



92% fail at their New Year's resolutions. Read this short BrainCandy if you want to motivate yourself to make important changes in 2021.

This BrainCandy is based on BrainCandy 49, but since the content is still "state of the art", I recommend it to everyone who wants to change a behavior. A lot of frustration can be avoided if one does not start intuitively, but on the basis of current scientific findings.

One more note in advance. If adapting to the Corona measures costs you a lot of mental energy, don't put yourself under pressure with additional changes, you can also start later. But even with corona-related changes, the processes in this BrainCandy can be very useful.

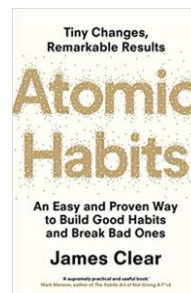
When we try to establish new behavior in ourselves, we usually fail. No matter whether it's more sport, less twittering or healthier eating. According to a study¹, as many as 92% fail. Why the hell is that so hard? And why don't most of the great editorial 'tricks' work? And why don't we marketers know better, given our deep-dive understanding of human behavior?

Because our brain works differently than we realise. Our automatic habits are anchored in system 1, i.e. in autopilot, and thus escape our attention. But we want to change consciously - and don't even notice when system 1 triggers another automatic action while we are moving in a familiar context. That's why the typical advice of only making the goal as concrete as possible doesn't help. Goals are like high heels, exciting and painful. Habits are like sneakers, we don't notice we have them on.

Author James Clear landed an instant New York Times bestseller with his book published in October 2018: Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones. He summarizes the latest scientific findings in a convincingly manageable model.

As an appetizer, I present the most important principles here. Another good overview is provided by one of the many interviews with the author on The Psychology Podcast #1442. (In the meantime, his book has also been published in German and is getting fantastic feedback: Die 1%-Methode - Minimale Veränderung, maximale Wirkung: Mit kleinen Gewohnheiten jedes Ziel erreichen).

I have reserved five copies for BrainCandy fans, just reply to this email: #1% for the German version or #Atomic.



He sets out four laws of behavior change:

1. make it **obvious**: what are the situations/contexts in which a new behavior is sought?
2. Make it **attractive**: The more we find the desired behavior attractive, the more likely we are to stick with it.
3. Make it **simple**: The behavior must be as easy and smooth to implement as possible.
4. Make it **satisfying**: Rewarding behavior is readily repeated.



And of course, when it comes to breaking negative behaviors, it works the other way round: make the context disappear, so don't put yourself in 'danger', make it unattractive, make it difficult and make it unsatisfying.

Everything is based on the model of how human behavior works and how our brain learns:

- a. We perceive a situation, a context. For example, that we enter a dark room.
- b. We evaluate the situation and develop a desire. For example, to be able to recognize something or to prevent a feeling of fear.
- c. We react to the situation. And reach for the light switch.
- d. We note the result.

This process takes place in milliseconds - and many other everyday decisions without any pause. So our routine behaviors are solutions to the problems of our daily lives that our brain has automated. Our consciousness (system 2) is not consulted. But that is where our desire for change runs!

Common recommendations target the symptoms (untidy desk) rather than the cause (delayed filing). And the 'compound interest effect' of the sum of small actions is underestimated. People focus on the decision at hand: Burger with fries or better salad buffet? At the end of the day, however, this makes no difference at all to the weight. Only years of persevering with relatively small actions lead to the desired success. And for that, you have to know how to 'programme' them as automatic actions.

There are three levels of behavior change:

- I. **Result** (Here we start intuitively: lose 15 KG, become more relaxed, learn the language)
- II. **Process/plan** (going to the studio three times a week, meditating daily, reading Italian texts twice a week).
- III. **Identity change/self-image** (More implicit: If I am slim/relaxed/multilingual, I am the person I really want to be).

You will be familiar with this. You automatically start at level I and also define level II, only level III is then supposed to emerge somehow. James Clear starts the other way round. One should first imagine the changed identity: What type is someone who can lose weight? For example, someone who doesn't skip workouts. And how can you reinforce this self-image? By doing at least five push-ups even after a strenuous day - and thus reinforcing the self-identity! If you just didn't go to the gym, you'd be a loser. But this way, your self-image has been strengthened a little bit and you stay motivated, even if you couldn't always give it your all.

Every time I sit down and write at least one line, I confirm my self-image as a writer. These little actions don't seem to have any value, but they solidify the identity you want to create. It is the difference between "I want this" and "I am this". One does not focus on the change in behavior, but on the appropriate behavior for the desired identity.



Quelle: Flamingoimages_istock by Getty Images

Suppose you experience yourself as too introverted and wish to become a little more extroverted. When a new challenge is in front of you, you ask yourself if you would do it if you were just a little more extroverted. A step that becomes infinitely more likely than simply resolving to be more extroverted in the future and hoping that the personality will follow.

Fake it till you make it? This is often recommended. The stupid thing is that our brain naturally senses the 'fake'. It is better to move forward with small steps and to continuously develop self-confidence.

This is why Clear recommends focusing on systems rather than goals. Goals are important for clarity on what you ultimately want to achieve, but we overestimate the importance of the outcome and underestimate the importance of the process. If we spend half a day decluttering a room, we have achieved the goal - however, the room will soon look the same again. Only if we change our habits can we keep the clean room permanently.

Social media massively increases the pressure to look for results. We see the well-trained bodies, but not the effort and fail to see the role models. A thinking error automatically becomes active here. The world's most famous psychologist and Nobel Prize winner, Daniel Kahneman, describes this as the 'what you see is all there is' effect. Our brain only sees the wiry body in yoga pose. All understood. No questions asked. But many influencers only have their beautiful bodies because they invest large chunks of time in working out and healthy eating all day. And you want to get there too with the new yoga class? It's not going to happen. Stay realistic.

We need to understand that our habits are always linked to contexts. Suppose you want to read more. You sit down on the sofa in the living room. But the sofa is linked to the TV on the wall opposite and Netflix. You automatically reach for the remote control. You can also learn Italian later on.....

It is easier to internalize a new habit if it is linked to a new context. For example, you could buy a new armchair where you only read in the future. Or you make Netflix watching less frictionless. To do this, always put the remote control away - and maybe always take out the batteries. You will be surprised how effective small hurdles are. Reaching for the book next to you is suddenly so much more comfortable.



Quelle: PickStock_istock by Getty Image

Want to check your mobile phone less often in 2021? Not a chance if it's next to you. But if it's in another room, you'll be able to devote yourself to the things that really matter. Don't worry, you'll still hear calls. But you have successfully defused a mental treat.

Clear gives beautiful examples of how this system can also motivate people to continuously improve. Developing closer to the desired identity in many small steps over the years. For example, to continuously expand one's expert status. In doing so, he also makes use of the FLOW principle. We are most motivated when our challenge is a few percent higher than our previous abilities. Then we give everything. Also with video games. They are programmed in such a mean way that they challenge us bit by bit more - and if we get stuck, they motivate us anew with additional forces or help. Clear says: "The secret to achieving results that last is to never stop making continuous small progress. "It's impressive what you can achieve if you just don't stop".

We are experiencing this principle right now at K&A. With our psychodrama we have a powerful method to understand the drivers and barriers of human behavior. We were so satisfied with this performance that we did not need to further develop this method for a long time. Until we set up a process that allowed for continuous development in small, often experimental steps. In doing so, we paid increasing attention to the impact of specific contexts. And, in late 2019, as a happy coincidence, started experimenting with monodramas. There are simply target groups among our clients who are very difficult to recruit into multi-hour group events. Then the stroke of fate Corona. Luck of the fittest. We very quickly succeeded in transferring our monodramatic experience to the web. Now our clients can also gain psychodramatic insights, while the pandemic policy constantly proclaims new restrictions.

What is your desired self-image for the future? What habits in what contexts will help you to achieve this? How will you make the contexts obvious? How to make the new habit attractive? And how to do it as smoothly as possible? Look forward to success. I wish you a satisfying 2021, or better yet many satisfying years with small new habits.

P.S. An important additional tip. For most change, Clear's small steps are perfect. However, there may be exceptions for certain issues. For example, when addictions (nicotine, alcohol, bingeing, internet, etc.) are involved, not all people can gradually cut down on consumption.



For these personalities, it can be easier to quit altogether - and to accompany this with other motivational measures as described by Clear. Best-selling author Gretchen Rubin has vividly described this personality effect in her book Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives.

Quellen:

1. <https://karrierebibel.de/vorsaeetze-einhalten-neujahresvorsaeetze/>
2. <https://itunes.apple.com/de/podcast/the-psychology-podcast/id942777522?mt=2&i=1000422094848>

Recommended reading

By Ralph Ohnemus:

Markenerleben. Die Strategie im Hyperwettbewerb und Informationstsunami > [Order here](#)

Markenstaunen. Gewinnen im Informationstsunami > [Order here](#)



Please send any feedback, suggestions or criticism on this article to:
braincandy@ka-brandresearch.com

The Author

Ralph Ohnemus, CEO. Director and majority shareholder of K&A BrandResearch since 2001. Previously a K&A BrandResearch client for 15 years. Nationwide and international marketing and sales experience in senior management roles, including in FMCG, fashion, media and telecommunications, most recently as Consumer Sales SVP in charge of marketing, sales and chains at Viag Interkom O2.

Contact: r.ohnemus@ka-brandresearch.com

