

Routine Creates Freedom!

It is a common belief among people (especially young ones) that any sort of “routine” is boring and dull; it is the enemy of “freedom” and “adventure”.

After giving it some thought, I have come to believe that “routine” is not all that bad, because it has the potential to *create* opportunities for freedom and adventure.

How is that? I think it depends on how you define “routine”.

A routine basically consists of **habits** that take care of all the *mundane* but *essential* requirements of your life. Daily exercise, for example, takes care of the need to stay fit. Routine may also include activities that you think are *good* for you – for instance reading a few pages of a book every day or practicing music.

Once you define such a routine and dedicate the required amount of time and energy to it, you become *free* to pursue any adventure in your remaining time. And that freedom is unencumbered by mundane worries and practical matters – precisely because they are all already taken care of by your “routine”!

So, the key, as you can see, is to set up your routine carefully.

Routine is a collection of habits!

Humans are intelligent beings – we possess highly developed brains. Using the ‘computer’ metaphor, we can say that the brain does all the “soft” work for us, while the body does all the “hard” work.

The brain’s capabilities are numerous, but, for the sake of this discussion, let’s divide them into two types: One type uses emotions, impulses, intuition – which we will refer to as *feelings*. And the other type uses logic, intelligence, analytical ability, reasoning, etc. – we will call this simply as *logic*.

When you use *logic* you benefit immensely, because the brain is capable of analyzing difficult conundrums and solving complex problems for us.

But in reality, we allow most of our actions to be driven by *feelings*.

Consider an example. *Logic* informs us that doing physical exercise is a good thing for our bodies. And yet, a feeling called “lethargy” prevents many people from following that sound advice! To make matters worse, *logic* usually fails to control/guide your emotions! If you try to reason with “lethargy” the benefits of exercise every morning, you will always fail!

That’s where “habit” comes to rescue! Habit is a way to overcome the unreasonable dominance of feelings in our lives! If you develop a habit of exercising, the feeling of lethargy doesn’t even get a chance to interfere.

So, that is the trick: whenever your *logic* informs you that something is good for you, look for a way to make it a habit. Sensible people develop habits to ensure that they are able to do all the good things without risking disruption by our whims, moods, or negative emotions.

What’s a habit?

It is a mechanical (un-feeling) way of doing something – your feelings don’t get a chance to interfere, because you do not think, consider pros and cons, or try to convince yourself every time about the benefits! You simply do it!

For example, I am convinced that reading books is a good thing for me, and so, I have developed the habit of reading a few pages every night before going to sleep.

A routine consisting of such carefully designed habits is certain to get important things done and create long-lasting and unfettered freedom in your life!

How do we develop habits?

Most of us have no trouble understanding and accepting what is good for us. For instance, no one would argue about the benefits of exercise. The main challenge is *turning that desire into a habit*.

The first step in this endeavor is to ensure you *really believe* that that habit is good for you. Getting inspired temporarily, for example, after listening to a motivational speech, is not enough. You need to ask yourself a number of times and check if you really want to do that thing.

Set up your environment so that it becomes conducive to your new habit is important. If you want to read books every day, having books around you would obviously help. If you think you get distracted easily, removing the sources of distraction is necessary.

Next, *look for ways to make the new habit interesting*. Running for 10 minutes as part of your exercise can quickly become boring (well, for me). But, if you listen to an audiobook while running, or watch a video while doing your treadmill, suddenly the boredom is taken care of.

Finally, *focus more on “regularity” than on “rigor”* when you are building a new habit. Running just for 1 minute is not great exercise, but start that way, and make sure you do it regularly without fail, say for a couple of weeks or a month, until you are sure you won't skip. Then, you increase it to 3 minutes and then to 5 and so on. Habits die or survive on the “regularity” aspect – which must be your primary focus. A lot of people get so inspired by some new idea they want to pursue, that they go overboard in their first attempt and then get exhausted. The result is it becomes a passing fad.

Disclosure: Everything I say above is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences, or based on what I have read, heard and observed. There are no absolute truths or ultimate answers.

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Appendix: My wish-list

Now that I have preached about the goodness of habits, let me share a few habits that I have been trying to build for myself:

1. **Attention to physical fitness:** This involves good habits such as activity, rest, hygiene, etc.
2. **Attention to brain fitness:** This translates into habits such as learning new things, solving problems/puzzles, meditation, etc.
3. **Attention to emotional fitness:** This translates into habits such as group activities (such as sports, games or music), meditation, etc.
4. **Effective time management:** This translates into habits such as watching over procrastination or wasteful activities.
5. **Staying organized:** This can be translated into many good habits.
 - a. Keeping track of important information.
 - b. Keeping track of important engagements and tasks.
 - c. Organizing resources (such as books or computer files) so that it is easy to access a specific item.
6. **Maintaining simplicity:** This can be translated into the habit of questioning every decision through the lens of “is this going to cause unnecessary complexity?”