

Tiny Habits: Embracing Intention Setting

Penny Schnarrs



TOP TAKE AWAYS

- Habits are not formed in isolation, they require grounding in existing patterns
- Motivation requires the ability to complete something and the prompt to do it
- Prioritize intention setting over resolution setting

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

- When creating a new habit, make sure it is easy, clear, and something you want to do
- Create cycles rather than goals so that momentum can build and carry you through long-term
- Find a habit recipe with an inciting event, action, and celebration

Competency
Culture

Maturity
Stage

CMM1, CMM2,
CMM3, CMM4

Facilitators

Penny Schnarrs
(AAMC)
Sean Marlin
(TheCR)





HABIT CONTEXT (P.1)

Resolutions often fail because they involve an all-or-nothing mindset.

- Ground your habit in the mindset of a system or process
- Think about percentages, rather than "streaks" when looking at your commitment
- Attach your habit to something you already do consistently so you're not starting from scratch

MOTIVATION (P.5)

Losing steam on a new habit is extremely common, but can be combated

- Making the habit as easy as possible lowers the barrier to entry
- Attach the habit to something you crave so it can tempt you to complete it
- Reward yourself as part of the habit to increase positive association with the habit
- Anchor your habit in something that you can't ignore to increase likelihood of remembering it

INTENTION (P.2)

When looking for a specific outcome it's easy to get wrapped up in that end goal. Instead, focus on the intention behind that goal.

- Why do you want to achieve this?
- What does the process entail?
- What are the individual steps or smaller, similarly spirited habits that contribute to that outcome?
- What habits do I already have that are in line with the spirit of this goal?

Resources

Tiny Habits by B.J. Fogg -

<https://bookshop.org/p/books/tiny-habits-the-small-changes-that-change-everything-bj-fogg/11781005?ean=9781713508212>

Atomic Habits by James Clear -

<https://bookshop.org/p/books/atomic-habits-an-easy-proven-way-to-build-good-habits-break-bad-ones-james-clear/12117739?ean=9780735211292>

Background

Penny has had the privilege and honor of working through this concept of mindful intention at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), as well as other companies. She comes from a long background of non-profit, internal communications, relationship building and higher education.



- **Understand the definition of intention.** Penny shared the following intention quote by Jennifer Williamson:
 - *“Intention is more than wishful thinking – it’s willful direction. It is a philosophy of the heart put into practice, a consistency of conscious patterns of thought, energy and action. Through intention, we see more and create with more clarity, passion and authenticity. Our attention then becomes a spotlight for every shred of supporting evidence that we’re on the right path.”*
- **Realize the power of tiny habits.** In his book *“Tiny Habits, Big Change”*, B.J. Fogg explains that emotions create habits. Not repetition. Not frequency. Not fairy dust. Emotions.
 - Fogg’s Behavior Model looks at ability and effort, as well as the learning someone has to do vs. the extent of their motivation. It’s about the right prompt, as well, to engage in the habit. He suggests these 5 steps:
 - Stop judging yourself.
 - Anchor new behaviors in existing routines.
 - Break your aspiration down into a teeny, tiny, simple version.
 - Embrace mistakes as discoveries.
 - Celebrate success.
- **Think about how to create a good prompt.** Taking from Fogg’s Behavior Model above, it has to be meaningful for people. It has to come at the right time and it has to grab their attention. Think about the end user and the empathy when deciding what makes sense, when to prompt people and how to motivate them to do these things. This will help shift their behavior – and our own perspective – when it is set up.
 - Penny added that she doesn’t get the Digest from the Community Roundtable because it is an external email. It goes into her spam. But she adores the emails that Sean and Mary Emma send that collect all the highlights. It comes from their email address. The emails are highly succinct – read this, do this, have a nice day. It’s not a digest of everything, but instead they are actionable items that Sean and Mary Emma have mindfully suggested that Penny do.

- **Recognize that tiny habits can also yield remarkable results.** “*Atomic Habits*” by James Clear is another great read. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision. People will always feel uncomfortable in the beginning. It’s the fear of the unknown and not yet feeling capable of the new task. However, the more we do it, the more we can grow the intention/habit. Once it becomes a habit, the discomfort goes away.
- ***Think about the systems we use, not the goal itself.***
 - Set goals = win the game. Don’t play to the end game or you’ve already lost.
 - Building systems = continue the game. Find a way for yourself to continually play the game and grow in it. It is the process you are committing to, not the end goal.
 - Ultimately it is your ***commitment to the process*** that will ***determine your progress.***
 - People don’t feel unmotivated; they simply don’t have the detailed enough plans for implementing a new habit.
 - Make the habit obvious.
 - Be as clear as possible about the habit
 - Habit stack (stack it with other habits that you are already doing)
 - Prime your environment, i.e. make the things more readily available to help you succeed. Don’t buy the potato chips if you are trying to cut back on eating potato chips. Make a healthier snack more readily available.
- ***Craving – make the habit attractive.*** Attraction is a natural human behavior.
 - “Temptation bundle”. Stack the habit with something else you already enjoy. One programmer hooked up his Netflix to his bike so he could only binge-watch shows while exercising.
 - Join social clubs where difficult challenges are the norm. Social reinforcement makes even unpleasant tasks attractive.
 - Ritualize it. If you want to make a difficult task more appealing, create a ritual that gets you in the mood for it first.

- **Establish ease. Make new habits easy to perform.** Do it often before you do it perfectly. Use a “two-minute rule” to begin with habit-forming “reps”. It’s more important that you establish the habit before you optimize it.
 - Get your reps in, even if the habit is incredibly easy at first.
 - Reduce friction. Find any automation, elimination or simplification that makes it easier to start your tiny new habit.
- **Reward yourself. Make your new habits satisfying.** Create a personal “loyalty” program. Every time you perform your habit, give yourself a visual sign of progress. This is why teachers give children gold stars.
 - Measure your progress. Habit tracking helps you calibrate your progress and gives you the rewarding feeling of momentum.
 - Gamify your progress. Games addict us through level-ups and little “ding” rewards along the way. Use this power for good!
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- **Find an anchor moment.** This is something that happens naturally, i.e. an existing routine in your life currently. Penny said that to combat the dread of turning off the alarm and getting out of bed, she immediately thinks of 3 things that she’s grateful for each morning. It helps to ground her in the moment and adjust her attitude to take on the day. Then, to celebrate, she gives her dog a hug. Tiny little wins.

- Penny shared that every year she has made a New Year's Resolution, but has never seen it all the way through. That is why the concept of intention is more effective. Penny explained that she can become easily overwhelmed. In our careers we wear many hats, especially in community. She believes that mindfulness will help us to empathize with ourselves for our many responsibilities.
 - With that in mind, Penny asked everyone to clear their minds for 2 minutes, not think about all the things they had to do, emails to return/read and/or any other distraction. She played a recording with mindfulness instructions to help participants experience a mindfulness exercise.
- Community managers are connectors. It's very important to remember that intention is key. It's not easy. You need to be mindful, you need to prioritize and community managers, above all, need to model the behavior. Community managers have the opportunity to model the behavior and shape community and connection in a way that many colleagues in other fields aren't thinking about yet. Tiny habits, small incremental steps are what are important to create a new habit or break an old one.
 - Community managers are change managers at the core. There is so much involved in change management, not the least of which is the emotional component that people feel. Many people are mired in the ways that they've always done something. However, it's important to be able to stop and show compassion to both ourselves and to those around us going through this process.

- Rewards through gamification are satisfying and motivating. In the book *Atomic Habits*, James shared the Jar Method. A stockbroker in Canada found a way to make his unpleasant sales calls rewarding. He set out 2 jars. One had 120 paper clips in it. After every call he completed, he moved a paperclip into the other jar. This made it possible to see progress and receive a little “ding” reward for each call. This stockbroker was soon making six figures in his early 20s.
- Penny gave participants the chance to think about their own ways to use her “Tiny Habits Recipe Card”. It follows 3 steps:
 - “After I”... – this is your anchor moment, i.e. an existing routine in your life that will remind you to do the tiny behavior. In other words, your new habit. Penny’s anchor moment was waking up and turning off the alarm.
 - “I will”... – this is the implementation of your new tiny behavior. The new habit that you want, but scaled back to be super tiny and super easy.
 - “Then, I celebrate!” The celebration step is something you do to create a positive feeling inside yourself, like hugging your dog or treating yourself to a latte.
 - This isn’t rocket science. It’s about getting ourselves to slow down enough to be mindful of what we want to work on within ourselves.