



how to

EMBED HABITS

10 scientifically proven ways that work

– the how-to of success? hell yes –

habits

The name given to what we repeatedly do is 'habits'. They are the things that make us most or least proud of who we are. The field of neuroscience reliably informs us that habits are maps in the human brain and that humans can create these maps at will – which is very good news for us. If habits are the maps, we have the opportunity to choose exactly WHO we want to be in life.

Tip 1

USE YOUR WILLPOWER WISELY

Willpower out predicts IQ for academic performance by a factor of two – that's a pretty stunning fact. But willpower is a finite resource in the brain. The world's leading researcher in this area, Roy Baumeister, says when it comes to willpower, "we must play offence, not defence". We want to decide every day where we're going to use that finite resource, and when it comes to habits, what we want to put all our energy into the one that we want to embed.

Willpower uses a part of the brain that in the human species is one of the most recent to evolve – the prefrontal cortex (fig. 1).

Another world-leading professional in this area, Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D (psychologist, lecturer and author), presents two striking ways to enhance willpower. This will help to use your willpower wisely.

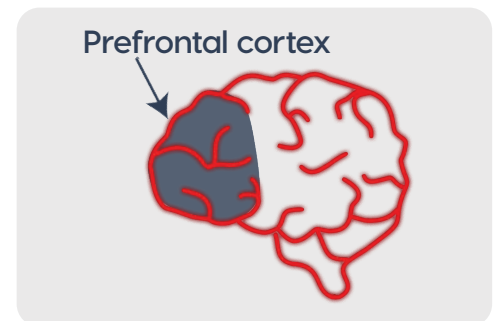


fig. 1 - the prefrontal cortex

> HOW TO ENHANCE WILLPOWER

• Breathe

It's no surprise that meditation or breathing deliberately has been proven to be the most effective resource humans have for so many outcomes in life. So, when it comes to our willpower, McGonigal says to slow down our breathing deliberately. This activates a part of our brain that can access willpower resources and takes us out of fight or flight mode.

"There is one way to immediately boost willpower. Slow your breathing down to 4-6 breaths per minute. That's 10-15 seconds per breath. Slowing the breath down activates the prefrontal cortex and increases heart rate variability, which helps shift the brain and body from a state of stress to self-control mode. A few minutes of this technique will make you feel calm, in control, and capable of handling cravings or challenges." (Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D.)

• Self-forgiveness

McGonigal notes that if we think that the way to achieve greater self-control is through self-criticism – think again. Study after study has shown that being self-critical reduces motivation. Taking the approach that we're all human, embedding a habit comes from little steps repeated often – and some mistakes along the way.



To learn more about boosting your willpower, check out *The Willpower Instinct* by Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D.

Tip 2

CHOOSE YOUR WHO

For most of us, there's more than one identity running the show. There's the version that's reliable, wise, who knows the answer to the question – if we would only listen to her. Then there's the one who we've learned to be in response to challenges, from a very young version of us, to the version we are today.

Our true identity is the one we want to activate when it comes to embedding habits. We're going to need that wisdom, determination and resilience. Resilience is critical for sustaining the activity that we will choose to do in order to get the outcome that a habit - once embedded - will give us.

> **HERE'S A RESILIENCE MODEL THAT WILL HELP US TO BE THAT OPTIMAL 'WHO' EVERY TIME:**



1. Identity - choose your identity



2. Behaviour - things I do (when I've chosen that identity, these are the things I do)



3. Feeling - taking action (when I'm being that person that does those activities)

When the less than optimal version of us runs that resilience model we tend to run it the other way round:



feelings > behaviour > identity

We have stimulus, then we have emotion. Emotion then dictates what we do and it may be that 'less than optimal' person who will choose a 'less than optimal' response and therefore may not be feeling great as a result. Flip that model around the other way, and it will remind us of who we really want to be.

So, choose your who. And when something happens and that stimulus goes straight to identity, choose your behaviours, and your reward will be that you'll feel who you're most proud to feel.

Tip 3

KNOW YOUR 'WHY'

What we're talking about here is motivation. Often we say, "I know, I should, I must, I ought to do something". And we find ourselves not doing it and wondering why. What's missing is authentic motivation. With the right motivation, humans will do things we don't want or can't be bothered to do – think of all the tasks of being a mum.

So in order to create a habit, we need to have something bigger than what we're going to do that will keep us going.

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE:

A personal example from me is that I realised I needed to change the time that I woke up in the morning. To be honest, I never actually want to get up super early, so why do I do it? I do it because of what getting up gives to me. It gives me more time in my day to do things that are important to me and to achieve outcomes that I otherwise wouldn't be able to. Before instigating this habit I was constantly running on the treadmill to try and make sure everything was done. Embedding the habit of getting up at a particular time changed everything as a result. When the alarm went off, I would naturally not want to get up, but I would have in mind the thing I was going for – the outcome, the ultimate prize – and I would jump straight out of bed. It works every day.

So what is your motivator? It will be connected to who you are most proud to be, and often to the mission that is really important in your life.



Tip 4

BE A RESEARCHER

Mastery is simply a series of steps repeated frequently, over and over (punctuated with falling down) as we develop our skills. And examining our process is key.



HOW TO BE A RESEARCHER

Pay attention to the data. So you stumbled? Look at how that happened. Look at how to do it differently next time. Being a researcher is to study success. So you got it right again? Tell me about that, how did that go and why did you get it so right? Success comes more from studying success than it does from so-called failure.

So, be the researcher. Study the data, focus on what's working (*sure, look at what's not working – we're not silly, we're not going to do that again*), edit the plan, take action and repeat.

Tip 5

COMMIT, 100 %

It's paradoxically way easier to be 100% committed to something than it is to be 97% and to be the person that revisits that commitment over and over again, wasting numerous moments on a decision that you had already decided was important.

The word 'decide' is derived from the Latin word 'decire', which literally means to 'cut off' all options. So when you've decided what it is you want to do – go all in, 100%, decision made, no questioning "is this the day that I do it?". It's the time to do it NOW.

Tip 6

GO SMALL

This one is super profound. Make the actions you choose (when it comes to embedding a habit) small to start with. So small that you can't fail, so small that you understand the anatomy of that new habit from every little increment there is. But importantly, so small we can't fail.

In the beginning, performance is irrelevant. What we want to do is to take action, take one step in front of the other. Something profound happens to our confidence when we reduce the size of the first action, meaning we can rapidly go from stuck and stalled into productive activity.

AN EXAMPLE:

When it comes to next-level thinking in terms of what we're doing here at CoOfWomen, I'm often stumped. I look at that step that I need to take to get us to where I want to be, and it feels hard, it feels unknown, it's unclear. I do things to distract myself.

Then one day, and I remembered this fantastic tip to go small. I thought, Let's break this down. I decided to spend one minute every day in front of my whiteboard – that's where I do my best thinking. Monday morning came and I felt unusually invigorated about this idea. I set my alarm on my phone, and off I went. Of course, it seemed like milliseconds went by and there was the alarm going off. I thought, that's interesting, I've done a minute, I reckon I can do 10. I actually ended up spending 20 minutes and completely outlined the whole plan.

Often it's in our head in bits, and all I needed to do was to take the time. So why was that successful? Because I chose to do just one minute. It felt like something I could easily do. I did it willingly and I've been repeating that one over and over again.



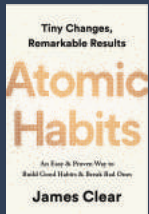
Tip 7

HAVE A FAIL PLAN

Have a fail plan. You're human, therefore imperfect – welcome to the race. Mastery is running a series of steps that we repeat over and over again. But we never take all those steps perfectly. We have what are called 'mis-takes'. We get some stuff right, and then there are some mis-takes.

What we need to do is plan in advance. When you stumble, look at what's happened and go *huh, a mis-take – OK, what I'm going to do is put more attention on this tomorrow than I did today. I'm going to make it front and centre.* Make it the most important thing that you do the next day.

Make sure you plan in advance when it comes to the steps you're taking to build habits.



Learn more about this tip and a number of other ideas in *Atomic Habits* by James Clear.

Tip 8

FOCUS ON THE SYSTEM

Focusing on the outcome has been proven to not be an effective way to see results. What we have to do to create habits is work on the system. Your system is going to be a series of small steps bolted together. A classic example is a sales result that you're going for to increase revenue by X-amount.

It will probably come down to something like the number of calls that you make in a period of time. So focus on building a system, a structure, series of activities that you do that will actively result in the goal happening.



What you've got to do is ask *what specifically do I need to do, in what order, to achieve that?*

Tip 9

DO IT DAILY

Whatever action we choose to do in building the new habit we must do it every single day. If it's important enough, it should be there anyway but the level of momentum we achieve will be in direct proportion with the amount of focus and attention we put on it.

Jeffrey Schwartz, M.D, a leading researcher in this area says that *"to embed habits faster, it is going to be a formula of the quality and quantity of focus and attention"*.

Here's a tool to help you really enhance that quality and quantity formula. It's a neuroscience-informed tool that we created here at Co.OfWomen called the 3Q's Review – we've also got a video on this in the digital platform so head over there to have a look at this later if you'd like the expanded version. But here's the quick take: ask these questions, in this order, as often as you can so that you can learn what to repeat.

> 3Q'S REVIEW

- Q1. What's working?** - What is working about the things I'm trying and the steps that I'm taking to build a habit. Ask it again, what else is working? And what else?
- Q2. Why is that working?** - This is actually the most important question. This is the one we often fail to ask and so often miss what is the real formula. Keep asking the question why is that working again and again until you've got *all* the data.
- Q3. What do I want to do differently?** - Tweak it based on what I'm learning.

The 3Q's review is a fantastic formula relating to what neuroscientists say about the quality and quantity of focus and attention. Use it often as many times in a day as you can to build that momentum faster.

Tip 10

CHOOSE BOTH A REWARD AND CONSEQUENCE

Let's make a game of this. Put something at stake so you really have something to go for. A reward will really enhance your motivation and will draw you towards your goal. Experts call this the *toward motivation*. Similarly, something that you don't want will have the effect of ensuring that your level of focus is really there. Ensure that your reward is compelling and the consequence is truly terrible and then go for gold. And you know what, if you get the consequence, c'est la vie. It will make you much more committed next time. Enjoy your game.



Summary

HOW-TO EMBED HABITS

- **Tip 1** – use your willpower wisely
- **Tip 2** – choose your who
- **Tip 3** – know your why
- **Tip 4** – be a researcher
- **Tip 5** – commit, 100%
- **Tip 6** – go small
- **Tip 7** – have a fail plan
- **Tip 8** – focus on the system not the goal
- **Tip 9** – do it daily
- **Tip 10** – choose both a reward and consequence

– meet the founder –

TARA LORIGAN



Tara is the founder of Co.OfWomen, a globally unique business support organisation focused on delivering the how-to of success to business women.

Co.OfWomen's model is built on a trio of commercial principals, the neuroscience of performance and a deep understanding of the distinctions of female success.

Offering three membership types in digital and hands-on versions, Co.OfWomen champions the success of thousands of women under a purpose banner they call 'for profit, for good'.