

# Creatures of Habit

We are creatures of habit and as you go through each day, old habits will be challenging you and trying to get you to revert back to your old ways. When this happens, you will have to recognize and learn to manage them. Habits can come in the form of behavior, thinking, feelings, or perceptions. They lie below the surface; under our level of awareness, and they certainly impact our daily lives.

A Tibetan Buddhist Rinpoche named Chogyam Trungpa once wrote: “No one is more arrogant than someone who is caught up in habits, that they cannot understand how another person can interpret things in a different way, or can desire to do something different.” Successful people sometimes get caught up in the arrogance of habits, which can work against them in the long run. If your habits have created success for you in the past, then your brain tries to keep you using those same habits. However, times change, and people need to change with those times. Relying on past habits for future success can lead to habits that make you lethargic or complacent. Being open to new ideas and new ways of doing things is a universal strength of the truly successful.

Changing habits is difficult because our brain is constantly monitoring inbound information, and trying to protect us from pain. Our brain is our friend, and it is trying to work in our best interest. But when it comes to breaking habits, it is our worst enemy. As our brain monitors our thoughts and other inbound information, it is seeking to protect us from either physical or emotional pain. It is certainly our friend when it is trying to protect us from physical pain, so it throws up flags of caution from time to time to keep us safe. But in its effort to protect us from emotional pain, it becomes overzealous and keeps us from sometimes making positive changes.

Emotional pain can be:

- Embarrassment
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Rejection
- Fear
- Failure

To keep us safe from these pains, our brain will send us messages that try to drive us back into our comfort zone. When we are taught how to do something new, our brain will react and say; “This isn’t the way we normally do this – let’s do it our way because it is safe.” Most of our brains are not risk takers, and work very hard to keep us doing things the same way, even if they are wrong. Even if our current way is painful, our brain is tolerant of the pain because there are no surprises (it knows what to expect). It is the fear of the unknown and the unexpected that encourages our brain to send warning signals and drive us back to the safety of our old habits.

Your self-talk can take a long time to go away, and sometimes it never goes away. In order to be successful in change, you need to manage your self-talk and be aware it is speaking to you. I believe that awareness creates change, and if you are aware of your self-talk, then you can manage your change much more successfully.

I also relate habits to other addictions in our lives, like alcohol, drugs, coffee, chocolate, foods, and other things that our bodies crave. In many cases, even with awareness, the cravings don’t simply go away. We will have to find a way to manage these habits or addictions. I believe that many people are also addicted to giving up their power, and find comfort in doing so. As long as these people believe that other people control their lives, then they can continue to play the victim role that suits them so well. Life can actually be simpler for victims because there aren’t many decisions they have to make. And if others are making the decisions in their life, then it reduces the chance of them ever having to be wrong. Life is sweet, because anything that goes wrong in their life was certainly someone else’s fault.