

Building new habits and setting intentions

The power of our habits

According to lots of research out there, somewhere between 40-45% of our behaviour is made up of things that we do on a daily basis. In other words, habits account for nearly half of everything we do every day. Nearly half!

If that isn't a reason to think about what better habits we can build – personally or professionally as artists or creative freelancers – we don't know what is!

But building new habits is really hard, as is unlearning bad ones. Any musician who's ever tried to correct a bad technique they've picked up along the way will know this, so too will those amongst us who somehow never get round to filing their tax return or accounts till the last minute, or who always mean to leave the studio or office an hour earlier than they actually do.

It takes time to build a new habit too; some research suggests it takes about 66 days to make even the tiniest change become routine. So that's a double whammy – it's hard and it takes a stupidly long time.



Which type of habit former are you, and what might work for you?

One of our favourite writers about all things wellbeing related is Gretchen Rubin, who says that habits are “the invisible architecture of daily life”. Gretchen’s Four Tendencies Framework, which is based on asking yourself “How do I respond to expectations?”, can be really useful in terms of helping you figure out whether you tend to respond more to ‘outer expectations’ (eg. client deadline or a request from a friend) or ‘inner expectations’ (eg. a New Year’s Resolution or decision to start running every day). Your response to expectations will determine which of her Four Tendencies - Upholder, Questioner, Obliger, or Rebel - best describes you, and will also help you figure out how.



Here’s a breakdown of those 4 tendencies:

- **An upholder:** ‘I do what others expect of me and what I expect from myself.’
- **A questioner:** ‘I do what I think is best. If it doesn’t make sense, I won’t do it.’
- **An obliger:** ‘I do what I have to. I hate to let others down, but I let myself down.’
- **A rebel:** ‘I do what I want. If you tell me to do something, I’m less likely to do it.’

Which are you? As ever, spending some time reflecting on what’s going on for you – in this case what drives you, what motivates you to change - can be key to unlocking a new path, and in this case forming, and keeping, a new habit.

Here’s what Gretchen suggests people with different tendencies do, to build a new habit:

- **Upholders amongst us might want to start with scheduling.** Put a regular time in your diary for the new habit you want to form, then repeat it. With upholders, habits often grow when they are repeated in predictable ways.

- **Questioners like clarity.** So, if you're a questioner, try to get as clear as possible about what you value and what you expect from yourself. Do that, and you are much more likely to make your new habit 'stick'.
- **Obligers amongst like to feel accountable.** So, tell people your goals, maybe sign up to something with other people, and make yourself accountable.
- **Rebels like to set themselves challenges.** If you recognise your inner rebel, then challenge what you tell yourself. If you tend to think of yourself as unreliable, try switching your thinking to 'if I say I'll be there, I'll be there'.



For more insights around habit building check out all the other resources in the [Why and how: balance your mind and build good habits](#) section of our Balance toolkit.