

HERO HABITS

How to be **Awesome** Every Day at Work and Life



Hugh Culver

This is what you will learn from this guide:

1. Why habits are so powerful and worth creating
2. A quick rating of your current habits
3. Where the '*buck stops*' and what to do about it
4. How to know *what habit to create*
5. Why consistency is more important than big
6. The science behind habits and why rewards matter
7. How to feed the good habits
8. The trick to firing bad habits
9. Habit #1 - getting better, more sleep
10. Habit #2 - how to create amazing mornings
11. Habit #3 - 5 ways to win by listening better
12. Habit #4 - 4 proven ways to lose weight by eating differently
13. Habit #5 - 5 fast ways to get in shape, even if you aren't now
14. Habit #6 - 7 steps to reading twice as fast
15. Habit #7 - how to plan like a pilot and reduce your anxiety
16. Habit #8 - 6 ways to easily bring mindfulness into your day

If you know your day could be more productive, fulfilling, and rewarding—read on. I have included all my research and experimentation over the last five years in this easy-to-understand guide.

HERO HABITS-how to be awesome every day at work and life

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Please share this ebook.

I wrote it for the benefit of anyone that wants to create great results in their day. If you know of someone that would benefit from reading it, please forward it to them.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hugh Culver". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "H" and a cursive "Culver".

Hugh Culver
Kelowna, BC
January, 2015

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"Good habits are as addictive as bad habits, and a lot more rewarding."

Harvey Mackay

Life is hard

I'm an optimist. Can't help it - just the way I'm wired. As an optimist, I get myself into trouble by over promising and underestimating how long everything will take me. Sound familiar?

My list of tasks is twice as long as I have time for. And it usually gets longer, not shorter, as the day goes on. Not good.

I'm fast to create new, exciting projects, but slow to delegate tasks (even when I delegate I often micromanage).

Everything I want seems to require more effort on my part - it's an exhausting way to achieve success. It's like that depressing old saying, *"Life is hard, and then you die."*

That's been my story through three company start-ups, a graduate degree, marriage, children, three ironman competitions, 12 marathons, and a long list of other "hard work" examples. Every time I had a new challenge, I braced myself to add more hard work to my already full plate.

I have a different story now and a much better way of getting what I need.

It's all about Hero Habits.

Enter Hero Habits

When I was growing up I loved shows like Batman, and The Green Hornet. Both crime fighters had a trusty side-kick: Robin for Batman, and Kato for The Green Hornet. Whatever nasty situation they got into, they could count on their partner to help pull them out. That's what Hero Habits do for you.

A Hero Habit is a routine you create that makes you a hero, over and over again. It could be for health, sales, marriage, reading, planning, communication, or meditation. It's your Kato - always there, never tiring, ready to serve. I love my Hero Habits.

According to research from Duke University, as much as 40% of your daily activities are habit-based, like: brushing your teeth, washing dishes, and driving your



Van Williams and Bruce Lee as the Green Hornet and Kato, 1966

car. I'm not talking about those. Hero Habits make you a better person, create capacity (your ability to take on more responsibility), and build success in your work and life.

You create your Hero Habits by first looking at what you need.

Rate yourself

"It is easier to prevent bad habits than to break them."

Benjamin Franklin

Something magical happens when you put a number to a problem. Once, when presenting to an audience of business leaders I asked what response they get when asking staff "How's it going?". After a collective sigh, the consensus was: "Good", "Fine", or "Okay." A bad start to a conversation.

I suggested they ask for a number.

When you put a number on something subjective (like, 'How are doing today?'), you get a more specific answer - one you can build on. For managers wanting to engage in a meaningful conversation, they can start with *"On a scale from one to five, how are you doing today?"* Regardless of what the answer is, you have something to talk about.

You car also gives you numbers so you know your speed, how much fuel is left, etc.. Your bank, utility company, and credit card company all give you numbers so you know what to pay. What about you - do you rate yourself?

Before we look at new Hero Habits, let's look at ones you already have.

For each of the following habits, rate yourself on a scale from one to five (where '0' means I never exercise this habit and '5' means I use it *consistently* well):

• planning habits: long-term and short-term	1	2	3	4	5
• work habits: working from a plan, not procrastinating	1	2	3	4	5
• organization and anti-clutter habits (at work and at home)	1	2	3	4	5
• diet habits: eating healthy foods in the right amount	1	2	3	4	5
• exercise habits: intensity, frequency, consistency	1	2	3	4	5
• sleep habits: amount, quality, consistency	1	2	3	4	5
• being present (in meetings, conversations, and with family)	1	2	3	4	5
• meeting, appointments, and being on time	1	2	3	4	5
• limiting time on email, TV, social media, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
• making realistic promises	1	2	3	4	5

My guess is your results were not all '5's' - that's Okay - I'm in the same boat.

The idea is not to beat yourself up, but be aware of your habits and work at improving them, one at a time. As the 18th century author and playwright Goethe once wrote “*We are what we repeatedly do, excellence therefore is an habit, not an act.*”

Now that we have awareness, the next step is becoming accountable and owning the need to change. That starts with needs.

What do you need?

"First we make our habits, then our habits make us"

17th century playwright John Dryden

You have wants and you have needs - big difference. I might want a Porsche (frankly, I don't even care what model). But, I don't need one.

I want one million dollars of income, but I don't need it.

When it comes to habits, you need to know what you need. Anyone who has tried to start working out at the gym, even just once a week, understands how hard it is to start a new habit.

You can succeed - many have. But, you have to need it. The same applies to losing weight, earning more, wasting less time, or clearing your closet of unneeded clothing. *You've got to need it.*

When I started investing in real estate it put real pressure on my cash flow. In the beginning, I had to find another \$1,500 per month I didn't have. I don't know about you, but my bank isn't very sympathetic if I have a "slow month." Coming up with that money every month was a need.

When I registered for the Yukon River Quest (YRQ), with my racing partner, we had a need. The YRQ is known as one of the longest endurance races in the world (714 kms, 444 miles). You have to show up healthy, strong, and ready to endure over 50 hours of racing, including paddling through the night twice. We needed to train, or suffer the consequences. That's a need.

So, what's the need for you? What routines are you running now that get in your way? Is your body sick, your work suffering, your relationships on the edge? What will drive you enough so that your new habit will stick?

A good place to start is by pointing a finger at yourself.



Start line on the Yukon River Quest

Point a finger

"We are taught you must blame your father, your sisters, your brothers, the school, the teachers - but never blame yourself. It's never your fault. But it's always your fault, because if you wanted to change you're the one who has got to change."

Katharine Hepburn

It's easy to blame, we all do it. It sounds like this:

"I have to work so many hours, I don't have time for anything else"

"I'm exhausted when I get home"

"I can't do anything, until I finish this project"

"I can't even think about it, until I get through this season/project/year."

"I've tried this before and it didn't work then"

Blah, blah, blah.

Go and tell Adam Braun (founder of [Pencils of Promise](#) who built 258 schools in impoverished countries in only six years) you don't have the time.

Go and tell [Malala Yousafzai](#) (Pakistani activist and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize recipient) it's too hard to change.

Go and tell [John Green](#) (he left his training as an Episcopal priest to write books like the best-seller *"The Fault In Our Stars"*) change is difficult.

Go and tell anyone who achieved big results why you can't make a change and guess what they'll tell you?

Do it anyway.

My Dad used to say there is never a good time to buy a house. Same applies for habits. You will always have a reason why you can't. It's always easier to say 'No', rather than expend the energy to try to make something new happen. It's the brain's *path of least resistance*, designed to avoid the effort of trying harder.

The best way to get inertia is to simply pick one habit you want to start, stop, or change make the change and be consistent.

Don't go big - go consistent

When I was training for my last Ironman competition I knew I was in trouble. I completed my first two races when I was in my early 30's - lots of energy, more time, lots of fun. When I registered for my third event, I was 47 - not as much zip, very little time, not nearly as much fun.

So, I had to make a decision.

I knew I couldn't put in five-hour bike rides, swim intervals, or pound out the hours of running I used to. Instead, I chose to be consistent.

I knew if I *consistently* completed high-quality training, it would be far better than sporadic hard-core long workouts. I would build a solid platform of fitness that I could add more training to in the final two months before the race. It worked.

I was slower in the race (by an hour), but I came away smiling, uninjured (always a good thing), and I had a great time!

Just like a wheelbarrow, when you pick something up and keep it moving it's a lot easier to keep it going. It's also more maneuverable. The hardest thing is to pick something new up, like a new habit.

That's where rewards come in.



Riley, my training partner for the Ironman

How Hero Habits work

We used to think habits became habits simply through repetition. Do something over and over again for 21 days and, presto! You have a habit. Not so.

If all we needed was repetition we would all stick with our diet, meditate every morning, and never procrastinate again. Yeah, right.

We now know that having the right *rewards* is what makes a good habit a *sticky* Hero Habit you can rely on.

Here's how it works.

Your brain is constantly sparking a response from the body. I know, not very scientific language—bear with me. When you need something to happen, like eating, talking, sleeping, or phoning, your brain sparks a 'Reaction'. That could turn into a one-off routine, or a habit-based routine.

If I am fixing something on my house, like a rain gutter, that could spark a one-off routine because I've never done it before. But, the process I go through to plan the repair, get the needed materials, and complete the task could be a habit-based routine.



Finally, we have our “Reward”. The reward could be checking ‘Fix rain gutter’ off my list, or it could be I feel good knowing that our house is protected for the next time it rains. Or maybe I made someone else happy (like my wife). Regardless, there is always a reward - even when the Routine (habit) is unwanted.

The following common scenarios will help you identify the three parts to a habit:

UNWANTED HABITS:		
REACTION	ROUTINE	REWARD
I should phone the client	I put it off	I avoid possible discomfort if the client doesn't have time to talk
I should go to yoga class	I keep checking my email and now it's too late	I avoid the hard work of exercise and I get more emails done
I think about someone on my team that did a great job	I tell myself I'll thank them when I have more time. It never happens	I stay busy and avoid what might be an uncomfortable conversation
HERO HABITS:		
REACTION	ROUTINE	REWARD
I should phone the client	I plan my calls for the first 90 minutes of the day and avoid all distractions	Regardless of outcome, I feel more confident and, over time, get better sales results
I should go to yoga class	I stand up and get ready to go	I keep my promise and feel energized after the workout
I think about someone on my team that did a great job this week	I stand up, walk down the hall and thank them	They feel good and I feel supportive

Now that you know how habits work, it's time to decide what to do with habits you should either: feed, fire, or form.

Feed the good ones

“Good habits are worth being fanatical about.”

John Irving

Imagine you made a plan to go to the gym first thing in the morning, you did, and now your hour-long workout is about finished. You’ve been on the stationery bike, hit the rowing machine, did some weights—you feel great! So, you decide to see the results.

After all, you’ve been working hard for an hour, sweating up a storm. Surely, you’ve burned off gobs of calories and pumped up some vein-popping muscle. You must be ripped!

You imagine heads turning and people nodding in awe as you head to the locker room to examine your hard, toned body. You strip off your sweaty shirt, suck in the gut, and stand in front of the mirror. Bad idea.

Obviously, your body doesn’t change in one hour. It would be nice, but that only happens in Hollywood. Instead, you need to find more creative ways to get your reward. Remember, there has to be a reward for every habit you want to feed.

Maybe you feel better after going to the gym. *Focus on that reward.*

If you make the call to the new client, regardless of what happens, you’re getting closer to a sale. *Focus on that reward.*

If you talk with the team member you’re upset with you’ll feel relieved. Maybe the relationship will even improve. *Focus on that reward.*

If you go to bed an half hour earlier so you can meditate in the morning you’ll feel more relaxed and focussed for the day. *Focus on that reward.*

Sometimes, I’m motivated by just keeping a promise with myself. That’s enough reward to make me want to keep more promises. And sometimes I need to manufacture a reward.

For over 10 years I have been tracking my exercise. I’m not manic about this - it’s simply for motivation. My goal is to average one hour of good quality exercise per day. Marking my workout, after the workout, on my calendar has been a part of the motivation for over 4,000 workouts. Last year I totalled 496 hours, for an average of 41.3 hours/month. Not bad for a cheap calendar!

Fire the bad ones

"When we learn a bad habit, it takes over the brain map in that area, this is why it is so hard to 'unlearn' a bad habit. It has residency first, like an unwanted roommate."

Norman Doidge, M.D., *The Brain That Changes Itself*

We all have them: bad habits. It could be over eating, smoking, excessive drinking, or procrastination at work. You want to stop the habit. You know it's not good for you. So, why is it so hard to break?

The answer is in the reward.

One of my bad habits was staying up late and scrimping on sleep time. I would stay up until 11:00PM, or later, watching a documentary, reading, or worst, catching up on work. I would still wake up at 5:00 AM, but I didn't feel fully rested.

The jury is out in terms of how much sleep we need - everyone is different. But, I know if I get seven hours of sleep I feel fantastic in the morning - rested and ready to go. So, why was I staying up late, even though I knew I shouldn't. I did it because I was getting a reward.

After a full day of writing, exercise, kids, wife, work, running errands, meals, and clean up, I wanted to 'zone out.' I felt I deserved—even needed—do-nothing time. So I took it. And I paid the consequences the next morning.

The trick to 'firing' old habits is to first identify the reward you get from the current habit. In my case, it wasn't the movie, or book, or work. That's too obvious. It was 'zone out' time I was craving.

The activities that kept me up late all led to the same reward. My willpower was exhausted and even though I knew I needed sleep the pull of zoning-out overpowered rational thought. So, I stayed up late and felt groggy and slightly out of control in the morning.

What I needed was to *fire the old habit* and form a new habit - a Hero Habit.

Form the new ones

"The people you surround yourself with influence your behaviors, so choose friends who have healthy habits."

Dan Buettner

Now that I know what the unwanted Routine is (staying up late) and the Reward I am getting ('zone-out' time), I need to form a new habit.

In other words, simply telling myself to go to bed earlier might work for a while, but eventually I'll migrate back to the old habit. I needed to satisfy the reward I wanted with a better habit.

That's why I created what I call my Morning Club habit. I knew I wanted 'zone out' time, I also wanted time to sleep, and to be productive. The first change I made was to make a list of what I wanted to do on waking - usually it is a writing project, followed by meditation, and exercise. Next, I allow myself about 30 minutes of reading, playing guitar, journalling, or watching TV before bed. And finally, I commit to being in bed by 10:00PM to read and getting seven hours sleep.

I love it. I get 'chill out' time, I have productive time, and I'm getting more sleep. I fired the old habit and formed a new one.

Now, let's look at Hero Habits *you* can adopt.



#1 Hero sleep

"Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together."

Thomas Dekker

If you short-change yourself on sleep, it will cost you. It might be you sacrifice sleep because of workload, or maybe you have a sleeping problem. Regardless, we all need sleep to restore our energy and health.

What once might have been considered a badge of courage, insufficient sleep is proven to lead to a crazy list of both short-term and long-term issues, like:

- **premature aging.** Lack of sleep leads to a breakdown of collagen, the protein that keeps skin smooth and elastic.
- **weight gain.** In one study, people who slept less than six hours per day were 30% more likely to be obese.
- **premature death.** A lack of sleep can double your risk of death from cardiovascular disease (Whitehall II study of over 10,000 people).

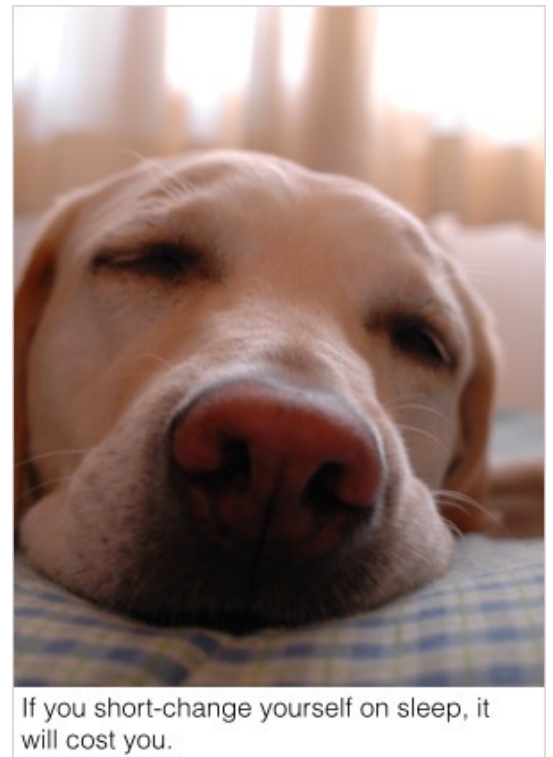
Plus a host of other issues, including: lower libido, suppressed immune system, impairing your brain's ability to reason, and solve problems, forgetfulness, and depression.

Should I go on?

Solving a sleep problem could be a complex issue that required specialized help. My wife, who has suffered from sleeping issues for many years, resorted to over-night sleep lab that monitors your change in physiology through the night (heart rate, perspiration, brain activity).

Try these changes first. If you still aren't getting the sleep you need, get help. Sleep is like water, we can't live without it.

- **GET OFF SCREENS** — Get away from screens one hour before going to bed. Computers, smart phones, and tablets emit the blue spectrum of light, which suppresses the hormone melatonin, which helps us feel drowsy.



- **TURN THE VOLUME DOWN** — Choose non-stimulating activities. TV, YouTube, email, Facebook, movies, and practicing Zumba fire up your brain - making it harder drop off. Instead, have a low-stimulus routine in the last 30-60 minutes before your lay down, like: music, meditation, reading fiction, art work, or journaling.
- **STOP EATING EARLY** — Snacking before bed is a bad idea: digestion makes sleep more difficult, extra calories mean extra weight, and you feel full in the morning. Stop eating an hour before bed.
- **TAKE SHORT NAPS** — If you take naps, limit them to 15-20 minutes and don't nap late in the afternoon. Use naps to restore your energy, not as a replacement to sleep.
- **PLAN YOUR MORNING** — A quick list for the morning, made before bed, gets To-Do's out of your head and makes you more productive as soon as you wake up (see *Hero Mornings*).

#2 Hero mornings

"An early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day."

Henry David Thoreau

I often ask audiences if they are a "morning person" - the majority are. We all have a circadian rhythm that influences the release of neurotransmitters, like serotonin and norepinephrine that make us feel awake and optimistic. That rhythm starts in the morning.

Hero mornings take advantage of that precious time zone so you can accomplish what you would never have time or energy for any other time of day.

Years ago, I shifted from staying up late to going to bed earlier and started to enjoy early-morning writing time. Once I stopped being a night owl, I learned how precious my morning hours can be. Plus, I was able to write my blog every week (most of my blog posts are over 1,000 words), complete client proposals on time, and work on book projects.

For two hours (like this morning), I have undisturbed time to think, write, and work on whatever project is current for me. I love it. Here's my routine:

- just before heading to bed I list what I'll work on in the morning. This is important. The better my instructions, the faster I get to work.
- 5:00 make tea
- 5:10 writing
- 6:00 stretch, more tea
- 6:40 silent meditation
- 7:00 outside for run, or fast walk with my dog Riley
- 7:45 weights (3X/week)
- 8:00 breakfast with family
- 8:45 leave for office

For one week, record what your morning routine is. Don't make a big deal of it - just note when you wake up, go to bed, exercise, commute, whatever. The idea is to notice your patterns.

Next, build your new Hero Habit and remember to tack on a reward you'll enjoy. Finally, practice and experiment with the new habit for a two weeks.

What's working better?

Are you getting a reward?

What still doesn't work?

What can I change and try for one week?

Keep experimenting - you are building a habit - it needs to fit you.

#3 Hero listening

"People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude."

John C. Maxwell

Are you a good listener? Sure you are - in someways. But, would your wife/husband/partner/employee/boss/client give you a '5' out of '5' for being a truly awesome listener. That's a habit worth developing.

If I don't work at it, my bad listening habits can take over. I interrupt, finish sentences, get distracted, make assumptions, and basically can do everything wrong—not pretty.

Fortunately, I have developed better listening habits and I get massive rewards by exercising them. I have fewer arguments with my wife, my employees feel more understood, and I'm teaching my daughters: Dad's aren't total goofs, and listening matters.

These are my top five Hero listening habits - all are super easy and work instantly:

- **BE CURIOUS** — It's easy to judge (she is wrong, incapable, misguided, controlling, angry, manipulative, whatever). It's smarter to be curious. Genuine curiosity opens the doors to new opportunities. If you are feeling judgmental, ask this question *'What do THEY need right now?'* When you take the focus off how right and justified you are, and shine the light on them, your natural curiosity will open you to a better, more generous place.
- **SAY IT WITH YOUR FACE** — You go into your head and start thinking about your response, why you disagree, how right *you* are, and how wrong *they* are, your face goes blank. To quote the philosopher Lady Gaga, *'No he can't read my poker face'* — no one wants to look at a poker face. Nod your head, smile, raise your eyebrows — it doesn't mean you necessarily agree, just that you hear them.
- **DON'T INTERRUPT** — It's wrong, doesn't help you, and pisses people off. Stop it.
- **ASK QUESTIONS MORE THAN YOU TALK** — Three somewhat-sneaky reasons why this works: 1) people love to talk about themselves, 2) you learn more with questions, 3) questions let you direct where the conversations goes.
- **SUMMARIZE** — Nothing trumps an accurate summary to prove you were listening, and can get you closer to a decision. Like this summary: *'It sounds like these five Hero listening habits can help you: rescue a marriage, avoid an argument, and sell used lawnmowers.'*

#4 Hero eating

"The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd rather not."

Mark Twain

Houston, we have a problem. Somehow, over the last two decades, we have become a generation of over-eaters. In fact, nearly 70% of Americans are either overweight or obese — and it's getting worse. Now, some 30% of our children have adopted the bad habits of their parents and are labeled obese.

That's where Hero eating habits come in.

Let's face it: there are only three ways to be healthier: eat less, eat better, exercise more. And eating less is by far the easiest of the three to master (pull on your shorts, Hero fitness is up next).

You might think you eat when you need to and only as much as needed—not so. When given the choice and opportunity (like 10 days on a Caribbean cruise), people invariably eat more than they need.

In one very sneaky study, a professor of marketing at Cornell (Dr. Brian Wansink), rigged a bowl of soup to keep filling as it was consumed. Participants with the rigged bowl drank 70% more soup, compared to those with a "normal" bowl. What's worse, nobody noticed.

Whether it's the size of the scoop for the bowl of candy, size of plate for the buffet line, or a bottomless bowl of soup, chances are you will eat more. That's a problem.

It takes enormous output to burn off calories input. For example, it takes 90 minutes of fast walking to burn off a single medium serving of french fries. Imagine what it takes to burn off a typical fast-food meal!

It's simple math: if your goal is to lower weight, gain fitness, or add energy—eat less.



We have become a generation of over-eaters.

Any one of the these Hero Habits will make a difference - pick one, blend in a reward (feel better, lose weight, be proud, etc) and you have a Hero Meal!

- DRINK WATER — a glass of water before every meal staves off hunger and hydrates you (better: brain function, anti-aging, digestion) - what's not to like?
- GO NUTS — I travel with a small bag of mixed nuts and nibble from it between meals. By the time the buffet line is forming, I'm happy with a small meal.
- GET NEW PLATES — In one test, people with larger plates served up 30% more food - wow! Either get smaller plates, or think of your plate as divided into thirds - leave one third empty.
- WAIT 10 MINUTES — it takes about 10 minutes for your stomach to radio the brain the tank is full. When you pace yourself and eat more slowly, you allow the full feeling to happen, before you over indulge.
- HARA HACHI BU — This habit comes from the island of Okinawa (Okinawans enjoy 80% lower rates of heart disease, lower blood pressure, cholesterol and rates of cancer, as compared to Americans) and it simply stop eating when you are 80% full.

#5 Hero fitness

*"If you thought there was no easy answers to getting Younger Next Year ...
um, you were right."*

Chris Crowley

The primitive body-design we inherited from our Palaeolithic era ancestors is designed to move. Whether it was: gathering food, hunting, escaping harm, or carrying heavy loads, we worked and burned off calories every day. Sitting in your car, in front of a computer, in meetings, and on the phone doesn't cut it - you need to move more.

Hero fitness habits are all about movement, but not just at the gym, or when you ride your bike on weekends. Hero fitness habits are designed to get your booty moving *all day*.

These are super-simple ways to build your Hero fitness habits:

- **WALK FASTER** — In *Younger Next Year*, authors Chris Crowley and Dr. Henry Lodge, recommend getting your heart rate up to 60-65% of your maximum heart every time you exercise (max. heart rate = 220-your age). At that rate your body is breaking down cells, and initiating the critical anti-aging rebuilding cycle. You are also building muscle, burning fat, and stimulating you brain - all good stuff!
- **MOVE EVERY 20 MINUTES** — Over four hours of sitting a day (commuting, meetings, at your desk, watching TV, doing email) doubles your risk of Type II diabetes, obesity, and coronary disease. It's no wonder sitting has been called the "new cancer". A simple trick is to move your waste basket, recycling box, and printer away from your desk - I probably stand up and move 30 times in a day, just because of this one change.
- **TAKE THE STAIRS** — I had a client once who trained for one of our Antarctica expeditions by taking the stairs in his building everyday. In one study (University of Roehampton), it was estimated that climbing five flights of stairs five times a week, burns over 300 calories.
- **STAND UP** — Stand up for phone calls, on flights, during movies, and in meetings. You will feel better, sound more energetic, and look better (at least two of those are true).
- **PARK FURTHER AWAY** — At a normal pace you will burn 80 to 140 calories per mile walking. Pick up the pace and you can double that burn.

#6 Hero reading

*"I took a speed-reading course and read 'War and Peace' in twenty minutes.
It involves Russia."*

Woody Allen

Even with Youtube, smartphones, and podcasts, nothing beats learning from the written word. It's through books, articles, blogs, magazines we can get a deeper understanding of an argument, or appreciate a poignant story, or feel the pain of the protagonist. My question is: what kind of a reader are you?

Rate yourself on this quick scale (on a scale from 1 to 5, where '5' = most of the time):

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| • I start books, but often don't finish them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • I have a habit of rereading sentences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • I know I could improve my reading speed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • I tend to forget most of what I read | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The average person reads at about 200–250 words per minute. With a few small improvements and a bit of practice, you should be able to double your reading speed and still have a comprehension rate of at least 75%.

Follow this formula (it's designed for business books) and you will be on your way to reading faster and enjoying more great books:

- **PLAN TO READ** — You will have greater speed and retention if you read in a quiet place, when you are fully awake, and have committed time to read.
- **READ THE TABLE OF CONTENTS** — Start by scanning the table of contents - note what parts are most interesting, and what parts can be skimmed.
- **READ THE FIRST PARAGRAPH** — Start each chapter by reading the first paragraph, then the sub-heads, and finally the last paragraph.
- **STOP RE-READING** — Use a device—a piece of paper, a ruler, or your finger—to move down the page, keeping your eye moving along with the device. Keep moving at a steady pace, slightly faster than comfortable.
- **SKIP WORDS** — You don't need to read every word to get sufficient comprehension. Start by reading the third or fourth word in from both ends of the line of text. This will prepare you to take "snapshots" of lines, rather than reading every word.
- **CREATE A GOAL** — You can quickly calculate your reading speed by averaging the number of words on a line and multiplying that by the number of lines on the page.

From there, it is easy to measure your speed for reading the page. Set a goal to double your reading speed - you will save time and probably not miss anything.

- TAKE NOTES — I also take a few notes as I go on a notepad. When I've finished the book I load a picture of my notes in Evernote. That's all I need to recall key lessons, quotes, and my own insights.

I use this formula for every book. I can now read about 700 words per minute and comfortably wrap up a book, with notes, in a week.

These simple Hero Habits allow me to comfortably cruise through more books, take better notes and get rid of that annoying stack of unread books by my bed!

#7 Hero list making

Lists suck. They suck your energy, your focus, and your results - especially if they aren't prioritized. If you've ever had a day where by 10:30AM your list is longer than when you started, I have a better way.

The goal with Hero lists is to get focus, without losing track of anything, and to avoid overwhelm. I use Evernote to store these lists, but you can use most popular apps for your phone (Wunderlist, Lift, Todo, Things, etc.), as long as they allow you to categorize your list (you can even use a simple MS Word doc., or Pages doc. on a MAC).

There are five categories in your Hero list ([learn more about Plan like a Pilot and Flight Plan here](#)):

- **LIFE PLAN** — these are your long-term goals (like a bucket list for life) and goals for this year. I keep mine visible, at the top of the other lists, so I can be reminded of what's really important.
- **DAY PLAN** — I work from this list during the day. I write this list out every evening, working from my Flight Plan and what is left over from the previous day. My goal is to remove anything that's been moved more than once. During the day, I am adding, crossing off, and modifying this list, so I keep it on a note pad that travels with me.
- **THE FLIGHT PLAN** — this is a short list (12, or fewer tasks) of what **MUST** happen by Friday. I include: critical meetings, proposals, staff coaching, marketing, and personal goals. This list is created every Friday or Sunday (depending on my travel that week) pulling from last week, This Month, and my Someday lists.
- **THIS MONTH** — this is a holding zone. If I have client work, or marketing I need to get done at some time in the month, it goes here. I don't work on anything on this list, until it is promoted my Flight Plan, or directly onto a Day Plan.
- **THE SOMEDAY LIST** — this is where all my random ideas, cool technology, new projects go. At least twice a month I purge old ideas and review this list.

PLAN LIKE A PILOT - PLANNING TOOL

LIFE PLAN My goal, by _____ year is to have created, completed, and accomplished:

- marriage, children, family _____
- health and spirituality _____
- adventure and meaning _____
- business and career _____
- wealth and contribution _____

YEAR PLAN

- marriage, children, family _____
- health and spirituality _____
- adventure and meaning _____
- business and career _____
- wealth and contribution _____

FLIGHT PLAN - date _____
What absolutely needs to be completed by this Friday (keep to 12, or fewer).

THIS MONTH
What will be completed this month. When ready, move to Flight Plan

SOMEDAY
What might be worked on in the future (it might also be deleted).

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#8 Hero mindfulness

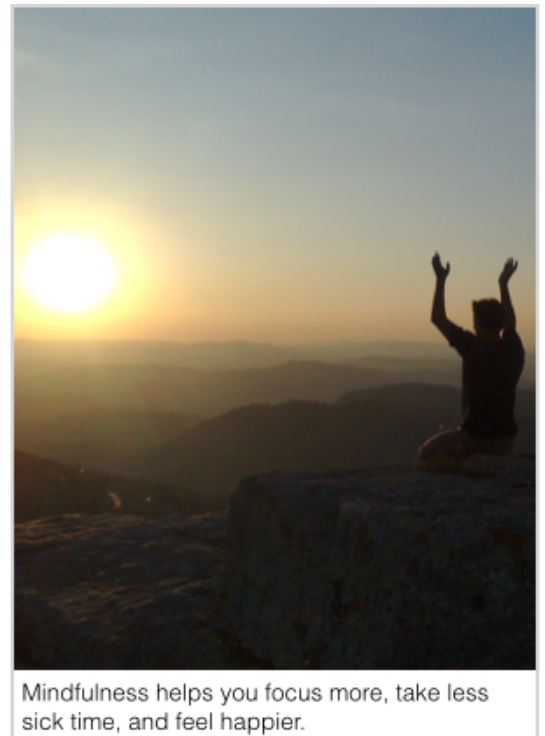
"I never think of the future. It comes soon enough."

Albert Einstein

In study after study, mindfulness habits reduce fatigue, symptoms of illness (ranging from headaches to chest pain, and depression), and improve mental function. People that practice mindfulness can focus more on work, take less sick time, and feel happier. The cool part, for people like me, is you don't have to sit cross-legged, chanting mysterious incantations, to get the benefits of mindfulness.

If this sounds good (and why wouldn't it?), let's break it down.

Mindfulness is the non-judgmental focus on emotions, thoughts, and sensations in the present moment. It's really meditation, but with more options for your practice. You can practice mindfulness while walking, in meditation, during yoga, or through breathing exercises. The goal isn't so much the *type* of discipline, it's more about consistency and results (however you get them).



Here are six, super simple mindfulness practices you can build into your day:

- **JUST SIT THERE** — take a few minutes to be still and sit. Allow all your worries, and random “must-do’s” to float away. Don’t worry about technique, or objectives, just sit there. It can be like a mini-vacation in the middle of a harried day of rushing.
- **BREATHE** — our breath is the centre point of our being and health. When you slow your breathing you slow your metabolism. Even your mind spins a little slower. Breath in through your nose for the count of five, then breath out through your mouth for the count of five. Repeat 10 times - it could be the best two minutes of your day.
- **“INTERESTING”** — when I practice yoga, my mind goes to Vegas. Starting with the first Shavasana (lying on back), thoughts like: ‘what-if’s’, ‘I-should-have’, and ‘I-can’t-believe-I-forgot-to’ bounce like unwanted beach balls into my consciousness. It’s bloody annoying! Mindfulness is about noticing, without attachment, and letting go. Like a leaf floating past on a river, negative, regretful, blaming thoughts don’t

have to touch you – they just float past. Notice them floating past and silently say “Interesting.”

- **FREE WALKING** — going to a meeting? Fetching a coffee? Catch yourself ‘going into your head’ and let it go. For just those few minutes, let it go and free walk. I like to leave my office every afternoon and walk around the block. No agenda, no crazy, all consuming thoughts, just walking. I always return happier, more centred, and re-energized.
- **TALISMAN FOCUS** — pick something in your office, or home, and bring all your attention to it. That can be your talisman. Mine is a photocopy of a postcard my brother Dan wrote to me in 1993 – the last time I heard from him. Let the world slip by and bring your attention to your talisman. Notice random thoughts trying to pull you away. Acknowledge them — no judgement, simply allow.
- **WILLPOWER WAITING** — it takes a bit of discipline to wait without fussing with your phone, or worrying about the 10AM meeting. Discipline builds willpower and willpower builds confidence and strength. Waiting without doing can be an act of meditation. At the stop light, the check-out counter, or before the meeting starts. No Ashram, sweaty yoga matt, or wilderness retreat – it can happen where you are.

We have met the enemy

"We are what we repeat."

Aristotle

How are you feeling? Have you spotted a need?

It's great that we have spent some time together while I tell you about Hero Habits. But, that's not what this book is for. It's all about you doing something different.

Imagine, if you procrastinated a little less, were grateful a little more, and invested in your health more consistently. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

What if you were kinder to your partner, delegated more fully, and slept a little longer. Wouldn't that be great?

That's what Hero Habits do. And it all starts by feeling the need.

In the 1960's Walt Kelly's comic strip character Pogo, famously exclaimed, "We have met the enemy and he is us." Have you met your "enemy"? Do you know the cost of not changing? That's the enemy. And it's always lurking around, waiting to move in and convince you change can wait.

Too many people try to lose weight once they are obese, or wait 20 years before they decide to quit smoking, or rush to see a financial planner only when they are close to retirement. Instead of waiting, use my little secret.

It's the secret of the start.

The secret of the start

"We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it."

Eeyore speaking to Winnie-the-Pooh

Maybe you've had this experience. After days thinking about it, you decide to clean out your closets and throw away (or donate) clothes you don't want. Before you know it, you've cleaned the closet, did the same to a book shelf, and started on the living room. Or maybe you found your momentum after the first sales call, or the first few paragraphs of your blog post, or 10 minutes into your run.

Your success was ignited by starting. Just like a big fire, you have to start with a small flame. That's also how you create a new habit — start small.

Once you recognize the need, design the new habit, and invent a reward, it's time to start small.

- I stopped drinking coffee 17 years ago by simply committing to one coffee-free week.
- I started blogging by first committing to just one blog every month.
- I built an education fund for my daughters with just one small payment every month.

Don't get me wrong, it's great to do big stuff. Volunteer in Nepal, compete in a charity running race, land a huge sale — all awesome.

But, it's habits that build a successful life. And first you have to start.

So, here's your homework...

Your homework

If you made it this far, that tells me something about you. My guess is you care about doing your best. And you want more. That's what Hero Habits can do for you - give you more productivity, wealth, even happiness.

Your homework is to get started by doing this:

Pick one.

What is the one habit that I wrote about (see list below) that got your attention? Maybe you've recognized a need you've had for some time, but have been ignoring it. Or maybe reading this made you think of a habit you need to stop. Or maybe you have a good habit, but you need to revive it and use it more often. It's time to create your Hero Habits.

And you need to start. Once more, here are the Hero Habits in this book. There are many many more, but this is a good start:

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#3 Hero listening	17
#4 Hero eating	18
#5 Hero fitness	20
#6 Hero reading	21
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My friend, you know what you need to do. Trust that by starting, repeating, and improving your new Hero Habit(s) it will serve you day after day. I know this is true.

Be your best, see the best in others, and MAKE IT HAPPEN (you deserve it).



Hugh Culver

"Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen."
Emerson