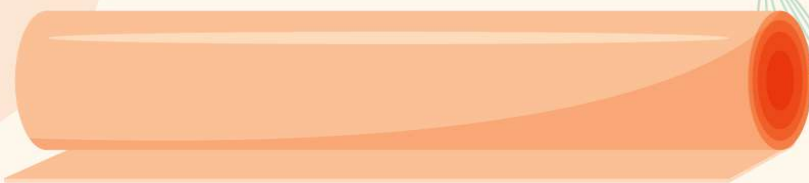


SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

TINY HABITS

BY BJ FOGG



Summary of Tiny Habits by BJ Fogg

Written by Alyssa Burnette

How a few small habits can change your life.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Change Your Mindset, Change Your Life	6
Find Something Small to Smile About	8
Start Small	10
Final Summary	13



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Introduction

Have you ever seen that funny meme that parodies the Lizzo hit, “Good as Hell?” Popular among many people in their twenties and thirties, the meme reads, “I do my hair toss, check my nails... Baby, how are you feeling? Feeling overwhelmed!” The meme makes us laugh because it’s so relatable! Although we’d like to be feeling “good as hell,” most of us simply find ourselves feeling overwhelmed. And it’s no wonder! With most adults juggling such conflicting responsibilities as a full-time job, full-time childcare, and continuing education, “having a lot on your plate” is a massive understatement! And in addition to these normalized pressures, most people also struggle with their attempts to eat a healthy diet, squeeze in time to exercise, maintain a healthy social life, and cultivate their personal development. It’s enough to drive anybody crazy!

So, if that describes you, then take a deep breath, grab a cup of coffee, and get ready to replace “overwhelmed” with “good as hell!” Because over the course of this summary, you’ll learn how to feel better and take control of your life by “thinking small.” That’s right-- contrary to the traditional self-help book which encourages you to achieve your dreams by thinking big, this book encourages you to downsize everything. If that sounds too wacky to be true, just keep reading, because you’re about to find out how thinking small can stop you from feeling overwhelmed!



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Change Your Mindset, Change Your Life

Have you ever made a New Year's resolution that you struggled to keep? How about one that you abandoned entirely? If you haven't, you might want to check your pulse because giving up on our healthy habits is a pretty universal human trait! The sad truth is that we've all been there, no matter how much we wish we haven't. We've all resolved to eat healthy, lose weight, be more assertive, or give up chocolate, and most of the time, we fail miserably. And as we reflect on our failures, we quickly dissolve into negative self-talk. We berate ourselves by saying things like, "If only I were stronger!" or "If I just had more willpower!" We then sink into despondency, becoming more bogged down in our negative circumstances and hating ourselves for it. Some people might even take a more toxic approach and embrace this stress and negativity because they believe that they can somehow bully themselves into creating the life they want.

When you say it like that, it's easy to think, "Why would anybody ever think that would work!" But this toxic mentality has been perpetuated by the belief that people thrive under pressure or that stress is somehow an integral part of anyone's success. But the author's research shows that nothing could be further from the truth! While it's always good to have a goal or to be motivated, both of those things are very different from being constantly stressed. And, contrary to popular opinion, stress is not necessary for success or motivation! But if stress is counterproductive, why do so many people think that it's helpful? As a psychologist, the author's professional experience has given him an opportunity to examine this problem at length and he's discovered a few key insights.

For starters, many people embrace stress and pressure because they believe they need it for motivation. If you don't have a boss or a deadline telling you that you have to get something done, many people worry that they might not have the motivation to accomplish their to-do lists. So, sometimes people procrastinate until the last possible second or overload themselves with too many commitments and believe that this pressure is necessary to help them get the job done. This happens because we associate stress with the rush of

adrenaline it gives us. As the adrenaline courses through our bodies, activating our “fight or flight” response, we suddenly find the strength and motivation to see a task through. Without it, we might feel lazy or apathetic. But that doesn’t mean that that stress is good.

Short bursts of adrenaline-based motivation can certainly be helpful, but this process puts a lot of wear and tear on our bodies. And over time, we can suffer tremendously from the stress. Because stress is an inherently negative thing, it naturally generates negative self-talk and negative coping mechanisms. For example, if you’re under a great deal of pressure, being kind to yourself probably isn’t your first instinct. Instead, you’re more likely to think something like, “You’re so stupid! Why can’t you get this done faster!” Similarly, you might be preoccupied with worries about what will happen if you fail. Instead of helping and motivating us, this stress can actually lead to burn-out and cause us to suffer from anxiety or depression or both. (Negative self-talk also contributes heavily to depression!) And in many cases, it can also lead to a mental breakdown. So, by putting ourselves under intense and prolonged stress, we’re actually doing our bodies more harm than good!

So, now that we’ve examined the toxicity of some common attitudes toward motivation, it’s time to consider an alternative approach. We know what doesn’t work, so let’s take a look at what can help us! For starters, the author affirms that changing your mindset is crucial for changing your life. And a more positive mindset asserts that it’s better to focus on being present in the moment and creating small, self-driven incentives for motivation rather than relying on external pressure. So, how can we do that? Well, keep reading, because we’re going to find out in the next chapter!



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Find Something Small to Smile About

This might sound like the most cliché advice in the world, but it might actually be the most helpful! That's because we should never underestimate the power of life's small, beautiful moments and their impact on our attitudes. Here's why: as we mentioned in the previous chapter, stress is the result of intense pressure and/or negativity. This wears us down and causes us to become frantic, nervous, and worried. But because it's impossible to rid our lives of all stress, it's vitally important that we find positive ways to counteract the stress we do encounter. This is the first and most important tiny habit to cultivate if you want to change your life.

Because it's so easy for us to become overwhelmed by the pressure in our lives, we need to balance that negativity with frequent bursts of little, happy things. It can be something as simple as sharing a funny meme with a friend. Or maybe you look forward to picking up a pumpkin spice latte on your work every morning. Maybe you just really love petting your cat. These small moments of joy can be anything and they will be different for every person. But no matter what brings you joy, the important thing is that you cultivate those moments. Because those moments are going to reduce your stress and re-set the short fuse that many of us accumulate during the stressful workday. They can also help you to focus on the positive, which is crucial for mitigating stress. Because-- let's face it-- it's highly unlikely that anyone loves every single aspect of their job or life. There's going to be something we hate doing, some task that feels mindless and unnecessary. As a result, we may often find it difficult to concentrate on that task (i.e. to stay present in the moment), to stay motivated, or to avoid procrastination. But if we can focus on the positive aspects of our lives as much as possible, we can improve our overall outlook.

For example, maybe you just really hate a certain part of your job. Maybe there's nothing positive about it and you're just always going to hate it. But maybe that task is just a stepping stone on your path to something better. Maybe once you master that skill, you can move on to the job you really want. Or maybe it's simply paying the bills and you can be grateful for that. Altering

your perspective in these small ways might not sound like much, but they can result in a substantial difference. In fact, if your outlook on life gets even slightly more positive, it can reduce your stress and improve your mental and physical health! So, take some time to truly stop and smell the roses. Tell your friend a joke. Treat yourself to a cupcake. And as you fall asleep each night, try to make a mental list of all the things you're grateful for.

These small positive things might sound cliché, but remember that our brains are basically computers. We have the power to program them with a vast array of information, so it's up to us to choose whether we want our brains to focus on the positive or the negative. Even simple things-- like the thoughts we dwell on and the attitudes with which we approach our days-- go a long way towards programming our brains. So, if you want to start building tiny, happy habits, start by programming your brain to look on the bright side!



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Start Small

Cultivating a positive outlook is only one of the tiny habits that can help you change your life. Dismantling toxic stereotypes is another important step that will enable you to embrace the power of thinking small. Here's why it's so important: if you're not familiar with the Information-Action fallacy, then the first thing you should know about it is that it's the number one flaw of most self-help books. The Information-Action fallacy posits that if people just know the right thing to do and how to do it, then they will do the right thing. But that's a pretty silly assumption because it actually undermines the need for self-help books! As we saw in the first chapter's example about failed New Year's resolutions, most people do know the right thing to do-- they just struggle to do it. And even when they're presented with advice such as, "Start a gratitude journal!" or "Wake up at 5am every day!" they don't feel capable of implementing that advice in their daily lives.

That's because-- you guessed it!-- achieving a major life change feels overwhelming too! And because people don't know how to cope with the overwhelming pressure of starting a big, new routine, they often lack the willpower to see it through. So, what does motivate people to achieve lasting change? The author's research indicates that everyone feels more comfortable starting with a small, manageable step. And the best part is that just a little bit of "stick-to-it-ive-ness" can turn that small step into a tiny habit! Here's how it works: we have the power to manipulate our subconscious into helping us form healthy life patterns. You can start by taking these three steps. First, determine your motivation. It's not enough to casually say, "I wish I had better habits"; you need an overarching goal that will motivate you to overcome any obstacles you might face.

That's why it's important to start by identifying your goals and the driving force that will motivate you to achieve them. For example, if you'd like to form a daily running habit, your desired outcome might be that you will get in shape and ultimately be capable of competing in a 10k marathon. Your expected obstacles, therefore, might be physical discomfort if you're unused to running and motivating yourself to stick with it even when you don't want

to run today. But that's a pretty tall order to accomplish all in one day, so start by adjusting your expectations until they're realistic. For example, you can form an easily achievable daily habit by saying, "I'm going to take the stairs every day."

But how you talk to yourself is also important when it comes to forming healthy habits. The author's research indicates that positive self-talk is more helpful and affirming than statements that begin in a negative way. For example, "I'll take the stairs today!" is more encouraging than, "I won't take the elevator." It sounds like a really small difference, but your brain pays attention to that little change in your vibe. Even if you mean it in a positive way, "I won't do this" always sounds negative. But starting with a positive statement like, "I will!" or "I can!" is always more encouraging. And, believe it or not, this little difference in your attitude can be a big help when it comes to motivation! So, once you've started the habit of encouraging self-talk, the next step is to repeat your action. This is important because repetition not only builds habits, it removes conscious thought and emotion. And when you're trying to form a healthy habit that may not feel very fun, it's best if you can quickly get yourself into the swing of doing it automatically, especially because it will cut out your internal monologue of, "I don't want to do this right now!"

You can also talk yourself out of giving in to excuses by anticipating challenging situations that may arise as you form your new habit. For example, if you haven't planned ahead, an unexpected rain shower might tempt you to say, "Oh, too bad! It's raining. I can't go running today!" But if you've planned ahead in little ways, you can counter that scenario with, "That's okay-- I'll just wear my waterproof running gear!" Doing this consistently is a great way to keep you on track. But now that we've examined some tips for forming good habits, it's also important to identify some small, positive strategies for breaking habits you'd like to get rid of. So if, for example, you want to quit smoking, remember that you don't have to make a big life change by going cold turkey. Instead, you can start small by doing one tiny thing to accomplish your goal.

For example, even trying to quit will boost your willpower. Even saying no one time when you want a cigarette will prove to your brain that you do have the power to resist! And you can keep going with these small starts until they add up. Because once you know you can go one week without indulging your nicotine cravings, you can surge ahead and try one more week. Just remember to take each attempt one day at a time-- or even one craving at a time, if it hits you multiple times a day! No matter how long it takes you, you can press on by continuing to repeat these small acts of resistance day by day and week by week.

You can also get your other habits under control in small ways like monitoring your behavior. For example, if you're struggling with thought patterns that lead you to engage in actions you'd rather avoid, you can try monitoring your thoughts through recording them in a diary. Similarly, if you struggle with your relationship with food, a food diary might help you track how many times per day you think about unhealthy foods or are otherwise tempted to stray from your newly formed healthy habits. Likewise, chewing gum when you're craving a cigarette or removing yourself from a toxic environment can also help. The important thing to remember is that none of these are big steps that require you to make a significant change at once. All of these tips are tiny habits you can build one small step at a time.



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Final Summary

Many people struggle to create the lives they want because they feel so overwhelmed. Whether they're overwhelmed by the pressure of their daily lives or the stress of attempting to change their habits all at once, these conflicting pressures join forces to keep people feeling down and out of control. But you can break free from this pressure and reclaim control! By debunking toxic stereotypes like the Information-Action fallacy, you can demystify the self-help process and focus on tiny habits that will help you take control, one small step at a time. Just start by saying no to negative self-talk, cultivating a positive outlook, and building small, healthy habits every day. And remember that something as simple as telling yourself, "I can do it!" every day can make a big difference in your life!



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