

habits

*a settled or regular tendency or practice,
especially one that is hard to give up*

Everyone has habits, and there's nothing inherently wrong with them. Some are pretty useful — maybe you lay out your clothes for work the night before or automatically turn off the lights when you leave a room. But other habits, such as biting your nails, drinking caffeine too late in the day, or hitting snooze too many times, might not be so beneficial. Inefficient work habits can even jeopardize or affect work not only for yourself, but for those around you.

Bad work habits may include "forgetting" to clock in or out on time, disruptive behavior such as yelling across the office, general negativity or even poor time management, resulting in unneeded overtime worked.

We all have our own bad habits at the office. Maybe it's gossiping or complaining. Or binge eating or nail-biting. Or checking e-mail incessantly. Whatever the habit, we'd be happier without it. Bad habits interrupt your life and prevent you from accomplishing your goals. And they waste your time and energy. So why do we still do them? And most importantly, what can you do about it? To break and replace those tendencies, follow these five simple steps:

Step 1: Identify your bad office habits Routine makes us feel safe, but don't hide under the umbrella of familiarity for too long. The problem with habits is that we let them control us. Our subconscious kicks in and tendencies take over—without us even thinking about them. Monitor yourself for a full week as you go through average work days. Jot down any potential habits in a job journal. Whether it's an arbitrary ritual like tapping your toe three times before you enter the building or sipping on an afternoon diet soda, include it on the list. The point here isn't to nab every habit and routine, but to find a starting point.

Step 2: Determine which habits are hurting you Let's shoot big; identify the habit that affects you most negatively. It could be wasting time, putting physical or mental stress on your body, fatigue (from that diet soda), etc. Look at the short-term and long-term picture and prepare to face your worst habit head on.

Step 3: Stop your habit dead in its tracks Sometimes stopping a habit is as simple as recognizing it. Next time you find yourself carrying out the habit, say to yourself, "Stop!"

If you're in a public office, say it in your head (rather than risk looking bonkers). Create a physical or graphical reminder that represents the negative outcome of the habit, and access that reminder when you need it. With the soda, for example, hang a picture of decaying teeth near your desk (or maybe in a drawer you open often, where your co-workers won't see it). Next time you reach for that soda, you'll at least consider drinking water instead.

Step 4: Replace your bad habit with something awesome Because office life is conducive to repetition, the same routine that created your habit might help you replace it with something useful. Instead of reaching for a coffee or candy, or rather than participating in gossip and complaints, do something that's good for you. Here's one example: every time you receive a new email, instead of dropping what you're working on, take a deep breath and clear your mind. Another positive work ritual, one that helps reduce eye strain, is practicing the 20/20/20 rule. For every 20 minutes of staring at a computer screen or document, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. From breathing to stretching to resting your eyes, there are a million positive things you can do while at work.

Step 5: Hang in there Some habits are deeply embedded, so don't expect to replace them overnight. Instead, focus on vigilantly monitoring your habits and routines for weeks or months. Consider making "habit inventory" a weekly ritual. Habits can be powerful, so why not have them work for you rather than against you? Master the art of habit replacement and watch your work experience improve.

The people who command the most respect are the individuals who recognize issues, including bad work habits and work to solve them. Reconfiguring how you approach your work takes committed effort, but if it helps you move forward, it's worth the investment.



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