

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Small Move, Big Change

THE SUMMARY

Penguin Books 2014

Introduction: Why Resolutions Fail

I will lose weight. I will be neat. I will be on time. I will get out of debt. I will get ahead at work. I will quit smoking. I won't be defensive. I will be a better person.

Why is it so hard to keep our resolutions? We begin with enthusiasm and determination, yet our will falters and our resolutions fizzle. And every time we break a resolution—a promise we make ourselves to improve our lives—we feel demoralized, powerless to make progress and realize our goals.

Even highly disciplined and successful individuals—*winners*—fail at self-improvement. We're all losers when it comes to the New Year's resolution, our collective failure rate a spectacular 88 percent. We run in place like hamsters on a wheel, renewing and forsaking the same resolutions in an annual cycle, telling ourselves that if we only had more resolve, more willpower, more *character*, we could force a breakthrough to a better self. We begin each year (or birthday or season or Monday morning) with fresh determination, muster our willpower, tweak our resolutions, and try again. Over time, the pattern of making and breaking resolutions becomes familiar and demoralizing. We go on making resolutions, *but we expect to fail*.

What if instead of failing annually at our New Year's resolution, we made strategic and targeted resolutions year-round that were guaranteed to succeed and transform us permanently. What if our resolutions brought us immediate rewards, raised our self-awareness, and energized our self-improvement efforts?

Small Move, Big Change

What if every time we made a resolution we actually expected to succeed?

The purpose of this book is to teach you how to translate broad personal goals into *microresolutions* that can be managed, measured, and kept. A microresolution is compact and powerful commitment designed to nail a precise behavioral target exactly and deliver benefits immediately. Rather than suffering a collapse of willpower after weeks of exhausting effort, you will learn how to overpower your objective through strategic focus and targeted self-control.

What gives habits their lasting power is that they are automatic, mindless. Thus, to change ourselves we must cultivate autopilot's opposite—mindfulness. The more aware we are of the habits that manage our lives, the more control we have over our future. Habits aren't boring; they are the very stuff we're made of—just ask Western civilization's more celebrated philosopher, Aristotle: *"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."* And what is self-improvement but the search for excellence? Let's begin.

PART 1: THE SEVEN RULES OF MICRORESOLUTIONS

Chapter 1: How to Make a Microresolution

Are you ready to make a microresolution?

Start by asking yourself what you'd like to improve about your life. Your goal might be framed in broad terms—"I'd like to be neat"—and that's a reasonable place to start. Yet *neat* is not a state you can adopt; rather, it's a set of distinctive behaviors that add up to *neat* according to *your* definition—there's neat and then there's *neat*. Every personal-improvement goal within your power can be reduced to a list of behaviors, whether your ultimate objective is to be neat, lose weight, get fit, be nicer to your spouse, become organized, be on time, save money, advance your career, or get more sleep.

So taking neat as our example, the first step is to deconstruct what you mean by neat. Your most pressing neatness issues might be to keep clothes hung up and stay on top of laundry; or perhaps every drawer is crammed and the bed never gets made; or maybe you leave dishes overnight and let items pile up on surfaces. Don't bother compiling an exhaustive list; just pinpoint one or two behavioral changes you think would make a difference. Remember, you're not trying to solve for *neat* overall; you're just looking to identify a discrete behavioral change that will move the neat dial in the right direction.

If your neatness target is focused on managing clutter, your first resolution might be as simple as resolving to allow only certain items on certain surfaces. It's hard to keep a surface organized when it's littered with items that have nothing to do with its utility. If every surface you have is just a parking lot for *whatever*, dedicating a surface might be a good first resolution (you might even want to start with just one surface). Once items are segregated in logical groups it's much easier to see what's required to keep a particular surface orderly.

What about the mental habits that keep you from succeeding in your goals? In the present case, how might you improve your neatness *mindset*—values, preferences, and attitudes—to advance your objective. For example, a neat mindset might include the attitude *it's more productive to work at a clean desk*.

You can do this by resolving to give yourself a *microresolution message* designed to improve your governing mindset. A change in mindset will drive behavioral change, just as a successful behavioral change ultimately alters your

Small Move, Big Change

mindset through experience. The success of a microresolution message is measured solely by your remembering to give yourself the message in the circumstance you've selected, and that's it. It's like a mental tweet synchronized to a specific trigger.

For example, someone working on *neat* might resolve to send himself the message *It's just as fast to hang it up* when removing his coat. Some of my most successful microresolutions have been mindset targeted. I once resolved to send myself the following message when I was tempted to snack in the late afternoon: *I enjoy dinner so much more when I'm hungry for it*. Repeating this message ultimately changed my mindset; I realized that by *choosing* to snack richly I was *choosing* to enjoy dinner less.

Microresolutions helped me to discover that the real action in self-improvement happens around the edges, at what we might call *the vital margin*. Drastic actions that try to get at the red-hot core of behavioral change (such as crash diets) nearly always end in failure, but a discrete and meaningful shift in behavior will always succeed if given enough focus. A single change in eating habits can result in permanent weight loss. To prove this you need only see that the reverse is true: A small but negative shift in behavior will take you further from your goals.

So this is the work: Identify a discrete change in behavior that will make a difference, and drill that behavior with singled-minded purpose until it becomes second nature. If you stick to the microresolution rules, you'll be able to make instant progress in any self-improvement category, from weight loss to achieving a more loving relationship. The more you succeed, the more you'll understand yourself and the smarter your next microresolution will be. A microresolution is a self-improvement adventure that pays off—every time.

Chapter 2: Don't Make Resolutions You Can't Keep

Your microresolution must be a pledge you are sure you have the power to keep—a *no excuses* resolution. To be absolutely achievable, it must be limited. Resolutions to *walk everywhere all the time* or *never eat sweets again* or *give up online shopping* don't qualify. Put aside that familiar temptation to try to fix everything all at once by tomorrow and focus instead on making a resolution that is so reasonable you are sure you can make it stick—so don't overreach.

Rule 1: A Microresolution is Easy. The more decision-making your resolution requires, the less resolve you'll actually have left to follow through, because decision making and self-control draw on the same limited mental resource. Making unrealistic commitments inevitably leads to frequent decisions about trade-offs, deferrals, and makeup sessions that deplete precious self-control reserves. The more challenging your resolution, the more likely that you will bargain yourself out of it altogether.

A resolution to walk one day a week doesn't mean you can't walk more than once. A microresolution doesn't limit what you want to do, only what you commit to do. If you're enjoying your once-a-week walk and decide you want to walk more often, go ahead and walk more; just don't expand your resolution to more days until your one-day walk is an established habit. Limit yourself to what you are sure you can accomplish. Keep your resolution limited, reasonable, and achievable—*easy*.

Chapter 3: Doing it

A microresolution is an action: not something you commit to be but something you commit to do. A microresolution is not a wish, a philosophy, or a result; its straightforward purpose is to build, change, or eliminate a specific behavior

Small Move, Big Change

or attitude. The action of your resolution is something you resolve to do or not to do or a message you resolve to give yourself in a given circumstance.

Rule 2: A Microresolution is an Explicit and Measurable Action. Your microresolution must be explicit so there's no guessing about what to do, when to do it, or how to carry it out. Resolutions such as *I will exercise more* or *I will snack less* are worthless. The more explicit your resolution, the easier it will be to measure success, identify obstacles, and fine-tune your commitment for greater effectiveness.

Explicit commitments do not constrain; to the contrary, they create certainty and comfort. Flexible or fuzzy resolutions, escape clauses, and loopholes result in stress, not greater freedom. Your resolution must focus on a specific change in behavior, not a result that can be achieved in multiple ways. Be absolutely specific in laying out the action of your resolution—what, when, how.

Once you've carefully defined the action of your resolution, you'll need to establish a context for your new behavior by linking it to a time, activity, or situation. Habits are triggered by specific *cues*. A strong link between cue and behavior creates a habit with lasting power. Often the best strategy is to use an existing habit to trigger the new behavior (such as flossing after you brush your teeth, or reviewing your priority list before checking your e-mail). By linking the action of your resolution to one of your existing habits, you can speed up the movement of your new behavior into autopilot.

A resolution focused on eliminating a negative personal behavior is often cued by an impulse that arises internally, such as in the case of a friend who wanted to eliminate a certain curse word from her vocabulary. She made the microresolution to substitute the word *boring* every time she was tempted to use the nastier word. In her case, the cue was the *impulse* to say the offensive word. Make your commitment only when you have made your resolution explicit—what you're going to do, when you're going to do it, and how it will be cued.

Chapter 4: Instant Gratification

A microresolution's time frame is today, not someday. A microresolution's payoff is immediate, obvious, and sustainable forever. Each microresolution carries its own payload—what you pledge to do is what you get, as long as you follow through.

Rule 3: A Microresolution Pays Off Up Front. A microresolution *to make the bed each morning before breakfast* achieves its goal and delivers its benefit as soon as the resolution is kept. A resolution *to keep the house clean* has very little chance of succeeding. The pristine bed may inspire more general tidiness in the bedroom, but the microresolution's exclusive target is *the bed*. A microresolution to stop eating after 8:00pm delivers a concrete benefit immediately.

Getting paid up front for your effort should leave you eager to nail your next resolution and its reward, so different from the familiar cycle of constantly renewing an ambitious and failed resolution in the hopes that you can finally achieve an ideal outcome *this time*. A microresolution brings an immediate and valuable benefit, by design. Never think of your microresolution as an increment, merely a stepping stone on the way to a future goal; the benefits your microresolution delivers today *is* the goal. Rejoice in the rewards that your microresolution provides today, and the future will take care of itself. Once you permanently lock in the benefits of just one behavioral change, you're on the path to continuous self-improvement.

Small Move, Big Change

Chapter 5: Made to Measure

Self-improvement resolutions are amazingly consistent across generations and demographics; they are, it seems, timeless. A microresolution is bespoke, not mass market.

Rule 4: A Microresolution is Personal. This book is full of examples to get you thinking, but to be effective, a microresolution must be designed by you, for you, based on observations of your own habits, attitudes, and situation. What personal behavior might you adopt, change, or eliminate to advance your objective?

Thoughtfully analyze your habits to determine the single change that will have the biggest impact in your particular circumstances. For example, at the New Year many will resolve *to be on time for work*, but solving late arrival will vary by individual. Every routine morning action represents a unique opportunity to shave off minutes and gain an on-time advantage. A small change of habit can make all the difference.

A microresolution is personal; it should fit like a glove. Or think of a microresolution as a kind of remedy, a prescription you write for yourself. You're the doctor—start by examining your patient.

Chapter 6: Give It Some Spin

Once you've got a handle on the easy, limited, measurable, personal action of your microresolution, the next step is to *frame* your resolution statement. Framing is a semantic exercise, finding the language to concisely and accurately capture the action of your resolution and its cue. There's no exact formula for framing a resolution, but the most potent framing add perspective—a slant—to what you're trying to achieve. The point isn't to be artsy or clever but to strike the right psychological note by invoking meaningful values.

Rule 5: A Microresolution Resonates. If your resolution is a straightforward action cued by the clock or calendar, the most direct framing is the best—there's probably not much point in tinkering with *I resolve to walk to work on Monday mornings*. But resolutions with frequent and fluid cues can often be made more effective through a thoughtful and resonant framing.

Most of us would rather follow a positive directive than a negative one. A resolution *not to snack* is pretty dismal; the microresolution message *I enjoy dinner so much more when I'm hungry for it* steers the tempted snacker toward a more gratifying goal. Which of these two resolutions would you rather sign up for *I resolve to chew my food slowly*. Or, *I resolve to dine leisurely and savor my food and drink*.

Positivity is nearly always the best strategy for framing, but not always. If your resolution focuses on a small action (taken or untaken) that can lead to or prevent a slide into disorder, consider using the language of *zero tolerance* to frame it. Some people may be able to eat just a few potato chips at a party and then walk away, but for those for whom the salty rich taste of one chip leads to eating handfuls, a resolution to have *zero tolerance for eating chips at parties* might be in order.

A *microresolution message* is a suggestion you design to get inside your own head and change your mindset. A deft framing can make a big difference in the impact of your resolution, and you'll be surprised how much you learn about yourself in the process of selecting a frame.

Chapter 7: Trigger Happy

Small Move, Big Change

We awake to the sound of the alarm; we perk up at the smell of morning coffee; we call out, “I’m home,” when we pass through the front door. We spend our lives reacting to cues, automatically responding with a learned behavior pattern in a specific situation or context.

Rule 6: A Microresolution Fires on Cue. Cues are personal—two people who each snack at the same time every afternoon may be responding to entirely different cues. The cue for one person may be a hunger pang; for another, it’s passing a vending machine on the way out of the gym locker room. Soon the mere sight of the machine will prompt you to make a purchase. Behavioral research demonstrates that it is the strong association between action and cue that creates a lasting habit.

An essential part of framing your resolution is identifying the cue best suited to trigger the action you’ve committed to perform. If your resolution is tied to the clock or calendar, the cue will be fairly obvious. If you make the fitness resolution to *climb six flights of stairs every workday after lunch*, then getting up from the lunch table is your cue to head for the stairwell. Piggybacking can be used to link a new behavior. If you want to acquire the habit of drinking eight glasses of water a day, you might decide that each time you wash your hands you’re going to drink a glass of water. The selected cue also makes performing the resolution easier, as water is at hand when the cue fires.

Chapter 8: Practice Makes Permanent

Experiencing the power of microresolutions may inspire you to double down on a mega set of micros. Resist that suicidal impulse. Less more when it comes to achieving lasting change.

Rule 7: Make Microresolutions Just Two at a Time. Two celebrated behavioral scientists once famously summarized the foundation of their science: “Most of what we do is what we do most of the time. Sometimes we do something new.”

Doing something new, something differently, demands *rigor*. Your microresolution is *easy* only in the sense that it is clearly achievable, but establishing any new behavior requires rigor. You must be in a position to demand of yourself that you follow through on your commitment, and that won’t be possible if you overreach. Building positive new behavior requires attention and self-control, both limited resources. If you try to change too much too fast, you’ll be overwhelmed, lose your concentration, fumble cues, and end up with only patchy compliance. A habit isn’t a habit until it’s a habit—you have to go after it with single-minded purpose until you get it into autopilot.

To guarantee unwavering focus and success, make your resolutions no more than two at a time. Limiting your resolutions ensures that you have the attention and endurance to stick with a behavioral shift until it comes to autopilot. A new habit needs time to work its way into autopilot and become neurologically embedded. Your microresolution will take around four weeks before it begins to feel less awkward and six to eight weeks before it begins to feel natural, but there’s no absolute rule.

Chapter 9: Test-Driving Your Resolution

It’s time to take your new micro resolutions for a spin and see how it drives, handles curves, and shifts in response to changes in road conditions. During the first two weeks of your resolution, you’re likely to encounter unanticipated obstacles, bumps in the road. Your resolution may need some tuning to get it humming on the open road. Fine-tuning your resolution in response to early experiences and new insight is part of the process of succeeding. Don’t give up if

Small Move, Big Change

your resolution doesn't prove to be an entirely smooth ride for the first couple of miles.

Albert Einstein famously once remarked, "In theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they are not."

It's very common to adjust a schedule cue during the early days of a microresolution. If it seems like a cop-out to adjust your resolution after your initial commitment, it's not. The test drive is a period for gauging obstacles and confronting what you are willing or able to do to make progress. Scaling back is far better than quitting.

A microresolution should succeed every time. If you aren't succeeding, rethink, reframe, reschedule, and rescope your resolution until you can put a ring on it. Each successful microresolution boosts your spirit, energy, and confidence, inspiring more progress. The key is simply to make a start.

PART 2: MICRORESOLUTIONS IN ACTION

It's time to apply what you learned in part 1 to making a microresolution in a specific area of self-improvement. Each one of the rules chapters used examples from different categories of personal development to illustrate a single microresolution principle at work; the chapters in part 2 pivot that perspective, each examine the utility of microresolutions through the lens of a single and popular area of self-improvement.

Remember as you take on a broader perspective: only two microresolutions at a time. And don't be fooled—a new habit takes hold only when pursued with rigor and single-minded purpose to succeed. Working one or two resolutions at a time, you'll make a lot of progress in just the first six months.

In sharing some of my own microresolution experiences, I hope I'm not creating the impression that I have conquered every area of self-improvement or met all my personal goals. My aim is to provide some solid examples to inform your efforts, not to advocate for particular standards or lifestyle choices. This book is about personal empowerment—not about how *you should*, but all about how *you can*.

The art of self-improvement is not about perfection but about priorities. To succeed in any endeavor one must assess and rank opportunities on an ongoing basis, and your self-improvement priorities will change as you change. Investing in continuous self-improvement means that there is no final item to be checked off the list.

Chapter 10: Sleep

If you're like most people living a modern life, you aren't getting enough sleep. For years I tried to force myself to bed at an earlier hour, but it wasn't until I began making microresolutions that I was able to crack my personal behavioral code and achieve a full night's sleep on a regular basis.

In thinking through a typical evening's events, I was struck by how often I fell asleep on the living room couch for an hour or more before finally going up to bed. I realized that once I entered a dozy state, I couldn't face performing the series of bedtime rites that stood between me and hitting the pillow. Worse, after finally peeling myself off the couch, climbing the stairs, and performing my bedtime routine, I'd suddenly find myself wide awake from my "nap." Finally ready for bed, I no longer felt sleepy.

So rather than giving in to the almost irresistible impulse to charge down to the den to relax and watch TV as soon as I had put my daughter into bed, I instead began completely preparing myself for sleep before diving onto the divan.

Small Move, Big Change

Everything that I needed to do before retiring I did before heading downstairs, from flossing to phone charging. Later on, I followed my *already-ready-for-bed* resolution with another resolution: *to have zero tolerance for recreational computer activity after 10:00 p.m.*

Chapter 11: Fitness

Pledges to hit the gym are right up at the top of the most popular annual resolution lists, representing the collective desire to get and stay fit. Any change you make that keeps you off your keister will deliver health benefits and help transform a sedentary mindset into an active one.

Any increase in activity has a positive fitness impact, and building new physical activity into your day can be easy and rewarding. An overweight person who makes no other changes to his diet and fitness routine can lose over ten pounds a year by climbing two flights of stairs a day.

However, overreaching on fitness pledges is endemic in classic resolution-think. Inactive all year, we abruptly pledge to go to the gym every night after work, trying to blow away our inertia and dispel our self-disgust with a single, unrealistic promise. If you struggle to make it to the gym at all, why would you suddenly pledge to yourself to make it to the gym five (or three or two) nights a week?

Wherever you are in your fitness goals, only make promises to yourself that you know you can keep and give them your full commitment until they succeed.

Chapter 12: Diet and Nutrition

Losing weight tops the list of New Year's resolutions every year, the most made, the most broken, the most likely to be repeated when the next year rolls around. Yet diets work; if you reduce the number of calories you consume, you'll lose weight; it's simple chemistry. So why do most diet resolutions fail?

Eating is a complex set of behaviors and attitudes that runs mostly on (*drum roll*) autopilot. Our eating habits are largely unconscious, but dieting requires that we be conscious of every morsel, weigh every food option, and make endless choices. Making decisions at every meal exhausts our self-control, making it difficult to stick with most diets beyond the first few weeks. Additionally, our narrow concentration on *how much* we eat ignores other autopilot behaviors that determine satisfaction and success: *how* we eat, *why* we eat, *where* we eat, *what* we eat, *when* we eat, and *how long* we sleep.

Losing weight permanently means eating less for life. The only way to succeed in eating less for life is *to be satisfied with less*. Reducing the microresolutions way doesn't require endless decisions, an abacus, or an app; the focus is on making discrete and permanent behavioral changes that reform autopilot so that it can maintain a healthy weight without mental effort.

Chapter 13: Clutter

Neatness is so much a product of autopilot that its quiet efficiency can surprise. Hanging up my coat is by now so ingrained that I end up hanging up other people's coats. But whatever constitutes *neat* for you, the way to achieve more is to move up one degree at a time by persistently practicing a new neatness habit or attitude until it sticks for good. Just as your parent used endless repetition to teach you to wipe your feet on the doormat before entering the

Small Move, Big Change

house (perhaps making you go back outside if you forgot), relentlessly practicing a microresolution of your own design can teach you a new neatness trick.

It's the relentless practice of your habit that establishes a *new normal* for your mindset. A friend once said to me, "Once you get used to order, boy, there's no going back," and I've come to appreciate her commitment more and more. I live a far from perfectly ordered life, but the order I have achieved I cherish. Becoming neater has a huge effect on mindset, perhaps because neatness has such a strong visual component.

Chapter 14: Relationships

So how can just one person in a relationship make a microresolution that improves a relationship? *By shifting behavior at the vital margin.* While you may think that your relationship issues involve of necessity *the other guy*, you can't change *the other guy*, you can only change yourself. The good news is that a change in your behavior can, on its own, increase mutual understanding and enjoyment, reduce stress, foster love, build respect, and keep simple disagreements from escalating into painful conflicts.

Often we resist changing our own behavior in a relationship because we get hung up on negotiating outcomes that we think are absolutely fair. Relationships aren't generally fair, if by "fair" we mean that everything is *equal*. It might not be fair that you work to improve your behavior when *the other guy* is mostly to blame, but it might get you to a better place faster than waiting on *the other guy* to improve himself.

Relationships may not be symmetrical, but they are symbolic. Disrupting just one negative relationship dynamic can immediately improve your relationship. If you pay close attention to how your communication with, investment in, and even thoughts of another person affect you both, you'll identify behavioral patterns that you can improve all on your own.

Chapter 15: Spending

Spending behaviors and attitudes are part of your autopilot; indeed, your lifestyle is a matter of unconscious routine. Using micro resolutions to improve your spending mindset and habits at the margin can help you keep your expenditures aligned with your long-term financial goals.

Spending patterns are a reflection of priorities, whether or not you have consciously considered them. Your dollars are like votes you cast at different retail and investment ballot boxes. Do you know what you have elected as your spending priorities?

Trimming or eliminating just one monthly charge can add up to considerable savings over time. If you're prone to impulse buying, you might consider a microresolution that will make you less susceptible to retailer come-ons. Among my most successful spending microresolutions was to *give up personal shopping on the Internet after 9:30 p.m.* The sumptuous feeling of a brand-new Prada handbag pales next to the luxury of knowing that you're financially secure.

Chapter 16: Punctuality

People with an on-time mindset believe that it's better to be ten minutes early than five minutes late, and for important meetings, better to be fifteen minutes early than *one minute* late. Arriving at the appointed hour is "late." The opposite was voiced by Oscar Wilde: "I am late on principle, the principle being that promptness is the thief of time."

Small Move, Big Change

In demonstrating how microresolutions can be used to improve on-time performance, it makes sense to divide lateness into two different categories: morning lateness and chronic lateness. While it is true that those who suffer from morning lateness may also be generally tardy, morning lateness merits its own discussion, as it so often results from actions taken (or undertaken) the night before.

Showing up late can damage you both personally and professionally. But like every other area of self-improvement, lateness is a result of ingrained habits and attitudes that can be altered through the rigorous drilling of new behaviors. Changing even one attitude through practice will begin to shrink the margin by which you habitually run behind. It's never too late to learn to be on time!

Chapter 17: Organization

Neatness is the physical side of managing clutter; organization, the mental side. If you're organized, you can bring a clear mind and your best game to your personal and professional life. Organization enables you to lay your hands on what you need when you need it. Organization enables you to show up prepared, on time, and in the right place. Organization enables effective and active management, so top priorities receive the most attention and minor tasks don't become emergencies.

A naturally logical and organized mind is a gift, as is the ability to operate effectively in chaos, but even if you can store, sift, and sort details in your head while bullets fly, getting better organized will save you time, stress, creative energy, and self-control. In contrast, if you can process predictable tasks mindlessly via autopilot, you preserve your best thinking for your most challenging work. Why waste ingenuity and heroic effort on routine tasks?

The microresolution method is itself an organizational tool kit that helps you isolate a behavior change that brings results. Any system you create for yourself will be only as strong as the habits you build to support it, so start with a simple system and elaborate it as needed over time. If you go from no filing system to something as elaborate as the Dewey decimal system, you are going to fail. Every small uptick in organizational skills saves time, prevents panic, and preserves active-initiative stores for problem solving, creativity, and decision making.

Afterword: Beyond Autopilot

By now perhaps, you've already given your first microresolution a try; maybe it has already become habit. If you're still at the stage where your target behavior feels awkward, don't despair; soon your new habit will feel more natural, and further down the road it will become second nature. Once in autopilot, your behavior will sustain itself, marking the conclusion of the microresolution life cycle. But is autopilot an end or a beginning?

Despite the fact that most behavior is unconscious routine, we don't think of ourselves as passive creatures of habit. Rather, we think of ourselves as decision makers exercising free will and making conscious choices. We believe that what we do is what we choose to do—what we like to do. Our habits are aligned with preferences that keep us believing that even routine behaviors are deliberate choices. Although some habits grow out of preferences—developing a taste for Frappuccinos, for example—it's just as often the other way around: Our preferences develop as a result of our habits.

A sedentary person embarking on a cycling program may view each ride as a dreaded chore, but if that routine is maintained over time, the couch potato is likely to become a devoted cyclist. Going for a bike ride becomes a relaxation preferable to collapsing into a chair with Sunday paper for two hours (well, most of the time).

Small Move, Big Change

Preference is habit's powerful ally, giving an aura of volition and inclination to autopilot activity. Each time we defend our preferences, we reinforce our habits. But once we succeed in making a change in habit, we often find that our old preferences stick around, suddenly out of sync with our new behavior. Even after experiencing the rich benefits of a new habit, it often takes us long to embrace it as a true preference.

The linkage between behavior, preference, and identity is powerful stuff. That's why a change in behavior is so difficult and why, even after we have succeeded in changing ourselves, we sometimes have to give our mindset a bit of time to catch up.

The habits you are building through microresolutions will ultimately give birth to new preferences. After a bit more time than it takes to move a behavior into autopilot, your preferences will align with your new habits, and nostalgia for old routines will fade away. You'll find that you prefer to make the bed, stop eating before you feel stuffed, walk instead of ride, refrain from having the last word, sleep instead of shop on the Internet, eat dinner without checking your phone, pay bills on time, roller-skate rather than watch television. This, finally, is where there really is no turning back on the new behaviors that you've taught yourself, because those new habits now enjoy the status of esteemed preferences.

As your preferences shift to support your new habits, your sense of who you are will shift too. You'll discover that the experience of doing things in a new way has made a different person of you. You'll begin to identify with your new behaviors, to describe yourself differently. You'll realize that you are indeed improved—in fact, transformed. A change in *doing* has made a change in *being*. Learning how to do just one thing differently punches your ticket for a voyage of continuous personal progress. Whatever your age and aspirations, transformation is within your reach, you just need to invest in the everyday process that works the magic.