

THE BIG IDEAS

Mini Habits

What are they?

Too Small to Fail

Stupid small = crazy good.

Newton's 1st Law

And your mini habits.

Ego Depletion

And your mini habits.

Self-Efficacy

Generating machine.

Winning vs. Losing

Your call. Let's win!

What's Your Chain?

Of mini habits?!



Mini Habits

Smaller Habits, Bigger Results

BY STEPHEN GUISE · CREATESPACE © 2013 · 126 PAGES

"I had experimented with personal development strategies for a decade. When I accidentally started my first mini habit—and the changes I made were actually lasting—I realized the prior strategies I relied upon were complete failures. When something works, that which doesn't work is exposed. The science of Mini Habits exposes the predictably inconsistent results of most popular personal growth strategies, and reveals why mini habits are consistent.

A mini habit is a very small positive behavior that you force yourself to do every day; a mini habit's 'too small to fail' nature makes it weightless, deceptively powerful, and a superior habit-building strategy.

Mini Habits will better equip you to change your life than 99% of the people you see walking around on this globe. People so often think that they are the reason they can't achieve lasting change; but the problem isn't with them—it's with their strategy. You can achieve great things without the guilt, intimidation, and repeated failure associated with such strategies such as 'getting motivated,' resolutions, or even 'just doing it.' To make changes last, you need to stop fighting against your brain. When you start playing by your brain's rules—as mini habits show you how to do—lasting change isn't hard."

~ Stephen Guise from *Mini Habits*

How's your habit-building process working for you?

If you've stalled a few (hundred?) times, Mini Habits might be just the thing you're looking for!

[Stephen Guise](#) tells us he stumbled upon this brilliant approach one fateful day when he couldn't muster the motivation to work out for 30 minutes. So, after struggling with the unsuccessful torture of trying to rally, he gave up and decided to do just one push-up.

That push-up wasn't so bad. It turned into another, and another. And, before he knew it, Stephen had completed his hoped-for 30 minute workout AND he'd discovered a magical approach to changing lives: the Mini Habit.

This is a great, quick-reading little book packed with practical wisdom I think you'll dig. (Get a copy [here](#).)

It reminds me of the fun, uber-practical energy of [The Miracle Morning](#) by [Hal Elrod](#) and [Superhuman by Habit](#) by [Tynan](#) with a splash of science from [The Willpower Instinct](#) by [Kelly McGonigal](#), [Willpower](#) by [Roy Baumeister](#), and [The Power of Habit](#) by [Charles Duhigg](#). (Check out the Notes on all of those in our growing [Willpower](#) collection!)

I'm excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

"Are you ready to discover how smaller habits lead to bigger results? I sure hope so, because I'm excited to show you. Let's go!"

~ Stephen Guise

"To summarize, a mini habit is a VERY small positive behavior that you force yourself to do every day. Small steps work every time, and habits are built by consistency, so the two were meant to be together."

~ Stephen Guise

WHAT IS A MINI HABIT?

"A mini habit is basically a *much* smaller version of a new habit you want to form. 100 push-ups daily is minified into one push-up daily. Writing 3,000 words daily becomes writing 50 words daily. Thinking positively all the time becomes thinking two positive thoughts per day. Living an entrepreneurial lifestyle becomes thinking of two ideas per day (among other entrepreneurial things).

The foundation of the *Mini Habits* system is in 'stupid small' steps. The concept of small steps is nothing new, but how and why they work have not been adequately dissected. Of course, small steps are relative too; a small step for you could be a giant leap for me. Saying 'stupid small' clarifies it, because if a step sounds stupid relative to the most you can do, it's perfect."

Mini habits.

Take your target habit goal and make it 'stupid small.'

If it sounds absurd when you say it, you've found a mini habit.

100 push-ups daily becomes 1 push-up daily. Writing x,000 words daily becomes writing 50 words daily. Meditating for an hour a day becomes meditating for 1 minute or even 1 breath a day. Getting up an hour earlier becomes getting up a minute earlier. Reading for an hour daily becomes reading 1 page of a book daily. (Stephen's mini reading habit is 2 pages but why not 1? Hah!)

Stephen has a huge list of minified habits at minihabits.com. Check it out.

What's YOUR target goal? And how can you minify it?

My target habit goal is: _____.

Here's my minified version: _____.

Remember: We want to make the habit "too small to fail"—building a super solid base of CONSISTENCY before we go for a larger load. And that's exactly what the next Big Ideas is all about:

TOO SMALL TO FAIL

"The benefit from following the *Mini Habits* system is surprisingly big results. First, there's a great chance that you'll do 'bonus reps' after you meet your small requirement. This is because we already desire these positive behaviors, and starting them reduces internal resistance. The second benefit is routine. Even if you don't exceed your small requirement, the behavior will begin to become a (mini) habit. From there, do bonus reps or scale the habit up. Another benefit is constant success. A bank may be too big to fail, but mini habits are *too small to fail*; and so they lack the common destructive feelings of guilt and inadequacy that come with goal failure. This is one of the very few systems that practically guarantees success every day thanks to a potent encouragement spiral and always-attainable target. Mini habits have made me feel unstoppable; prior to starting mini habits, I felt unstartable."

Too small to fail.

THAT's what we're looking for with mini habits.

So stupid small that it's harder NOT to do it than to just do it.

If you need to meditate for 15 (or 30 or 60) minutes to have a win, on some days it will take a *ton* of motivation and/or willpower—perhaps more than you can muster—leading to a feeling of failure and resulting in you giving up and abandoning the creation of your hoped-for habit.

"Mini habits are a pretty simple brain trick at the core, but also a life philosophy that values starting, letting action precede motivation, and believing that small steps can accumulate into giant leaps forward."

~ Stephen Guise

"Bigger requirements look good on paper, but only action counts. Be the person with embarrassing goals and impressive results instead of one of the many people with impressive goals and embarrassing results."

~ Stephen Guise

But if all you need to do is meditate for 1 minute or 1 breath to call it a win, you don't need a whole lot of motivation or willpower to make that happen.

And that leads to a sense of winning—which is a VERY good thing.

It also leads to a feeling of momentum where you're likely to do what Stephen calls "bonus reps"—which equals more winning which is also a very (!) good thing.

Speaking of momentum, let's look at how Newton's first law applies to habits:

NEWTON'S FIRST LAW + YOUR MINI HABITS

"Chances are that you will do extra sometimes. And the reason relates to basic physics. Newton's first law states that..."

1. An object at rest will stay at rest unless an external force acts upon it.

2. An object that is in motion will not change its velocity unless an external force acts upon it.

Can you see how this relates? Once you take the first step, you are officially *in motion*. You will find as I have, that once you get started it is almost as hard to stop as it is to keep going. Add to this that nothing is more motivating and inspiring than seeing yourself take action. Put it together and we get a new equation:

One small step + desired behavior = high probability of further steps."

This is really cool.

So, Newton's law tells us that an object at rest tends to stay at rest; an object in motion tends to stay in motion. Got it.

Therefore, we need to remember that the most challenging part is GETTING STARTED!!

Know this: If your mind is trying to compute how it's going to get you thru a 30+ minute grueling workout or equally arduous meditation session when you're just not feeling it, you're likely to not even try and make up some excuse as to why today's the day to take off.

BUT... If you have a mini target, your defenses go down and you (easily!) take that first (and hardest!) baby step—creating momentum that will likely keep you going.

This applies to EVERYTHING, btw.

If you're procrastinating with your writing or business planning or PhilosophersNotes creating (ahem), break your target task down into the smallest possible chunk and just do THAT! I don't need to read a whole book—I need to read 1 page. I don't need to write a whole Note—just one quote or Big Idea.

You don't need to write your whole essay—just a sentence. You don't need the whole marketing plan—just 1 idea. You don't need to eat perfectly today—just have a leaf of romaine lettuce.

JUST GET STARTED.

As Plato tells us, "*The beginning is the most important part of the work.*"

In [Choose the Life You Want](#) (see Notes), [Tal Ben-Shahar](#) tells us: "*Fortunately, the research into procrastination has also identified practical ways that can help overcome the tendency to procrastinate. The single most important technique is called 'the five-minute takeoff.' It consists, simply, of starting to do the thing you have been putting off, no matter how little you feel like doing it. Procrastinators often believe that to do something one has to truly want to do it—to be in the right mood, to feel inspired. This is not the case. Usually, to get the job done, it is enough merely to begin doing it—the initial action kick-starts the process and often brings about more action.*"

"When I feel resistance to a task, I make it smaller. Problem solved."

~ Stephen Guise

Here's to building momentum with that first baby step!

EGO DEPLETION

"This means one thing—we've got to maximize our self-control reserves to be effective at changing ourselves."

~ Stephen Guise

"In 2010, a meta-analysis of 83 studies was done on ego depletion. Ego depletion essentially means the same thing as willpower or self-control depletion, so I will use these terms interchangeably. From this meta-analysis, the five biggest factors found to cause ego depletion were effort, perceived difficulty, negative affect, subjective fatigue, and blood glucose levels. These factors, then, are the five biggest obstacles that keep us from sustaining success with a willpower-based strategy. What do we do once we've exhausted our willpower? Is all hope lost then? According to the analysis, motivational incentives, training on self-control tasks, and glucose supplementation promoted better self-control of ego-depleted people."

Stephen does a great job of walking us through the basic science of willpower and habit creation. Really good stuff.

Check out the book plus our Notes on [Roy Baumeister](#)'s classic book *Willpower* for more. (Baumeister is essentially the world's leading researcher on the science of willpower and Stephen comes back to his work many times!)

For now, remember this: Your willpower is FINITE.

Think of your smartphone battery. You start the day with green bars. End of the day you're looking at red warnings that your battery is about to die.

Scientists call that ego depletion—aka willpower or self-control depletion. The five primary drivers of willpower depletion? As Stephen advises: "effort, perceived difficulty, negative affect, subjective fatigue, and blood glucose levels."

There's a ton we can talk about here, but focusing on the power of mini habits, note the fact that you can have VERY little willpower left in the tank and STILL rock your mini habit because the perceived difficulty is so low—stupid small, eh?

Too small to fail.

You can pretty much ALWAYS get yourself to bang out 1 push-up if that's your goal. Or do your 1 breath meditation, etc., etc.

AND...

Not only can we engage in a mini habit behavior when our willpower is *already* depleted, but the tiny nature of the target behavior is perceived to be so easy and the effort required so nominal, that it preserves your precious willpower as well. <— That's a winning combo!

"Willpower is reliable, but only if you don't run out of it."

~ Stephen Guise

A SELF-EFFICACY-GENERATING MACHINE

"Mini Habits are a self-efficacy-generating machine, and importantly, you can get started successfully with zero self-efficacy. Your daily successes will train you to have high self-efficacy. How can you not believe in your ability to do one push-up per day? You can do it in between these two sentences. And this amounts to strengthening your self-efficacy through practice. Mini habits double as training for believing in yourself."

Self-efficacy.

It's HUGE. In short, your self-efficacy is your confidence in your ability to achieve the things that are important to you. We kick off our Confidence 101 class (overview [here](#)) with a discussion of this.

If you're currently struggling with creating positive change in your life, your belief in yourself (aka self-efficacy) might be a little low.

"It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives. It's what we do consistently."

~ Tony Robbins

What's exciting with mini habits is the fact that:

- a) You don't need *any* self-efficacy to get yourself to do something so silly small as all the mini habits we've been discussing; and,
- b) Once you engage in those new mini habits you GENERATE the belief in yourself that you can do them and more.

As Stephen says, mini habits are self-efficacy-generating machines.

Very cool.

Here's to putting them to work!!! :)

WINNING VS. LOSING

"It is far more mentally energy efficient to break things down into small components that are easily 'mentally digested' and less stressful. The goal of losing 100 pounds in a year is a constant energy drain and burden. And with this goal, it's possible to lose 50 pounds and feel like a failure. Why would anyone be interested in that? One workout feels like a drop in the bucket, and it is in the grand scheme of your massive goal. It's hard to feel good after a workout when it represents almost nothing compared to your goal. With mini habits, though, willpower is preserved as much as possible, every step you take feels like success, and going beyond your goal feels even better than that. It's a system that makes you feel like a winner, because people who feel like winners act like winners."

Would you rather feel like your constantly winning or constantly losing?

That's not a trick question. :)

Seriously. If you want to lose 100 pounds but you've only lost 10 so far, do you celebrate how much progress you've made or do you still feel like a bit of a loser because you haven't hit your target yet?

We want to pay attention to how we're setting up our lives and focus on SYSTEMS that make us feel like a winner rather than goals that we're always not quite attaining.

[Scott Adams](#) echoes this with his blunt point that "goals are for losers."

Here's how he puts it in [How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big](#) (see Notes): "You could word-glue goals and systems together if you chose. All I'm suggesting is that thinking of goals and systems as different concepts has power. Goal-oriented people exist in a state of continuous presuccess failure at best, and permanent failure at worst if things never work out. Systems people succeed every time they apply their systems, in the sense that they did what they intended to do. The goals people are fighting the feeling of discouragement at every turn. The systems people are feeling good every time they apply their systems. That's a big difference in terms of maintaining your personal energy in the right direction."

The systems-versus-goals model can be applied to most human endeavors. In the world of dieting, losing twenty pounds is a goal, but eating right is a system. In the exercise realm, running a marathon in under four hours is a goal, but exercising daily is a system. In business, making a million dollars is a goal, but being a serial entrepreneur is a system.

For our purposes, let's say a goal is a specific objective that you either achieve or don't sometime in the future. A system is something you do on a regular basis that increases your odds of happiness in the long run. If you do something every day, it's a system. If you're waiting to achieve it someday in the future, it's a goal."

Systems. Mini Habits. Let's focus on those!

What are yours? :)

"Don't imagine the easiest days; imagine the hardest days. If you can do something on the day you're tired, stressed, and very busy, you can do it every day."

~ Stephen Guise

"I wish you very small successes, over and over and over again."

~ Stephen Guise

WHAT'S YOUR CHAIN?

"Jerry Seinfeld appears to have been a pioneer in mini habits. He famously marked each day on his calendar with a big X if he completed his joke-writing task. He recognized that daily progress was the key to forming a habit and improving his craft of telling jokes.

He first told young comedian Brad Isaac about his productivity secret before a show one day. Brad wrote about Seinfeld's response in an article for Lifehacker:

"After a few days you'll have a chain. Just keep at it and the chain will grow longer every day. You'll like seeing that chain, especially when you get a few weeks under your belt. Your only job next is to not break the chain."

This is a good summation of mini habits. We don't want to break the chain."

At this stage, you've probably heard of Jerry Seinfeld's awesome commitment to write a joke every single day as he was mastering his craft as a comedian.

He bought a big ol' wall calendar and would put a big 'ol red X every day he hit it. All those Xs looked so nice next to one another he didn't want to break the chain.

That's basically mini habits in a nutshell. A goal so small he couldn't fail and a consistency that aggregates into great things.

How about YOU?!

What's your mini habit streak?! Now a good time to get on that? (Seriously, if it's as stupid small as it should be, why not go rock it right NOW? :)

Here's to optimizing and actualizing one micro habit and step at a time!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

[Superhuman by Habit](#)

[Willpower](#)

[The Willpower Instinct](#)

[The Power of Habit](#)

[One Small Step](#)

[How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big](#)

About the Author of "Mini Habits"

STEPHEN GUISE



Stephen Guise began researching and writing about personal growth strategies in 2004. He founded the award-winning Deep Existence blog in 2011, and in late 2013, he released the international bestselling book, *Mini Habits*. Stephen enjoys minimalism, playing basketball, and exploring the world. Get the book [here](#) and connect with Stephen at deepexistence.com.

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.