



Danny Lennon: Here we are. James welcome to the podcast, thank you so much for taking the time out to do this today my man.

James Clear: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me, it's great to be here.

Danny Lennon: So I have a ton of questions that I am keen to ask your thoughts on, but before we get into any of that nitty-gritty, maybe a good place to start is with a bit of your background for those listening. So how is it you would actually describe what it is you do and what are maybe some of the cliff notes that maybe led you to that point?

James Clear: Sure. So I identify as an entrepreneur more than a writer, but what I spend most of my time doing is writing and of course I just finished this book, it's called Atomic Habits and most of the writing that I do is about habits, decision-making, continuous improvement and peak performance, and about sort of what the evidence based and science based strategies are behind some of those things, how habits work, how decision-making works, how the brain functions. But more importantly, I am interested in knowledge when it's applied to daily life and work, and so I view myself as a bridge between the scientific research and practical application and daily life, and that's true not only for the articles that I write but also for my own life. So I think it's important that I am not just someone sharing an opinion, having an educated opinion can take a fair bit of work itself, but I also want to be someone who's putting the ideas into practice.

So for me, usually that falls under the categories of weightlifting, occasionally I will compete in powerlifting and Olympic lifting competitions and I was an athlete for a long time, I played baseball with college ., And then creativity, so for me usually it's either writing articles or taking photos, I've done travel photography work in over 30 countries so I have a lot of – that's the chance for me to experiment with creative habits and implementing some of the ideas in that way. And then business and productivity, so productive habits, whether it be running my own business at jamesclear.com or just trying to be more effective than the articles that I am writing and getting workout on a good system basis, I sort of get to test the ideas out there. So I guess the overarching summary is I am a writer and an author and the primary area that I focus on is habits and I try to both implement those in my own life and share what I learn with people on my website, on my newsletter.

Danny Lennon: Yeah. And just with that sheer amount of work that you've put out on habits and obviously we will mention the upcoming book in a moment, but where did that interest in habits first stem from? Obviously you've mentioned some things about try not to play in your own life and these things that were going on, but what about it when you try to learn more about habits, made it so compelling to you that you actually wanted to go this in-depth with it?

James Clear: Well, I think, you know, and this is true for many areas, you connect the dots looking backward but I didn't really know it at the time. And so, my career as an athlete was one example of that, so there are all sorts of things I was practicing, all sorts of habits I was practicing years ago as an athlete, but I didn't really have the language for it at the time. And at one period I went through a very serious injury, I was hit in the face with a baseball bat and I ended up being air-carried to the hospital and couldn't breathe on my own, I was placed into ICU overnight and it was a very long process of recovering from that, it took eight or nine months. And essentially my hand was forced at that time, I didn't really have the option to make some radical change or strive for some incredible transformation, the only really thing that was available to me was making small improvements. And so that was where I sort of got fascinated with this idea of small habits, of making small changes and trying to get one person better each day. Now, again, I wouldn't have said it that way at the time, I

didn't have the language for it, but that was essentially what I was practicing. And I've always been interested in science, I was a science major in undergrad, I majored in biomechanics, mostly chemistry and physics classes. And so I kind of always had like one foot in the scientific research world and then another foot in athletics, and eventually a few years later, I kind of put both of them together and I was writing about habits and I was just sort of keeping a document for my own use, I had a word doc that I think was like 60 or 65 pages long. And it was just my thought on habits, like what I was trying to apply and how I was using them in the gym or in the kitchen or whatever. And eventually I was like, all right, this is long enough, I should just publish something, I should put something out. And so November 12, 2012, was the first day that I published an article on jamesclear.com and I just decided to do a new one every Monday and Thursday, and so I did that for the first three years, and that was the habit that changed the trajectory of my business, of my writing, but it also was the process that gave me that language to talk about, continuous improvement, it was by writing about it twice a week for three years that I became an expert on it and learnt more about it and discovered a bunch of things I didn't know before.

Danny Lennon: Very meta in some ways. So if I just pull back to you mentioned the name of the upcoming book is Atomic Habits, how did you settle on that name or what is the relevance of that name?

James Clear: Yeah, it's a good question. I chose the word atomic for three reasons, and the word atomic can have different meanings. So, first, atomic can mean like atom or small or tiny and of course that's kind of a central piece of my philosophy for building better habits, it's that there should be little changes, they used to try to find a way to get one person better each day. And so that was an important symbol there, but atomic also has another meaning which is that it is the smallest fundamental unit of a larger system. So atoms build into molecules, molecules build into compounds and so on. And I think in a certain sense we could say that habits are like the atoms of our lives, they are these fundamental units, these rituals and patterns and routines that we follow each day; and when you put them together, you get the collective system of your life. And so much of building better habits or getting better results is about building a better system, about creating a better collection of habits. So atomic can symbolize that and then the third one is that atomic also means the source of the men's energy or power like nuclear, that kind of idea. And so this kind of

brings those three meanings together, which is that if you make small changes, the first meaning of atomic and you collect them into a system, the second meaning then you can get immense outcomes or powerful and remarkable results. And so I chose the word Atomic Habits, the phrase Atomic Habits for that reason, I felt like it best represented the idea that small changes when put together in an overall system can lead to a remarkable outcome.

Danny Lennon: Awesome. So if we start talking about making some of these changes in behaviors and actions and creating new habits, there's probably a few areas we could explore. One would be to look at when someone has a specific thing they know they need to change and, we'll, definitely circle back to that. But maybe one place I think is often relevant, particularly in terms of, if we are talking about someone's nutrition or a healthy lifestyle for example, when we think about some of these small changes they could make or small new habits they could put in place, there's a whole list of things we could come up with if we sat down and made a list of them. So, if someone's trying to get a foothold of where to start, how or is there a process for someone deciding what are the most relevant starting points or what habits should be changed first when they have this laundry list of things they would like to eventually change?

James Clear: Yeah, that's a good question. So, there are a couple of different ways to answer it. The first is the way to come up with that list is that you need to become aware of your current habits. And so sometimes I think it's useful just to have an inventory of what you do each day. So in the book I call this the habit scorecard, you essentially start at the very beginning of the day and write down what happens in sequence. So I wake up, I turn off my alarm, I check my phone, I go to the bathroom, I take a shower, I brush my teeth, I get dressed, then on, and on and on. And first you list out all those habits just, and that exercise alone can be somewhat instructive because often we are just doing things but we don't even realize we are, that's, in a sense, that's what a habit is, it's just something you are doing on autopilot. But after that, then you kind of go back through the list and you rank them by is it a positive habit, is it a negative habit, is it a neutral habit. And the point here is not to judge yourself or to feel guilty about your bad habits but just to become aware, oh, I am checking my phone before I get out of bed, that is probably a negative habit. I think I probably shouldn't be checking Instagram before I even take a shower. Or oh I am eating, I am snacking a lot, I am snacking more

than I would like, and again, you don't have to feel guilty about it, but you are just trying to be aware of it first.

So, once you have that baseline, then you have options, then you know what your behavior is like and now you can choose which one is the highest value or which one should I focus on first, and that's your real question here which is how do I know what to focus on first, where do I direct my attention. And again, there are multiple ways to approach this but I think one way that's very useful is to focus on what I call the decisive moment, so for example, there are a couple of decisive moments throughout my day. At 5:15 PM my wife comes home from work and either we change into our workout clothes or we sit on the couch and turn on rerun the Office or Netflix or something and order takeout. And it's really the moment of changing into our workout clothes that determines what happens the next two hours. If we do that one thing, then we are going to get in the car, we will drive to the gym, we will get down and do the bar, we will do the workout like or the next two hours are kind of already pretty decided if we change. So it's really mastering the habit of working out, it's really about mastering that first little decisive moment. And there's a similar moment in the morning where I sit down and either I open up Evernote and start working on the next article that I am going to write or I go to ESPN and check on the latest sport news or whatever. And it's really about like what I do in those first 60 seconds that determines what the next like 40 minutes are going to look like.

So I think for most people, there are maybe five or 10 decisive moments like that throughout the day, little like forks in the road that these inflection points that determine how you are going to spend the next chunk of time. And if you are trying to figure out where should I focus first, I would say focus on those decisive moments, try to figure out what's the habit I am trying to change, and what is the decisive moment that precedes that, that determines what that block of time is going to look like. And what you come to realize is that there isn't actually that much that you need to change, you are really focused on like the first two minutes of a behavior. And this is true not only for behaviors that you are working to change but also for new ones that you are looking to create. So, a lot of people have heard the idea that they should start small or build small habits, but even when you know you should start small it's still really easy to start too big. So for example if you are trying to start a running habit, then a lot of

people say okay I want to run but I know that I should start small, so let me just run for 15 minutes. But even that is like way bigger than what I am talking about, I am talking about take your habit and scale it down into the first two minutes, so the habit would be I put on my running shoes and I step out the door. And if you do anything else more than that, it's just a bonus. If you go for a run, it's just bonus.

Now, some people will hear that and think that, oh this kind of sounds like a gimmick or a trick like I know the real goal is to run, I know it's not just putting my shoes on. But, if you feel that way, I would encourage you to do literally the opposite to stop after two minutes and you are – the point of this entire exercise is to get yourself to master the art of showing up, so the very first thing, and this is the ultimate answer to your question of what do you focus on first, when you are building a new habit, the very first thing you need to master is the art of showing up. A habit must be established before it can be improved. If you don't have a habit to begin with, you don't have anything to optimize. And so, as an example, I had a reader who, he ended up losing a 100 pound and one of the ways that he did it was that he went to the gym but he wasn't allowed to stay for more than five minutes, he would show up, walk in, maybe do an exercise and then once they would clock at five minutes or his watch showed five minute, he would walk out the door. And he did this for like six weeks and eventually he was like, not coming here all the time, he might as well start staying longer, doing a better workout or whatever. And that sounds funny to people when they first hear it, but the point is that he was mastering the art of showing up, he was figuring out there are all these like logistical details associated with building a new habit in the beginning, like all right, I am going to go to the gym, what gym will I go to, what route will I take, will I go by myself or will I go with a friend, will I go before work or on my lunch break or after work, do I need to have my clothes ready before I leave, am I going home to change... and like nobody thinks about any of those questions in the beginning, but if you just focus on mastering those first two minutes, you get all that stuff figured out, and it's important because those little things that don't sound like much, like being annoyed that you have to get your clothes ready before work or do I have to bring a water bottle or is there a water fountain at the gym. And then something like as stupid as that, they are like, oh I keep forgetting to bring my water bottle and there's no water fountain here, that's enough friction that it can drive someone to stop, especially

early on. So by focusing on just the first two minutes or five minutes or whatever, you can get that habit established and then from there you have all sorts of options.

Danny Lennon: Yeah I think that's really interesting because I presume it's so often the case where people feel it's a thing of, oh I am either going to go to the gym or I am not and it's just this decision that this is my new habit to try, but as you said, there's often these obstacles that are maybe invisible to them when they first think of this new habit and all these little things in the way that as you put a great enough friction that are in the environment, around them that is just enough to on a certain day when their motivation is low or they are feeling tired, it's just enough to stop that and break that momentum. Is there anyway apart from that initial awareness of this that someone can maybe try and take into account some of these obstacles or things in their environment that may influence the likelihood of following through on a habit or an action?

James Clear: Yeah, absolutely, so there, it's actually, it can be quite instructive to write down and map out what those points of friction are for you. So for example, my own mother, when she was looking to build an exercise habit, for a while, she went to the local gym and she would go to work and then she'd pack her clothes beforehand – pack up her gym clothes and wear clothes before she left, go to work all day and then leave and go straight to the gym, work out and then come home. And she did this for a few weeks but she was telling me about how she was like annoyed by it. There are two things in particular that she didn't like, one, she didn't like having to pack her clothes before having to remember to do that before she went to work, and secondly, she didn't like working out in public in front of other people, I think that's a fairly common thing a lot of people feel. So anyway, what she ended up doing was she bought this home yoga program and so she would go to work, come home like normal, change at home, she wouldn't have to pack her clothes and then she would work out and put her yoga mat out and just work out in the living room or basement or whatever. And she stuck to that just fine, she was able to not fall into this annoyance, the points of friction that had been associated with the habits had been removed for. And that's just one example and the points of friction are going to be different for whatever your particular habit is or whatever bothers you about that. But I think it can be very useful to just map out like the sequence of behaviors that you have to go

through to perform this habit and then figure out like which areas are causing me some friction.

So as another example, for a long time, I would brush my teeth every morning and night, but I wouldn't floss consistently. And so eventually I started looking at like what's causing this issue, and there were two things, the first one was it wasn't visible, so the floss was like tucked away in her drawer and just because I didn't see it, I wouldn't remember it sometimes. And then the second thing was I didn't like the feeling, it sounds silly, but I didn't like the feeling of wrapping the floss around my fingers, it was like, I don't know, I just didn't enjoy it. So, what I ended up doing was buying some of the premade flossers and then I bought a little bowl and put that bowl right next to my toothbrush and then put the flossers in it, and now as soon as I put the toothbrush down, I pull a flosser out and I floss my teeth.

So my point here is that often this can be, these points of friction can be removed either by strategy and the example of my mom, choosing to work out at homes instead of at the gym or by environment design, by making the habit more obvious or by reducing the friction associated with the habit in the case of my flossing habit. And so, by knowing about that point of friction, you often can do something to resolve it.

Danny Lennon:

So we've got to a point where we've identified a certain habit that wants to be changed, mapped out some of those potential points of friction or obstacles, so in a maybe a larger overview when someone is trying to look at how do I not only start to take some of these actions, how do I make these habits stick tends to be this like golden question, and there's no shortage of different methods or models people may have come across. So I am just interested to hear based on everything that you've read in research and popular work in this area and you've experienced and written about, in terms of an overall framework or process or model or whatever people want to term it, is there this kind of general framework that you think about habit formation in?

James Clear:

Yeah, so in the book I lay out a four-step framework for how habits work and also for how to change them. So the four stages that I lay out in the book are cues, so something gets your attention, craving, you have some type of motivation or you make a prediction about what to do next and based on that prediction or based on that motivation and desire you take an action so that

the third step is your response. And then the fourth step is the reward. Now, for the first three stages, cue, craving and response, all three need to be present at the same time for you to take an action in the first place. If you don't see the cue or you don't notice a cue, then it won't be obvious to you, you won't be aware of it, you won't be prompted to do the behavior. If you don't have a craving, you don't predict that it will be useful for you or that you should take that action, then you have no motivation to act. And then of course if it's too difficult for you to do, it doesn't matter how many times you look at a basketball who wanted to dunk a basketball, if you can't jump that high, then it's not going to happen.

So those three things cue, craving and response, all have to be possible for a behavior to happen the first time. But the fourth stage, reward, that needs to be there for you to want to repeat the habit the next time. So when it comes to consistency, the question that you just asked, how do we maintain this, it's really all about the fourth stage. And in the book I explained a concept that I call the cardinal rule of behavior change, which is that behaviors that are immediately rewarded get repeated and behaviors that are immediately punished get avoided. So you can think of pretty much any behavior as producing multiple outcomes across time. So for example, a bad habit, the outcome, the immediate outcome is often positive, so for example you eat a donut and right now it's tasty and sugary and enjoyable, but the ultimate outcome is unfavorable and you gain weight in two weeks or a month or whatever. For good habits it's often the reverse, going to the gym right now, the immediate outcome is a little bit unfavorable, you sweat, it takes sacrifice, you have to work hard, you are panting and breathing hard, but the ultimate outcome is favorable, you get in shape in two weeks or a month. And so much of the battle of building good habits and breaking bad ones is about taking the punishments of your bad habits and finding a way to move those into the immediate moment and taking the rewards of your good habits, the ultimate outcome and finding a way to move that into the immediate moment.

And I think when it comes to building good habits, one of the best ways to do that is to find an alternative way to be satisfied in a moment so that you are not waiting for this long term reward to show up. The reward for going to the gym for a month isn't really a whole lot, like you don't really see much of a change in your body, people probably aren't commenting on how you look

different, the weight on the scale may not have changed that much, so you need something more immediate to feel satisfied, and that can either be with an external reinforcement like if I go to the gym three days a week, every week that I do that, then I get to take a bubble bath or I take a walk in the woods or I get to watch my favorite TV show for an extra hour or something like that. Or it can be an internal reinforcement which is that you decide, okay, I want to build the identity of the type of person who does these workouts, and so now, any time you go to the gym, you are fostering that identity and you get this immediate benefit of that even though you are still waiting for the long term rewards of your body to change to show up.

Danny Lennon: So with this tying of a certain habit to one's identity, does that kind of bleed over into maybe some of the self-talk that person may have around themselves of the person they start identifying as, is it more of a powerful thing than I am just someone who tries to do this behavior/action?

James Clear: Right, so imagine two people and they are both trying to quit smoking, and the first person you offer a cigarette to, and they say something like, no thanks, I am trying to quit; and then another person you offer the cigarette to, and they say oh no thanks, I am not a smoker. Now, both of them are trying to accomplish the same thing, but saying that I am not a smoker signals a shift in identity, they no longer identify as the type of person who smokes; whereas the other person still identifies as the smoker, they are just trying to resist it. And it's one thing to say like I want this, it's something very different to say I am this, and that's a more powerful place to be is once you've adopted that identity. And so then the question of course is like, well, how you do that, how do you shift your identity from a smoker to a non-smoker, from someone who doesn't work out to someone who doesn't miss workouts. And I think the answer is, is it's a feedback loop, so once identities are adopted they reinforce certain behaviors; if you go to church every Sunday for 20 years, you have a lot of evidence that you are religious and then you start saying things like, oh well, I am religious so I go to church on Sunday, it becomes this perpetuating loop.

So it's the same way with pretty much any habit, it's almost like every action that you take casts a vote for the type of person that you want to become. And so, each time you take an action, you are adding a vote to the pile and as the evidence accumulates

your identities start to shift in that direction. And so, the method for changing your identity or for, I would say, I want to be careful, you don't need to completely change your identity, you don't need to rip your current identity in half and come up with a new one. It's more like you are retouching a painting or something, you are just trying to upgrade and expand a portion of yourself. So the way to do that is to let the habits drive the votes, to let the habits accumulate evidence of this new person. So every time that you sit down to write, you are a writer; every time you go to the gym, you are a fit person; every time you meditate, you are someone who is a mediator. And so embody the identity by practicing it, and this is another reason why I think habits are so important is that they not only provide an avenue for achieving better results or making more money or being more productive or getting in shape, and it's true they can do all that, but they also are the avenue through which we develop our sense of self, through which we kind of solidify our self-image, because every time we are repeating these actions, we are reinforcing certain identities. And if you want to develop into a new identity, the answer is to building the habit that reinforces that.

Danny Lennon:

Super interesting. One thing that I did want to ask about James is not only do – pretty much everyone listening is probably going to have some areas where they want to make some positive changes or create some new habits, but I think for a large percentage of this audience, many of them are nutritionists, personal trainers, dieticians, doctors, physicians, and so on who are trying to help clients and patients make some changes. I am just wondering does anything change when it comes to how we should talk about some of this or how we should operate in a kind of coach plan setup, when we are looking at habit formation. Is there anything in particular to rather than looking at making habit change for ourselves, trying to help others, is there any good ways in terms of communicating that or making that happen in other people that is kind of relevant to a kind of relationship like that?

James Clear:

That's a good question. So I am not a physician, I am not a nutritionist or a coach, so I am not sure of what the specific issues are, points of friction are between say a coach and a player or a nutritionist and a client or a physician and a patient. But from a general level I will say two things, so first, in the book – so I lay out that four-stage models for habits which we just talked about a few minutes ago. From that model, I lay out what I call the four laws of behavior change, and effectively those four laws are kind

of like levers, and each one is like a lever you can pull or adjust, and when the levers are in the right positions, building good habits is easier, or it is sometimes the case, effortless. And when they are in the wrong positions, building good habits is very difficult, almost impossible. So, in a way, you can use that framework and those four laws of behavior change when you are working with a client or when you are dealing with a patient, and think about like which levers are in the right positions right now and which areas do we need to focus on. And in a sense it can help narrow your focus or direct your attention to the right area.

But the second thing they will say, and this is something that I am sure many coaches, nutritionists and physicians have seen in their own practice, But a patient can want to change or a person can want to change themselves, but still find it incredibly difficult to sustain those changes based on the social norms and the groups and the tribes that they are a part of. And so in many ways, getting someone to change for the long term is often an exercise in getting them to change the social norms that they are around each day. So a lot of the strategies that we've talked about so far are about an individual implementing that change for themselves, making a change to what is laid out on their bathroom counter, how they approach their workouts or whatever. But it's also true that many of our habits are where everyone is leaned on heavily by society. So for example, we all have these social norms that we follow like stopping at a red light or when we walk into an elevator we turn around to face the front rather than facing the back or when we go to an interview we wear a suit and tie or a nice dress or something professional rather than gym clothes for example. Now, there's no reason that we have to do those things, you could run through a red light, you could turn around and face the back of the elevator, you could wear a bathing suit to an interview. But we don't do that because it's not the social norm, it's not what the tribe or the culture that we are a part of expects.

And this same type of imitation of cultural social norms, it happens on a large national scale so what it means to be an American or to be French or to be a Christian or to be a Muslim or to be a Buddhist or whatever. But it also happens on smaller scales, so for example, if you join a Crossfit gym, there are a set of social norms that go along with being part of that culture and as you become part of that culture, as you develop friends there, and start to feel like you belong, you take on some of those norms. And so you will find yourself buying these sleeves or

wearing certain type of shoes or eating paleo or whatever. And the key here for getting habits to stick and sustain themselves, especially when you are working with other people is to make sure that they are part of the right tribes, to help them be a part of a group where their desired behavior is the normal behavior. And so, for a lot of people, exercising three days a week feels like a sacrifice, but there are many people out there who that's not a sacrifice at all, it's just normal for them. And if the patient or the person can become friends with someone who that's normal for, then they start to see it more likely as something they could do normally as well. And I really think the key aspect here is friendship and belonging, the key aspect is not just being around the desired group, the key aspect is belonging.

So for example, the strategy that I like to recommend is one, join a group where your desired behavior is the normal behavior, and two, where you already have something in common with the group. So my friend, Steve Kamb, he runs a site called Nerd Fitness, and Nerd Fitness is all about getting in shape but it's specifically organized for nerds, for people who love Star Wars or Batman or the Marvel Universe or Legos or whatever. And if you come into that community and you want to get in shape, you can already connect with someone and be friends over your mutual love of Star Wars and then you can start to adopt the other habits. But it's really the friendship that ingrains the desire to build the habit, because once you are friends with those people, you want to fit in with the rest of the group, you want to do what the group is doing. And I think when you deal with patients or clients, you will find that there's often a lot of resistance to change unless they have like a social reason like that to change.

So I don't know that that necessarily changes the approach that coaches or nutritionists or physicians should take but it does give you something else to focus on, perhaps a different area to direct your attention rather than just giving like a prescriptive list of tips like, hey, here's how you need to change your environment. What really is going to make it stick is the social component.

Danny Lennon:

For sure and I've seen that firsthand in our coaching practice as well where definitely that peer group has such a powerful effect not only getting someone into a positive reinforcing peer group like you mentioned but so often sometimes we've seen results or progress being undermined in the opposite where they are in a certain work environment where their colleagues make fun of

them for bringing a salad to lunch, because that's not the normal thing to do and they've been used to going for junk food in this group of friends and that can make it very difficult and it was something that when you are first working with a client you are maybe not aware that this needs to be something to pay attention to.

James Clear: Yeah, when habits go against the grain of social norms, of whatever the tribe is, they are very unattractive. When they go with the grain of what the group is doing, they are very attractive. And so, that's one of the core challenges is figuring out how to belong to groups where the right habits or your desired habits are the attractive habits for the group.

Danny Lennon: For sure. We are coming close to time James, so I want to wrap up with maybe a couple of shorter questions that are more general in nature around habits but I think are quite common ones, at least that I've heard people ask in various different forms about this particular topic. The first one is we know that some degree of replication is important, just the fact that we are trying to do a habit in a consistent fashion. So, maybe one time where people have an issue keeping momentum that they've built up going is when there's a change within their schedule or environment or it gets thrown off for example if they are doing shift work or if they are someone who's traveling. Is there any kind of first bits of tips or strategies that are just something to bear in mind for people when they are trying to mitigate the likeliness of not losing momentum with something like that disrupted schedule?

James Clear: That's a good question, it's hard and there's no real easy answer there, so it is true that habits are formed when you are in repeatable or recurring situations or context. And so, in many ways you can kind of think of your habits as a relationship to a particular environment or a particular moment in time. So if you make a morning cup of coffee in your kitchen, your habit is a relationship with the environment or the context of the kitchen at 7 AM for example. And so, if you are out of that context, if you are on the road in hotels, well, then you don't have the same environment to brain relationship going on and it's hard for habits to be triggered automatically like that.

So one idea, maybe two ideas of things you can do. The first thing is you can develop like an internal rule sort of like an if, this, then, that thing that is more tied to an aspect of the context that will

repeat itself. So for example, after I check into my hotel room, I will do 10 pushups once I get in the room or something like that. Or after I check into my hotel room, I will look up where the grocery store is so I can go buy healthy food to eat whilst there. But you need something that is going to be repeated, of course, each hotel will look slightly different but if you can come up with a rule that is going to replicate itself in those different contexts then you can start to tie a habit to something that's a little more reliable.

The second thing that you can do is it really just comes down to simplicity. So, I've tried to take a more intense approach to my training in the last six months but I've also had a lot of travel, and as a result of that I've just had to cut stuff out like I haven't been able to go out to dinner with friends if I am on the road as much, because I got to find a gym and get that workout in and that just throws the stuff off. And I will have to push my flights back an extra hour or two so that I can get a workout before I leave town. And the point here is that you can't focus on everything, and there's always a tradeoff, and so something has to give. And so when you are in a new environment you have to figure stuff out, you got to figure out where's the grocery store, where is the gym, and it just takes that extra time and energy so you have to take that from somewhere and essentially what I am recommending here is to have fewer things that are important to you and to focus on just the two or three habits that are worth that additional time and energy rather than trying to be as productive as possible and getting as much done as possible.

Danny Lennon: For sure. One other thing that is common for people to ask is about the timeframes for creating new habits because often people see various different numbers reported for the length of time it takes to create a habit, oftentimes there's disagreement in those as well. Have you seen anything that you would be able to kind of quantify a typical time length for a habit or is that even a useful question for people to be asking in the first place?

James Clear: Well, first of all, just the real quick answer is, it depends, but nobody likes that answer. So you will see things like, oh it takes 21 days, it takes 30 days, it takes 100 days, or the real common one that's going around now is it takes 66 days. And that number, 66 days, does come from a study that was done, which found that on average, it took about 66 days for a new habit to become more or less automatic. However, if you read that study, the range is quite

wide depending on the habit that you are trying to build. So for example, drinking like a glass of water at lunch, that might have only taken a few weeks whereas going for a run after work each day can take seven or eight months. But the point here is that it's going to take months for it to become comfortable, so I think that's the first main takeaway rather than a specific number of days. But the real, the bigger issue here is that when we ask that question how long does it take to build a new habit, really the implicit assumption behind it is, well, how long will it take me to get to the finish line, how long do I need to work on this and then I will be done with it. And the honest answer, the real answer to how long does it take to build a new habit is forever, because once you stop doing it, it's no longer a habit, so you need to, I think we need to have a shift in our viewpoint and look at this more as a habit is a lifestyle that we lived, not a finished line to be crossed, it's not something that you just do for 66 days or 30 days or whatever it is, it's not a monthly challenge, it's a way of living your life. And so this I think is just another reason to focus on small sustainable changes on 1% improvements that you can implement into your life and reliably perform day after day and make it a part of your new lifestyle.

Danny Lennon: Very much agree with that. I think that's a great way to frame it, especially looking at considering that longer like process for life as opposed to I need to get to a certain point and then it will all be taken care of because that never really works out. James, before I get to the very final question, now might be a good time to let people know where they can find more of your work online, where they can track you down on social media, and then any relevant information about the upcoming book.

James Clear: So I write at jamesclear.com, you can poke around there and see if anything interests you. If you are into this conversation and been listening this long then I think you will probably find some of the articles useful. I have them organized by topics so you can dive in and just kind of check out what topics are relevant to you. But the real kind of comprehensive analysis of this topic is in my book Atomic Habits, so you can see more about Atomic Habits at atomichabits.com and you can also get some additional chapters that were cut from the final manuscript and look at some bonus materials and templates and guides and so on. So atomichabits.com is the best place to check that out.

Danny Lennon: And for everyone listening, I will be linking up to all of that in today's show notes so you can go over and click through to all of that stuff. So, James that brings us to the final question that we always end the show on and this can be to do with anything, even outside of today's topic if you wish, and it's simply, if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would have some positive impact on any area of their life, what would that one thing be.

James Clear: Well, obviously there are many answers you could give here but I am going to say read, if you read each day, then you can solve pretty much any problem that you are facing or at least come across some examples of solutions to the problems you are facing. Almost nothing that we experience in daily life is unique to us in the sense that it hasn't happened throughout history or someone else hasn't dealt with it at some point. Furthermore, reading a new idea each day, one new idea isn't going to make you a genius but a commitment to lifelong learning can be transformative. And so, I think building the habit of reading is sort of like a meta habit that allows you to solve almost any other problem that you are facing.

Danny Lennon: Excellent. A great way to finish this off and with that I want to say James, thank you so much for not only the great information today but taking the time out to do this and I am very much looking forward to hearing peoples thoughts on this, I think they will get great value from it, so thank you for being part of the show today.

James Clear: Wonderful, yeah, thank you so much for having me. I appreciate the opportunity.

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