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Context to the nugget

BJ speaks about how we can sow the seed for a new habit but how we can ramp up and ramp down what we do as long as we are moderate in our expectations. He speaks about the trap that a lot of high achievers get into where they keep increasing the bar for themselves often upto a point where they often end up becoming slaves to the habit as the habit starts losing relevance in the evolving context in their lives. BJ speaks about how we can bake the habit, yet regain the flexibility to ramp up or down the habit depending on how our context plays out.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And talking about growing habits when is a point where we can start thinking about moving from a tiny habit to a big change? How long should we keep at it?

BJ Fogg (BJ): Well, the surprising answer is you can do it day 1. You can do a bigger version of the habit anytime that you want but the key with tiny habits is you set the bar low and you keep it low. You can always go way over the bar if you want and say count it as extra credit, but you don't have to even year... I mean for the years I have been flossing two times a day, there are some days I just floss one tooth and I move on and I do not consider that a failure. I consider it a big success. It's like oh, something was going on, maybe I was really distracted or busy or just not in the mood. I still got to have it done well for me. So, the idea in tiny habits is not start tiny and then raise the bar, it's not that. Just too many journalists and people writing about tiny habits and that's not how it's done. You set the bar low and you keep it low. But you will find it, you will naturally do more and more but you don't raise the bar even so, you just keep thinking of yourself as a superstar, as the A+ student who is overachieving continually. And that takes a mindset shift, especially for high achievers who are used to raise the bar and who just keep going higher and higher and so really is a skill; this is one of the skills I talk about in the book is to set the bar low and keep it low and actually be good with underachieving and being okay on those days you can just floss one tooth, being okay with that and not feeling bad but feeling positive. That reaction is a skill and so for the high achievers out there listening this concept may surprise you but this is how you make... habits aren't really about the size of the habit, it's about the consistency of that habit and as long as you are being consistent, you can do a bigger version anytime. So, you really, really want to get the consistency nailed, do more when you want to and when you don't want to or can't just do the tiny version and keep it consistent.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is a profound point that BJ makes. A lot of people, I would include myself here, often fall victim to the habit and become its slaves without us realising. Devdutt Pattanaik (DP) makes the point in quite a provocative but an effective way.

DP: "This concepts of habits is a western idea, habit is a bad word in Indian philosophy, another word for habit is conditioned I am conditioned to do it, conditioning there's a pavlovian response, a god has a habit of salivating whenever the bell rings and the west has made it a virtue action without thought is habit repetitive action without thought is habit and if you look at the many of the cultures in the west they are like domesticated animals at a particular time they will get up and run, so they are on a treadmill all the time and this is seen as virtue, driving in a car with a coffee in your hand, nobody sees in America that this is tragedy, it's a tragedy, you can't enjoy your coffee, you can't enjoy your drive you have glamourized slavery, you have glamourized slavery and nobody sees it because you have all the gurus in white coats with their chin what is called their fist on the chin photographs, these photographs that you see are telling you therefor it must be right nobody is questioning what is the habit? And habit has been somehow projected as a good thing Indian thought is all about awareness, it's all about awareness, why are you doing what you are doing, why are you not doing what you are not doing, once you are aware then you realize what is of value to you and what is not value to you, so then breaking habits becomes difficult, there are good habits there are bad habits, habits are good or bad depending on context, so you will find people behaving, that's why I always find, when experts come to Indian they have tough time because their habits suddenly in the new context they don't know because oh my god there's no place to run, oh my god they don't have this thing because of their habit, you become like an animal and habit really goes to the lower part of your brain not the upper part of your brain and habit is about avoiding life, you do habits like it's an addiction, it's an autopilot and it's addictive, like I have habit of writing, but its addiction if I don't write I get withdrawal symptoms, which means I have trained my body to be in pain when I don't do it and to get pleasure when I do it and I am not aware of it I am just doing it mechanically, so we are an awareness culture, awareness culture not habit culture, in habit culture empathy goes away"

DJ: Devdutt speaks about the role of awareness versus habits and how we should not become slave to the habit. That still leaves us figuring out how we build good habits while being aware. Instead of seeing this as Either OR, is there a way we can combine the two and get the benefits from it. Here is where we turn to the Japanese for inspiration. One of my earlier guests, James Clear (JC), Author of the Book Atomic Habits, speaks about something he observed in Japanese train stations

JC: "So, there is this method which is called pointing and calling that I think helps raise our level of awareness about our current habits and once we become aware of our habits then we can change them, and then we can start to more meaningfully adjust them. So, the story, and I actually saw this when I went to Tokyo, if you walk around Tokyo, go to a train station what you will see is this interesting pattern where when the train pulls into the station the conductor will point at like a signal and say the signal is green or the point of the speedometer and say the speedometer is 30 km an hour. Outside on the platform other employees are doing similar things, they are pointing up and down the platform and they'll say the platform is clear. The cleaning staff even as they walk on to the train in between sessions to clean it off, take the trash out and so on, they'll point at each car and say the car is clean or the trash is clear and things like that. The purpose of this is that for anybody who does the same kind of job over and over again like a train conductor pulling into the station it becomes kind of automatic, it becomes habitual. So, it's very easy to overlook your mistakes. So, by pointing and calling by literally physically pointing and saying out loud what you are doing you are raising the level of awareness of the action. People don't use the phrase pointing and calling but you can see them do this kind of thing all the time in daily life. So, for example, I have friend who... she'll leave the garage door up accidentally some times, and so now every time she pulls out of her garage

she points at the door and says garage door is down or when you are getting ready to go on a trip or leave your house for a few days you might double check everything and say I have my keys, I have my glasses, I have my wallet and you are like touching them in your pockets while you are doing that. So those are all examples of pointing and calling to try to double check, to raise the awareness, to be more aware of what you are doing and if you want you can actually use that same strategy when you are trying to build or break habits, So, for example, if you want to stop snacking when reach into the cupboard to get out a cookie or go to the pantry to get out a snack you could say, I am about to eat this cookie and I don't want to because I am trying to stop snacking and just the act of saying that out loud before you do it might be enough to prevent you from it. It sounds silly, it sounds a little like over the top to do it but it can be a very useful strategy early on so that you become more aware of your behaviour."

DJ: I guess the long and short of the point I want to make here is that while we often glorify building habits, we forget the criticality of building awareness. Like BJ says, being aware gives us the ability to ramp up or down a habit depending on the circumstances without being obsessed about it. Habit is a bit like the engine of an automobile while Awareness is like the Steering Wheel, without which you could end up crashing your formula 1 car when you see a bend in the road!

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Devdutt Pattanaik that is referenced: [Building Habits vs. Enhancing Awareness](#).

Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [Building habits with awareness](#).

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BJ Fogg - Nuggets

- 58.00 BJ Fogg - The Full Conversation
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- 58.02 BJ Fogg - The MAP of behaviour change
- 58.03 BJ Fogg - Prompts - the low hanging fruit of change
- 58.04 BJ Fogg - Action versus Context Prompt
- 58.05 BJ Fogg - Build ability to beat motivation cycles
- 58.06 BJ Fogg - Celebrating to wire in a habit
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive’s / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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Podcast Transcript [58.07 BJ Fogg - Tiny habits to big change](#)

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