

Mark Kennedy: James thanks a lot for coming back. I wouldn't say come back on the show, well, it's been about six years I just look back in the previous...my blog feed, and I think it was March the 10th, 2013. Anyway, so welcome back and great to chat again.

James Clear: Yeah. Thank you, good talk to you as well. And kudos on the consistency and being around six years later, that's great.

Mark Kennedy: I'm still around and obviously so are you. So first, I just wanna congratulate you on your book that came out. When did it actually come out, was it October?

James Clear: Yep, October 2018. So it's been out for a few months now as of us recording this.

Mark Kennedy: Yeah. So the book's called "Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones." And I've read through it, loved it, recommended it to quite a few people already. And actually, we're up skiing with my family this past weekend, and the family we stay with, I walk in the kitchen, first thing I notice is a copy on the kitchen table.

James Clear: Oh, wow. That's great.

Mark Kennedy: So, I'm glad I'm actually talking to James on...when are we? On Wednesday. So anyways that was kinda cool.

James Clear: Oh, I see.

Mark Kennedy: So anyways, I just want basically to break our conversation into three main parts. I'm thinking first part sort of being a walk through some sort of the general principles of the book. Second part being maybe take you through a scenario, like what a typical None To Run subscribers... So their typical scenario, and perhaps we can walk through and maybe give some tips for a person sort of in that circumstance and with those goals. And then the last part, I just got two or three questions from some of my subscribers, so I'd love to get to those if we can. And that's about it.

James Clear: Yeah, great. That sounds perfect.

Mark Kennedy: Awesome. So the first part, some of the general principles that I liked and would love is to get you to just give us sort of your general tips, and feedback, and guidance around those principles would be awesome. The first one being, and this is a struggle for many of my subscribers would be overcoming

the lack of motivation and willpower as it comes to, you know, building a new habit. Obviously, you know, overcoming that inertia is difficult for many. They wanna do it, but it's hard. So what's sort of your general advice, thoughts, and tips around overcoming sort of a lack of motivation and willpower?

James Clear: Yeah, it's a good question. So I think first of all, maybe to invert the question, I don't really think it's a good idea to rely on motivation and willpower. So some of kind of my central philosophy and approach sort of comes out of that or maybe is like the other side of that coin. So if you don't have much motivational willpower, what can you manage to do? Well, you can usually only manage to do small things. And so, if you think of, you know, you sort of think of any habit as maybe like a spectrum from very easy to very hard.

You know, so like doing one push-up is very easy, doing 100 push-ups might be very hard. Or, in the case of running, you know, putting on your running shoes is very easy, walking for 10 minutes is easy, going for a run for a 5K might be moderate or maybe a 10K or something is hard, and a marathon might be very hard, right? So, a lot of people when they start, they say things like what you just said. Like, "Oh, I really want to do it, I want to run the marathon, I want to be able to do 100 push-ups." But I think we don't even realize that we're jumping so far down the spectrum, right, we're just like immediately thinking of this ultimate finish line or outcome that we want.

And instead, you know, and this is one of the core ideas of "Atomic Habits," I think it's much more useful to focus on the easy portion of the spectrum, to scale it down and focus on the simplest action, the first movement. So, kind of the practical answer to your question, what do you do when you don't have much willpower, what do you do when you feel like you're low on motivation? I talk about a variety of strategies in the book, but I think one good place to start is with what I call the two-minute rule.

So, we basically take whatever habit you're trying to build, and you scale it down to something that you can do in two minutes or less. So, in the case of, you know, running 3 miles or something that becomes put on your running shoes, or do yoga 4 days a week becomes take out your yoga mat, or read 30 books a year becomes read 1 page, something that takes 2 minutes or less to do. And you're really trying to automate that first action, that first movement.

And I have a story or an example that I like to share from a reader of mine. He ended up losing over 100 pounds, but one of the first things that he did was he went to the gym, and he wasn't allowed to stay for longer than 5 minutes. He would get in the car, drive to the gym, get out, do half an exercise, get back in the car and drive home. And it sounds silly to people at first. It sounds like, you

know, so small, it's almost to be ridiculous. You know, it's like, well, clearly doing half an exercise, being in the gym for 5 minutes is not gonna be the thing that gets you in shape.

But what the key thing that he was doing and what you realize is he was mastering the art of showing up, right? He was becoming the type of person that went to the gym 4 days a week, even if it was only for a few minutes. And if you don't become that kind of person, then you don't really have a chance to be the person who works out for 45 minutes for 4 days a week, right? I think this is, you know, maybe a surprising and deeper truth about how habits work, and what you need to focus on, which is that a habit must be established before it can be improved, right, figure out a way to make it the normal in your life, the standard before you worry about optimizing it.

And if you can become that person who puts on their running shoes 3 days a week or who goes to the gym for 5 minutes, 4 days a week, then you have a chance to be the person who does the big ambitious thing that's on the hard side of the spectrum. So I think that's really my solution for dealing with willpower, and discipline, and motivation problems is let's scale it down to a point where it's so easy, you feel like you could do it 98% of the time even if you had no motivation. And then once that becomes your normal, then we can start to talk about ways to upgrade and expand from there.

Mark Kennedy: I love that and that's so common. I mean, you know, I fall into that trap. I think everyone does, you start something new and whether it's, you know, running, cycling, playing the piano whatever. And you're looking for that improvement, improvement, improvement when you haven't established even, you know, the habit of, you know, playing the piano four or five times a week. So, yeah, that's so common and yeah, I love that advice that you just gave there. That's in the book as well I believe, right? That story about the...

James Clear: Yeah. The two-minute rule is, you know, maybe 75% of the way through. It's mentioned in there as part of making your habits easy and convenient.

Mark Kennedy: Yeah. And I think the story about the fellow driving to the gym is in the book as well if I remember.

James Clear: Yeah. You know, ultimately, what we're talking about here is you wanna perform a habit enough times that you feel like it's reinforcing being a certain type of person, right? So in the case of, you know, I mention this in Chapter 2 of the book, this kinda concept of identity-based habits. That true behavior change at a certain level is really identity change, it's really about

looking at yourself in a new way. You know, there are a lot of people who when they start working out, or they start going for runs or whatever, it feels like a lot, it feels like a sacrifice, it feels like it's not normal. It feels like it requires a lot of energy and effort to do that.

But there are also plenty of other people who go into the gym 3 days a week is normal. It doesn't feel like a sacrifice, it's just kind of what they do. And I think that that shift occurs once you start to adopt that action as part of your identity. And so this is why I say things like the goal is not to run a marathon, the goal is to become a runner. The goal is not to meditate for 20 minutes every day, the goal is to be a meditator. The goal is not to write a book, it's to be a writer. Because once you identify as those things, I am a writer, I am a meditator, I am a runner, well, then it's like doing those actions does not require a lot of additional effort or motivation, because you're just acting in alignment with who you already believe yourself to be. You know, like, do I need to get motivated to write? Well, not really because that's who I am, right, I am a writer, that's what writers do.

And I think so the natural question follows from that, of course, is like well, if that's true, then how do I get to that point, right, how do I become that? And this is where I think we get, you know, the loop closes, and we get back to this kind of two-minute idea. Which is you show up in small ways, you know, you write a sentence each day and on the first day, maybe you don't identify as a writer and maybe you don't on the second day, or the 20th or the 50th. But at some point maybe at 6 months, or 12 months, or 2 years later, you've been showing up every day and writing a sentence. And so, you start to identify as "Yeah, I'm the type of person that writes every day, that's just what I do."

So I think it's that consistency in small ways that sort of...the way I like to phrase it as, every action you take, casts a vote for the type of person that you believe that you are. And so even when you're doing small things, 1 push-up, reading 1 page, meditating for 1 minute, you're casting a vote for being a person who doesn't miss workouts, or for being a meditator, or for being a reader. And eventually, once those votes accumulate and pile up, you start to actually believe that that's what you are.

Mark Kennedy: You talk a lot about in your book and in your writing about and this sort of leads into what you were just talking to into this. But making tiny easy changes that deliver big results and sort of making the comparison to like compound interest or 1% changes that like may not seem like a lot today and over a month or so but in over weeks and months, they can add up to a lot. So can you talk a little bit about that?

James Clear: Well, habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. And what I mean by that phrase is the same way that money multiplies through compound interest, the effects of your habits multiplies, you repeat them across time. So, you know, if you have money and you're saving a little bit like retirement, well, you know, you save 100 bucks or something, it doesn't really feel like a whole lot. You're like, "Well, I can't retire on that," you know, like it doesn't seem to make much difference. And that's especially true in the early days, you know, you got those early months, you're in your 20s and 30s or whatever, and you're kind of trying to accumulate a little bit and save. And you're like, "Man, you know, this is gonna take forever."

But then in the later years, you get a decade or two in, you start to hit that hockey stick portion of the curve, it starts to compound in a surprising way and, you know, you turn around and you're surprised by how much the portfolio is growing. And habits are not exactly like that, it's not a mathematical equation in the same, you know, way. But Dave, man, they can feel like that a lot of the time. And I think what is true and what's very similar between compound interest in finance and kind of the compound interest of self-improvement is that the greatest gains, the greatest results are delayed. And that's kind of a hallmark of any compounding process. You don't have a whole lot in the beginning. It doesn't seem like very much, seems insignificant at first, but if you keep showing up, it really compounds and takes off over time.

And, you know, you can look at almost any habit like that. Reading one book today is fairly insignificant, doesn't mean a whole lot. But commitment to lifelong reading, well, that can be transformative. Then you get this kind of compound effect of knowledge over time. Or, you know, what is the difference between eating a burger and fries for lunch or eating a salad? On any given day, it's not really a whole lot, you know, your body looks basically the same in the mirror, the scale doesn't really change. But if you repeat that habit for 2 years, or 5 years, or 10 years, well, then you turn around and you're very surprised by, you know, "Oh, wow, those daily choices really were adding up."

So, I think that that's kind of the ultimate truth or that kernel of truth about compounding and habits, which is they can feel insignificant in both directions, getting 1% better or 1% worse on any given day. But if you can master that little advantage then you put time to work for you rather than against you. So that's why, you know, sometimes I'll say like, "Time magnifies the margin between success and failure." It multiplies whatever you feed it. So good habits make time your ally and bad habits make time your enemy. And if you can master that and capture that little 1% improvement each day, you'll end up surprised, you know, 2, or 5, or 10 years later at where you're at.

Mark Kennedy: I love that. Breaking bad habits versus sticking or starting good habits, is there a difference in the approach to breaking habit versus starting or sticking to a good habit?

James Clear: Yeah. I mean, I think there is there, you know, to a certain degree they're kind of two sides to the same coin, but there are some differences. So when you're building a good habit, when you're trying to build a new habit, it's not, well, first let's just set the stage. So what is the definition of a habit? So a habit is a behavior that has been repeated enough times to be more or less automatic, so you can do it pretty much on autopilot. So like brushing your teeth, tying your shoes, unplugging the toaster after each use.

And then, you know, it's not just physical things, it also can be habits of thought or things that you say. So, you know, maybe you don't realize that you apologize each time before you ask a question, "Oh, I'm sorry but," you know, whatever or that you cover your mouth every time before you laugh, or that you have a certain like mental loop that you get into or anxiety habit that you get into when certain things happens or whatever. So there are all kinds of habits like that, but the point is that you've repeated them enough times that you kind of slide into them naturally by default on autopilot without thinking about it.

Now, when it comes to building a good habit, well, the behavior is not automatic yet, it hasn't been built yet. So one of the key factors in building a good habit is repeating it enough times to gain like fluency and fluidity and, you know, gain the ability to make it routine because it's not that yet. But then when you think about breaking a bad habit, well, many of our bad habits are by definition, they're already habits, right? They've been established, they're already automatic. You bite your fingers without thinking about it, or you twirl your hair even though you don't notice or you, you know, fall into this anxiety trap before you even realize that you're there.

So bad habits are kind of like already nonconscious and automatic, and so one of the challenges with those is becoming aware of them at first. So bad habits kind of require a lot of self-awareness in the beginning because you don't even realize that you're doing it. And then if we can combine these two, so you've got the good habit, you're really trying to focus on like get the reps in, make it routine, make it automatic. And then you've got the bad habit, it's already automatic, how do I make it maybe more conscious, or realize, or become self-aware of it. You know, there are other strategies for breaking bad habits like you can just eliminate it outright, or you can try to curtail it by reducing some of the triggers that prompt it, things like that.

But you can also, and we can talk about more of that stuff if you'd like, but when it comes to building good habits, sometimes I think the most effective way to break a bad habit is just to focus on building a good one. You don't even really worry about the bad habit. So like let's say, for example, that you have a bad habit of watching like too much TV when you get home from work, or playing video games, or something. You like get home and you turn on the screen and then you just zone out for a few hours. Well, you could focus on a bunch of ways to try to break that habit, you know, you like hide the video game controller, figure out strategies for, you know, how to break stuff like that.

But you could also say, "Well, there is a good habit I wanna build, which is I wanna get in shape. I wanna start exercising more." And so rather than even think, you don't even think about the screen thing, the video games or TV. And you just say, "All right, I'm gonna focus on the new habit of when I get home from work, I change into my workout clothes. And then after I change into my workout clothes, I head to the gym." Well, if you can start to master that habit, make exercise easier, get into the flow of doing that, well, when you're at the gym, you've kind of have already taken care of like an hour of that video game habit. You know, you can't play it because you're at the gym, doing sets and reps, right, like you're not even thinking about the TV, because you're somewhere else doing something else.

And basically, the lesson here is that everybody only has 24 hours in a day. And so a lot of the time, kind of like one plant crowding out another and taking up the sunlight and nutrients in the soil, good habits can sort of crowd out your bad ones automatically. And so sometimes I think it's more useful just to focus on the positive side of the equation, and build some good ones and then your bad ones sort of fall by the wayside naturally. Doesn't always work but sometimes that can be helpful.

Mark Kennedy: Now, everyone also gets off track, you know, when they want to start a new habit such as running, in this case. What do you do when you get off course? Like what are the approaches you would recommend people take when they, you know, miss a day or two of running, they're sick, or they just feel lazy that day, or they've been busy and their kids have lots of stuff going on, they can't run. So what do you recommend when people get off course?

James Clear: You know, if you think about it from like an overall perspective or a high level, there really are only two things that you have to do to think about your habits. You need to master the art of getting started, so you have to figure out how to make it easy to get started, and then you have to figure out how to stick. So getting started on a habit and sticking to a habit. Those are really the only two things from a big overall view that matter.

And then if you think about it even further, you zoom out like one level higher than that, really sticking to a habit just means that you get started on it each day. So really the only problem to solve is getting started. If you can make it easy to get started each day, you automatically stick to it. And if it's easy to get started and you're sticking to it, then you don't have anything else to worry about, because you're doing it all the time. So I think a lot of this comes back to making it easy to start, reminding yourself to start, getting over the friction of starting day in and day out. So, you know, I guess we could just summarize it as saying a habit simply means a behavior that you get started on each day or consistently.

So if that's true, and then you find that you have fallen off course, as you just said in your question, then the only thing to focus on when you fall off track is making it easy to start again. And there are a couple of different things you can do. You know, we already mentioned the two-minute rule, so scale it down. Let's say for example, in the case of running, let's say you've been running for like 2 months, and you've been consistent, you've been doing it 3 days a week or something. And then your kids get sick, or you have to travel for work for a week, or whatever it is, something takes you off track, and you didn't get any running in that week. So now you have this backslide.

And sometimes people will feel like, "Oh, I need to get right back to where I was before." Or, they realize, "Oh, man, I already lost some progress, you know, like I'm not gonna be able to finish the full workouts this week that I was supposed to do last week." And that can make them feel like, "Oh, I've already blown it." And instead, I would say don't worry about coming right back in at the level you were at, you can just, if you have trouble getting started again, scale back down to that two-minute version. You know, just put on your running shoes and get out the door or do the workout that you were doing the first week rather than, you know, 3 days ago. So focusing on scaling it down can help a lot.

But the real mantra that I like to keep in mind and the philosophy that sort of helps me get back on track and get started after I slide off course is never miss twice. So, you know, this is particularly powerful, I think for like diets and there are certain type of habits that people get very all or nothing about for whatever reason. You know, like diets, it's like, "All right, I picked this diet plan and I'm gonna stick to it." And they do it for 5 days, and then on the sixth day their friends wanna go to happy hour, or they binge eat a pizza, or something. And they're like, "Oh, you know, I knew I was gonna blow it, I guess I'm not cut out for this diet." Which is so interesting, right? That like you do something five out of six days but you think like, "Oh, I'm not cut out for it." For whatever reason, we just get very, like it's either 100% or it's 0.

Mark Kennedy: Absolutely.

James Clear: So never miss twice is a mantra that kind of helps overcome that. Where you say, "All right, I wish I hadn't binged ate the pizza, but never miss twice. So, let me make sure the next meal is a healthy one." Or, in my case, for a long time, you know, I was writing articles for the first few years. When I started jamesclear.com I was writing every Monday and Thursday. Well, if I missed on Thursday, I wish that hadn't happened but never miss twice. So let me make sure that I show up and get something out on Monday. And it helps you get over that perfectionism trap, that all or nothing trap. And ultimately, it just nudges you to do that one thing that matters, which is how can I make sure I get started next time. And so, I think that that can be one helpful way to deal with that.

Mark Kennedy: Yeah. The never miss twice is just great. Yeah, and that's sort of what I reinforce with my runners the None To Run participants is just like it's okay to miss a workout and, you know, just come back. And, you know if need to scale it back, do it. And just, you know, get back on the horse. And you haven't ruined or lost all your fitness and just because you missed one or two workouts by any means, so I love that never miss twice.

Okay, let's move into the next section. So I just wanna walk through sort of a typical None To Run participant, and I thought it might be cool to sort of profile, give them a sort of an avatar and then you could walk through some quick tips for this person based on sort of your four laws of behavior change. And those being one, make it obvious, two, make it attractive, three, make it easy, and four, make it satisfying.

So a typical participant coming in a None To Run program, they might be overweight, may or may not be overweight, they wanna improve their diet, they're busy, they've got, you know, one, two, three kids, they work a full-time job. Motivation and time is lacking at times, but they really wanna start running. So there's lots going on, there's lots of change required. But, yeah, perhaps we can walk through based on the four laws of behavior change sort of what this person can do to set themselves up for success.

Mark Kennedy: Yeah. So first of all, let me set the context a little bit. So, you know, in the book I talk about kind of dividing a habit into four stages, cue, craving, response, and reward. I won't explain it all in detail right here, if you want to get the full explanation, you can check out Chapter 3 of the book. But the point is that dividing a habit into these four stages allows us to understand better how a habit works and what we can do to change it? And so each of these four laws, each one addresses one of those four steps.

So in the case of like, for example, make it obvious, the idea is to make the cues that trigger and prompt your good habits as obvious, and available, and visible as possible. And then for each of the four laws, you can invert it if you want to break a bad habit, so you make the cues invisible instead of making it obvious for your bad habits. So that's how can we hide those cues, reduce distractions, reduce exposure, and so on.

So in the case of like this prototypical runner who would come into the None To Run program, I think one of the first things to do, we can focus on the third law of behavior change, making it easy. So in order to make running easy, especially if you're busy, you got a couple kids or things are just crazy at work, you have this very packed schedule. So the first element of this is simplicity. I find that a lot of time, you know, behaviors are sort of tied to each other in the sense that you change one thing and that reminds you of something else you'd like to change too, right? So you might have people come in and say, "Oh, all right, I wanna start running and I'm also gonna stretch consistently, and I'm gonna change my diet and start meditating or whatever." Right, they like wanna do all of these health habits as one [crosstalk 00:24:56] package.

Mark Kennedy: Complete life overhaul.

James Clear: Right. And I think that's natural. As soon as you start to get motivated about one change, you start thinking about all the other stuff you wanna do. And, you know, it's kind of comes in and as you said, you try to do this complete overhaul thing. So what I think people often don't realize is that when you try to change one thing, you often need to change multiple.

So let's say, for example, that you're gonna build a habit of eating healthy. Well, you might say, "All right, I'm just gonna focus on this one habit, I'm going to eat healthy." But actually, you need to change like five other related habits for that to happen, right? You need to change your meal planning and prep habits. You need to change your grocery shopping habits so you're buying better food. You may need to change your cooking habits and like chopping and preparation of the food. After you get done eating the meal, you need to change your cleaning habits and, you know, because you're cooking more meals at home rather than eating out or whatever.

In reality, like the actual habit you're trying to do, eating a healthy meal, that's like...eating the meal is the easy part. It's like all this other stuff that's related to it. And I think we could probably say that many people who are trying to build this habit of running are facing a similar situation where the actual run itself is maybe the easy part, especially if you scale it down and start small. It's all the other stuff related to it, finding the time and space to do it, making sure that I take

care of my responsibilities with my family before I'm, you know, trying to go out on this run or whatever. Figuring out what kind of program I'm going to be following, I don't even know what I... You know, now I need to change my habits of like researching workout programs and things. So there's a lot of extra logistical stuff that goes along with doing just one habit. So my key point with that is simplicity, focusing on just one thing, let the meditation, and the stretching, and the diet changes, and all that stuff, let it sit to the side for now. Let's just think about running.

Then the second piece of making that easy is scaling it down so that it's not intimidating. So that you feel like, you know, if I was going to ask myself, you got this busy schedule, I'm gonna ask myself to go for a 45-minute run 3 days a week, when I'm motivated, when I have the time and the space, I'll make it happen. But as soon as the day gets busy, then I start looking at my calendar and my clock, and I think "Oh, I don't have 45 minutes," right, "I got 10 minutes."

So I think the level that you want to scale down to, the question to ask yourself if your habit is easy enough or not is can I do this 98% of the time, no matter what the conditions without fail? And if you can't do it that frequently, that consistently, then it's too big, at least in the beginning, right? At least at the very start, again, in the beginning, all we're trying to do is master the art of showing up. Become the type of person that gets your running shoes on and gets out the door even if it only means that it's at 10:00 after you put your kids to bed and all you do is run around the block and then come back inside. But you have to like find a way to become that person that's showing up consistently first. So make it easy is a big part of that. I guess I'll pause there, and then we can dive into the other three. I just wanna see if you got other stuff to add or want me to expand on any particular part.

Mark Kennedy: No. I think that's good. Yeah, just carry on your train of thought there. This is great.

James Clear: So, making it easy and staying simple and focused I think is a good place to start. Then we can kind of go through these other three stages, right? So the first law of behavior change is to make it obvious. Well, you can ask yourself, what are the things that I need that make running obvious to me? What are the cues that prompt that habit? So maybe it's seeing your water bottle filled, maybe it's seeing your running shoes sitting by the door. Maybe it's the route that you're gonna run mapped out on your phone, and you can like check that throughout the day and remind yourself where you're gonna be running or whatever.

But no matter what it is, there are gonna be some cues that kind of prompt, and remind, and motivate you to get started on that habit. And I think the key thing

to think about here is you wanna prime the environment so that all that stuff is ready, and visible, and available for you. So I actually have a couple of readers who, you know, a lot of people I think will prep their gym bag the night before or set their running shoes out by the door so they can see them right away when they get up if they're trying to go for a run or workout in the morning. I actually have some readers who will wear their running clothes to bed. And all they have to do is roll out of bed, put their feet in their shoes and then step out the door.

Mark Kennedy: I love that.

James Clear: So those are examples of not only making it obvious but, again, that that third law, making it easy, right, making it as easy as possible, as convenient as possible to slide into this habit. So that's an example of how to apply the first law of behavior change. I also wanna add while I'm talking about this, it can be helpful to think about the inverse of each law and how it might be preventing you from moving forward. So when it comes to the cues of your good habits of running like seeing your shoes or your water bottle and so on, those help nudge you forward.

But it also might be worth asking, what are the cues that distract me? What are the things that pull me off course? And can I make those cues less obvious, less available, less visible? You know, you may find, for example, that you wake up in the morning and you turn off your alarm on your phone, and the first thing you do is you tap the email icon and then you start scrolling through your email. And you may find that that cue of seeing the email icon and the habit of scrolling through your phone, that if you start to see emails from your boss, and work-related stuff, or whatever, that either you start to get anxious or overthink, you know, start thinking about what you need to do for the day. Or, you may just find that that pulls you into work immediately. You know, you go take a shower and you just immediately start doing all the stuff you need to do. And it like swallows up that 45 minutes that you would have had to go for a run.

And so perhaps you should ask yourself, "Well, how can I cut that cue out?" You know, like maybe it's more useful to charge your phone in the kitchen than in your bedroom, and buy an actual alarm clock and put it right next to your bed. And now when you wake up, you turn the alarm off, but you don't tap on the email icon, you're not reading emails before you've even taken a step. And maybe you, you know, turn off the alarm, get out of bed, go for a run for a half hour, come back, take a shower, and start your day, and then you check the email. But my point is that it's not only useful to make the cues of your good habits obvious, it's also can be very helpful to make the distractions invisible. So restructuring your environment in that way can be useful as well.

All right, so that's the first law. We've talked about making it obvious. We've talked about the third law, making it easy. The other two, make it attractive and make it satisfying. So making your habits more attractive, making them more appealing is really about the meaning that you assign to the behavior. So let me give you an example. Let's say that you go to bed and you think, "All right, tomorrow is gonna be the day. Right, I'm gonna wake up at 6:00, I'm gonna go for a run early, and I'm gonna go to work." You go to sleep, 6 a.m. rolls around and your bed is warm, it's cold outside, and you're like "Well, maybe I'll just hit snooze instead."

But if you rewind the clock and you send a text to a friend the day before and you say "Hey, can we meet at the park at 6:30 and go for a run?" Well, now 6 a.m. rolls around, and your bed is still warm and it's still cold outside. But if you don't get out and go to the park, you're a jerk, because you leave your friend there all alone, right? And so that's what...psychologists call this a commitment device. It's like a choice that you make now that helps lock in your behavior for the future.

And that's one way to make habits more attractive, right? Suddenly it's more appealing to wake up at 6 a.m. than it was previously. Because now if you don't get up, there's like a cost associated with that behavior. And so making your habits attractive, it's about shifting that analysis in your head like, "Oh, what does 6 a.m. mean? How attractive is it now?" And little strategies like that can help nudge you along, you know, and help lock in your future behavior and make it more likely that you'll follow through. So commitment devices are a helpful way to make habits more attractive.

And then finally, we have the fourth law of behavior change, make it satisfying. So really what this is all about and this is what helps get a habit to stick in the long run is you want to feel successful once you finish the habit. The completion of the habit should be satisfying, enjoyable, pleasurable. The more that you have positive emotions and feelings associated with the finish of the habit, the more you're training your brain and teaching yourself, "Hey, it's all good. I should do this again next time." You know, like if you feel bad after you finish a habit, well, nobody wants to repeat that, right?

So there are a couple of things you can do here. And I think that you can think about it both on a short-term or immediate gratification timescale, and a long-term or ultimate outcome timescale. So the ultimate outcome of going for a run consistently is great. You get in shape, you start to feel good about yourself, you lose a little bit of weight, you start to identify as I'm a runner. But most of those rewards that I just described, they don't come for a while, right, they don't come until 3, or 6, or 12 months later, like you need to stick with it for a while.

And so there's this valley of death from the beginning of a habit until that ultimate outcome, those ultimate rewards start to accumulate and show up. And in that valley, in that gap there, from when you start to when you start to identify as a runner and get those long-term rewards, it can be helpful to have some external motivators, some external rewards that get you through that period.

So, you know, for example, you could say, at the end of each week, when I do all of my running, let's say you're running 3 days a week, for every week that I get my 3 days in, on Saturday, I get to take a bubble bath. And so the reason I like that is because it... You can also imagine other external rewards like people do this exercise a lot, after I do my work out, I reward myself with a milkshake or, you know, a bowl of ice cream or something. Well, the external reward is there but I don't like that strategy, because you're casting conflicting votes, right? Like, on the one hand, you're voting for, I am a healthy person. I worked out. On the other hand, you're voting for, I ate ice cream.

And so what you're looking for is an external reward that aligns with or reinforces your desired identity. And so that's why I like, for example, the bubble bath option, because both taking a bubble bath and going for a run are casting a vote for, I'm taking care of my body. And it doesn't always have to align perfectly like that, but at a minimum, you don't want the external reward to conflict with who you're trying to become. So that kinda gives you a overview of how to apply, make it obvious, make it attractive, make it easy, make it satisfying. And use those four laws of behavior changes to improve the odds or increase the odds that you'll follow through on the run.

Mark Kennedy: I love that. Thanks for walking through that for us. Okay, so the last part of the conversation. I've got a couple, it's like three questions. Some of the questions, some of the information you may have touched upon but we'll go through them anyway here. The first question is from the Nicole Park. She says, "What tips do you have about adding on to habits? If I set my habit goals realistically enough, I can usually stick to the first very small habit, but as soon as I add another or up the ante, I can't seem to stick to either habit."

James Clear: Yeah that's a good question. Okay, so there are two possible strategies I think you can take here. So first strategy is, and this sounds like what she's trying to do, if you want to perform multiple habits. And I think the answer here is to try to find the right time and location to insert each habit into your life, and then keep them small enough that you can make a little stack out of them. So this is a strategy that in the book I refer to as habit stacking. I first learned about it from B.J. Fogg, he's a professor at Stanford.

And the basic idea is that you stack or add one habit on top of another. So let's say that you can create like a morning productivity stack, for example, and let's say that you always make a cup of coffee every morning. Well, you could say, "After I make my morning cup of coffee, I will meditate for 60 seconds." And then you're like, "All right, I did that for a few weeks, and that's easy," which is what she's mentioning in this question. And now I think, "Okay, not only do I want to meditate, I also want to start journaling."

Well, the key here is to make sure that the morning, first of all, is the right time of day to do this for you. You know, you can imagine, for example, if you have little kids, like your four-year-old doesn't care at all if you're trying to meditate. They're just running around and, you know, you're trying to get people ready for school and whatever. So maybe the morning is not the right time for that habit. But let's assume that it is. You need to keep it small enough that you can build this little stack, so you could say "After I make my morning cup of coffee, I will meditate for 60 seconds, after I meditate for 60 seconds, I will journal 1 sentence about what happened yesterday. After I journal one sentence, I will write my to-do list for the day and start working on the first task."

So now you have this little morning productivity stack, right? Where you've got like three little things, I meditate, I journal, and I do my to-do list. And they all can happen in rapid succession building on each other, and they're short enough that you can actually stick to them. So the scale and the scope is important there, and so is the timing and asking yourself to do it at the right time of day. So that's the first strategy.

The second strategy though is to say, "All right, I'm not gonna add multiple things to my life. So I'm not going to both meditate, and journal, and do the to-do list, I'm just gonna pick one habit to focus on." So let's say, for example, that writing is the important habit that you're gonna focus around. Well, the same thing happens as what she's mentioning here. You start writing and you say, "All right, I'm gonna write one sentence each day." And you do that for, I don't know, a month or two, and then all of a sudden it gets boring. You're like, "All right, I'm writing a sentence every day but, you know, I'm used to it. I know what to expect, whatever." Well, the thing to do then is not to add another habit, a separate unrelated habit, it's to find a new detail to get obsessed with or interested in."

And so you're still asking yourself to do the core fundamental, but you're finding a new way to be fascinated with the behavior. So let's take, say you're like "All right, you know, I've been writing 100 words a day, and now I started to know what to expect. So for the next few weeks my little 1% improvement, the area I'm gonna focus on improving is I'm gonna try to write great opening sentences." And so maybe I'll pick a few books off the shelf and I'll look at how the opening

sentence for each chapter. Maybe, I'll go to "The New York Times" and see what the popular articles are in that site and like look at what the opening sentences are there, and that kinda becomes my research for trying to improve my own opening sentences. And after you do that and add that into your habit for, you know, the next few weeks then you pick a different thing to focus on. Maybe, now you're focused on transitions between paragraphs, or on a great concluding sentence, or things like that.

And my point here whether it's writing or running as another good thing you like, maybe for a few weeks, you focus on hand placement while you're running or on foot strike, or on your stride length or, you know, breathing, a ton of other, right, there are like an infinite range of things you could think about. But you are sticking to the same fundamentals, but you're finding a new detail to be interested in. And I think the advantage of that is that it prevents you from jumping from habit to habit, you know, there are so many people who do things like "All right, I write for six weeks then I got bored. Well, maybe I shouldn't write, maybe I should start a podcast." And then they do a podcast for 6 weeks and then they get bored and they're, "Well, maybe I should do a YouTube channel or whatever." But they're never sticking with anything long enough to get the results. And so finding new details to be fascinated with is a good way of overcoming that barrier and continuing to expand your habit and scope but maintaining the interest in that core fundamental that really matters.

Mark Kennedy: That's great. Nicole also asked any tips on how to get back up from a perceived failure? I think you tackled that a little bit earlier in the conversation, so we'll move on to the next one here. And this question is from Kate Reed. She says, "James, my best chance to run is in the morning as I don't govern when my work days end, but I'm not a morning person by any stretch of the imagination. It takes me a good 45 minutes to wake up to any kind of functional level, how can I make this work?"

James Clear: Yeah. That's a good question, so it's tough. But I would say that the commitment device idea that I shared earlier, so whether that's texting a friend to run with them, or joining a running club, or otherwise meeting somebody tends to be enough of a social motivator to get you out of bed if you don't feel like that's what you naturally would do, right? If left to your own devices and you don't feel like a morning person, you might just hit snooze and, you know, like not make it happen. But the social cost is enough to make it work, and that was her question like, how can I make it work? Well, that's one way, so increasing the consequence that you feel.

If you're not in a position or a place or, you know, don't have a group like that that you could join or people that you could meet, you can also try an interesting

technological solution. So I came across a story of this one guy who, he wanted to start waking up earlier, he wanted to wake up at 6 a.m. each day. But he just was, same thing, he wasn't a morning person. It was a struggle. So he set up an automated schedule, an automatic tweet to go out at 6:05. And that tweet would say "I'm not awake yet because I'm lazy. The first 5 people to reply to this, I will PayPal you \$20."

And so that went out at 6:05. So he would wake up at 6:00, and the first thing he would do is turn off his alarm clock and then just reschedule the tweet for the next day. And so as long as he was waking up on time, he was always able to move the tweet back a day. And that was enough, of course, to get him up and out of bed, and then once he was out of bed, the rest kind of fell in line. So it's possible that you could do something like that, like maybe you could schedule the tweet, just charge your phone in the kitchen. And so by the time you wake up and get down to the kitchen and schedule the tweet for the next day, now it's like, all right, I've already put in enough work. Let me just grab a cup of coffee and then go for a run. So, little things like that might be enough to get you moving to make it happen.

Mark Kennedy: I like that. And I definitely like the social cost. In the summer, here in Toronto, I'm part of a cycling club actually, and we meet at one of the sort of big parks at 5:20 or 5:30 in the morning. And I've got two buddies I ride with, and I know they're waiting for me at the top of my street at 5:30 sharp, so I got to be there. So the social cost is...it definitely works for me and, yeah, it's a good strategy.

James Clear: It's actually remarkable how meaningful the driver, that social environment is for our habits. I think, you know, I have a whole chapter on this in "Atomic Habits." And I think even still I undersold the importance of it. So many of the behaviors that we perform are a response to the groups that we belong to. And so being part of that cycling group, it changes your morning routine, right, changes whether you wake up. And the same thing is true for all kinds of habits that we do each day. You know, like if you move into, this is true in big and small ways, and if you move into a new neighborhood and you walk outside, and you see all your neighbors have their recycling bins out on Wednesday night. Well, you're like, "Oh, I guess we need to sign up for recycling. That's what everybody like us does here, you know."

And those little social nudges and reinforcements are all around us. And if you can get in with the right group or the right tribe, then you can start to put that peer pressure to work for you rather than against you. It can be a very beneficial and positive force when you're surrounded by the right folks.

Mark Kennedy: Yeah. I agree, very powerful. So we should wrap up just to be conscious of our time here and your time. Is there any tools or habit trackers you recommend? And I know there's a sort of a supplementary, paper-based habit tracking like is it a journal that you have that sort of accompanies your book or is anything else that you'd recommend?

James Clear: Yeah. So I wrote "Atomic Habits," and that's kind of the comprehensive guide on how habits work and how to change them. You know, it gives you a lot of the strategies we talked about today and, you know, a bunch of other ones that we didn't have time to get into. And then as a complement to that, we created what I call the "Habit Journal." And it's got a section in the front that helps you build a journaling habit, and kind of write one line per day, so there's 12 pages there, so one for each month. And then the bulk of the notebook is just a regular notebook. And you use it how you use any other notebook. It's Dotgrid, you know, you can fill... I use it to record my workouts in, but you could use it for whatever you want.

And then at the back of the notebook, there are 12 habit tracker templates, so again one for each month of the year. And you can write down the habit that you're performing, and then each day, there's 31 cells you can, you know, check off or shade in each day of the month there and then tally your total at the end and so on. You know, I have to say it's funny because I've been writing about this stuff for a long time, and the journal just came out a few months ago, but I've really enjoyed using it. It's been a little bit of a surprise to me. I have never had a consistent journaling habit, and this was the first time that I... You know, first month that I used it I journaled 30 out of the 31 days.

So it's kind of nice to see the principles in practice and see that, you know, they do work. So the "Habit Journal" is a nice compliment to "Atomic Habits," and a good manual way to put some of those ideas into practice. But then, you know, there are also a variety of apps and stuff for your phone. I don't have any particular one that I tend to recommend. I actually think that a lot of the habit apps don't work that well, but we'll see. I have a lot of people asking if I'll design one at some point. I don't know, maybe we will, but I don't have any immediate plans to do it. But we'll see what happens. But for now, the "Atomic Habits" and "Habit Journal" are kind of my one-two punch.

Mark Kennedy: That's great. So where can listeners find out more about your book, and the "Habit Journal", and then any other work, your writings that you do?

James Clear: Well, you can find all my stuff at jamesclear.com. And if you click on Articles, you can just kind of poke around there and see what interests you. If

you feel like signing up to the newsletter, you can do that as well. And if you click on Books, then you'll see both "Atomic Habits" and the "Habit Journal." And if you wanna just go straight to the book and find the best place to grab a copy, you can just go to atomichabits.com.

Mark Kennedy: Awesome. Well, James, thanks so much for joining us today. And hopefully, the next time we speak is in another six years from now.

James Clear: Yeah, I hope so. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Mark Kennedy: Thanks, James.