

Volume 11, Issue 12: Start Small

I have realized from my own experiences that one of the reasons we fail at developing new habits is that we start big. We set a goal then go all out with the behavior to attain it. Being an introvert, I can spend a whole day without having a conversation with anyone and be perfectly fine. But this disposition isn't good for relationships.

Awhile back, I wanted to develop a habit of having a conversation with a loved one for at least fifteen minutes each day. I set the time and place for it and got started. Well, I don't have to say that I failed miserably. It just didn't work out as planned. Most days I didn't have anything to talk about or found the whole situation awkward. I later re-introduced the habit in a different fashion. Rather than waiting for a set time to go talk, I created opportunities for talking without necessarily focusing on making conversation.

Another habit that I flopped at was having daily family devotions and learning sessions. My family members weren't always available to congregate at the set time and I eventually found it easier to continue with the sessions without them. I later re-introduced the habit by not only stacking it with other established habits but also reducing the chunk of time it takes. After getting my family members to gather at the table for family dinner, I have the short devotional and motivational messages run right after we finish eating and conversing, before anyone leaves the table.

By making these two habits small and unpronounced, I have managed to sneak them into daily evening routines with my family. I get to have my extra conversations and family devotion and learning without making a big deal of them.

Picture a man deciding to jog five miles each day in order to get in shape. He probably hasn't done serious exercise routines before but he is determined to do this now. With a strong sense of will power working in his favour, he gets started and jogs five miles consistently for a month without skipping a day.

Expecting to see good results on the scale, he is disappointed when the scale reports negligible

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Written by Lillian Chebosi

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change in his weight. He has worked really hard from the onset of setting the goal but doesn't see the fruit of his labour. He decides, "What's the point?" and quits jogging all together.

This man's chances of sticking with the discipline of jogging and reaping the desired results in the long run would have been higher if he started small and set realistic targets. He could have started with jogging for maybe even just 5 minutes a day and build on that over time.

One of the fundamentals for habit formation is first getting the new habit formed and ingrained in your routine to the extent that you identify yourself with the habit. Starting big on a new habit is not only overwhelming but highly unlikely to stick. Your chances of sticking with a new habit is starting small.

In his book Atomic Habits, James Clear says to "Standardize before you optimize. You can't improve a habit that doesn't exist. When starting a new habit, it's important to keep the behavior as easy as possible so you can stick with it even when conditions aren't perfect. Once a habit has been established, however, it's important to continue to advance in small ways."

For His Glory,

Lillian Chebosi