

Fueled

I am likely the only one in my extended family who didn't befriend shortsightedness. My parents, brother and all my immediate cousins are all friends to spectacles from a young age until some of them opted for laser surgery. I remain a 6/6 with perfect eyesight, something I give credit more to one of my primary school teachers than my family genes.

Mdm Tan taught my Chinese class. She once mentioned in class that we should look at trees and plants from at least 50 metres away as it is highly beneficial for our eyes. Though I'm not sure if there is scientific backing for this, I thought it made sense because living in Singapore, our eyesight is limited by densely built high rise buildings, and therefore we seldom look into the distance. My teeth-brushing ritual consists of gazing at green plants and trees from a distance every day since I was ten years old. It's become a habit for me to gaze out of my window and see trees and plants when I ponder, even when I'm writing or planning my work. Another good habit I picked up from Mdm Tan, and which I have passed on to my three children, is to plan your day and week in advance.

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Just as bad habits chain and hinder us, good habits fuel us. Incorporating the habit of looking out of the window towards plants and trees that are in the distance as part of my oral hygiene ritual would be an example of 'Habit-Stacking' in the famous self-help book, 'Atomic Habits' by James Clear. Most of us have a difficult time sticking with the good habits we'd like to adopt and we often find ourselves lost in cycles of 'Starting Enthusiastically' but 'Failing Miserably'. A key to developing good habits and sustaining them is to start small and manageable.

For example, if you need to lose some weight and cutting down on milk is on your agenda, you are less likely to succeed if you suddenly ditch your favorite Latte and Cappuccinos to a full Black Coffee. You might stick to the new habit for a couple of days or weeks by sheer will power but this is unlikely to be sustainable. Instead, conditioning your taste buds to adjust to the new taste as you progressively reduce the amount of milk in your coffee is more manageable, sustainable and habit-forming. Think of it this way, if you habitually pair 100 ml of coffee with 80 ml of milk, can you start by reducing the milk progressively, moving from 80 ml to 60 ml, to 40 ml, to 20 ml, and perhaps stay at 15 ml of milk? The progression of 'milk-cuts' will be determined by how urgently you need to lose weight and how sustainable it is.

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There are many ways to incorporate good habits, such as making them public, adding accountability, changing routines, introducing visual cues, and introducing excitement. I've introduced 'Mundane Thursdays' to some of my clients, where their end-of-month Thursday morning calendars are designated for administrative work, and 'Midweek Refresh', where my clients engage in lighthearted activities with their staff, or recreational sports that refresh their mind, or 'Floating Sticky Notes' on desktops reminding them what they should be mindful of when writing their emails. One of my clients schedules his monthly coaching session to be one week before his executive team meetings so that we can evaluate the agenda and brainstorm ideas. Another makes it a habit to schedule his coaching session before meeting with his CEO, so as to review and brainstorm ways to influence him.

We usually don't see overnight results when we develop good habits. Like caring for plants with water, sunlight and fertilizer, a little here today and a little there tomorrow, but the plant will grow. A fulfilling life and a fulfilling career depend on good habits.

Don't be chained by bad habits. Fuel yourself with good habits. Let's work together on your good habits!

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