

Create a Habit of Success

Making **small, positive changes** to your habits can be your secret weapon to achieving your goals.

{ BY DARREN HARDY }



A wise teacher was taking a stroll through the forest with a young pupil and stopped before a tiny tree.

“Pull up that sapling,” the teacher instructed his pupil, pointing to a sprout just coming up from the earth. The youngster pulled it up easily with his fingers. “Now pull up that one,” said the teacher, indicating a more established sapling that had grown to about knee high to the boy. With little effort, the lad yanked and the tree came up, roots and all. “And now, this one,” said the teacher, nodding toward a more well-developed evergreen that was as tall as the young pupil. With great effort, throwing all his weight and strength into the task, using sticks and stone he found to pry up the stubborn roots, the boy finally got the tree loose.

“Now,” the wise one said, “I’d like you to pull this one up.” The young boy followed the teacher’s gaze, which fell upon a mighty oak so tall the boy could scarcely see the top. Knowing the

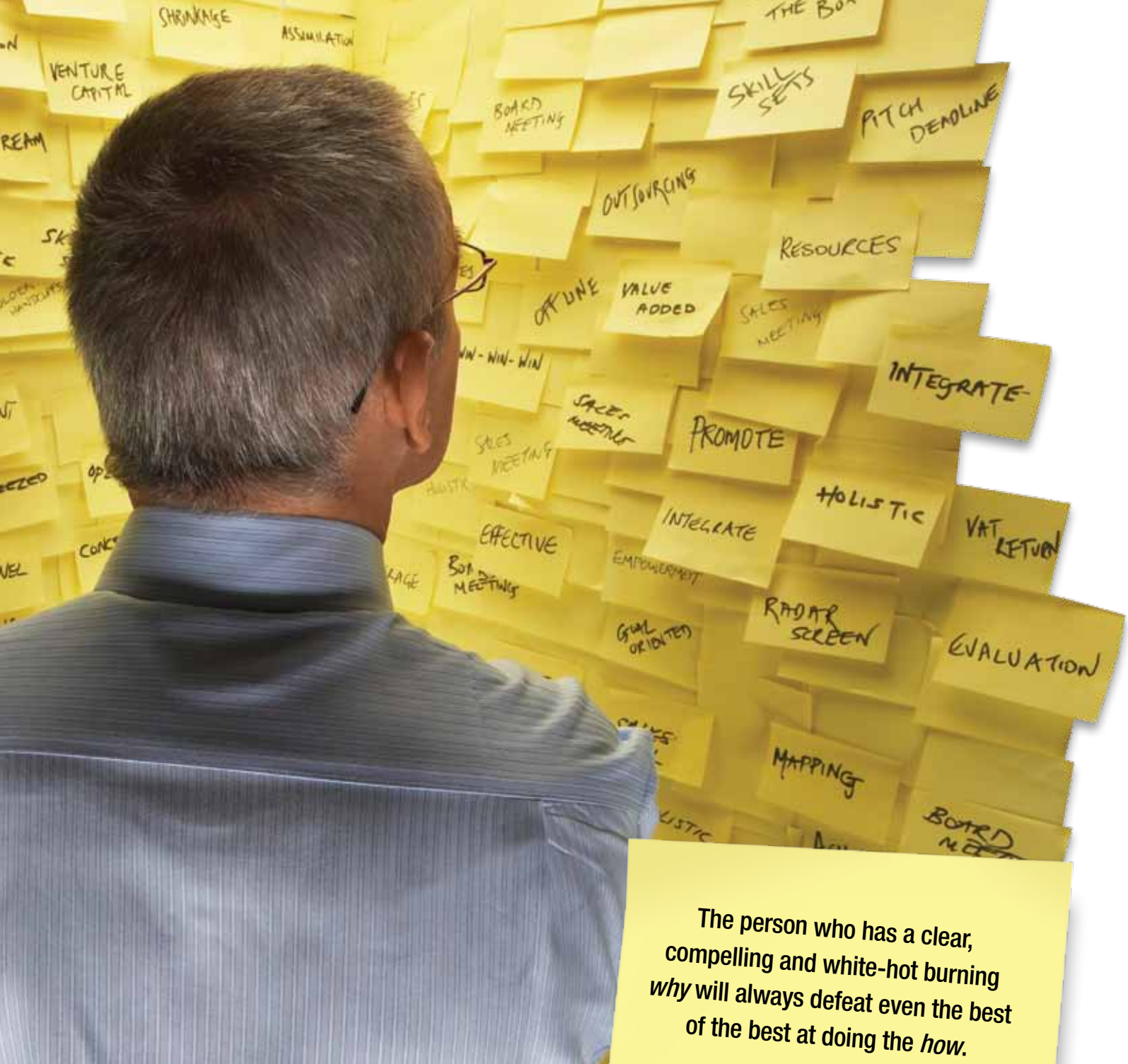
great struggle he’d just had pulling up the much smaller tree, he simply told his teacher, “I am sorry, but I can’t.”

“My son, you have just demonstrated the power that habits will have over your life!” the teacher exclaimed. “The older they are, the bigger they get, the deeper the roots grow, and the harder they are to uproot. Some get so big, with roots so deep, you might hesitate to even try.”

Creatures of Habit

If you’ve been living on autopilot and allowing your habits to run you, I want you to understand why. And I want you to let yourself off the hook. After all, you’re in good company. Psychological studies reveal that 95 percent of everything we feel, think, do and achieve is a result of a learned habit! We’re born with instincts, of course, but no habits at all. We develop them over time. Beginning in childhood, we learned a series of conditioned responses that led us to react automatically (as in, without thinking) to most situations.

In your day-to-day life, living “automatically” has its definite positives. If you had to consciously think about every step of each ordinary task—making breakfast, driving the kids to school, getting to work, and so on—your life would grind to a halt. Our habits and routines allow us to use minimal conscious energy for everyday tasks. They help keep us sane and enable us to handle most situations reasonably well. And because we don’t have



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to think about the mundane, we can focus our mental energy on more creative and enriching thoughts. Habits can be helpful—as long as they're good habits, that is.

My dad used Larry Bird as an example to teach me about habits when I was a kid. "Larry Legend" is known as one of the greatest professional basketball players. But he wasn't known for being the most athletically talented player. Yet, despite his limited natural athletic ability, he led the Boston Celtics to three world championships and

remains one of the best players of all time. How did he do it?

It was Larry's habits—his relentless dedication to practice and to improve his game. Bird was one of the most consistent free-throw shooters in the history of the NBA. Growing up, his habit was to practice 500 free-throw shots every morning before school. With that kind of discipline, Larry made the most of his God-given talents and kicked the butts of some of the most "gifted" players on the court.

Like Larry Bird, you can condition your automatic and unconscious responses to be those of a developed champion. With enough practice and repetition, any behavior, good or bad, becomes automatic over time. That means that even though we developed most of our habits unconsciously (by modeling our parents, responding to environmental or cultural associations, or creating coping mechanisms), we can consciously decide to

change them. It stands to reason that since you learned every habit you have, you can also unlearn the ones that aren't serving you well.

Start by Thinking Your Way Out of the Instant Gratification Trap

We're a "rational" species—at least that's what we tell ourselves. So why are we so irrationally enslaved by so many bad habits? It's because our need for immediate gratification can turn us into the most reactive, nonthinking animals around.

If you took a bite of a Big Mac and immediately fell to the ground clutching your chest from a heart attack, you might not go back for that second bite. If your next puff of a cigarette instantly mutated your face into that of a weathered 85-year-old, chances are you'd pass on that, too. The problem is that the payoff or instant gratification derived from bad habits often far outweighs what's going on in your rational mind concerning long-term consequences. Indulging in our bad habits doesn't seem to have any negative effects at all in the moment.

It's time to wake up and realize that the habits you indulge in could be compounding your life into repeated disaster. The slightest adjustments to your daily routines can dramatically alter the outcomes in your life. Supersmall, seemingly inconsequential adjustments can and will revolutionize everything.

Most people drift through life without devoting much conscious energy to figuring out specifically what they want and what they need to do to take themselves there. Uprooting bad habits that have grown into mighty oaks is going to be arduous and difficult; to see the process through will require something greater than even the most relentless determination—willpower alone won't cut it.

Finding Your Mojo—Your Why-Power

When you're having trouble doing the hard work of achieving your goals, it's common to believe you simply lack willpower. I disagree. It's not enough to choose to be successful. What's going to keep you consistent with the new positive choices you need to make? What's going to stop you from falling back into your mindless bad habits? What's going to be different this time versus the times you've tried and failed before? As soon as you get the slightest bit uncomfortable, you're going to be tempted to slide back into your old, comfortable routine.

You've tried willpower before and it's failed you. Forget about willpower. It's time for *why-power*. Your choices are only meaningful when you connect them to your desires and dreams. The wisest and most motivating choices are the ones aligned with that which you identify as your purpose, your core self, and your

So, what is your *why*? You've got to have a reason if you want to make significant improvements to your life. And to make you want to make the necessary changes, your why must be something that is fantastically

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motivating—to you. You've got to want to get up and go, go, go, go, go—for years! So, what is it that moves you the most? Identifying your why is critical. What motivates you is the ignition to your passion, the source for your enthusiasm, and the fuel of your persistence. You **MUST** know your *why*.

Why Everything's Possible

The power of your *why* is what gets you to stick through the grueling, mundane and laborious. All of the hows will be meaningless until your whys are powerful enough. Until you've set your desire and motivation in place, you'll abandon any new path you seek to better your life. If your why-power—your desire—isn't great enough, if the fortitude of your commitment isn't powerful enough, you'll end up like every other person who makes a New Year's resolution and gives up too quickly and reverts to sleepwalking through poor choices. Let me give you an analogy to help bring it home:

To truly spark your creative potential and inner drive, you have to look beyond the motivation of monetary and material goals. It's not that those motivations are bad; in fact, they're great. But material stuff can't really recruit your heart, soul and guts into the fight. That passion has to come from a deeper place. And, even if you acquire the shiny objects, you won't capture the real prize—happiness and fulfillment.



highest values. You've got to want something, and know why you want it, or you'll end up giving up too easily.



Core Motivation

The access point to your why-power is through your core values, which define both who you are and what you stand for. Your core values are your internal compass, your guiding beacon, your personal GPS. They act as the filter through which you run all of life's demands, requests and temptations, making sure they're leading you toward your intended destination. Getting your core values defined and properly calibrated is one of the most important steps in redirecting your life toward your grandest vision.

If you haven't already clearly defined your values, you may find yourself making choices that conflict with what you want. If, for example, honesty is a big thing for you, but you hang out with liars, there's a conflict. When your actions conflict with your values, you'll end up unhappy, frustrated and despondent. In fact, psychologists tell us that nothing creates more stress than when our actions and behaviors aren't congruent with our values.

Defining your core values also helps make life simpler and more efficient. Decision-making is also easier when you are certain of your core values. When faced with a choice, ask yourself, "Does this align with my core values?" If it does, do it. If not, don't, and don't look back. All fretting and indecision are eliminated.

Find Your Fight

People are either motivated by something they want or something they don't want. Love is a powerfully motivating force. But so is hate. Contrary to social correctness, it can be good to hate. Hate disease, hate injustice, hate ignorance, hate complacency, and so on. Sometimes identifying an enemy lights your fire. In history, the most transformational stories and political revolutions came about as a result of fighting an enemy. David had Goliath. America had the British. Luke had Darth Vader. Rocky had Apollo Creed. Apple has Microsoft.

Enemies give us a reason to stand tall with courage. Having to fight challenges your skills, your character and your resolve. It forces you to assess and exercise your talents and abilities. Some of my mentorship clients worry that their why-power derives from less-than-noble goals. They feel guilty for wanting to prove the naysayers wrong. Or wanting to get back at the person who said they'd never amount to anything, or beat the competition. What matters is that you feel fully motivated. Sometimes that motivation can help you use a powerfully negative emotion or experience to create an even more powerful and successful end.

We can all make powerful choices. We can all take back control by not blaming chance, fate or anyone else for our outcomes. It's within our ability to cause everything to change. Rather than letting past hurtful experiences sap our energy and sabotage our success, we can use them to fuel positive, constructive change.

Goals

When I attended the funeral of Paul J. Meyer, I was reminded of the richness and diversity of his life. He achieved, experienced and contributed more than dozens of people combined. His obituary made me reassess the quantity and size of the goals I set for myself. If Paul were here, he would tell us, "If you are not making the progress that you would like to make and are capable of making, it is simply because your goals are not clearly defined." One of Paul's most memorable quotes reminds us of the importance of goals: "Whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon... must inevitably come to pass!"

The one skill most responsible for the abundance in my life is learning how to effectively set and achieve goals. Something almost magical happens when you organize and focus your creative power on a well-defined target. I've seen this time and again: the highest achievers in the world have all succeeded because they mapped out their visions. The person who has a clear, compelling and white-hot burning *why* will always defeat even the best of the best at doing the *how*. **SHH**

Darren Hardy is the publisher of SUCCESS magazine and has been a leader in the personal-development industry for 16 years. He has mentored thousands of entrepreneurs, a d v i s e d many large corporations, served on the board of several companies and nonprofit organizations, and is committed to helping others achieve their potential in order to live richer, more fulfilling lives. He is a product of the principles he reveals in his latest book, The Compound Effect (www.TheCompoundEffect.com).

