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**Use a Trigger** – A trigger is a short ritual you perform before a habit. If you wanted to wake up earlier this might mean jumping out of bed as soon as you hear the sound of your alarm. If you wanted to stop smoking this could be snapping your fingers every time you feel the urge for a cigarette. A trigger helps condition a new pattern more consistently.

**Replace Lost Needs** – You can't just pull out habits without replacing the needs they fulfill. Giving up television might mean you need to find a new way to relax, socialize or get information.

**One Habit at a Time** – A month may seem like a long time to focus on only one change. With just one habit change you can focus on making it really stick. Multitasking between three or four can be exhausting.

**Keep it Simple** – Your change should involve one or two rules, not a dozen. Exercising once per day for at least thirty minutes is easier to follow than exercising Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays with yoga the first day and mountain biking the third day, except when it is raining in which case you will do... Simple rules create habits, complex rules create headaches. LC

Ah, habits. Those pesky little routines, or sometimes elaborate rituals, that seem harmless but sometimes hold us captive. Captive to what? "Captive" seems a little intense to describe habits! Maybe. But maybe some of our habits keep us from a deeper self-awareness and enable us to ignore the fear or anxiety that dictates our behavior. And since it's a bunch of therapists writing this newsletter, of course we hope folks are interested in becoming more self-aware. Of course, habits can also help keep us aware of routines that benefit us too. So, here are our thoughts about what drives our habit-forming selves. Happy April!

JV

It's funny that I found ***The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and In Business*** by Charles Duhigg to be rather habit-forming. I'd find myself wanting to pick it up and read the next chapter, as Duhigg tells some powerfully compelling stories. For instance, what kept Angie Bachmann going back to casinos over and over again, even though she had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars? How was Eugene Pauly, whose brain had been damaged by viral encephalitis, able to excel at a memory test over a period of time when he couldn't remember a conversation he had had five minutes ago? The answers lie in the formation of habit loops. In a series of fascinating stories, Duhigg delves into how we develop and maintain habits, and why some of them fall to the wayside. I read this book with an eye to how I could apply the science of habit formation to what my clients experience, and I came away from the book with a number of new ideas I'm putting into practice. I recommend this book to anyone interested in how to help themselves or others with lasting change, or anyone who enjoys really good stories.

SN

In life, many of us realize that the only thing that is constant is change. It often becomes necessary to change such things as old habits, old ways of thinking and old ways of coping. When addressing how and what to change, it is most helpful to focus on effectiveness. Is how I am behaving working for me? Do I feel ashamed after I do it? Is it causing medical, emotional or spiritual problems in my life? Am I okay with the results of what I am doing? In 1977, James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente established the 5 Stages of Change to assist us in understanding how change happens in our lives. Stage 1: Pre-Contemplation – We are aware of discomfort in our lives, but unaware that any change needs to occur. Stage 2: Contemplation – We begin to understand that some change needs to occur for our lives to be more positive. Stage 3: Preparation – We begin to establish what we are willing to change and how. We begin to do research and come up with ideas for how the changes will impact our lives. Stage 4: Action – We implement change and are committed to the decision to do so. Stage 5: Maintenance – We focus on making the change an integrated part of our lives. Stage 6: Relapse/Termination - We either go back to old patterns or we decide that we no longer need to practice the new patterns.

In any stage, it is important to again assess whether the change is effective. It is easy to try to shame ourselves into changing, but this tends to make problems worse. Focusing on effectiveness and understanding where we are in the stages keeps us engaged in learning to make things better for ourselves.

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