

responses and fears, to improving motivation and performance in any area of life.

The field is constantly growing and the applications for human development, innovation and learning are always expanding.

It's amazing the results you get when you understand how your brain works and how to put it to work for you! Finally, with what we know now about the brain and how it works – its easier than ever to make the change that you desire.

What is a Habit?

Our brain creates habits for efficiency. Anything that we repeat over time becomes a habit. This is useful in many ways, we no longer need to learn to tie our shoes, or drive a car, we do it on autopilot. (Though I wish some people would go back to driving school).

We all have habits that are not so useful. And changing a habit used to be hard to change, but not anymore! When we understand how the brain makes habits, we can easily create new habits quickly and replace old ones.

To understand habits, we need to understand the brain in finer detail. The brain is made up of a neural net, millions of brain cells wired together. Neurons are the cells in the brain and they connect with other cells by

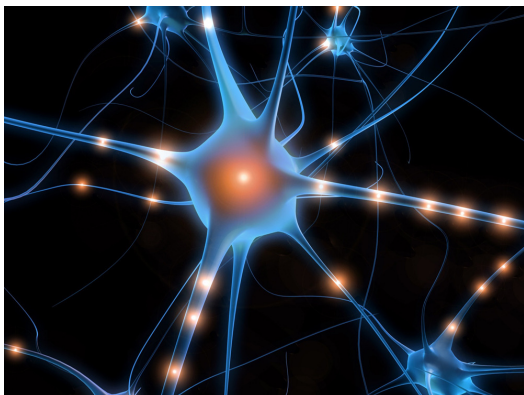


Image of a neuron and it's connections to other neurons, chains of which set up neural pathways.

'synapses'. The connections of these neurons can be thought of like a hand with many fingers. The fingers can connect with other fingers of other neurons. The neurons that 'fire' together more often become a preferred pathway.

This is how the brain learns, it actually makes new connections between neurons, and creates pathways. The neurons that fire together more often become preferred pathways and when triggered, these

neuron pathways will fire first – automatically.

When a pathway becomes automatic – it is a habit. It is a learned pathway that has linked up neurons and over time, it becomes automatic.

Changing a habit can be as simple as learning something new. We are learning new things all the time.

What makes a learned pathway automatic? It's simple – it's repetition.

Repetition turns a thought, a feeling or a behavior into a habit.

We've all heard the old saying, "it takes 30 days to make a new habit?" What is happening is really repetition.

With the tools of NLP, we can set up a new pathway in the brain, condense the repetition, and turn it to a new habit very quickly. In understanding our habits, we have triggers or cues that tell the brain when to run the habit. This story illustrates a simple habit, and the awareness of my "trigger" behind it.

Understanding Triggers

When I moved to Portland, Oregon, I found I wanted to make chocolate chip cookies all the time. Every day, I was getting the feeling, the craving to make cookies. It wasn't just about eating cookies, it was about the whole process of making them. I had piles of cookies, and after a few weeks, my pants were getting tighter.

After shopping for larger size pants, finally, I asked myself? "Why do I want to make cookies all the time?"

As I gave it some quiet reflection, all these childhood memories started coming to mind. It was dark and stormy outside. All five of us kids were laughing and talking in a warm cozy kitchen, and making chocolate chip cookies.

I grew up in Utah where it is almost always sunny, even when it snows, often the sun is still shining through. The days it rained were few, but

intense. The skies were dark and stormy, thunder crashed across the sky, and rains were torrential. These were the days we stayed inside and made chocolate chip cookies.

When I moved to Portland, Oregon, the weather was a bit different. In fact, as many days as the sun shines in Utah, it rains in Oregon. My brain had created the association of rain and cookies, and so every time it rained, my brain was saying, "It's cookie time!"

Rain was my trigger, or the cue telling my brain when to run the habit.

Our habits can range from simple to complex. The simplest is an association like cookies and rain. Sometimes, just the awareness of the habit is enough to change it. I no longer have to make cookies every time it rains (thank goodness or I'd be as big as a house). Our habits can also have emotional drivers. In the next section, we'll look at the underlying patterns that keep habits in place – the emotional drivers.

Assessing Your Habits and Triggers

The first part of changing habits is to identify what they are. What are the habits that are getting in your way of healthy living and releasing the weight? And, what is the trigger (the cue that tells your mind knows when to run the habit).

Your Habits

Your Triggers

Layers of Habits: Associations, Meanings

The simplest level of a habit is an association, like my association of rainy days and making cookies. Another example comes from the famous story of Pavlov and his dogs. Pavlov was a psychology researcher who worked with dogs, he always rang a bell before he fed his dogs their dinner. Pavlov noticed that after awhile, the dogs would salivate as soon as they heard the bell. The dogs created the association, the sound of the bell means food, and salivation was an automatic response.

In a way, we are all like Pavlov's dogs, we all have a history of food associations. Our foods have history, and from this history, foods take on meanings. For example, what do you think of when you think of pumpkin pie? Or apple pie?

Because of how our brain learns and our ability to make associations, the present moment is never just about the present moment, it's about our whole history connected to it.

For example, a hot fudge sundae is not just frozen sweet milk and chocolate goo. It's really connected with every time mom or dad sat down with you over a sundae, or every time your grades were rewarded with a sundae, or every social event that had sundaes.

Our foods have a history to them.

Your food choices, preferences and cravings are really about your past "programs" and the history connected to them. You have been 'conditioned' to like the foods you enjoy.

In the typical American home, you may have grown up with food rewards, perhaps you got a candy bar for good behavior or you went out for ice cream when you got good grades. Our unconscious mind tracks all these meanings and history connected with foods, and it sums it up into a feeling. And now, as an adult, the foods you reach for when you want to feel

rewarded are the same ones you had as a kid. These food associations are also connected to feelings.

