



Changing Habits

WVNG Coffey Break

By Elizabeth Coffey

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This month's topic is Changing Habits. Whether you are one who makes New Year's Resolutions or not, the start of a new year is a great time to change some bad habits into good ones. A habit is any action that we have performed so often that it becomes almost an involuntary response...second nature, so to speak. We label it a "bad habit" if the action is undesirable. People spend numerous hours and dollars each year attempting to "break" bad habits, often without success. Change is hard work and, no matter what TV ads say, there are no short cuts. In this month's article we are going to address the most common bad habits as well as steps to change any bad habit into a good one. So please, take a few minutes to read the following article before hitting "Delete" on your computer.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." - Aristotle

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"The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken." -Samuel Johnson

Quick Tips

- Be honest with yourself about the underlying motivation of the bad habit, i.e. smoking to reduce stress; impulsive spending to achieve instant but short-term happiness.
- Set your goal and tell someone about it. You'll be more likely to take action, stick to your plan, and reach your objective when you reveal your desire to change to someone else.
- Accept that there is no short cuts to changing bad habits— it took a long time to develop and it takes a long time to change.
- Celebrate each small step you make toward achieving your goal!
- Don't give up— if at first you don't succeed try and try again.

Coffey Break



Break (brāk) definition
verb: To interrupt or stop
break a habit; noun: A respite
or brief pause *taking a break.*

Top Ten Bad Habits

By Elizabeth Coffey, Director of Psychological Health, West Virginia

1. Credit Card Debt/Overspending

(Financial): Getting too far in debt with credit cards is common and easy to do. We live in a society that reinforces immediate gratification. We want something; we buy it with the thought of paying for it later. Unfortunately, “later” has its own set of expenses.

2. Borrowing/Lending Money from

Friends or Family (Financial): Relatives and friends may want to help you for a time. Yet, there will come a day when the money will run out or the situation will get old. Borrowing or lending money puts a strain on relationships. There may even be a sense of animosity if a written contract is suggested. You rarely win if you get into this bad habit.

3. Passing Judgment (Relationships):

This is the habit of being “judge and jury,” setting the standard for all to live up to and label people according to your classification system. Passing judgment is disrespectful and nullifies the individuality and uniqueness of others.

4. Gossip (Work/Relationships):

Similar to passing judgment is gossip. Word of mouth is not always the most reliable source of information. In some form or another, we are all guilty of this bad habit. Gossip can ruin friendships and destroy reputations. Water cooler gossip about salaries, medical or other private information can not only hurt feelings but sometimes lead to legal actions.

5. Confusing Casual with Disrespectful

(Work): Ask yourself if what you do or say undermines his or her authority. When you begin to think of yourself as your boss’s workplace equal, you cross a line that could damage your relationship. Showing respect doesn’t mean you need to be a “yes” man or woman who goes along

with everything; it just means you should know what is appropriate for private conversations and what is appropriate for group setting.

6. Always Being Late (Work): Although deadlines and meeting times are sometimes annoying, you’re probably not the only person they affect. Tardiness inconveniences other people. It also gives the appearance of being an unreliable person.

7. Making Excuses (Work/

Relationships): When someone points out an annoying behavior, your reply is “Well, that’s just the way I am. I’ve always been that way.” This habit justifies a behavior as genetic. Not true! Every bad habit can be modified.

8. Cursing (Personal): Cursing can become an automated response to stress, anger, frustration or peer pressure. Some people only curse when injured or terribly upset. A habit is when profanity is used in nearly every sentence.

9. Smoking/Overeating/Excessive Alcohol Consumption (Personal):

These habits can lead to a shorter lifespan. They are associated with high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and damage to cardiovascular system.

10. Self Criticism (Personal): This negative “self talk” feeds low self esteem, anxiety, and depression. There is a saying, “You are what you think.” Self criticism can destroy resiliency and drain away your energy.

Fast and Fattening



“The easier it is to do, the harder it is to change.”
- Eng’s Principle

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Steps to Change Bad Habits to Good Ones

Habits form the engine beneath the hood of our car. Good habits move us forward; bad habits set the car in reverse. Now and then we should look out the window to see which way we're driving. Does it make any sense to keep going if we're driving the wrong way? Those who want to improve their lives will replace their bad habits with good ones.

The Pattern and the Payoff (Motive):

The first step is self reflection. Take a good, hard look at yourself, identify the unhealthy pattern and why you find the action so compelling. In other words, what is the payoff for doing this seemingly negative thing? You may be tempted to say there isn't one. Look closer. There is always a motive. If there wasn't, you wouldn't keep doing the behavior. For example, perhaps your bad habit is yelling at your kids. The payoff may be letting off steam to feeling better temporarily.

The Trade-Off (Consequences): This step should be easier. What is it that you are losing by "exercising" your habit? In simpler terms, why is it considered a bad habit in the first place? In the example of yelling at your kids, you may be trading off a temporary relief of tension for the emotional well-being of your children.

Make a Choice: Now that you have weighed both sides of the issue – the payoff and the trade-off, it's time to make a decision. It's no longer an involuntary act because you are making a choice every time you perform the action. You are choosing

which you value more....the payoff or the trade-off. Do you value more the relief you get by yelling at your kids or the value of their self esteem?

Replace Bad Habits with Good Ones:

The only reason you formed a bad habit in the first place is to fill a need. As you break old patterns, you still need a way to fulfill those needs. This is done in much the same way you formed the bad habit....mainly, by repetition. What is it you will repeat? What the new habit is that you substitute isn't as important as what you feel about the choices you have made. After all, the reason you consider it a bad habit is because it leaves you feeling bad about yourself.

References/Resources

www.depression.about.com

www.healthchecksnow.com

www.improving-relationships.suite101.com

Next Month's Topic

Stress Management

Stress Reduction Kit



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Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going

- Jim Ryun

Feedback on this article is welcomed. As always, if you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact me. Services are free and confidential. I look forward to hearing from you. So.....Step back , take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!

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