



the supplement
FACILITATING VITALITY

JULY 2019 FRICTION

As a died-in-the-wool Type A personality, I can only wait patiently if my personal reserves are topped off. The amount of work it takes to keep them topped off has increased markedly with age. I have to eat well, monitor caffeine and alcohol, exercise religiously, sleep seven to eight hours per night and spend the weekends recovering. Recovery for me includes playing golf with friends, learning to row on a team, reading and taking naps with my corgi, James. Type A's are characterized by an acute awareness of the passage of time, a trait cardiologists term "hurry sickness". It's tough to wait patiently when you are born with hurry sickness.

I am currently at the airport waiting for a flight. As the tram lurched toward the terminal, I caught my balance and muttered "oops" to myself. A fellow passenger alerted me to the fact that I had not been paying attention to the loudspeaker warning me to hang onto the handrails securely. He then should-ed me to "put your listening ears on". My immediate reaction was to contemplate gouging his eyes out. But my personal reserves were moderately topped off, so I merely mentioned how much he must love working with pre-school children and waived to him as I entered the TSA pre-check line. The TSA pre-check line saved his eyesight. If I had been doomed to wait next to that patronizing passenger (not my first choice of moniker) for the 20 minutes it takes to navigate the homeland security maze, one of us would have been escorted to a higher security area and the other to the emergency room. The TSA pre-check line minimizes the wait and hence what we Type A's perceive as friction. Friction is the enemy of personal reserves. With all of the effort it takes to preserve mine, I am not going to waste them waiting next to an idiot (closer to my first choice) in the airport.

I have always called the effort between a thought and a deed activation energy. James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, calls it friction. I like that even better. Friction is critical to repeated behavior and particularly to changing it. It can be used to create a good habit or to break a bad one. Habits expend little mental or physical energy thus freeing us up for higher mental pursuits such as creativity or, as in my case this morning, patience.

Behavior proceeds through four phases: cue, craving, response and reward.

PHASES OF BEHAVIOR

1	CUE	Trigger causing the ensuing behavior chain
2	CRAVING	Desire to change the internal state
3	RESPONSE	Action or inaction depending on the level of friction between the craving and the reward
4	REWARD	Satisfaction



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When repeated to the point of habit, the phases aren't particularly discernible because the cue and the anticipation of its satisfaction produce the same physical response as the reward itself—the release of dopamine. Dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter in the reward center of the brain, is intended to encourage and sustain the behaviors that perpetuate us as a species such as feeding, reproduction and social interaction. No one could have predicted the hyper-secretion of dopamine that results from such modern marvels as social media, junk food, and online shopping – and these are just a few of the more pedestrian ones.

So how does one interrupt the behavior chain to create a good habit or to break a bad one? Increase or decrease the level of friction. Here are a few examples:

PHASE	CREATING A GOOD HABIT	EXAMPLE: ROUTINELY EXERCISING
CUE	Make it obvious	Find a gym or studio on your commute to or from work
CRAVING	Make it attractive	Make it a place where your friends already go
RESPONSE	Make it easy	Change into your workout clothes before you get into your car
REWARD	Make it satisfying	You just spent an hour with your friends investing in your health. Good job!

PHASE	BREAKING A BAD HABIT	EXAMPLE: BUYING TAKE OUT FOR DINNER
CUE	Make it invisible	Take a different route home. Disable the app on your phone.
CRAVING	Make it unattractive	Keep track of the amount of money you spend in restaurants. What else could you do with that money?
RESPONSE	Make it difficult	If you want to order takeout, you have to reload the app or travel to pick up the food. You have to wait to get home and use real plates and silverware at the dining table to consume it.
REWARD	Make it unsatisfying	Were the money, the calories and the trip worth it?

The first step in changing habits is to be on the lookout for them. We all have them. What are yours and what are you going to do about them? Start by reading *Atomic Habits*, by James Clear. It could be life altering. It might even save someone's eyesight.



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Patricia M. Fuller has dedicated the last 20 years to designing and delivering wellness programs. Her events earn consistently excellent ratings for her holistic approach and her real world application.

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