. In the following decades, food related health problems were due to overeating rather than undereating, and it took most governments much too long to update their food advice, which is the reason why many people still think that this is valid advice.

It always sounds so difficult to eat healthy, and such lengthy books and studies have been published about the subject. But if you just follow the few simple rules which I describe in a couple of pages in this chapter, you're already very well on your way.

Some of my recommendations, and what I am trying to follow myself, are based on the Zone Diet. The diet itself is quite complex to master, but just applying some of its ideas is easy enough.

Please note that if you have food related health issues, such as serious overweight or eating disorders, you should consult a doctor, and not base

your decisions on my advice or on any diets that are not based on a personal consult with a doctor.

## **Government advice**

The government of most countries has food recommendations which are adequate for the majority of their population. This is less sexy than the latest diet book, but the most reliable source for knowing what exactly healthy eating means. For the United States, you can find the official advice on the web site: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.

## **Food dating**

I always thought that I didn't like any healthy food. But there are healthy foods for everyone to like, if you only think hard enough to find them.

Certainly there are fruits and vegetables which you like? Eat more of them. Are there things you like to eat in a restaurant which are healthy? Eat more of them and prepare them at home as well.

The real secret to eating healthier foods, which nobody ever told you, is that you have to try many foods before you find the ones that you really like. Tried something healthy and didn't like it? That's fine. Try a few other ones.

That is why finding healthy foods you like is like dating. Finding your ideal partner is also not easy. You have to get to know many potential partners before trying the right one. Well, it's the same with healthy foods. So don't give up, be assured that you will find the perfect match in time, and start dating a wide variety of healthy foods.

## **Balanced eating**

Most people know by now that it's not good to eat too much carbs and too much fat. However, banning both of them is also not right. You should always try to get a good combination of carbs, fats and proteins. According to the Zone Diet, the perfect ratio carbs:proteins:fat is 9:7:3 (expressed in grams).

Note: I studied for Weight Counselor in the Netherlands, so I'm obliged to follow the official advice from the Dutch government. According to the Dutch government, it's 40-70:10-25:20-40, expressed in calories, which translates to 9-14.7:1.9-6.3:1.6-4.9. For overweight people, the upper limit for fat is 30-35% instead of 40%. The ratio proposed by The Zone Diet is very close to the maximum proteins and minimum carbs recommended by the Dutch government, with protein levels just over their maximum recommendation.

You should always strive to have a ratio close to this. Of course you will need multiples. In the Zone Diet, one time 9:7:3 is called a block, and a full meal should consist of 3-4 blocks while a snack should consist of one block.

A typical meal would then consist of 100 grams of lean meat and a lot of vegetables, prepared with a little bit of olive oil or other fat.

A snack could be a piece of fruit together with a slice of light cheese. If you're short on fat you can always throw in a couple of nuts.

If you would decide to follow this advice literally, and calculate your nutrients, it would be wise to prefer to err on the side of a little bit less proteins, especially when the number of blocks is high.

Of course, the Zone Diet is intended for losing weight and puts very low limits. How many calories you need per day depends on many factors. For an average person, this might be 2000 kcal/day, or when trying to lose weight, 1500 kcal/day. This would correspond to 22 blocks per day, or 16 blocks per day when trying to lose weight.

If you are exercising, you can use extra carbs.

### **Regular eating**

Just as important as what you eat is when you eat it. Certainly you know that you should always eat breakfast, and not eat too much too late in the evening.

The best to do is to eat three full meals per day and two to three additional small snacks. Eat a good breakfast, lunch and dinner. Eat a small snack between lunch and dinner and between dinner and bedtime,

or depending on how much time is between your full meals, maybe between breakfast and lunch.

### **Avoid high GI food**

Food with a high Glycemic Index (GI) is one of the main causes of health problems in today's society. A high glycemic index means that eating the food will make your blood sugar level rise fast. Pure glucose has a glycemic index of 100.

Examples of food with a very high GI include: white bread, white rice, corn flakes, regular soft drinks, potatoes, chips, pizza, pretzels, crackers and pancakes. It's better to avoid these foods. Eating them a lot will result in many changes to the sugar level in your blood, in turn followed by fluctuations in insulin and other hormones. These foods can easily lead to overweight, diabetes and insulin insufficiency.

Of course, avoiding these foods doesn't mean nobody should be allowed to eat them at all. What counts is the GI of your total meal, not of the individual ingredients. So if you combine a little bit of potatoes with a lot of vegetables you're good.

However, it is sometimes very easy to get the GI of your meal down. Just pay attention to your choice of ingredients. Instead of white bread, use full grain bread, which is much healthier and has a lower GI.

### **Full grain products**

This brings us to the subject of full grain products. Instead of white bread, use full grain bread. Instead of white pasta, use full grain pasta. Instead of white rice, use brown rice. It amazes me that so few people do that, and that so many food suppliers, such as restaurants, offer these options.

The lower GI is just one advantage of the full grain products. Other advantages include: more vitamins, more mineral, more fibers. Just making this small change can give you an enormous health benefit.

## **Avoid sugar**

Sugar has a high GI, so avoiding high GI food includes avoiding sugar. But there's something more going on with sugar. Refined sugar is increasingly found to be extremely unhealthy, and is even said to poison your body by some. Yet, the food industry keeps adding more sugar to all our foods, and most people are so used to super sweet tastes that they forget how unnatural it is. When you start eating foods with a natural taste, without added sugar or other sweeteners, at first it feels like it has no taste. If you continue to do it for some time, and it really doesn't take long, it will get normal for you. If you then try the food you were eating before, the amount of sweetness is almost intolerable.

Even although eating unsweetened foods may seem difficult at first, you should really give it a try.

Of course, just as with everything, this doesn't mean that you should ban all sugar at any cost. A little bit of sugar will not kill you. It's just the overdose that is now normal for most people that is the problem.

## **Avoid saturated fat**

Fats should be avoided altogether, because they contain too many calories. Small amounts of fat are needed in our food, but we usually have more than enough of them even if we avoid them.

But saturated fats have to be avoided even more, because they are also a major source of health problems.

In general, unsaturated fats have a vegetable origin and are fluid (oils), while saturated fats have an animal origin and are solid. Fish oils are also mostly unsaturated.

Again, choosing your ingredients more carefully can make a huge difference. Just taking the light version of products that contain fat can help a lot. When choosing meat, choose lean meat, like turkey or chicken. When choosing cheese or other dairy products, processed meat products, etc. choose the low fat varieties. Instead of butter, you can use light margarine. When you need fat to prepare something, use margarine or oil.

## **Use less salt**

The use of too much salt is one more cause for health problems that can be very easily avoided.

Generally, our food already contains enough salt, and we should never need to add salt to it. Of course when you are baking bread, or preparing other things for which salt is a required ingredient, you will have to add salt. But don't put salt on the table when you are eating, and don't bring food up to taste with salt.

If you are used to using a lot of salt, you may find at first that your food has no taste without salt. Give it some time, and you will relearn to discover the real taste of food, instead of the taste of salt.

When you feel that your food has not enough taste, you can use herbs and spices. This can open up a whole new world of tastes that you didn't know before.

Make sure that you always have fresh herbs at home, and start using them.

Athletes doing great efforts during a prolonged time may need extra salt because of the heavy transpiration. But they are an exception rather than the rule.

## **Portion control**

One common problematic eating habit is overeating. The portions we eat tend to be too large.

There are a number of strategies you can use to systematically diminish your portion sizes.

One rule that you should always follow is that you don't put extra food on the table. Put the correct portion on everyone's plate. If someone wants to take extra, make that more difficult. Cook just enough, so that taking extras is impossible, or immediately after serving, put extra food away in the refrigerator.

Use smaller plates. It sounds silly, but when you use smaller plates, you get the feeling that you are eating more because your plate is fuller, and you end up eating less. Finally, use dark green or dark blue plates. They contrast more with unhealthy foods like pasta and potatoes and less with vegetables. In such plates, you will naturally want to put more vegetables and less potatoes and pasta.

For drinks, use tall and slender glasses, instead of short, fat glasses. The same content looks like it's a lot more in a tall slender glass. You will typically drink 20% less from such a glass.

### **Add color to your plate**

This is a piece of advice which I took from Jessie Pavelka, and it makes a lot of sense. It means, obviously, that you should eat vegetables and fruits with different colors. The colorants in fruits and vegetables are bioactive substances and are similar to vitamins, or can be turned into vitamins by the body. The most known one is beta-carotene. Eating different colors thus means consuming different colorants, which each have a different effect in the body. Their functions in the human body include antioxidant and coenzyme functions. There is still a lot of research to be done towards many of the active substances that can be found in fruits and vegetables.

### **Variation**

We all tend to eat the same things all the time. The more variation you get in your food, the healthier, because all foods have a unique composition of nutrients, and each food will be a particularly good source of at least one specific nutrient.

From the balanced eating, you already know that you should eat sources of carbs, proteins and fats. Within these groups, you should still put as much variation as you can.

### **Drink water**

Our body needs a lot of fluids every day. The best way to get enough is by drinking water. A lot. All day long. There is nothing wrong with the occasional cup of coffee or tea, but keep that to a maximum of five cups per day. Avoid soda (even zero sugar versions), lemonade and juices. Drinking them occasionally is fine, but try to limit that to not more than one glass per day. Instead of drinking juice, eat fresh fruits.

If you get bored from water, or simply need more taste, there are many variations of water available which have a little bit of extra taste. You can drink these instead of water.

# Chapter 14: Healthy Lifestyle

*You're only one workout away from a good mood.*

*Anonymous*

It was found that there are five behaviors that play a major role in health in industrialized countries:

1. Walking 30 minutes per day
2. Eating healthy
3. Not smoking
4. Having a waist size that is less than half of your height
5. Drinking alcohol only in moderation

In the US, people with these five characteristics spend 33% to 50% less on health care costs. Unfortunately, only 4% of the US population shares these five characteristics.

Think about that for a moment. Everyone knows that these five items are healthy. Everyone can control them. Why are people not doing this?

Think for yourself which of the five items you need to work on. For myself, even after losing a fair amount of weight already, my waist size is still not good. I will continue working on that.

Being healthy is such a great gift, but you appreciate it only when it's been taken away from you. Don't wait until it's too late and work on it now.

## **Move enough**

If you have a desk job, like many people, you are in serious risk of not moving enough. Sitting still the whole day has serious consequences for your health.

If you are in this case, as most readers of this book are, you have to think about how you will move more.

Moving enough means taking 10,000 steps per day, or an equivalent in other activities. You should also break sweat one time per day.

It is great if you can do some sports or other activities in the evening or in the weekends. There is something for everyone to enjoy. If you don't like sports, maybe you like to talk a walk. If you don't like going to the gym, or don't have time for it, maybe you can do exercises at home. Just be creative and think about what you like to do.

If you have children or grandchildren, playing with them is a great way to move more in a way that you enjoy. You're never too old to enjoy a game of tag or hide and seek.

However great this all is, this still doesn't mean that sitting still the whole day is a good idea. During the day, you also have to get moving a bit. You should get out of your chair at least one time per hour. Go get something to drink and walk around a bit.

The key here is to have strategies for moving more during the day, and for forming habits that make it happen consistently.

## **Strength training**

If you don't use your muscles enough, they fade away over time, and as you get older you get health problems. Keeping your muscles healthy is important for everyone. This goes for women as well, not only for men. The added benefit of strength training is that your body will look better because of it.

Maybe you are afraid that you will look like a body builder when you do strength training? Don't worry, that will only happen if you are training several hours per day over a long period of time and taking extra steroids. In all other cases, you will just improve your body shape.

There are many different ways of doing strength training. Sure, going to the gym and working with their fitness equipment is a great way. But if going to the gym is not something that appeals to you, then you can do body weight exercises such as push-ups. You could also get some inexpensive or even second hand equipment to use at home.

There are some important things to think about when doing strength training; Make sure that you train all muscle groups in your body. If your muscles are not balanced, you will have problems in your joints. Make

sure to warm up before exercising to avoid injuries. When you feel any unusual discomfort or pain, just stop training. Learn to listen to your body.

In addition to strength training, you should also do exercises that increase your mobility. You can simply do stretching exercises, but you can also do yoga or Pilates.

If you want to exercise until muscle failure, you have to understand that muscle failure means that you are no longer able to do the exercise perfectly. It doesn't mean until you are no longer able to do anything.

## **Sleep enough**

Sleep deprivation has serious consequences. More serious than most people think. There are many health issues related to lack of sleep.

Besides the health issues, sleep deprivation has a negative influence on our mental and physical functioning during the day.

You probably know what it is like when you skipped a night's sleep. Everyone has done it at one time during their lives, and we all know that you don't perform well the day after. It turns out that when you get a few hours of sleep less than you need, for several days in a row, the effect is the same, except that you are less aware of it.

Furthermore, catching up on sleep doesn't help a whole lot. If you catch up on your sleep during the weekend, you will feel better rested, but your performance will not return to normal. Your performance will still be poor, and you will be totally unaware of it.

Everyone knows that you should sleep enough. No doubt you also have a good idea about how many hours of sleep you would ideally have. Great. But still, most people don't sleep enough. The people who don't get enough sleep fall in two categories: the insomniacs and those who go to sleep too late.

If you are an insomniac, unless you have an underlying medical condition, please forget about pills and things like that. You just have to learn to relax. Exercise more so that your body is tired, don't watch too much TV or be on other screens before you go to sleep, and learn to

relax. You can learn the techniques you need by following a yoga class, a tai chi class, mindfulness training or a meditation program. I know these may all sound far from interesting to you. Just consider that they are an alternative to your current sleeping problems.

The other people who don't get enough sleep are those who go to sleep too late. Most people get up at the same time every day. If your wake-up time is fixed, and your total sleeping time needs to be longer, then going to sleep earlier is the only option you have.

Think about what it is that you do in the evening that keeps you from sleeping. If you are really so busy that you don't have time to sleep, then you have to improve on your time management skills. You will have to prioritize better, delegate more and plan better. You'll have to treat sleeping as a top priority activity for which you schedule the necessary time, and not let anything interfere with that. When there is still something urgent to be done when it's time to sleep, just let it wait for the next day.

If you are simply watching TV, playing games or doing other low importance and low urgency things, then just stop doing that. Agree on a time to go to sleep. Set a timer for it. When the timer goes off, stop watching or playing or whatever it may be, and go to sleep. You will be rewarded by feeling better, but you may want to add other rewards for yourself.

### **Be outside**

Make sure that you are outside for at least 30 minutes per day. For many people this is only normal, but some people are just indoors all day. If that is your case, make sure to pay extra attention to having more outside time.

### **Make your well-being a priority**

When I talk about well-being, what I actually mean is your mental and physical health.

When you wake up in the morning, what are the top priorities that you want to invest your time in? For many people, the priorities include work,

children, partners and friends, but the self is usually low on the priorities list. By putting yourself on lowest priority, you are effectively ignoring your own well-being.

When you ignore your own well-being and make everyone else your highest priority, you will get stressed. You will be in a bad mood. You will have low energy levels. Your relationship with those that you put as your top priorities will suffer. Those that you made the most important in your life may simply not like you too much anymore because of your constant bad mood. Your fitness levels will drop, you will get on more weight, and you will constantly feel bad. You will show everyone on the top of your priority list the worst version of you. As the years go by, this only gets worse. Sounds familiar?

So you have to make your own well-being your first priority, or at least do so minimum one time per day, say for a half hour each day. Use this time to exercise, to invest in yourself, to learn, to handle your stress, and to improve yourself in every way you can. Make it your priority to learn something new every day. Make it your priority to exercise sufficiently. Make it your priority to have quiet time and to get enough sleep.

When you make your own mental and physical health a priority, your stress will drop. You will be in a good mood. Your energy level will increase. Your relationship with those around you will improve. Those on the top of your priority list will begin to like you again because you are happier, more cheerful and generally better company. Your fitness level will improve. You will get your weight under control. You will just feel good. Those around you will finally get the best version of you. As the years go by, things will only get better.



## **Chapter 15: Know Yourself.**

Society always tends to focus on our weak points. Think back for a moment to your time at school. Certainly there were some subjects that you were good at, and some subjects that you didn't do very well. So what was the result? You had to study hard for the subjects that were not going well, and put less time into the subjects that you were good at. School was organized in a way to make us spend more time on what we are struggling with, and less time on what we are good at.

Hey, that can't be right?

If you want to be good at something, you have to ask yourself what your strong points are. Get better at your strong points. Ignore your weak points. That is to say, if they become a problem, you have to improve them to the point that they are no longer a problem. But you'll never excel at them, so everything beyond making the problem go away is mostly a waste of time.

As I demonstrated before, society doesn't always make it easy to make this correct choice. When you have a boss who has to evaluate how you are functioning, most of the feedback will most likely be on your "points to improve" or the few things that you are less good at, rather than figuring out what you are good at. You will be asked to improve on your weak points, not on your strong points. When that happens, make this very clear, and say clearly that you disagree with this. Explain why. Make it your point that you want to focus on those things you can excel at, not those things which you are less good at.

A good strategy when working on a plan to develop yourself is to choose 2 or 3 areas that you are really strong in that you want to improve, choose one problematic area that you want to get under control, and choose one new area that you want to try out.

### **Activity History**

In order to know what you like to do and are good at, it is a good idea to take the time to think about things you used to do but no longer do today. In [7], Ann Marie Ludovici calls this the "Activity History". Try to

remember things that you really enjoyed to do, either as a child, as an adolescent or as an adult. Think about why you are no longer doing these activities. Can you integrate them into your life once again? Or do they inspire you to explore other activities?

## **Chapter 16: Balance your Life**

Choose habits that will improve different aspects of your life at the same time. Different aspects are: work, home, self and community.



## Chapter 17: Mindfulness

I've always been convinced that mindfulness and everything related to that is just some new age nonsense for people who have difficulties in finding purpose for their lives. There's a big change that you fell the same.

Until I read about scientific research that showed that mindfulness and meditation structurally change the brain and have a profound science backed impact on the mind. I was a bit perplexed when I read that, and decided that I had to find out more about it.

The problem is that things like mindfulness and meditation is, in the world of Dan Harris, that "Meditation suffers from a towering PR problem, largely because its most prominent proponents talk as if they have a perpetual pan flute accompaniment."

So maybe you are not in need of deep spiritual meaning. Maybe you are put off by the incessant scientifically unfounded big claims and the talk about a vortex into the infinite mind or levitation. Trust me, you're not alone. This doesn't mean, however, that we have to treat everything related to mindfulness by that standard.

So it is a good idea to start meditating, taking yoga or tai chi classes, or whatever may work for you. To get started, you could download the Headspace app and try it out a couple of times.

It turns out that all these things come down to pretty much the same. I've done a few years of tai chi myself. A big part of it was breathing exercises. The same exercises you have to do when you follow yoga classes, and the same they tell you to do in mediation or relaxation exercises.

Even if most of what the gurus say is to be taken with a large grain of salt, it's these breathing exercises in the first place that have a real, scientifically proven impact on your body and your brain.

## **Stop worrying**

A colleague once told me a story from when he was on business travel to Peru. In order to catch his plane home, he had to undertake a five hour bus trip, which would bring him to the airport two hours before his plane was to take off. During the bus trip, the bus broke down in the middle of the desert.

His reaction was of course to be upset, to worry about what would happen. But after some time of eating himself up, he understood something that would stay with him for the rest of his life. You can worry about it, be angry, be upset, be furious, and rage on, but you cannot do something about it anyway. Your whole emotional rollercoaster is utterly pointless because it changes nothing. So you might as well just sit down and relax.

This is an example of applying the “Circle of Influence” principle as described in Chapter 8: A Growth Mindset. It’s also in the center of mindfulness. When you can get your emotions under control, understand what’s important or not, and understand what you can change or not, your life gets so much easier.

## **Taming the monkey mind**

By now, I hope you understood that I am not looking to bring more spirituality into your life. Nor am I particularly interested in things like Buddhism and Zen, which have for a long time been driving factors for mindfulness. However, there is one term from Buddhism that I would like to discuss here, and that’s the monkey mind (also sometimes called mind monkey). We all have a little voice in our head that continuously tells us what to do, tells us things about ourselves, tells us things about other people, and can just not seem to shut up. This little voice usually doesn’t bring us very balanced and sound grown-up advice. Instead, this little voice seems to be more like a toddler, always wanting to get its way, liking to exaggerate, and preferring negative comments over positive ones. That’s why we call it the mind monkey, jumping in all directions and never being quiet.

An important skill that you should learn is being aware of the mind monkey. In fact, the key to mindfulness and to controlling your emotions and to responding rather than reacting is being aware of what your mind monkey is doing. Observe the mind monkey. When the mind monkey says, “This is a disaster!”, you can just note that the mind monkey is saying this. Once you’ve done that, why not play with words? You could say: Disaster is probably not the best choice of words. This is bad news, a setback. Changing the words, and observing this way, you may just note that the mind monkey was overreacting, and that the situation is in reality not as bad as was reflected in the word disaster.

Practicing this, listening to your mind monkey, observing it, making notes about it, and why not even write down what it says to read it at a later time, you will gain so much insights into how you are functioning, and you will dramatically change. You will be able to react to something the way you would like to, instead of being pushed automatically towards a certain reaction.

There is no need why this would have to apply only to your mind monkey. When you feel a certain strong emotion, such as anger or panic, coming up, just note to yourself: “Hey, I’m getting angry!” or “Hey, I’m beginning to panic!”. Being aware of it, and making an explicit note about it, gives you the chance to think: Is this emotion the way you wish to react? If not, you can take a deep breath and tell yourself to let it go, or start developing mechanisms that keep your impulses under control.



## Chapter 18: Happiness

*Surveys show again and again that the average mood while watching sitcoms on television is mild depression.*

*Martin Seligman*

Tolstoy convinced us that happy people have no story. I disagree. People like Barack Obama, Elon Musk, Bill Gates and Richard Branson look happy enough to me, and I happen to find their stories interesting.

In fact, happy people seem to have many advantages over depressed people. They live longer, are healthier, are more successful and have better relationships.

But what exactly constitutes happiness, and how can we get more of it in our lives?

First, it's important that we are dispositioned for a certain level of happiness. Some people are born to be happy, some people are born to be miserable. But, however unfortunate this may be, the story doesn't end there.

In fact, it turns out that disposition counts only for 50% of our happiness, and our environment for 10%. The other 40% is what we can change, and that's the part that we should focus on.

There are many misunderstandings about being happy. Most people think that having more money would make them happier. This turns out to be totally untrue. Once you have enough money to live a decent life, having more or less money doesn't influence your happiness. Or maybe you think that having children will make you happy? Wrong again. Having children doesn't make people more or less happy. The same goes for living in a better climate.

One important thing to understand is this: What makes us happy is not having things, but doing things. When you buy a new car, you may feel happier than before, but the feeling doesn't last long. It's always wiser to spend money on doing things than on owning things.

## **The hedonic treadmill**

Hedonism is the belief that we can improve our lives by maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. This belief has existed for thousands of years, but has been contradicted by scientific research.

When we can improve our living conditions, for example by getting a better paid job, in the beginning, we will feel better. But this feeling disappears in a short time, and something strange happens: We adjust our expectations, and see our improved conditions as our new baseline. We go back to experiencing our life as just what we expect. This phenomenon is called hedonic adaptation, or the hedonic treadmill. We can continue to try to improve our living conditions, but there is no net effect in improved happiness or wellbeing, only a few momentary ups that fade away fast.

## **Positive thinking doesn't work**

Let's get this out of the way already. You may have heard that positive thinking will make you feel better and will get you results. This usually comes in the form of some mantra that you have to repeat to yourself, sometimes called affirmations. An example of such an affirmation would be: "I love and accept myself", or "Each day I become more confident in who I am."

Fortunately, we are not such fools that we believe things without any evidence. That's why affirmations don't work. If you really want to overcome your negativity, you will have to do real work, and find proof that your negative thoughts are not true. You can do this by trying to find examples of the opposite of the negative beliefs that you hold.

So, although many books have been written about such principles and a lot of money was made getting people to use the techniques, they simply don't work. Be aware of that. There are, however, techniques which are based on actual science and which do work. That's the ones you have to stick to.

## **So what does work?**

The things that do work are most likely not the ones you would expect.

The main thing that makes us happy is helping other people. This is so important that I devoted the whole chapter titled Generosity to it. Other things that make you happy are:

- ❖ Gratitude. Being grateful makes us feel better. One of the reasons is that it makes us see the good things that we have in life, and the things we have to be grateful for. This doesn't have to be gratitude towards specific people. It can also be gratitude for being so lucky to have the things that you have. Gratitude can be practices. Saying “thank you” helps, and many people become much happier when they start a gratitude journal: write down every evening what they are grateful for.
- ❖ Forgiving. Having bad feelings towards others because of events from the past makes us miserable. If you can learn to forgive others, you can begin to feel much better. An added bonus is that you will have an improved relationship with those you've forgiven.



# **PART III**

**The Process**



## **Week 0: Forming a circle**

*The act of beginning is a significant part of the challenge facing people who want to work.*

*Ben Elijah*

Now let's get to the real work.

First thing you have to do is start your journal. Take a paper booklet, start a Word document, start a note on your phone, or use any way that suits you. Just make sure that you can take it to the Circle Meeting.

Next, you will have to start your to-do list, if you still don't have one. During your twelve week journey, you will regularly have to use it. If you already use a to-do list or task management software, just continue using that. If not, you need to look out for what you want to use. Do you just want to use the task list in your email client? You want to install something on your computer, tablet or phone? Or do you prefer to use a list on paper? Figure out what works best for you, and prepare to start using it.

Now you have to find a group of people who are interested in joining you. Best is to have a group of three to five people, but two people can work as well. If your group becomes larger (six people or more), split it up into groups of three to five people.

Keep in mind that you will share personal things with the group. Including only people that you've never met before works great. If you're including people you know, make sure that you can trust them, and that you can feel comfortable sharing personal things with them. Including your boss or manager, for example, would not be a good idea. Including your life partner or best friend however could work out well.

If you are having problems finding a group of people, you could use the following strategies:

- If you work in a company or organization, send an email to an internal email list, or post a message on an internal social network or message board.

- If you are a student, take a few minutes at the beginning or end of a class to invite people to join you.
- Post a message on social media. Use the hashtag #habitcircle.
- Look for people in an organization you are a member of. Ask to put a message in their newsletter or post a message on a forum or other medium they operate.
- Hang a message on a message board. They can sometimes be found in school buildings, company buildings or supermarkets.
- Post a classified ad.
- Contact me.

The more difficult it is for you to find a group of people, the more you will get out of this.

### **How to meet**

Ideally you should meet in person. In a company, you can of course simply meet in a meeting room. Otherwise, you can meet at someone's house, or in the lobby of a hotel. If the people from the group live too far away from each other to meet in person, you can meet virtually. There are many teleconferencing tools available now, such as WebEx, Blab, Skype, or the hot communication app of the moment.

If you meet in person, and you keep your journal and other things on your laptop, remember that the meeting place will have to accommodate for laptops.

# **Week 1: Personalities**

In the first week, you will learn something about your own personality, get to know the other people in the group, start learning to tell your story to others, start learning to listen to others, start discovering your goals, start taking actions towards your goals, and start experimenting. In addition to all that, you will start getting organized better by using your to-do list and your calendar. You will sign a contract to show your commitment to the group.

## **Preparation**

Before the first meeting takes place, I want you to complete the MBTI test. Just search for Briggs Myers on the internet and you will find several sites offering the test for free. The test should take you just a couple of minutes, and you will see the result immediately. One version of the test which I can recommend is at HumanMetrics:

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

Write the result down in your journal. It's just four letters.

Read up on your personality type. Read the Wikipedia page, or read the HumanMetrics page. Search also for celebrities sharing your personality type.

When you read about your personality type, do you recognize yourself in what is described? Write your conclusion down in your journal.

Next, think about a specific goal you would like to accomplish. It may be more than one goal. You can refer to the Goal Library at the end of this book to find inspiration.

It would be best to split this up already in a long term goal and a short term goal. The short term goal is something you want to achieve in the next twelve weeks. The long term goal is something you want to achieve in a couple of years' time, and the short term goal should be a step in that direction.

I would also really like to know that you are doing this. Please send me a message on twitter: "I'm forming a #habitcircle. @henkdv" If you don't

have a twitter account, just create one. It will take no more than a couple of minutes. You can fill in all details later on.

### **Your contract**

Finally, before the meeting starts, prepare your contract. Print it out and take it with you, write it down on paper and take it with you, or make sure that you have paper with you to write it on during the meeting. Your contract is the basis of your commitment to forming a habit circle and starting to live your dream. A sample contract is included below. If you have specific goals in mind, then it is better to include your specific goals in the contract.

Contract between:

- *Name*
- Members of the habit circle: *names of other members*

I, *name*, commit to participating in the Habit Circle. I will attend all the meetings and take the necessary time to prepare for the meetings. I will plan this time to make sure it gets done. In case I can not make it to a meeting, I will inform the other members of the Circle and try to move the meeting to a more convenient time. If that doesn't work out, I will catch up with the other members after the meeting. If I can not prepare for the meeting, I will inform the other members in time and try to find a solution.

I also commit to trying new things and changing my habits in order to become happier, healthier and more successful. I will report my progress honestly and openly to the other members, so that they can help me achieve my goals.

I am ready to start living my dream.

*Signatures*

## The meeting

Introduce yourself: 5 min

Choose a facilitator: 5 min

Discuss your goal: 5 min

Your contract: 5 min

Choose one action: 10 min

Discuss your MBTI: 15 min

Choose one experiment: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Introduce yourself: 5 min**

Everyone gives a short introduction about themselves.

### **Choose a facilitator: 5 min**

You may already know in advance who will be the facilitator, but this is a good time to make this clear. Decide also on other roles which may be needed. Do you need any logistics? Does someone have to reserve a location where you will meet? Do you want a place for electronic exchange? Will you keep in touch using WhatsApp, or will you use some other online service? Decide who will look into this further.

You should also have a timekeeper, who will make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that you stay inside the allotted time for each subject.

Whatever your role is, make sure to put your tasks on your to-do list.

### **Discuss your goal: 5 min**

Everyone gets the chance to briefly say what they want to accomplish in the next twelve weeks. Write everyone's goals down in your journal.

Your goal will most likely still change during the next few weeks, but it's important to have a starting point right now.

### **Your contract: 5 min**

Now is the time for everyone to sign your contract, and for you to sign everyone else's contract. Discuss it briefly.

### **Choose one action: 10 min**

During the next week, take one simple action that should get you on the way to your goal. It can be a simple action that takes a couple of minutes. Maybe write an email, give someone a call, look something up, read something.

Choose one action, and share it with the group, or ask the group to give you ideas.

Write the goal down in your to-do list.

### **Discuss your MBTI: 15 min**

Give everyone the time to explain what their MBTI is, what they could find online about it, and what it means to them. The person who is speaking can use this as an opportunity to learn to share personal things. The people who are listening can use this to practice their listening skills.

### **Choose one experiment: 10 min**

Everyone has to choose one experiment. Choose something that you will do different during the next week. You can find inspiration in the Experiment Library at the end of this book.

Share your experiment with the rest of the group, and write it down in your to-do list.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week (one simple action and one experiment).

When you perform the action and the experiment, you should write it down in your journal, and write what the experience was like. Did you like to do it? Will you do it again? Did you learn something from it?



## **Week 2: 10 Years**

In the second week, you will think about who you want to be 10 years from now, and how this should affect your goals. You will continue to learn to tell your story and to listen to others. You will start thinking about habits that would be good for you. You will also continue experimenting.

### **Preparation**

We begin the preparation by evaluating our actions which we planned during the previous meeting.

In the previous meeting, you wrote one action down in your to-do list. This action should bring you closer to your goal. Did you perform the action? What was the result? If you have not done so yet, write this down in your journal.

In the previous meeting, you were choosing one experiment and wrote it down in your to-do list. Did you perform the experiment? How did that go? Was it a success? What did you learn from it? If you have not done so yet, write the answers down in your journal.

Think about how you have used your to-do list during the past week. Did you use it at all? Was it useful for you? Write the answers down in your journal.

Answer the same question about your agenda. Did you put activities in your agenda? Did this help you making time for those activities? Did you put the time for the meeting preparation in your agenda? Do you see how this helps you to make sure you find the time to do it? Write the answers down in your journal.

### **Preparation: 10 years from now**

Now take some time to think about yourself 10 years from now. Assume you are applying for a job 10 years from now. Which job would you apply for?

When you apply for the job, you will need a resume. Write a small resume that starts from where you are now (current job, current studies, or whichever activities you are currently engaged in) and contains the next steps in your education and career up to that point in time, 10 years from now. Write this resume in your journal, together with a short job description of the job you would be applying for.

Maybe you don't plan to apply for a job, but instead plan on being creative (writer, musician,...) or self-employed. In that case, write down what it is you want to do 10 years from now, and what the steps are to get there.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 15 min

Discuss your resume 10 years from now: 20 min

Choose one experiment: 10 min

Choose one new habit: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 15 min**

Last week, you had 2 special actions to take: You had to execute one action that would bring your goal closer, and you had to perform one experiment:

First, let everyone talk about the action they took towards their goal. Let them also recap what their goal was and how this action brings it closer. If you see any action that would be the logical next step, write that down in your to-do list.

Then, let everyone discuss the experience they had from the chosen experiment. What was learnt from it? Is this a good start for forming a new habit?

Finally, let everyone talk about their experience with time management. Did everyone use the to-do list and the calendar? How is that going?

## **Discuss your resume 10 years from now: 20 min**

Everyone shares their resume 10 years from now, or explains what it looks like. Discuss also how this resume relates to the goal which was formulated last week. Are these in line? Take notes of the remarks regarding this in your journal.

After talking about your resume 10 years from now, try to formulate your long term and short term goal again, and make sure that they are aligned with the resume. Write the new modified goal down in your journal and share it with the group.

## **Choose one experiment: 10 min**

Now is the time to choose a new experiment. You did this last week as well, but now you have your first experience, feedback and a clearer idea of what your goal is. Just like last week, you can choose the experiment from the Experiment Library at the back of the book. It doesn't have to be from there though, and the more you will be used to doing this, the less you will want to refer to the Experiment Library at the back.

Just like last week, share your experiment with the group and write it down in your journal. Explain to the group why you are choosing this experiment, and write that down in your journal as well.

## **Choose one new habit: 10 min**

Now is that time that you start thinking for the first time about new habits that will help you reach your goals easier.

It is very likely that you already have something in mind that you wanted to change in your life for a long time. Maybe you wanted to lose weight, to eat healthier, to keep in touch more with friends. Maybe you've made a new year's resolution which you didn't keep. If that is the case, you've found the perfect start for changing your habits.

Or maybe the experiment from last week gave you the idea for a new habit.

If not, think about what you need for your goal or look through the Habit Library.

Once you identified a good habit to adopt, or an existing habit to lose, there are some things to think about:

- Does this habit align with the goal you defined? If not, you may have found an additional goal that you want to pursue.
- If you want to lose a habit, with which new habit can you replace it?
- What will be the cue for your new habit? Make sure to define your habit as a “when” statement: “When I pass through the hallway, I will pause for a minute to do some breathing exercises.”
- What will be your reward when you complete the action that constitutes your new habit?

Share the answer to all these questions with the group, and write them down in your journal.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. Everyone should list at least one experiment and one new habit for the next week. Some will also list actions which follow from what was learned from last week.

Again, just as last week, when you perform the experiment, try the new habit, or take other actions that you agreed upon in the meeting, write your experience down in your journal.

## **Week 3: Heroes**

In the third week, you will think about people that you look up to, and why that is the case. You will think further about how you can realize your goal. You will think about activities that you liked in the past, and use those to find inspiration for what to do now. You will continue to tell your story to the group, and to listen to the other members.

### **Preparation**

Just like last week, we begin the preparation by thinking about the actions that we planned in the previous meeting.

Last week, you wrote down at least one experiment and one new habit you wanted to try, and possibly other items. Did you perform all those? Did you write your experience down in your journal? If not, do so now. Ask yourself how meaningful the experience was to you, if you will continue to do the same things, or if it brought you ideas to try other things.

#### **Preparation: Heroes**

Next, think about people that you look up to. Think about family members, historical people, fictional characters, celebrities, writers or artists, or simply friends or colleagues. Which people do you admire the most? If you don't find someone, think about your favorite movie, and maybe the main character in that movie can be a good choice. Write a list down in your journal.

Next, choose one or two people from your list. Write a half page about each of them. Write what you admire about them. Write why they are so important to you.

These people are your heroes. You will tell their stories to the group during the meeting. Understanding why you look up to them will help you understand yourself better.

## **Preparation: Activity History**

Think about what you liked to do as a child. Were there certain games you liked to play? Were there places you liked to go? Creative things you liked to do? Hobbies that you had? Things (preferably healthy) that you liked to eat?

In your journal, write down three activities that you enjoyed as a child.

As a teenager, did you engage in sports? In your past, did you engage in cultural activities? Did you do anything creative? Did you have hobbies?

In your journal, write down three activities that you enjoyed before but are no longer doing.

Now, think about things that you've always wanted to do but never got to.

In your journal, write down three things you always wanted to do.

It's important to write these things down, because you will need this a few weeks from now.

Finally, let the lists that you have inspire you. Think about three things that you could do now, that are realistic and that would make you happy or bring you closer to your goals. Ideally, you should make this something that you can do in a small break. This will make it easy to follow through. Of course you can also go for getting really engaged in something, but do so only when you are really ready to commit.

Note: This exercise is adapted from [7].

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Discuss your heroes: 15 min

Activity History: 20 min

Choose one action: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

## **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Last week, everyone decided on at least one experiment and one new habit to try out. Some of you may have decided on other things as well.

First, let everyone talk about their experiment. This is the second experiment you did. How was this different from the first time? What will you take away from it? Do you think it can lead to permanent change in your behavior? Do you want to adopt a new habit related to this?

Then, let everyone discuss the new habit they wanted to try. Did you do it as many times as you wanted? Did you struggle to get it done? Is something holding you back?

If you had any type of difficulties, discuss how you can overcome them.

If you want to continue your new habit, or change it a bit, or discontinue it, or overcome problems related to it, write that down in your journal.

## **Discuss your heroes: 15 min**

Everyone shares the stories about their heroes and why these heroes are an inspiration. Discuss the character traits of the heroes that you admire. Do you see a similarity with the MBTI personality type you discovered two weeks ago? Do you see how the qualities of your heroes would help you realize your goals?

## **Activity History: 20 min**

Everyone shares their activity history. Talk about the things that you used to like.

Talk about the various suggestions that you had which you could do right now. Which ones are realistic? Together, discuss which of the proposed activities would be best, and decide on one activity for each of you to start doing. Make this very specific. If this is an activity you can do in the course of 15 minutes, you could decide to do it each day, or a number of times per week. Make sure that you have a clear schedule, as well as answers to practical questions: Where will you do this? Which materials do you need, and where will you get them?

Make sure that you define a trigger for your activity. The trigger can be your afternoon break, before you leave to work, or a specific hour. If you decide on a specific hour, put it in your agenda as a recurring appointment, or install a reminder on your phone.

### **Choose one action: 10 min**

Choose one action that will bring your goal closer and that you can complete during the next week. Share it with the group and put it on your to-do list.

You've done this before, in the very first week, but now that you've learned a lot, you should be able to make a better choice.

As the previous time, the action can be something small, but make it something meaningful that will help you reach your goal.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one activity from your activity history, and one action to bring you closer to your goal. Recap also what you will do related to the new habit you tried during the past week.

Note that the Firo B test is required for next week. Do you plan to take a paid assessment? Or do you plan to self-score? If you will take a paid assessment, keep in mind that it can take some time to get the results, so don't wait with that.

Plan the Firo B test in your agenda, and plan another half hour for the rest of the preparation.

Again, just as last week, when you perform the activity, perform your action, or do other things you agreed upon in the meeting, write your experience down in your journal.

## **Week 4: Relationships**

In the fourth week, you will think about how you interact with other people. The Firo B test will help you understand that better. You will also think about events in your life that made you who you are, and continue to tell your story to the others in your circle and to use your listening skills.

### **Preparation: Firo B**

This week, you have to do the Firo B Test. There are several options to do that. Do this as soon as possible. The rest of the preparation can be done later.

There are commercial services available that will do an assessment for you and give you an interpretation of the report. Prices vary, but they are all paid. You can find these services on the internet.

Alternatively, if you don't want to spend money on the test, you can self-score. If you want to do this, you can search SlideShare for the Firo B questionnaire and the Firo B scoring key.

### **Preparation**

Just like the other weeks, we start the preparation by thinking about what we did during this week. Did you perform the activity from your Activity History? Did you enjoy that? Is this something you will continue to do? Write the answers down in your journal.

Did you take actions towards your goal? Was this successful? Do you want to plan any follow-up actions? Write this also down in your journal.

Finally, think again about the habit you wanted to try 2 weeks ago. Or you still doing that, or something resulting from that? Write it down in your journal.

## **Preparation: Firo B**

Write the result of your Firo B test down in your journal. Think for a moment what this means to you. Do you recognize yourself in the results?

Assess also how this corresponds to reality. The values of your Firo B test represent what you would find ideal. Does the amount of inclusion, control and affection that you give and receive in reality correspond with the values that you find ideal? (Note that these questions have already been answered in your report if the test you took was the Firo Element B test.)

If there is a discrepancy between ideal and actual values, why do you think this is the case? Is there something you can do to change that?

As always, write the answer to all these questions down in your journal.

## **Preparation: Life changing event**

Everyone has certain moments in their life which changed them dramatically, and made them who they are. One such moment for me, for example, is when I decided to study computer science. Your life changing events may be decisions that you made, people that you met, people that you lost, events where you were present, places that you visited, a book that you read, a movie that you saw, and so much more.

Take some time to think about the moments in life which really changed you. Write it down in your journal. Write down what happened exactly, and which impact it has had on your life.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Discuss one life changing event: 20 min

FIRO B Test: 15 min

Choose one experiment for each other: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Last week, everyone decided on at least one activity from the activity history, and one action towards the goal. Other things may have been agreed.

Discuss how this was going. The activity from the Activity History should be something that everyone liked to do. How does everyone feel now after doing that? Does it make you understand that it's easy to enjoy your life more? Does it make you want to do other things? Is this something you want to continue to do?

Discuss also the action towards your goal. What did you do, and what was the result? Are you more confident that your goal is achievable, after making some progress and having done some things that bring your goal closer?

### **Discuss one life changing event: 20 min**

Give everyone the time to talk about the life changing event they were choosing. Discuss how this has made everyone what they are today.

Discuss how this relates to your goal. Is your goal aligned with the person you became after this event?

Write the feedback down in your journal.

It may be a good idea to adjust your goal if you feel a disconnect between who you became and what you stated as a goal.

### **FIRO B Test: 15 min**

Discuss the result of your Firo B test, and the difference between desired and actual values.

Brainstorm together about things that you could do differently to bring your actual and desired values closer together. If you want to be included more by other people, which strategies can you follow to make that happen?

Choose one habit that you can adopt or one current habit that you can discontinue in order to improve your situation.

### **Choose one experiment for each other: 10 min**

Now that you know each other already a bit different, it's time to help each other get out of the comfort zone. Think in group about one experiment that should be beneficial for each member. The person concerned should try to stay out of the discussion.

Choose experiments that the person would not have chosen himself, but that you think will be beneficial.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one experiment that was chosen by the other circle members and one habit that you were choosing during the Firo B discussion.

Again, just like the previous weeks, when you perform the experiment, try the new habit, or take other actions that you agreed upon in the meeting, write your experience down in your journal.

## **Week 5: Defenses**

In week 5 of the process, we will try to figure out for ourselves what our major defense mechanisms are, and try to get them more under control. In the exercises you will have to do some deep soul searching, which will be the starting point of letting go of your deepest fears and your defensive behaviors.

### **Preparation**

Just like every week, we start the preparation by thinking about what we did during this week. Did you perform the experiment that the circle was choosing for you? Did you enjoy that? What did you learn from it? Will this result in something that you want to do differently going forward?

You also wanted to try a new habit or get rid of an existing habit related to relationships. How did that go? Did you get a chance to do what you wanted?

As always, write all answers down in your journal.

### **Preparation: Defense mechanisms**

In the list below, put a check mark next to each defense mechanism that you recognize. If you don't find any, put a check mark next to "Denial".

The list of defense mechanisms is adapted from [4].

#### Signs of defensiveness

- Loss of humor
- Taking offense
- High charge or energy in the body
- Sudden drop in IQ
- Wanting to be right (“No question about it!”)
- Flooding with information to prove a point
- Wanting the last word
- Endless explaining and rationalizing
- Calimero: Playing “poor me”
- Teaching or preaching
- Rigidity
- Denial
- Deadly silence
- Cynicism (victim)
- Sarcasm
- Making fun of others (being highly critical)
- Terminal uniqueness (“I’m so special; rules don’t apply to me.”)
- “It’s just my personality; It’s just who I am.”
- Not wanting to negotiate
- Blaming
- Sudden onset of illness or accident
- Confusion
- Suddenly tired or sleepy
- Intellectualizing
- Acting crazy (the temporary insanity defense)
- Eccentricity

### Signs of defensiveness (continued)

- Being too nice
- Selective deafness
- Attacking
- Holding a grudge
- Trivializing with humor
- Inappropriate laughter or giggling
- Sour grapes!
- “I’m aware of that! Leave me alone!” (defense of awareness)
- Becoming addicted to alcohol, drugs, people, shopping, working, gambling, chocolate, workshops, gaming
- Eating comfort foods
- Personalizing everything
- All-or-nothing thinking
- Catastrophizing
- Fast breathing/heartbeat
- Cold, clammy skin
- Hot, sweaty skin
- Mind reading
- Jumping to conclusions
- Magnifying everything
- Minimizing everything
- Emotional rigidity (if I feel it, it must be true)
- Tight stomach
- Speaking too fast
- Becoming physically immobile
- Obsessive thinking
- Yelling, getting angry
- Perfectionism

Take a look at the items where you were putting a checkmark. Write down the three most important ones in your journal.

Think about what happens when your defense mechanisms kick in. What is the first thing that happens? Can you use this to alert you that you are getting defensive?

### **Preparation: Rigidity**

Take your scores from the Firo B test. Then look in the table below under the scores that you have. If you are on the edge of a column; look also in the column next to it. For example, if you have 7, take a look in the middle column as well.

Circle the behaviors in your columns that you recognize.

The tables are adapted from [4].

Inclusion Rigidity									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Leaving		In/out behavior					Acting out		
Withholding		Lukewarm commitment					Over-involvement		
Not being available		Over-neutrality					Taking credit		
Avoiding		Half-heartedness					Busybody		
Quitting							Notice-me behavior		

Control Rigidity									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Passive		Inconsistent behavior					Threatening		
Complacent		Few boundaries					Only my way		
Nonassertive		Playing martyr					Shaming		
Not trying		Blaming					Hostile		
Avoiding responsibility		Hostile teasing					Domineering		

Affection Rigidity									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Withholding	Lacking passion					Superficially friendly			
Overly silent	Pleasantly neutral					Premature disclosure			
Having nothing to say	Unpredictable periodic sharing					Over-processing			
None of your business	Middle of the road					Inappropriate details			
Secretive	Difficult to know if cares					Emotional flooding			
Stonewalling	Overly influenced by context					Sharing <i>everything</i>			
	Runs hot then cold								

If you circled any behaviors in the tables above, you most likely exhibit rigidity in that aspect.

Rigidity in inclusion is usually the consequence of a fear of feeling insignificant, or of being ignored by others.

Rigidity in control is usually the consequence of a fear of feeling incompetent, or of being humiliated by others.

Rigidity in affection is usually the consequence of fear of feeling unlikable, or of being rejected by others.

If you have behaviors circled, they usually indicate a fear that is based on experiences from your childhood or on things that happened to you in your life. Think about which events in your childhood or in your past could trigger those fears. Did you ever have a negative experience that you don't want to be reminded of?

If you circled a behavior, write the name of the table down in your journal. Write the corresponding fears down in your journal: feeling ignored, feeling insignificant, feeling unlikable, being ignored, being humiliated, being rejected.

Write down which experience in your childhood or in your past could have triggered this fear.

## The meeting

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Defense mechanisms: 25 min

Rigidity: 20 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Last week, the other team members were choosing an experiment for you, and you were choosing one habit related to the Firo B test. Other things may have been agreed.

Discuss how this was going. Was the experiment a good choice? How did it make you feel? Will you develop a new habit from it, or try other related experiments?

Discuss also the habit related to the Firo B test. This was either a new habit to adopt or an old habit to discontinue. Were you successful in this? How do you think it will improve your relationships with other people? Will you continue this?

### **Defense mechanisms: 25 min**

Everyone discusses their three major defense mechanisms. Discuss any early signs that your defense mechanisms are kicking in. Are your defense mechanisms problematic? Do you wish to trigger them less? How will you go about doing that?

Everyone chooses one defense mechanism to work on during the next week. The whole group discusses which one would be best, but everyone decided for themselves which one to choose. Write down in your journal which defense mechanism you will work on, which early warning signs you will look out for, and which mitigation you will use. For example: Your defense mechanism is deadly silence. The first thing you notice

when this defense mechanism kicks in is fast breathing. To work on that, you can decide that each time you feel your breathing getting faster, you will take a deep and long breath, and then say: “Please give me a moment to process that.” Then you will count to 10.

### **Rigidity: 20 min**

Everyone discusses the rigid behavior that they found. Discuss memories from your childhood which could have led to this rigidity. For inclusion rigidity, this may be memories of being ignored, not being included or feeling insignificant. For control rigidity, this may be memories of being humiliated or feeling insignificant. For affection rigidity, this could be memories of being rejected or feeling unlikable. You may also include memories from your adult life in addition to memories of your childhood.

Talking about your memories should help you process them better. The only way to stop your rigidity is by feeling the feelings that you have been avoiding. If you feel that the time allotted in this meeting is insufficient, or if you want to talk further about these things, you can decide to follow up later with one or several members of the circle, or you may decide to find help elsewhere.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least the defense mechanism that you want to work on.

When you work on the defense mechanism or when you perform other actions decided upon, as always, write down in your journal how this is going.



## **Week 6: Awesome**

We are now in week six. At the end of this week's meeting, we will be halfway.

After last week's session, you've learned to be very open to each other and make yourself vulnerable in the group by sharing your deepest fears and your childhood memories that still impact you. Normally, you should now feel very close with the people in your circle and have a high level of trust.

This week, you will continue one more time to share something difficult with the group. You will discuss a recent failure with them and ask them how you could have handled it better.

Once that is done, we focus on the positive, and you will explain what is great and awesome about yourself. The rest of the program will focus only on the positive.

You will also continue to focus on getting results, by continuing to experiment, move towards your goals and adopting new habits.

### **Preparation**

Just like every week, we start the preparation by thinking about what we did during this week. Did you work on your defense mechanism? How did that go? Do you feel like you are improving?

Think also about your goals. Did you do anything to move towards your goals, or are you forgetting about that?

Do you generally feel that something has changed in your life because of this program? Can you explain?

As always, write all answers down in your journal.

#### **Preparation: One recent failure**

Think about one recent failure that you had. What happened? Why did you fail? What would you do different the next time? Which lessons did you learn from this experience? Write the answers down in your journal.

Remember that we are trying to see failure as something positive. If you experienced failure, it means that you took on a challenge and that you've experienced something. When we have a growth mindset, we don't think that we always have to be successful at everything that we do. Instead, we want to make sure that we learn from our experiences.

Keeping that in mind, do you think that the failure that you described was something worth doing, even if you failed? If you had the chance, would you do it again? Write the answers down in your journal.

### **Preparation: Awesome**

Write down 30 (thirty!) things that you are good at. 30 seems like a lot, doesn't it? But once you're on a roll I'm sure you can finish up. It's important to try to get to 30.

There are many different kinds of things you can be good at. Maybe you are good at certain things at work, so those things are easy to write down. Same for your hobbies, sports activities and the like. But think beyond that. Are you great to care for your loved ones? Are you a great friend to certain special people? Can you inspire other people to do certain things?

Write the 30 great things about yourself down in your journal. Once you've finished that, I bet you begin to understand just how awesome you are.

As a next step, go over your list, and find your five most important qualities. Write these down in your journal in a second, shorter list.

### **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

One recent failure: 15 min

You are awesome: 20 min

Get back in touch with someone: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

## **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Start with discussing your memories of last week's meeting. How did it feel to everyone?

Everyone discusses the defense mechanism that they wanted to work on.

Everyone also looks back at their goal, and discusses whether any progress has been made.

Of course, share any other things that happened during the past week that are interesting to the circle.

## **One recent failure: 15 min**

Everyone discusses the failure that they wrote down, and what they learned from it. Think also if you can learn from the failures of the others. Do you have any tips for each other?

## **You are awesome: 20 min**

Everyone discusses the list of their five most important qualities. For each of your most important qualities, explain how you use them every day. The team thinks about ways to use these qualities more.

Everyone writes down one way to use their qualities more in the upcoming week.

Everyone also discusses how their goals are related to their most important qualities. How are these aligned? Should you think about new goals that are better aligned with your qualities?

## **Get back in touch with someone: 10 min**

Everyone thinks about someone they haven't heard of for some time and they would like to get back in touch with.

Tell each other about this person, and what this person means to you.

Discuss what would be the best way to get in touch: A phone call? An email? Connecting on social media? Any other ways that could work?

## **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one action from the “You are awesome” exercise. There should also be someone to get back in touch with.

As always, as you do the things which were agreed, write down in your journal how this is going.

## **Week 7: Opportunity**

You are now halfway through your journey. You've been trying to get closer to living your dream for 6 weeks now, and there are still 6 weeks to come. This is the perfect time to evaluate your journey, and see if you are really moving in the right direction.

### **Preparation**

Until now, every week, we've gone back to the previous week and evaluated what we have done since then.

This week, we will re-evaluate everything from the first 6 weeks.

As usual, start out with what you decided last week. There should be at least one action from the "You are awesome" exercise, and one person to get back in touch with.

Write down how these things were going.

### **Preparation: Halfway there**

Now it's time to evaluate your journey so far.

Start out with a general overview. Which effect has the program had on you? What was valuable, and what was not? What did you discover about yourself? How did you change? How did the program impact your life?

Write this down in your journal.

Next, go back in your journal, and look at everything that you committed to do at one or another point.

Your first commitment was to attend the meetings and do the exercises. Did you do that? If yes, will you continue to do this? If not, will you try to improve?

Think about the rest of the process as well. Did you plan your exercises properly? Did you use your agenda and your to-do list? Did you use your journal?

Your next commitment was to do one experiment. How do you look back at that?

Go over your journal and think back at all the commitments you made each time. Do they have a lasting result today? Did you adopt new habits because of it? Did you make changes to your life?

Finally, when all that is done, look back at your goal and how it has changed over time. Now would be a great time to adjust your goal based on your new findings.

Now is also the time to think about what you have realized so far. Are you truly on your way to reach your goals? Which obstacles are on your way? What is keeping you from reaching your goal?

Write all answers down in your journal.

### **Preparation: Opportunity**

Think about one recent opportunity that you had. Did you grab the opportunity, or did you let it pass? Why? Looking back at it now, how do you feel about the opportunity? Are you happy that you took it? Are you sad that you let it pass? Would you do the same today?

Think about what you can learn from this experience. How will you react the next time an opportunity presents itself? Will you grab it more eagerly, or will you think about it more in depth?

Write all answers down in your journal.

### **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Halfway there: 30 min

One recent opportunity: 10 min

Time saving idea: 5 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Everyone talks about what happened since the previous meeting. Talk about the action from the “You are awesome!” exercise. Talk also about the person you got back in touch with. Talk about any other things that were agreed upon last week, and tell your circle any other things that happened that you think are interesting.

### **Halfway there: 30 min**

Take the time to go through everyone’s experiences during this journey.

A lot has been happening since the beginning. Tell each other what the most important thing is that you go out of it so far. Try to really listen to each other and understand what it has been like for the others.

Remember that everyone’s experience is different, so when others talk, don’t assume that their experience is similar to yours. Instead, ask open questions and try to really understand how the others have progressed and benefitted, and which issues they have.

Also look through your journal and tell the others about what you wrote there in the preparation.

You have 30 minutes, which seems like a long time, but it really isn’t, so make good use of your time.

At the end of the conversation, see how everything you learned has influenced your goal, and think which next actions you could take to bring your goal closer.

### **One recent opportunity: 10 min**

Tell each other about your recent opportunity. Discuss in group what can be learned from it.

### **Time saving idea: 5 min**

Think about one change you can make to save time. This can be a small change in your routine. Choose something that you have to do regularly enough so that the time saving is worthwhile, and think about how you can do it differently and faster.

This will be your task for this week. Write down in your journal what you will be doing, and give it a try during the coming week.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. This week, you will figure out what your core values are. There are many systems to do that, and I will not provide a specific system. I will leave it to you to find one on the internet. So it might be a good idea to plan a half hour to find the system that you think is best prior to your exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one time saving idea and one action that can bring your goal closer.

As always, as you do the things which were agreed, write down in your journal how this is going.

Two weeks from now, we will discuss the Clifton StrengthsFinder. In order to do this, you will have to get an access code. This access code is included in the book *StrengthsFinder 2.0* by Tom Rath. It might be a good idea to order the book now. It's available from Amazon.

## **Week 8: Core values**

This week, you will find out important things about yourself, which will guide you through the rest of your life. You will start determining your core values, which are elements that you are strongly attracted to. Aligning the things you do with your core values is a key factor to success.

### **Preparation**

Just like every week, we start the preparation by thinking about what we did during this week. Did you make progress towards your goal? Did you implement your time saving idea? What else did you do during the past week?

As always, write everything down in your journal.

### **Preparation: Highlights and complements**

The “Highlights and complements” exercise will get you on your way to understand your core values. It is based on [10].

First, think about some of the highlights in your life. The highlights are those moments when you are so consumed by something that you disregard space and time. It can be single moments or extended periods of time. Write a few of these highlights down in your journal.

Next, think about the best compliments you ever had, or what you think the best complement would be that someone could give you. Write at least one down in your journal.

Now is also a good time to look back at what you wrote down in week 3 for the “Heroes” exercise and in week 4 for the “Life changing event” exercise.

All these points together should give you an idea of what is important to you.

## **Preparation: Core values**

There are many ways to determine your core values. Search the internet for “determine core values”, “core values worksheet” or “core values workbook” and you will find some good resources. It is up to you to choose the system that you like the most. This is really worth putting some time into.

Whatever you do to determine your core values, make sure that you have everything in writing and keep everything for future reference. Make sure to write your 5 to 10 core values down in your journal.

If the system you choose is based on selecting items from a list, then think about the “Highlights and compliments” exercise each time when you make a choice.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Highlights and compliments: 15 min

Core values: 20 min

One new habit: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Everyone talks about what happened since the previous meeting. Talk about the time saving idea and how it turned out. Talk about how you are getting closer to your goal. Discuss anything else that happened that is interesting to the circle.

### **Highlights and compliments: 15 min**

Everyone talks about the highlights and compliments they wrote down in their journal. Discuss the “why”. What does it say about yourself?

### **Core values: 20 min**

Now is the time to talk about everyone’s core values. Share your list of core values with the circle, but it doesn’t stop there. Have a profound

discussion on what these core values mean, and how they are reflected in your life.

Discuss how the goals you set for yourself are aligned with your core values. If your goals are fully aligned with your core values, you will find an inner motivation, a drive to accomplish your goal. This is key to being successful in accomplishing your goals.

### **One new habit: 10 min**

Think about your core values, and what is important to you. Think about one thing you really need to do to align yourself more with your values. Maybe you have to read more, to develop yourself more, to have more contact with others, to eat healthier, to exercise more, to look after your finances better, to relax more, to think more positive.

Discuss with the group what would be the one thing you can change in your habits that will make a real difference in how you live your values. Make a promise to start doing it this week.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. This week, you will have to do the Strengths Finder assessment. If you don't have the book yet, order it now so that you have the access code in time. The book is called "Strength Finder 2.0" and is available from Amazon. It comes with an access code to do the assessment. Plan a half hour in your calendar for taking the StrengthsFinder assessment and one hour for the preparation.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one new habit to adopt.

As always, as you do the things which were agreed, write down in your journal how this is going.

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## **Week 9: Strengths**

This week, you will create a group of trusted advisors that will help you with different aspects in your life. You will also take a closer look at what makes your habits stick.

### **Preparation**

As every week, start your preparation with thinking about what you did in the last week. You planned to adopt one new habit. How did that go? Write the result down in your journal.

Think also about progress towards your goal, and anything else that happened during the week. Write everything down in your journal.

#### **Preparation: Strengths Finder**

Take the assessment at [www.strengthsfinder.com](http://www.strengthsfinder.com). You will need the access code from the book you ordered. The assessment takes 30 min.

#### **Preparation: Your good habits**

This exercise is taken from [10].

Follow the steps listed below:

1. Fill in the following form with as many of your good habits as you can think of.
2. For each habit, ask yourself, “Which higher goals does each habit serve?” Also include results reached, values honored, etc.
3. Now ask yourself, “When did I initiate what came to be a good habit?”
4. Then ask yourself, “What do I tell myself today that helps me maintain this good habit?” Write down examples of your inner dialogue.
5. Then zoom out to a “helicopter perspective” and look at your responses from a distance: “What do the good habits seem to have in common?” Write it at the bottom of the form

<b>Good Habit</b>	<b>What higher goal does the habit serve?</b>	<b>When did I initiate it?</b>	<b>What do I tell myself that helps me maintain it?</b>
Planning my next day before leaving the office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview</li> <li>• Focus</li> <li>• Prioritization</li> <li>• Inner calm</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “First closure, then leisure;”</li> <li>• It feels great to have the big overview.”</li> <li>• “Knowing my priorities gives me flexibility.”</li> </ul>
A run each morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Focus</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Inner calm</li> </ul>	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A kickstart is a great start.”</li> <li>• “I invest in my day, in my relations, my well-being.”</li> </ul>
Listening (and asking) before speaking my mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insight</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Overview</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	1985	<p>“What (more exactly) does he/she mean?”</p> <p>“If I don’t get the situation, I won’t hit home.”</p>
Parachuting holly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Inner calm</li> </ul>	1991	<p>“How different the world can look!”</p> <p>“Free as a bird.”</p>

**What do the good habits seem to have in common?**

Certain values seem to motivate and work for me: freedom, flexibility, curiosity, energy. There is playfulness in my choice of words. My inner dialogue focuses on the activities' higher aims – and joy.

By filling in this form, you should learn a couple of things about yourself, and about what your good habits look like to you.

Next, repeat the same exercise for the habits that you wanted to adopt during the Habit Circle program. You don't need a column for "When did I initiate it?", but instead you can have a column for "Was it successful?".

## **Preparation: Create your personal board of directors**

Make a list of 5 people whose opinion you appreciate, and whom you could turn to when you need advice. Write these 5 people down in your journal.

From now on, these people will form your Personal Board of Directors. Contact each one of them, and tell them that you want to include them in your personal board. You may want to postpone this until after the meeting in case you still have doubts.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Strengths finder: 20 min

Your good habits: 15 min

Create your own personal board of directors: 10 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Everyone talks about what happened since the previous meeting. Talk about the new habit you wanted to adopt and how it turned out. Talk about how you are getting closer to your goal. Discuss anything else that happened that is interesting to the circle.

### **Strengths finder: 20 min**

Everyone discusses the results of the strengths finder. When you read the report, do you recognize yourself in it? Which phrases especially appealed to you? Now that you understand your strengths, what does that say about where you should be heading in life? Is your goal aligned with your strengths? If not, how should you change your goals? Should you add new goals which are more aligned with your strengths?

Everyone should decide on one action that is aligned with their goals and that will bring their goals closer.

## **Your good habits: 15 min**

Everyone discusses the result of the good habits exercise. Did you see certain themes coming back in all your good habits? Are these themes aligned with your core values, with your strengths? Or are they something completely new?

How about the habits that were tried out in the course of the Habit Circle? Are there common themes? What do the successes and the failures have in common? What did you learn from that?

Based on your findings, see which modifications you have to make. Do you want to drop one of the habits you wanted to adopt, or change it a bit? Do you want to try a new habit based on the common theme?

## **Create your own personal board of directors: 10 min**

Discuss who you want to include in your personal board of directors. For each person you want to include, explain why, and explain what you can learn from them.

## **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week.

In case you haven't done so, contact the people you selected into your personal board of directors.

Next week, everyone can bring a friend to the meeting. Think about who you want to bring, and don't forget to contact them well enough in advance to be sure that they are interested and that they can make it.

As always, as you do the things which were agreed, write down in your journal how this is going.

# **Week 10: Mission**

This week will be a special meeting. Everyone will bring a friend. This is a great way to get to know a few new people, and to get them interested in the process of The Habit circle as well.

This week, you will write your mission statement, and think about what really sets you apart. You will also think about work/life balance.

## **Preparation**

As every week, start your preparation with thinking about what you did in the last week. As the weeks have passed, this should feel as the normal thing to do by now.

### **Preparation: Your mission statement**

As the weeks have passed, you have learned many things about yourself. You should now be aware of your own strengths, your core values, the things that matter to you and the things you want to achieve in your life.

Now is the time to write this down in your own personal mission statement.

In this book, I will not prescribe a way for you to create your mission statement. It's very well possible that you already know clearly what should be there from everything you've learned over the previous weeks. If you need help, search the internet for help on how you can best develop your personal mission statement, or look for examples.

As an example, here is my own personal mission statement:

*I'm striving to have a positive impact on other people's life: people close to me and other people. In order to do so, I have to develop myself, maintain a positive attitude, maintain my integrity and have a fun and meaningful life. I use my creativity and innovation drive to advance the greater good. I overcome problems and meet challenges. I connect with people and value diverse perspectives, as they help me grow. I try to be my best self, so that I can inspire others to be the best they can be.*

Now that you have your own personal board of directors, this would be a good time to ask them (or at least one of them) for some advice. Maybe you can show them a draft of your mission statement and ask for feedback.

Work on your mission statement until it's perfect for you, and put it in your journal. You can also print it out in big letters and put it in a visible place. Or you can write or paint it on paper or canvas and make it really beautiful.

### **Preparation: Integrate different parts of your life**

Most people think about work/life balance as or/or. But what happens when we think about it as and/and?

According to Stew Friedman, there are four aspects in our life that seem to fight for our time and energy: work, family, community and self. Seeing those as and/and, the trick is finding things to do which are good for several of these aspects of life, and ideally all four of them.

As an example: If you improve your mathematics skills, this is good for your self as you are developing yourself. This can also be good for your work because you can use the new skills. And it can be good for your family, because it will enable to help your children with their studies.

Another example: If you exercise regularly, this is good for your self, because you will be healthier. It will be good for your work, because you will have more energy and perform better. It will be better for your family, because you will be happier and your relationships will improve.

And a final example: If you work from home two days per week, this is good for your self because you don't have to commute. This is good for your work because you can be more productive. This is good for your family because you are can see them more. This is good for the community because one day per week, you can spend one hour that you saved from commuting on a good cause.

Now is the time for you to think about one change that you can make that will be beneficial for several aspects of your life. Find at least three examples that could apply to you, and for each one, write down in your journal how they would affect each aspect of your life.

## The meeting

Introduce your friend: 10 min

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Mission statement: 20 min

Integrate different parts of your life: 15 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Introduce your friend: 10 min**

Today is certainly a special meeting! Take some time to introduce all new faces. Let them talk about who they are, and give them an overview of what you are doing in the circle.

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Take the time to talk about the things that happened that you care about. Include things you've learned, interesting things you've read, people you met, and actions that you took.

### **Mission statement: 20 min**

Everyone has to read his mission statement out loud.

You have a total of 20 min to discuss the mission statements, which is a lot of time. Reflect together about how the mission statements sound, how everyone's values and strengths are coming through in it.

### **Integrate different parts of your life: 15 min**

Everyone discusses the three examples for integrating different parts. Discuss in group which ones sound good. If there are insufficient really great examples, brainstorm about something even better to do. Then everyone decides on one way to integrate the different parts of their life and commits to that. You will start making that happen during the next week.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Decide on a meeting time and place for next week.

Everyone should also plan the exercises for next week. Plan one hour in your calendar for the exercises.

Everyone gives a small recap of what they will do during the next week. There should be at least one way to integrate different parts of your life.

As always, as you do the things which were agreed, write down in your journal how this is going.

## **Week 11: Bucket List**

This week, you will think about something important that most people never get to in their life. Everyone should have a bucket list, and everyone should actively cross things off. If you have not done this before, it's really time to get started.

If you want to live your dream, this includes not just one goal, but many things that you would love to have done during your life. The only way they will happen is if you will make them happen.

Besides the bucket list, we have” to keep in mind that our habit circle is almost coming to an end. It's time to start evaluating.

### **Preparation**

As every week, start your preparation with thinking about what you did in the last week. Think about keeping the habit of reviewing your week after the program finishes.

#### **Preparation: Review your goals.**

Over the weeks, you've learned a lot about yourself. You understand better what matters to you. You understand what you really want, and what you are good at.

Look again at your goals with all this new knowledge. How far did you get in reaching your goal? With one week left until the end of the program, will you get where you wanted?

More importantly, did you choose the correct goal for you? If you would start again from the beginning, how would you define your goal?

Which are the final steps you want to make towards your goal during the last week? Do you want to extend your goal beyond that, or define new goals?

#### **Preparation: Review your habits.**

One month ago, in week 7, you did an exercise called “halfway there”. You reviewed all that you have done during the program.

Today, with only one week left until the program is finished, it's time to do this exercise again. Start from what you wrote in Week 7. Read it again. Then, continue from there on, and do the same for the rest of the program.

Do you see remarkable differences between what you did in the first half of the program and what you did in the second half? Are there any lessons learned?

### **Preparation: Bucket List**

Now, this is one of the best parts of the whole Habit Circle program. Think about things that you would like to accomplish in your lifetime. Think very wide. Obvious examples are places you want to see, people you want to meet, specific experiences you want to try. Examples from my own bucket list include: see the pyramids, see Prince live (which will not happen anymore I'm afraid), SCUBA diving (which I started), visit 50 different countries (almost halfway), own a Dali (I now have a Dali lithograph and a numbered Magritte lithograph).

Here are some examples of other people's bucket list items:

- Run a marathon
- Swim with sharks
- Bunjee Jumping
- Wear a snake around my neck
- See the rain forest
- Visit Antarctica
- See an eclipse
- Visit Australia
- Learn Spanish
- See a coral reef
- Be on Orpah
- Attend a jazz festival
- Be on a TV game show
- Meet a senator
- Have 100,000 followers on Twitter
- Sell something I made with my hands

- Be on the cover of a magazine
- Hire a personal shopper
- Sell something online
- Eat food cooked by a celebrity chef

User your imagination, and look online for bucket lists. The internet is full of them.

Try to find around 30 items that you want to include in your list. For each item, think about how realistic it is.

Once your list is ready, look over the list, and find the five items that you are most likely to do in the near future. Look for things that are easy to do. For each of these items, write down one specific action that you have to take in order to get this item started.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

Review your goals: 10 min

Review your habits: 10 min

Create your bucket list: 25 min

Wrap up: 5 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

Everyone talks about what happened since the previous meeting. Did you take an action to integrate the parts of your life better? Talk about how you are getting closer to your goal. Discuss anything else that happened that is interesting to the circle.

### **Review your goals: 10 min**

Everyone gives their findings about their goals, and the whole group discusses what they think are the best next steps for everyone.

### **Review your habits: 10 min**

The group discusses how everyone's habits are going along, and what has to change.

### **Create your bucket list: 25 min**

Everyone shares their bucket list, the five easiest items, and the actions to be taken to get there.

You should spend some time on discussing this. For the items that the others have on their list, give some feedback. Discuss which items seem easiest and ways to make them happen.

This is also the time to inspire each other. Don't be afraid to take items from each other's list and add them to your own.

### **Wrap up: 5 min**

Next week is your last meeting. Why not make it special? Consider meeting over dinner, or going to a place that's a little bit special.

Set a time and place for the meeting, and make time in your agenda for preparing the last meeting.

Remind each other to start at least one of the actions that will lead to an item on your bucket list, and repeat all other commitments made during this meeting.

## **Week 12: Celebrate**

This week you are finishing the program. I hope that you enjoyed and that it has shaped you to become a different person.

This week, we will celebrate our success, discuss what we are taking away from the program, make plans for the future, and think about forming a new circle.

### **Preparation**

There are no difficult exercises for this last week. Some parts of the program were quite heavy, but we're finishing off more lightly.

Start your preparation with going over what you promised last week, and going over your bucket list.

#### **Preparation: Thank you!**

During the preparation, take some time to think about what the circle has meant for you. Think about each member of the circle separately. How was interacting with them? What did you learn from them? What are you thankful for?

Write down what you want to thank each circle member for.

#### **Preparation: The future**

Now that the program has finished, how will you move on? Will you join a new circle? Will you stay in touch with the circle members?

Think very good about your goals. Now that the program is finishing, do you see your goals for the future clearly?

Now is the time to write a new contract for the future. I will not give you any examples of what it can be like. By now, you should know well enough where you want to go, and you should be able to write that down.

Write your contract down, and make sure that you have it on paper. If you are writing it on a computer, make sure to print it out and take it with you to the meeting.

## **The meeting**

Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min

How you changed: 10 min

Your next steps: 10 min

Contact for the future: 10 min

Wrap up: 20 min

### **Discuss what happened since last week: 10 min**

For the last time, discussed anything interesting that happened during the last week. Discuss also how you feel about your bucket list and which items you took related to that.

### **How you changed: 10 min**

Discuss briefly how you changed because of the program, and how you will do things differently from now on.

### **Your next steps: 10 min**

Briefly discuss the next steps that you will take now that the program is finished.

### **Contact for the future: 10 min**

Share your contract for the future with each other. Sign your own contract, and let all other circle members sign it as witnesses.

### **Wrap up: 20 min**

Take some time to chat with each other. If you would like to stay in touch, discuss how you will do that. A good idea would be to hold a reunion after 1 month, or after 2 months, to see each other back and see how everyone is doing.

Now that the circle has finished, tell each other in which ways you would still like to support each other in the future.

## **After Week 12: Your next steps**

Once you've finished the twelve week cycle, you should understand how valuable it has been to you, and how it has changed your life. But you will understand even more that it was just a starting point.

The ultimate goal is that you don't need a system like this anymore.

You may not have followed the guidelines in detail. That is quite alright. Everyone is different, and what works for you is different. But even then, I'm convinced that the value for you has been great.

After the twelve week cycle has finished, my suggestion is that you form a new Habit Circle, with people who are new to it, and that you start the process over. Since you are more experienced, you will be the facilitator. Doing this will not be such a radical change as the first time, but it will help you develop further.

After the second twelve week cycle has finished, I advise to start a circle with only people who have done the two cycles like you did. This can be your original group from the first cycle, but this can also be a completely different group. This time around, you don't follow the guidelines anymore. Instead, you dedicate the first meeting on alternative things that you would like to do in the upcoming weeks.

To get ideas for additional things you can do, I recommend reading the books in the "Further Reading" section.

This is also a great time to review your original bucket list, which you created during the first cycle.

By changing your habits gradually, you are changing the course of your life into the direction where you would like it to go. This is never finished. The circles have given you many tools and good habits that will stick with you the rest of your life. Your life has truly changed. But now is the time for you to find your own way. I can only wish you a happy, healthy and successful life.



# **Part IV**

**The Library**



# The Habit Library

Here is a large list of habits which work out well for certain people. They will not be all for you. You have to pick the ones that correspond the best with who you are and who you want to be.

You will see that some of the habits in the library contradict each other. That's fine. Some people may want to get more on social media because they would like to stay more in touch with their friends. Others may want to spend less time on social media because they are currently losing too much time with it. These people will want to adopt opposite habits.

## Green Habits

### **Don't get angry**

Getting angry is just a habit. You can stop doing it, just like with any other habit.

When you get angry, you're going into the "fight or flight" mode, which should be reserved as an extreme reaction for situations where the behavior is useful. When a wild animal attacks you, your fight or flight reaction will help you survive.

But we don't usually get attacked by wild animals anymore, and fight or flight reactions are bad in everyday situations.

When you feel the need to get angry, replace your habit with a new habit. For example: take a deep breath, or count to 10.

### **Don't show your anger**

Even if you do get angry sometimes, don't show it. Many people think that venting emotions such as anger is good, because you can let them out. However, research shows the opposite. Venting your anger only gets you angrier. People who like to show their anger are more prone to heart attack. When you suppress your anger, your blood pressure lowers.

## **Don't blame people**

Many companies and relationships are broken because of the blame game. When something bad happens, blaming someone doesn't help. It doesn't have any positive" effect, but it has many negative ones.

Stop thinking whose fault something is. Instead, think about what you can learn from a situation.

Never say: "It's because you ...". Instead, say: "next time, we should think about...".

## **Don't criticize other people**

Criticizing people may make you feel better at the time you are doing it, but in the end it makes you unhappy. You will feel guilty about it, and you will feel less good about yourself. It's the instant gratification of criticizing that makes it a hard habit to change. But it is after all just a bad habit like all others. Try, for example, to replace it with complimenting people. When you catch yourself criticizing someone, try to think about something positive to say about the same person, then you can say: After all, that person is not so bad, and here are a few positive things I've noticed.

## **Say thank you**

We all know that we have to say thank you. However, most of us don't do it enough. People really like being thanked for something. Make it a habit to think about who you should be thanking more, and to go out of your way to do so.

## **Tell jokes**

Even if joking doesn't come naturally to you, make it a habit to slip jokes into a conversation. Everyone loves funny people, and everyone likes to have a good laugh every now and then.

## **Hide hand written notes**

Write a note to say that you love someone, to thank someone, or just to say you're thinking about someone. Hide the note in a place where they

will find it later, for example in a purse, a drawer of the pocket of a jacket.

### **Provide solutions**

When you are not happy about a situation, think of a solution. When you talk about problems, but don't have a solution for them, you are just complaining. Complaining makes you unhappy, and nobody is interested in listening to it. Instead, think about a better way to do it or a solution for the problem at hand. Then talk about the solution, or implement the solution yourself.

### **Involve people**

When you are in a group, try to involve everyone in the conversation. When in a meeting, ask the more quiet people for their opinion.

### **Don't be biased**

We are all biased in ways that we are painfully unaware of. When talking about bias, most people think about religion, sex, race and the like: the well-known things that we are always told not to discriminate on. But bias goes so much further.

You automatically make assumptions about people based on very superficial things, such as the way they are dressed, their hair, their car, their involvement in a good cause, their eating, drinking or smoking habits, and what have you. Not being biased means looking behind those superficial data, and assuming that your initial assumptions will be false. As an example, having a tattoo doesn't exclude you from getting a PhD.

### **Enlarge the cake**

When it gets difficult to divide the cake, enlarge the cake. When you are having a discussion, and it's difficult to satisfy everyone, bring something else to the table.

### **Don't be defensive**

When someone says something, it's easy to react immediately in a negative way, without even trying to understand what the other is saying. When you feel that happening, take a small pause, and think if there this

could have been meant in any other way. Then simply ask. For example, you can react by asking: “what do you mean with that?”. If it’s a remark about you, treat it as a learning opportunity. Can what is being said be interpreted as feedback from which you can learn? If not, and if someone’s really bad to you, can you think of anything that could have triggered this? Can you think of a way to avoid getting such reactions in the future?

### **Don’t gossip**

Gossiping is one of the worst things you can do. You will always find people around you who do it. It’s very easy to fall in the trap of participating. Steer away from that. If you like to gossip, everyone knows that you cannot be trusted, and people will not like you, not even the other gossips.

### **Why you are asking**

When you ask someone a question, always add why you are asking: “I would like to know because I’m preparing a report for my manager.” People usually put more effort into formulating a good answer when you explain why you want to know something.

### **Ask for clarification**

Instead of assuming that you understand what the other is saying, always ask for clarifications and try to really understand what the other is saying.

### **Eating healthy**

#### **Omega 3**

There are numerous health advantages attributed to a larger intake of omega 3 fatty acids. The most obvious ones are related to heart and blood vessels, but fatty acids also have a positive impact on the brain, and will, for example, inhibit Alzheimer. Omega 3 can be found in fat fish, which you should eat one time per week. But you can also take daily omega 3 or fish oil supplements.

Some people will advise to use coconut oil instead. Keep in mind that health claims of coconut oil have not been scientifically proven, while it

has been proven that consuming coconut oil increases the cholesterol levels (both LDL and HDL). The currently sound scientific advice would be to avoid coconut oil.

### **No sugar**

Avoiding all sugar can transform you. Mind you, avoiding sugar doesn't equal avoiding carbs. The most correct formulation would be: avoid free sugars (added sugars and sugars in juices and fruit concentrates).

People who start avoiding all these sugars always report suddenly feeling much better, and report for example less headaches.

If you don't eat free sugars for two weeks, you will feel transformed and will never want to go back. If you will then tried the sweetened food that you were eating before, you will dislike the taste.

Of course, you can eat fruits while doing this – preferably a lot.

### **No caffeine**

Many people think that coffee is unhealthy, but this turns out to be not the case if you don't overdo it. You should limit your coffee drinking to five cups per day.

Still, many people see advantages in staying clear from coffee altogether. Caffeine stimulates your brain, so it does make you feel different. Some people feel better without caffeine.

Why don't you try it out? Cut down on coffee or eliminate it altogether, and you may feel better. If you have inexplicable headaches on days when you don't get your regular dose of caffeine, this problem will go away if you cut down on coffee.

### **3 meals, 2 snacks**

As a general guideline, it's best to have three big meals and two or three snacks per day. Big meals doesn't mean extra-large though. The snack should be a healthy one, for example a piece of fruit or a slice of bread.

## **Breakfast**

The most important meal of the day is breakfast. Sounds familiar? Many people skip their breakfast. This is unhealthy, will cause you to lose focus during the morning, and can lead to extra weight.

## **Only full grain pasta**

This is a very simple one, but with a huge health impact. If/when you eat pasta, eat only the full grain variants. So easy to do and I cannot overstate the health benefits.

## **Drink water**

Drink eight glasses of water per day.

## **Double topping pizza**

Eat only half of your pizza slices. Put the topping of the half you don't eat on the half you do eat. This way, your pizza is extra tasty and you eat less carbs.

## **Daily fruit**

Pick a specific time of the day, with a specific cue, to eat an extra piece of fruit. Even if you already eat a lot of fruits, you can add one specific time when you always eat this one additional piece.

This is a great way to overcome a feeling of getting hungry that you may experience at a certain time of the day. Instead of snacking, take a piece of fruit.

## **Freeze your food**

When you cook a healthy meal, cook large quantities, and put some extra portions in the freezer. You save time, because next times you don't have to cook. You save money, because you can buy larger quantities at once. Furthermore, you make it easier to eat the same healthy meal again, because you have it ready in the freezer.

## **Lemon before breakfast**

In the morning, 10-20 minutes before starting breakfast, take a lemon, cut it in two halves and squeeze out the juice. Pour the juice into a large

glass of room temperature water and drink it. This has numerous health advantages in addition to detoxing and making your skin glow.

### **Honey water**

In the morning, on an empty stomach, drink a glass of lukewarm water with a tablespoon of honey in it. The ideal mixture is 1/3 honey and 2/3 water.

### **Probiotics**

Probiotics are foods that contain live bacteria that can survive the acids of the stomach and arrive in the bowels in a living form.

Many people wonder if probiotics, such as milk drinks with bacteria, actually work. Well, scientific research shows that they do. Health benefits include: better working of the bowels (diminishing risk of obstipation and diarrhea) and an improved immune system.

### **Fermented foods**

Fermented foods include such things as sauerkraut, yoghurt, kefir and tempeh. There are many health claims attributed to fermented foods, but as of today, there is little scientific proof for those health claims. Still, there's also no evidence of the opposite. In general you can assume that fermented foods, which some refer to as "living foods", are good for you (as long as they are not too salty).

### **Vitamins**

You should get enough vitamins from your food. But what if you're not? If your eating habits are not healthy enough, or if you eat less than normal, for example when trying to lose weight, you may benefit from vitamin supplements. Commercially available vitamin supplements taking in the quantities indicated on the package are safe to use.

If you see that you do feel better when starting to take vitamins, you should think what may be the cause, and think about making your eating habits healthier.

## **BYOF – Bring Your Own Food**

Always make sure that you have your own healthy food and healthy snacks with you. This way you are bound to eat healthy.

### **Grow herbs**

You can easily grow some simple herbs at home. You don't even need a garden. You can just do that in your kitchen.

Great candidates are thyme, parsley, basil, chives and dill.

This way you always have super fresh herbs ready.

### **Food diary**

Write down everything you eat in a diary. There are great apps to keep track of everything you eat, and they can make recommendations on how you should change your eating patterns.

## **Energy and focus**

### **Make choices**

You can't do everything at the same time. If you make clear choices, you can focus all your energy on the choices you made. If you leave many options open, you lose your focus.

### **Cold Shower**

Some people recommend to take a cold shower every day. That is certainly great to do. You have to try it to understand the boost this will give you. However, it's not an easy change to make. Alternatively, you can simply end your shower with 30 seconds of ice cold water.

### **Time to think**

One CEO of a startup reserves two hours each morning in his calendar for thinking.

### **Positive self-talk**

Tell yourself out loud that you did a good job.

## **Screen free evening**

One evening per week, ban all screens from your life. No TV, no smart phone, no computer, no tablet. Use the time to play board games, talk to each other, read books, go to sleep early, exercise, or any other activity that you find more valuable than your usual screen time.

## **Think of alternatives**

When you make a decision, first think of a number of alternatives, and make sure you choose the best alternative you can think of.

## **Don't be a perfectionist**

Good enough is good enough.

## **Clean Up**

Most people feel better in a clean environment, free of clutter.

## **Ask Why**

When there is a problem, ask yourself why this problem is occurring. The principle of the five whys states that you have to ask again why to the answer of your previous why, until you found the absolutely root cause. This usually takes five whys. Continue to ask why until you can get no further anymore.

## **Mail Free Morning**

Don't check your email in the first few hours of the day. Don't check social media either. Keep the first hours of the day for doing what constitutes your own agenda, what will bring you closer to your own goals. Checking email and social media makes sure that you will work on the agenda and goals of others instead.

## **Skip social media**

Stay away from the social media, and use the same time to do something else. Make it very specific that whenever you would normally go on social media, you will not engage in the other activity. For example. Read books. You can read books on every screen where you can read the social media, so this makes it a perfect replacement activity. If you spend some

time on the social media, you could use this time to read one or two books per week, amounting to a total of 50 to 100 books per year. But when you read books, you decide for yourself what you want to read. It's your own agenda. By contrast, when you read social media, you read what others want you to read. It's their agenda.

No need to give up on social media altogether. If you normally go on social media in the morning and in the evening, use your morning time to read books or engage in other activities and your evening time for social media.

## **Measure things**

How do you know that you are progressing towards your goal? Sometimes you don't. But you can find measurements that reassure you that you are going in the right direction.

As an example: I do my writing in Word. Word displays the word count of your document in the status bar. Every time when I finish writing, I check the word count. I see that quantity go up, and that reassures me that my book is growing and getting more ready.

When your goal is far away, you can always find a measurement that will reassure you that you are moving in the right direction.

Everyone knows that we always try to optimize for the metrics we are using. In a software company, the number of bugs is usually measured. That means the engineers will try to minimize the number of bugs. But some companies think that they can improve code quality by having more comments, and they measure the number of comment lines in their code. The engineers will add additional comments which will diminish the code quality rather than improving it.

So you have to think very good about what you want to measure. But increasing the number of things you measure, while choosing your metrics wisely, will certainly drive you to improve on those things you want to see improved.

## **Meditate**

Take some time for meditation, or, if you are religious, for prayer. Make this a fixed time each day.

Or why don't you read a book while you have to wait? If you don't have a book with you, you can also read books on smart phones these days.

## **Navigation**

If you don't have one yet, get a navigation system. If you've never used one, you may think that you would only use it sporadically. But once you are used to it, you cannot live without.

## **Smart phone**

If you don't have a smart phone yet, time to get one!

## **Sleep tracker**

The traditional alarm clock is no good. We usually don't like being woken up by it. The main reason is that it wakes us up at a random moment, which can be when we are in a deep sleep or when we are dreaming. There are apps available for your smart phone or smart watch that analyze your sleeping pattern and wake you up at the perfect moment in your cycle, when you are in a light sleep and almost waking up by yourself.

# **Productivity**

## **To-Do List**

## **Plan activities**

## **Delegate**

Think which tasks you can delegate. Can your parents look after your children? Can your spouse do the dishes?

Think the same way at work. For each task, think about who can do it instead of you? People may be happy to do it.

## **Outsource**

When you don't like to do something, pay someone else to do it for you. The typical example is cleaning the house. But it can go much further than that.

There are services like Upwork where you can hire people to do a multitude of things, and it doesn't have to be expensive. You can have your own personal assistant, graphics designer, programmer, or even writer or sales person.

Focus on the things you like to do, and hire others for the rest.

## **Automate**

Don't perform repetitive tasks, especially on the computer. Instead, write programs or scripts to automate it for you. This can go far beyond computer tasks.

If you don't know how to automate it, outsource that.

## **Write your ideas down**

Whenever an idea pops into your head, write it down. Otherwise you will forget it. I'm personally using this idea a lot while writing this book. Whenever I have an idea for a paragraph in the book, or I read something interesting that I can use, I put it in a small notepad application on my phone. Without that habit this book would be far less interesting.

As always, choose what works best for you, be it paper or electronic. Just make sure that you can always have it with you.

## **Active waiting**

We all have to wait sometimes. We can all lose a lot of time waiting. However, the waiting time doesn't have to be lost time. You can find an activity that fits into your waiting time.

When you have to wait for something or someone, why not get in touch with someone you haven't heard from for some time? Waiting time is perfect to give someone a call.

## **Fake meetings**

Plan fake meetings in your agenda to keep time free for yourself. You can take this time to take a walk, to focus on a specific task, or to relax.

## **Shortening meetings**

When you want to plan a meeting for an hour, plan a meeting for 45 minutes instead.

## **Shopping list**

Keep a shopping list of all things you need. When something is finishing, write it down on the shopping list. You take the last bottle of milk? Write milk on your shopping list. You now know exactly what you need.

## **Say No**

## **Do groceries online**

## **Weekly review**

One time per week, look at what you've done during the past week. Think about progress towards your goals.

Ask yourself the question: If I will do every week what I did during this week, where will I get after one year? Am I moving in the direction I want, or do I have to make changes?

# **Health**

## **Floss**

## **Fasting**

Some people feel better when they engage in fasting. You could do this one day per week.

## **Bread diet**

When you need to lose some weight in a short time, you can do so with the bread diet. Every two days, you take a bread-only day and eat only bread the whole day. The other days, you can eat normal.

**Don't bite your nails.**

**Sleep enough**

**Take power naps**

Taking a 20 minutes nap can do wonders. You can feel much better after that. But don't make it longer than 20 minutes, because then you could feel even more tired than before.

**Keep your back straight**

**Check your weight**

Make it part of your routine to check your weight, one time per day or one time per week. Every day doesn't give you extra value but makes it easier to make this a habit that you will stick to. Do this in the morning at a fixed time. Make sure that you always measure in the same way: Same scale, same amount of clothes, etc. This makes it easy to see evolution.

If you want to do it one time per week, make sure you do it always on the same day of the week.

**Far Far Away**

Put things you need regularly far far away, so that when you need them you are forced to take a small walk. If you work in an office, choose your desk far far away from the entrance, the bathroom and the watercooler so that you take extra steps throughout the day.

**Take the long way home**

When you walk home or when you walk to another place, don't take the shortest way. Take a way that takes you a little longer. Maybe there will be something interesting to see on your way.

**Park far away**

When you go somewhere by car, park far enough away, so that you can still walk a bit.

## **Pedometer**

Install a pedometer app on your phone, or get a pedometer device. See every day how many steps you are taking. You should try to take 10,000 steps per day. When you don't get that, try to think of ways to walk more, for example by putting things further away or by taking a different way home.

## **Standing desk**

If you have a desk job, organize a place where you can stand up to do your work. Go there at least one time per day to work for minimum one hour.

## **Face cream**

Most women do this already, but men tend to forget. It is important for everyone to put a good cream on your face. If you're looking to save money, this is not the right place to look. Don't wait until your skin is beginning to degenerate. From a young age, make it a habit to put a good cream on your face every day.

## **Physical activity**

**Take the stairs.**

**Walk**

**Trampoline**

**Jump roping**

**Frisbee**

**Swimming**

**Tennis**

**Rollerblading**

**Biking**

**Skiing**

**Snowshoeing**

**Paddle boarding**

**Playing catch**

**Shoot hoops (basketball)**

**Playground**

Take your children to the playground and play with them.

**Horseshoes**

**Volleyball**

**Bowling**

**Badminton**

**Bocce ball**

### **7 minutes workout**

There are several apps available that offer a workout that takes 7 minutes. The result of this workout is amazing. Because it takes only 7 minutes to complete, there is no excuse to skip any day.

### **30 days challenge**

If the 7 minutes workout is too boring for you, move on to a 30 days challenge app. This will give you increasingly difficult exercises, and more variety.

### **Bag exercises**

When you are walking with a bag, satchel, brief case or laptop case in your hands, you can use it for exercises. Just move it up and down while you are walking. This way you can do some extra exercises without losing any time and without needing anything. At first you may find that it looks funny, but hey, get over it, and who knows, you might inspire the people who see you.

### **Morning push-ups**

Every morning, when you wake up, start your day with 10 push-ups. Of course the number can be adjusted to your physical condition. It will take you less than a minute to do, but it makes you start your day with an accomplishment and gives you energy.

### **Financial freedom**

#### **Save money.**

A good rule of thumb is that you should save 10% of your income. Just pretend that this money doesn't exist. Another good rule of thumb is that

you should always have minimum 6 months of income available as savings.

### **Keep track of expenses.**

Make sure that you have an overview of what you are spending money on. At the end of the month, you should be able to say how much you spent on total on food, transportation, utility bills, clothing, etc.

## **Relationships**

### **Praise effort.**

### **Ask for expectations**

Ask people what exactly they expect from you.

### **Formulate expectations**

Make sure that people know exactly what you expect from them.

### **Check in first**

When you want to talk to someone, ask first if this is a good time to have their full attention.

### **Check your stories**

Sometimes we assume things about others. We imagine how they must feel, what they must think about us, how they must feel about us, and what their intentions are. But you can never be sure unless you ask.

You may get an impression that someone is angry from an email. But that is quite difficult to know. Why not just answer: “I get the feeling that you are angry. Please let me know if I misunderstood that from your email.”

### **Ask about their children**

A great way to get people to open up is asking them about their children. People who have children love to talk about them, and opening the subject up can turn them into a different kind of person. You can similarly ask about the grandchildren when you know someone to have them.

## **Remember details that matter**

When someone told you that their mother is in the hospital, that they plan a trip, or that there is something changing in their life, remember that, and ask about it the next time you meet. “How is your mother?” or “How was your trip”? Of course in case of something lasting, like an illness of a family member, you can ask again a few months later. Doing this shows that you care, and makes a great difference.

## **Summarize**

When someone tells you something, summarize it and feed it back in your own words to ensure mutual understanding. You may want to do this by e-mail as well.

## **Match tonality**

When talking to someone, try to match the way they are talking. When they sound excited, try to sound excited as well. When they sound uninterested, try to sound uninterested as well. And so on.

This is a great technique for building rapport with people. They feel that you understand them, and will be much more ready for talking to you.

## **Match preferred sensory channel**

Someone’s preferred sensory channel is either visual, kinesthetic or auditory. This is reflected in the words they use. Look for clues in what they say.

Visual people like to use words like “see”, “bright”, “focus”, “highlight”, “look”, “color”, “show”. When you hear someone using such words, that’s a clue that they are mostly visual. When you see these clues, match their language and describe things in a visual way. Use visual words yourself to show them that you see things the same way.

Similarly, kinesthetic people will use words that are related to feeling: “feel”, “handle”, “hard”, “cold”, “warm”, “soft”. When you feel that someone is kinesthetic, also use similar words and describe things in a kinesthetic way.

Finally, auditory people tend to use words like “hear”, “ring a bell”, “sound right”, “loud and clear”, “listen”, “talk”, “music to my ears”. When you hear these clues, talk back with similar words, and describe things in an auditory way, to ensure that your message gets heard.

### **Match proactive vs reactive**

People are either proactive or reactive. Proactive people do things out of their own, while reactive people react to what happens around them. In a conversation, you can usually get clues about this preference.

For example, when you ask someone to do something, do they propose to wait until the boss tells them to? Or do they just want to go, and see later what the boss will think?

I am personally proactive, and usually like to just go. However, when talking with reactive people, keep in mind that their preference is different, and if you want to get them to engage, you'll have to keep this in mind.

## **Happiness**

### **Be amazed**

Allow yourself to be amazed when you see something amazing. See the world as a child, and be surprised by the many little things that are amazing and beautiful.

### **Laugh**

### **Smile**

Happy people smile a lot. But the inverse also works/ when you smile a lot, you become happier.

### **Don't complain**

The main effect of complaining is to make yourself unhappy, because it will reinforce all your negative beliefs and feelings. The secondary effect is that you are driving other people away, making you even more unhappy and giving you even more reasons to complain.

Complaining is a bad habit. Replace it with a good habit. For example, when you feel the need to complain, think of something positive to talk about.

### **Be grateful**

Don't spend your time being negative. Don't think about what you would like to have but don't. Instead, think about everything that you are lucky to have, and be grateful for all that you have. After all, your life is not so bad. It's even quite good.

### **Gratitude List**

Every evening, write down in your journal what you are grateful for.

### **Think positive**

### **Schedule fun activities**

### **Activity jar**

Write a number of fun activities on small pieces of paper and put them in a jar. Each week, take a piece of paper from the jar and do the fun activity.

### **Sunglasses**

When there is too much sun, you will squint your eyes. This makes your brain think that you are frowning, and decreases your happiness. When you wear sunglasses, you will feel better.

### **January Retrospective**

This is a method taken from Martin Seligman.

Every year, shortly after New Year, take a half hour time on a quiet place. You can either do this on paper or on a computer. If you want to start the habit right now, you don't have to wait until January. You can just as well do it each year in any other month.

Rate your life satisfaction in a number of domains on a scale from 1 to 10, and write a few sentences for each domain to sum it up. Domains could include: love, profession, finances, play, friends, health, overall.

## **Authenticity**

### **First truth first**

Sometimes, when you have to talk to someone, you are nervous, afraid, or concerned. This will inevitably get in the way of the message that you want to deliver. Your body language and tone of voice will give you away. Because of this, you may very well be misunderstood.

To overcome this problem, explain first how you feel. Say, for example, that you are afraid to have this conversation out of fear that your relationship might be affected.

After explaining this first, the rest of the conversation will go much smoother, and you will be perceived as more authentic and trustworthy.

### **E-mail intentions**

When you communicate by e-mail, the non-verbal portion of your message is missing. This non-verbal part includes tone of voice and body language. This often leads to misunderstandings. Is the person writing you angry? You would normally hear from the voice, but this information is now missing.

That's why it's a good idea to communicate this missing information at the beginning of your e-mail. For example: "Reading my e-mail, you could get the impression that I'm angry, but that's not the case. Quite the contrary: I'm generally pleased, but just wish to communicate a minor issue."

### **Don't try to impress**

If you like flashy cars, you should obviously get one and enjoy driving it. But don't buy it because you think other people will be impressed. Contrary to what many people think, doing things because other people will be impressed will make you less happy.

## **Personal development**

**Write**

**Read**

**Audio Books**

**Write a blog**

**Start a Youtube channel**

**Start a podcast**

**Ask for feedback**

**Letter to the kids**

If you have children, every now and then, take the time to write something for them. You do this on their birthday, when something happens with them, when a historical event takes place, or any time you have something to tell them.

Keep everything that you write together. Once your children will be all grown up, you will have the most amazing gift for them that they will treasure the rest of their life. You may want to give it to them on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, or when they graduate from college.

By that time, your letters will have formed a book. You get extra points for including pictures. When the time comes, you can self-publish the book as a nice hardcover.

**Daily ideas**

Write down 10 ideas each day. The ideas can be of all types: things in your personal life to implement immediately, ideas for work, or simply ideas about how something – anything- can be improved upon. As you practice writing down ideas each day, your ideas will get better. Some of them will be worthless, but that's quite alright. All creative people have a lot of worthless ideas. It is important, however, not to make that judgement at the moment when you write ideas down. Just write all of them down, and you can evaluate them later.

## **Book notes**

When reading a book, take notes. This has so many advantages that it seems totally obvious to do so, yet most people don't. When you take notes while reading a book:

- You will remember the contents better. Writing things down and summarizing helps you remember better.
- You will be able to find things back later. If you computerize your notes, for example on EverNote, you can search all your book notes later and find back where exactly you read something.
- You can turn reading into studying. If you read your notes again later, you can repeat what was most important to you so that you will remember it well.
- You think about what matters to you: Summarizing requires you to think about the content more than you would do without taking notes.

## **Make an impression**

### **Wear great shoes**

Make sure that your shoes are always clean. Wear the best shoes that you can afford. Make sure that your shoes are comfortable.

Many people try to look good, but forget to think about their shoes. Impeccable shoes show that you pay attention to details. Dirty, worn or tasteless shoes can kill your impression completely, and you may not be aware of it.

### **Dress for the job you want**

# The Experiment Library

**Try an audio streaming service**

**Go to a different shop**

**Take a different way home**

**Sit at a different place**

**Say “Thank you”**

**Ask someone for help**

**Try a new vegetable**

**Wear something different**

**Speak up**

**Use different communication channel**

When you would usually send someone a text message or an email, give them a phone call instead. When you would normally call someone on the phone, go to meet them face to face.

**Put yourself first**

If you are always looking after other people and offering yourself to help them, today, put yourself first instead and do what will please yourself the most.

**Match tonality**

You will see that you find this back in the Habit Library as well. As an experiment, when you are talking to someone today, on the phone or in person, try to match

their tonality as well as possible, and see what the effect is. Pay close attention to their reaction. Do they react as usual, or do you find they are somehow different to you?

## **Listen to yourself**

Take a recording of yourself when you are speaking, if possible in a real situation. Audio recordings work, video recordings are even better. Then listen to yourself and if possible watch yourself. How do you think other people will perceive you? Is there something you would like to change?

## **Alcohol free week**

For one week, don't drink any alcohol. You will become much more aware of your drinking habits and of the effect it has on you. Ideally, you would even do this for one month.

## **GI escape**

What is your major source of carbs? Potatoes, bread, pasta? Try not to eat that for a full week.

## **Awesome certificate**

Print a paper with the following text on it:

- From: *Name*
  - To: *Name*

I think that you:

- Are awesome
- Made a difference in my life
- Did something extraordinary
- Keep amazing me
- Are beyond compare

*Signature*

Of course you can vary the text to your liking. Put your name and the name of someone you want to surprise. Put a check mark in the boxes that apply. Then give it to that person.

Of course it is quite OK to make it a more beautiful page.

## **Game free week**

For one week, don't play any computer games. Use the time that you save to do other things that you love but never have the time for.

## **Move something**

Move one item in your home to a different place

## **Podcast**

Listen to a podcast.

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# **The Goal Library**

Own a house

Have automated revenue

Get a top level job

Bucket list

Become an expert at something

Make a living from your hobby

Get a degree

Attend an event (Olympics, music festival, exhibition...)

Visit a country or city

Live in a different country or city

Start a family

Have savings to survive one year

Appear on tv or in a movie

Get elected

Meet a specific person (president, athlete, artist, ...)

Lose weight

Write a book

Have more free time

Have six months of income on your savings account.



## **The Action Library**

The action library contains a set of actions that you can take towards your goal. These actions are generic and applicable to many goals. You will have to add in your own actions which are specific to your own personal goals.

**Read about your goal**

**Follow a course**

**Get certified**

**Get in touch with a specialist**

**Read how specialists got to their goal**

**Subscribe to a blog on the subject**

**Get a mentor**

**Get a coach**

**Vision board**

Create your own vision board. Take a large piece of cardboard and hang it on a visible place, where you will see it at least once per day. On this piece of cardboard, put everything that's related to your goal.

If you prefer to do this online, you can use pinterest for exactly that.

**Find an investor**

**Find an executive sponsor**

**Write a business plan**

**Find a business partner**

**Find an accountability partner**

**Buy a house**

**Volunteer**

**Garage sale**

## **Further reading**

The purpose of this book is to keep it simple for everyone. I want to explain all that you need to participate in the program, without going into scientific details, so that it is easy to digest. However, this is all backed by science, which was willingly excluded from this book.

If you want to know more about the topics covered in this book, and gain a more in-depth understanding, I recommend the following books:

- [1] *Transform your Habits*, by James Clear.  
Short, easy to understand but more in-depth explanation of how habits are formed.  
Free ebook, available online.  
<http://jamesclear.com/habits>
- [2] *Working out loud: For a better career and life*, by John Stepper.  
Introduces the Circle technique to learn new habits, but links it specifically to habits relating to reaching out on social media.  
Paperback, available on Amazon.  
<http://workingoutloud.com/the-book>
- [3] *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*, by Steward D. Friedman  
How to integrate the different aspects of your life: work, home, self and community.  
Paperback or hardcover, Harvard Business Press  
<http://www.totalleadership.org/books/>
- [4] *Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships*, by James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet  
Paperback or hardcover available on Amazon, digital version also available on Safari Books.  
<http://www.radicalcollaboration.com>
- [5] *Enter The Zone: A Dietary Road map*, by Barry Sears, PhD and Bill Lawren  
This is the book that originally introduced the Zone Diet. You don't have to follow it to the letter (even the author doesn't), but if will give you great ideas for healthy eating habits to adopt.

Available on Amazon, paperback or hard cover, also available in a Kindle version.

<http://www.zonediet.com/shop/more-products/books/the-zone>

- [6] *Getting Things Done: the art of stress-free productivity*, by David Allen  
A true classic: How to organize yourself by using lists.  
<http://gettingthingsdone.com>
- [7] *Change Your Mind, Change Your Health: 7 Ways to Harness the Power of Your Brain to Enhance Wellbeing*, by Anne Marie Ludovici  
Describes the Trans Theoretical Model for behavior change (TTM) and gives some good advice on improving your health habits.  
Available from Amazon in paperback and kindle version, digital version also available on Safari Books.  
<http://www.annemarieludovici.com>
- [8] *The Productivity Habits: A Simple Approach to Become More Productive*,  
by Ben Elijah  
Available from Amazon in print and in kindle version, and available on Safari Books.  
<http://www.inkandben.com/tph>
- [9] *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey  
A true classic with over 15 million copies sold, this book explains how you can change yourself in such a way that you will be successful.  
Available anywhere.
- [10] *Play Your Brain: Adopt a Musical Mindset and Change your Life and Career*, by Anette Prehn and Kjeld Fredens  
This brilliant book explains how we can use up to date knowledge on how the brain works to make our brain behave the way we want it to.  
Available on Amazon, available on Safari.  
<http://anetteprehn.com/play-your-brain>
- [11] *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, by Carol Dweck  
This is a very important book. It explains how the growth mindset and the fixed mindset work, and how to learn to adopt the growth mindset. It should be mandatory reading for all

teachers and coaches.

Available anywhere.

- [12] *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, by Martin Seligman

This book pretty much forms the foundation of the recent science of positive psychology. The chapter on happiness is mostly based on it.

Available everywhere.