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Context to the conversation

Katy speaks about the magnitude of change that one can typically hope to undertake. She refers to the example of Ben Franklin who decides to make a fresh start after a phase of debauchery. He goes on to make a list of 13 virtues and starts tracking himself on those. Katy shares her perspective around how much to take on in a change initiative.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Katy, in the book, you also speak about the example of Ben Franklin who decides to make a fresh start after a phase of debauchery and you say that he made a list of 13 virtues and started tracking himself on those and clearly, we know the transformed Ben Franklin and the body of work he has produced, but what does your research suggest about how much change people should take on? Something I think about as an executive coach when I am working with a leader, the question on my mind is how incremental versus how transformative should the change be.

Katy Milkman (KM): Well, it is a great question. You know, I do not have specific advice about the incrementalness of the change you are going for overall, but I certainly think it is important to think about goals, not just a big long-term goal but rather to break them down into more bite-sized pieces and there is lots of research showing how important that is to goal achievement starting with work by Al Bandura, the great Stanford psychologist who actually passed away just a few days ago at the time we are recording this, he showed how important it is not just to have that big long-term goal but to break it down sort of what are the component parts, so what is your weekly or daily goal, not just what is your yearly goal because when it feels bite sized and more achievable, you are more likely to see progress, so that is really important. If you have that big goal, also have the sub goal that you are going to be able to achieve and see progress on and make plans for on a more immediate basis. And then, I guess, the other thing I would say about what kind of goals to set is, it is important to start with one and research shows that if we have a goal and we make a plan for how to achieve it, we are more likely to follow through if we are just pursuing one goal and one plan rather than a bunch of things at the same time. When we have too many plans that we are making, this is work led by Stephen Spiller of UCLA, if we have too many plans, we get overwhelmed. So we map out how I am going to get to the gym every day and how I am going to cycle more regularly, how I am going to meditate every day and how I am going to learn a new language and what I will achieve for that each week and it is just overwhelming. It feels impossible to do all these things. And so, one at a time is the way we want to take on these challenges, which is not to say you cannot be working towards several objectives at once, it is rather that you want to focus on and plan for one at a time. And then once you can put that plan into an autopilot mode and it is working for you, then you can turn to the next goal that you want to achieve and make it your focus and figure out how

you will plan and achieve. But that is also a really important thing to keep in mind when we are working towards big overarching goals.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: A related point that came up in the context of wiring in a habit is around Celebration. Earlier in the podcast, I spoke to BJ Fogg (BJ) of Stanford who has been studying habits for several decades now. He speaks about the ABC required for a habit. Anchor around which we need to tie a habit. Then we have the behavior and finally, he says that we need to have a healthy mini-celebration to bake the habit in which is a step that we often overlook.

BJ: "So really what you are shooting for to wire in a habit is to cause a positive emotion inside yourself. Now, sometimes these will happen naturally. When you look at any app or technology that you love and you use on the daily basis I would wager a lot of money that the first time you use that app or that technology it made you feel very successful and made you feel like you had super powers like, oh my gosh I can do so much, I am so capable with this. And that's what helped to wire then in as a habit was that sense of success. I am achieving something important. And so that will happen naturally with oh lots of things but for new habits that doesn't always happen naturally. The fact that you are wiping the kitchen counter doesn't make you go oh, I am so great, you know, naturally, so you hack that emotion by going, look at the counter, I am so awesome, so you deliberately cause that emotion to fire off. And so, celebration is the term that we decided to use for causing that emotion. And we looked at other terms like self-cheer, that were the one we liked, just plain cheer, cheer you, cheer for yourself."

DJ: Thankyou for listening. For more please visit playtopotential.com. If you want to tune into the conversation with BJ Fogg which is go to playtopotential.com and find him in the guest section.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from BJ Fogg that is referenced: [Celebrating to wire in a habit](#).

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Katy Milkman - Nuggets

- 79.01 Katy Milkman - Agassi and Behaviour change
- 79.02 Katy Milkman - The power of a fresh start
- 79.03 Katy Milkman - Temptation bundling
- 79.04 Katy Milkman - Entering the magic circle
- 79.05 Katy Milkman - Benefits of Commitment Devices
- 79.06 Katy Milkman - Boosting morale instead of Unsolicited advice
- 79.07 Katy Milkman - Building a robust habit
- 79.08 Katy Milkman - One goal at a time

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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 [79.08 Katy Milkman - One goal at a time](#)
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