

Habits are a Mind Game

I remember years ago, my high school basketball coach, Mr. J, said that it is not the tallest or fastest that will make you successful in the game – it's your will. At the time, I was not having it. As the team captain and point guard, I took losing to heart. Some would call me a sore loser. After our 4th loss in row (a record of 3 wins and 5 losses in a 16-game season) I was not in a good place mentally. I felt like I was the only one hustling, and when my teammates would make silly mistakes or miss easy shots, I could feel myself boiling inside. I would not take it out on them verbally, but inside, I was mentally frustrated, and this was reflected through my non-verbal behaviours.

As walk into the change room after the game, Coach J stood at the front of the room just looking at us. It was not a look of anger, but more a look of concern. He walked over to the locker room blackboard, grabbed a piece of chalk turned to face us and said, "Success at the end of the day is really about one thing - your will. Will plays a role in life when things are going well. Every shot goes in and every loose ball is yours. Will is just as important when things do not go well. Can you stay mentally strong, even when you get knocked down or lose a couple of games in a row? Do you have the will to get up and keep going or will you be down for the count?" And as he said, I felt like I was the only one in the room. I wanted to lash out at him and blame my teammates until he wrote an equation on the locker room chalk board that I will never forget. This equation has since helped me keep my head in the game and develop new habits with ease.

He wrote:

- **Intention + In-Action = Zero**
- **Intention + Action = Will**

Coach continued, "Will is the secret to growth. If we want to grow, adapt, learn or win basketball games, it starts and stops with *will*." He then looked over at us, stopped at me, and said: "I know you all want to win, but do you have the *will*? Do you have the *will to win*?"

Over the past years, as I have refined executive coaching sessions I have led, audited leadership development series, or reviewed numerous learning experiences I have designed, I have found that it is possible and easy to uncover will and make new habits in spite of business practices, and in spite of ourselves.

Whether you ascribe to the 3 months to form a routine or the Malcolm Gladwell theory of taking 10,000 hours to becoming an expert, the focus is the same - consistency. The will to constantly practice new thinking, speaking, and behaving over a 3-week period rewires the brain and creates a paradigm shift or new dominant response pattern. The magic is that you do not need to be motivated, you just need the ***will (intention + action)***.

Here a combination of keys steps that I have learned from others and practiced myself to create will and ultimately change behaviour.

1. Identify

This is your new focus step. What do you want? When do you want it? More importantly, why do you want it? These 3 simple questions will clarify and identify the new habit you desire. This Identifying

phase will require you to examine assumptions and pre-conceived notions to see if and how they may be invisible roadblocks to your new behaviour.

The key step is to do this often. Doing so in written form or with a partner works best.

2. Frame & Feedback

To drive commitment to this new behaviour, select 1 or 2 close friends with a similar interest (the frame) and share with them the new habit you are developing. Give them the information they need to give you specific input/commentary (the feedback). Building a strong support team around you accelerates progress.

Put up visual reminders in your office, home, on your smart phone display, or google calendar to keep you moving towards your new destination.

3. Drive Commitment

This may be the most challenging step. *Do not deviate from your desired behaviour until it is a routine.* Remember, you do not need motivation to do something, just do it. Many of us do what is critical some of the time. Some do the right things most of the time. Only few of us do the right things all the time. Part time commitment will give us part time results. This is where you need to involve your commitment partners because we are quick to let ourselves off the hook when new habits are required, but not so much when someone else is holding us accountable. The employee of today and tomorrow has more choices than ever before and they are choosing to work in places that they want to be rather than where they feel they need to be. Consequently, if you want greater outcomes, focus on a better employee experience.

4. Drive Commitment

When you do see the progress, your will is more powerful than motivation and a change in your behaviour - celebrate and share it. This communication with self or with others helps galvanize the will to sustain the habit. So, celebrate proudly. After all, you have just achieved one of the most challenging tasks as a human being – changing behaviour from an internal force – or *will*.

On another note, that basketball team I mentioned earlier went on to finish the season 11 wins and 5 losses. Although the 7-game winning streak was amazing, it was the will to win and the habits we created as a team and individually that I am most proud of.

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