

SUJATHA



BUILD
A
LIFE
HABIT
IN
10
STEPS

I am not here to motivate you. Motivation can get you started but will not keep you moving.

I am not here to inspire you. Inspiration will wean off as soon as the impact I create in your thoughts fizzles out.

I am not here to give advice because that is the last boring thing anyone wants to hear.

I am here so you can move on—from where you are this minute to where you want to go in life—on a solid road that you build yourself.

A road that you know will keep you going, and you'll never have to spare a single thought for me.

I am here to make you aware of the most powerful foundation that lies within yourself: **YOUR HABITS.**

I am here for you to build that one habit you wanted to.

That one habit about which you've said, "I wish I was doing this every day, but anyway, who has the time?"

That one habit that pricked you inside when you saw someone else doing it.

The one habit you felt life never allowed you the time to get to.

Habits are the most impartial. They neither spare people nor differentiate between the ever-debated good and bad.

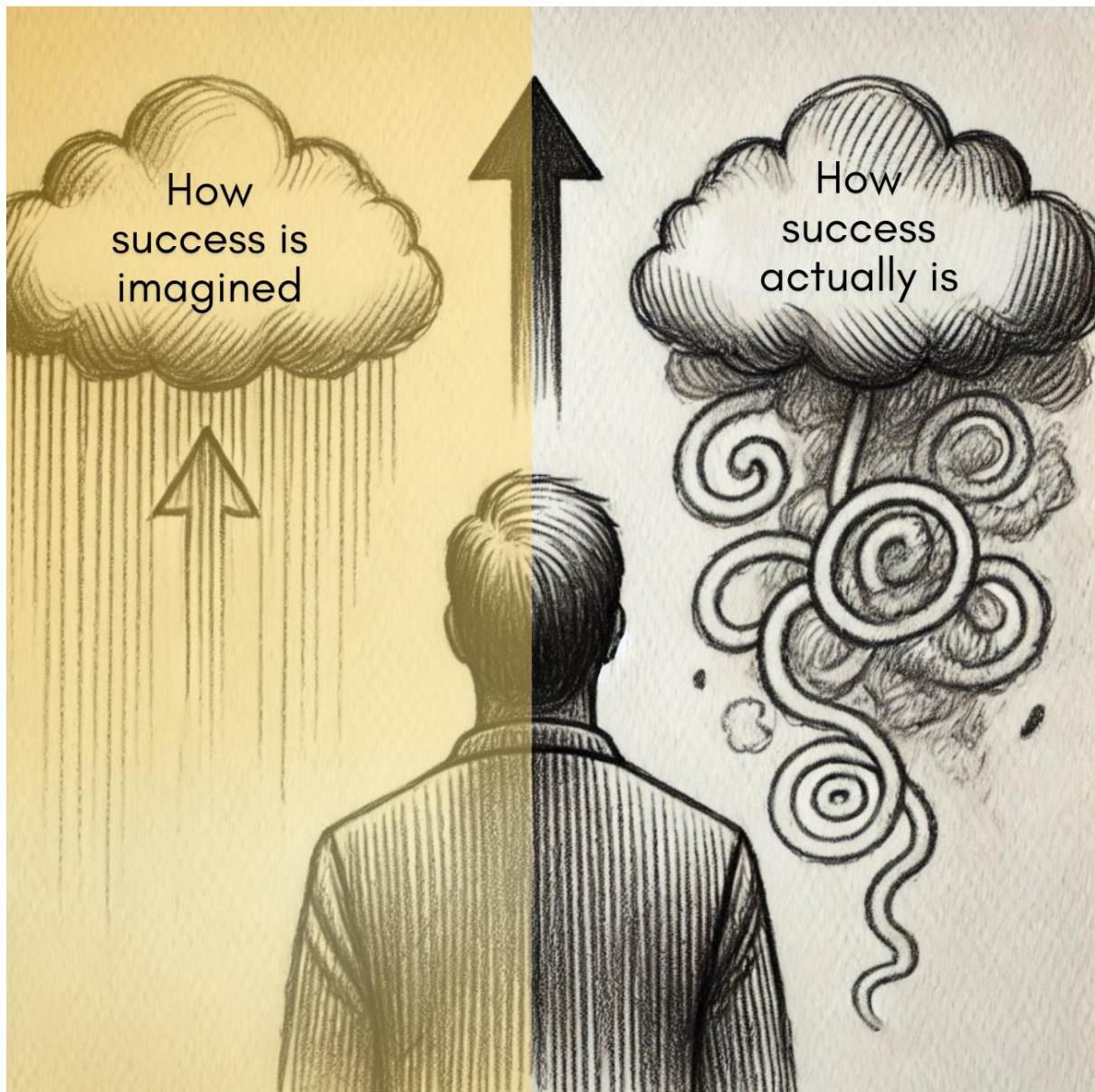
You can see that as the bad news because the good news is this: you hold the power of any habit.

Our life is built around how we handle our daily routine. Anyone can have dreams, but only a rare few take them forward. Of all the success stories I have studied and the people I am interviewing, what starkly stands out is this one aspect alone: they take action consistently (or fail to take it consistently).

Action-takers are the needle movers.

What do they do on a daily basis that makes them keep the needle moving?

No one has it easy. No success flows straight. No awards come without seeing multiple failures.



Who does not know this? “This must be running in your mind now.”

Yes, we all know it, but how many of us work on this knowledge?

Taking action is a process—a long process. A process you will give up on if it drains your energy, and that is the single reason most people give up.

James Clear sold more than 20 million copies of his book *Atomic Habits*, which has been translated into 60 languages and has remained on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 200 weeks.

He started after an accident that caused multiple injuries. Many people in the world would have given up, but he chose to change his life by making small changes every day that became a routine and soon, a towering success.

Whether you are the CEO of a global company or living on the platform, a habit does not mean repeating a dumb action over and over again. It means mastering an action so well that it soon flows effortlessly but still with full alertness.

You barely think when brushing your teeth. It is a classic habit, and everyone around you would probably notice if you didn't for some reason. But will it make sense to spend years mastering it? And should you?

Here are 10 steps that show you exactly how to build a habit that flows effortlessly.

Step 1 - Habit Selection - Anchor your WHY.

If you have not been doing it for some reason, either you think it is a lower priority, or you are scared to start.

As a wise man once said (on Facebook), if you can't do it today, why do you think you will do it tomorrow?

Before that, let us have a small glimpse into how we process habits.

Extensive research in the 1990s at MIT explored what builds habits at the brain level.

To cut it short, the summary is this: when the trigger is new, the brain explodes with activity. New trigger, routine, and the reward. Once the reward is experienced and these three steps are repeatedly done—trigger, routine, and reward—the brain activity becomes more automatic. The activity is done with less effort. We have observed this in our lives so many times: brushing, cooking, typing, driving.

This triple-step process is the backbone behind it.

Marketers have used this heavily for years and still do.

1. Something triggers you.
2. It makes you perform the habit.
3. You feel rewarded in some way.

It is the same reason why we buy products, why some people get gold medals at the Olympics, and why some become hardcore alcoholics.

There is a trigger that creates a want because they want the reward.

Once it becomes a habit, you do NOT need to stress yourself at all! That is the very definition of a habit.

Now, that is why it is most important to select one habit you want to build to make it worthwhile. It should matter a lot to you.

The below factors should not matter:

- Whether you can or not,
- Whether you have the resources or not,
- Whether you have the time or not

The experience from the action or the result from it should be important enough to you.

- *I want to walk because it keeps me active during the day.*
- *I want to do one new course every year because it improves my career.*
- *I want to have a healthy diet to reduce my BP.*
- *I want to You need to fill this in first.*

Pause here to reflect on this before you continue.

Ravi always admired his neighbor, an elderly man who jogged every morning without fail. One day, Ravi asked him the secret.

The neighbor said, “I chose jogging because it lets me breathe the sunrise. It’s not just exercise; it’s my way of starting the day with gratitude.” Ravi realized habits stick when they resonate deeply.

He picked meditation for the same reason—it brought him peace.

Summary - Have faith in yourself to achieve what means a lot to you. A habit is the means to achieve that.

Step 2 - Set up a simple plan and ditch the initial Euphoria.

I hate to break this to you, but initial excitement should be avoided. Feel good, but never jump headfirst into it.

It cannot be sustained.

The whole intention is to build a sustainable habit, one that lasts through life.

Let us approach this using the concept of reverse engineering.

You sustain when you see results.

You see results when you make progress.

You make progress when you act on it, even when you don’t feel like it.

You act when you know you can do it.

And you know you can do it when you start small.

That is the key—start small. See progress. See results, and then build up.

It has worked for me every time—every single time. Writing this book is the best proof.

A little every day is, in reality, a compounding effect. Not only do you learn, but you also build your sense of confidence.

Do you know about the 2-minute productivity rule?

What can be done in 2 minutes needs to be done, but there is a deeper meaning. It gives a dopamine boost because we like completing things.

The sense of “I have done it” drives you to sustain the habit rather than push yourself beyond limits for a few days and then give up.

And even more important—you might be surrounded by success stories from around the world, but no one (except a lottery winner) has had overnight success.

I have learned to see the effort behind success rather than success itself. Somewhere, as I grew up, the journey started to matter more.

Start the journey, as soon as you decide to. The classical excuse all of us give (I gave I for years before I stopped) “let this happen in life before I start “ - Children should grow up, I need to finish this project, let the rainy season get over, let my exams finish. The bottom line is it is only an excuse.

Summary - Have a workable plan that allows you to feel a sense of progress. Rome was never meant to be built in a day, and it would have been a pathetic structure if it had been built in a day.

Step 3 - Stack your habit.

Most people struggle with this: staying consistent.

They have the intent, they want to do it, they know the consequences of not doing it, but yet—after the initial few days, it takes a back seat.

I mentioned in step 2 that you need to see progress. And what do you need for that?

You need to start. It sounds simple, and yet I know the pain.

Starting is a problem, and resuming after a break is another. I have been through it all. The trigger needs to be set in place next—a trigger that reminds you to start, a small push in the right direction.

Habit stacking is the answer to begin. The final trigger should ultimately come from within you, but until then, this works.

James Clear also spoke about this in detail in *Atomic Habits*.

Stack it with an already existing routine habit you have.

- *I will drink a healthy juice after brushing.*
- *I will take a walk after dinner.*
- *I will write a journal before hitting the bed.*



Be conscious about it until it comes naturally.

For me, it's yoga after I wake up. I've been at it for 14 years with this habit stacking.

Daphne kept missing her skincare routine at night since it was at the fag end of the day. She decided to combine it with brushing her teeth while looking in the mirror. It served as the best reminder.

Or fix a consequence if you miss it—some tasks that are difficult for you.

Mopping the floor immediately, running to the supermarket, or doing 50 pushups—anything that disrupts your routine. Once or twice, you do that, you will automatically follow your habit.

A prior act or a consequence should ensure you do it daily, at least for the minimum amount of time.

In many cultures across the world, many religious practices span 40 or 48 days. In Tamil, it is called a mandalam because anything practiced for 48 days becomes a habit for life.

Summary - Set the trigger or the consequence until it flows naturally.

Step 4 - Reduce friction.

I wish people would stop asking or writing about New Year's resolutions.

For starters, they stay "new," and the number of times they are broken is always greater than the number of resolutions made. Why? Because a resolution is made once but can be broken many times.

As the earth innocently circles around the sun, blissfully unaware of the new year resolutions somewhere, somehow an excuse rears its ugly head among its inhabitants.

Monica kept deciding that she would finish the courses she had signed up for, but after a few lessons, it always came to a halt. Her job, family, and routine work where her priorities were the reason she kept telling herself, when she needed to squash the guilty feeling, that came along with the thought of her courses. But was it? No.

She missed her assignments.

Why? They were difficult, and they were difficult because she couldn't focus on her lessons. Continuous interruptions stopped her. She always started in the evenings, a busy time at home.

Her incomplete assignments and the difficulty of balancing home responsibilities and her lessons blocked her.

After some discussions and self-reflection, she decided to devote 30 minutes in the mornings when there would be no disturbances. It worked, and she completed her first course.

No matter how good your intentions are, if something seems difficult, you start searching for excuses.

That “seems difficult” feeling could stem from various reasons. Somewhere, a thought might be creating a blocker, like:

- **Physically difficult (when starting to exercise):** You remember the pain and don't feel like starting.
- **Fear of others' opinions (like wanting to post a video of your work every day):** A comment you heard or think you might hear creates fear about how you'll handle it.

- **Comfort zone getting disturbed (yours or those close to you):** For example, starting something new that requires effort. A stay-at-home parent returning to work is a classic case where routines—yours and others'—get disrupted.
- **Routine issue:** Like needing to dig your exercise shoes out of the back of the cupboard every day. That's a headache.
- **The list could go on, but the solution is the same.**

You need to identify what's holding you back and not turn it into an excuse. Work around it or on it.

You need to hold on, keeping in mind why you started in the first place.

Do whatever it takes to make the flow of habit easier. If it's dieting, keep the food you need to eat in plain sight and remove the food you shouldn't eat.

Get equipment ready.

DO. NOT. STOP.

- **Physical difficulty:** It will reduce after a few days if it's due to muscle stiffness.
- **Fear of rejection:** Believe in yourself and give more weight to your opinion of yourself than to others' opinions. They don't matter and at some point, we need to face it. Better get it out of the way faster.
- **Comfort zone:** Understand that it's the riskiest place to stay. If you take yourself seriously and stay consistent, the way you see yourself and the way others see you will improve over time.

I enjoy creating content and have no problem speaking in front of a camera, but making video content of myself talking still feels like a big task.

I keep the gimbal in front of me, so it reminds me every day. Hopefully, I'll break that block.

My friend keeps his running shoes right next to his bed. He sees them as soon as he wakes up. Either he runs or spends the day feeling guilty. It works most of the time.

Summary - Smooth out the wrinkles that seem to block you, so it becomes easier to start.

This might be a little difficult to identify, but if you notice you're skipping or slowing down, do a little self-reflection and be honest with yourself.

Step 5 - Make it input based, not result based.

Age old mantra and works always. Practice makes perfect. Being consistent is the KEY deciding factor in whether you succeed. This consistency comes from seeing progress. Progress comes from starting small and building like we already discussed in step 2.

Let's dig a bit deeper into how you can push yourself to do those "Small Steps" without pressing the pause button or how to keep that momentum day by day.

Focus on the input, not on the result.

Instead of saying, "I will lose 5 kgs. in three months," decide to walk for 30 minutes every day.

If you set the result as losing 5 kgs and do not achieve it, you are likely to feel disheartened or lose the drive. This feeling is what pushes or breaks a person. It is at the end of the day a psychological game you play with your self.

One the other hand, if you decide to walk for 30 minutes every day and stick to that, the chances of giving up are lower.

To reach those 30 minutes (if it's difficult for you), start with 10 minutes. Keep at 10 minutes for a week, then increase to 15 minutes the next week.

If you aim to have a wealth portfolio worth a certain amount, but you are a compulsive spender, invest a fixed amount at the beginning of every month (after planning your expenses and buffer amount). This makes it difficult for you to touch that money. It gives you the freedom to spend without guilt since you have already invested and also ensures you maintain a consistent portfolio.

What you actually crave is a sense of gratification and achievement, and that never comes from the shiny object syndrome. (For those new to the term, it refers to chasing new paths very often, hoping for immediate success, which finally takes you nowhere.)

Whatever action you take, efforts will lead to results.

Either you win, or you learn. There is no loss here. It will also give you a sense of power over yourself when you master the skill of being consistent.

For some, deciding, planning, starting, and progressing happens seamlessly; for others, it is difficult. Let the journey of others not matter too much, and that means do not compare yourself.

You own your journey, and they own theirs.

Stick to what works for you but stick to it.

Summary: Mastery over daily action matters more than immediate results.

Step 6 - Decide your Trigger.

From the research studies that the famous book *Power of Habit* was based on, what triggers all our actions, plays a pivotal role. The action could be good or bad, but we need to see some results.

Craving to eat that chocolate cake, the craving to watch one more episode, the craving to keep scrolling through endless mobile videos—these are so easy to identify. We do those to satisfy some inner feeling within us. So, what you need to think about is what is or could be the trigger behind the habit you want create.

You know your WHY, but what triggers it?

I can give my example. I work out five days a week mainly because I like to wear the clothes I want. So good clothes are the trigger. (Of course, being active and healthy are reasons too, but my main trigger is clothes). Seeing a good dress that I feel might not fit me is a big trigger for me to work out more.

The concept behind any habit is that it happens so naturally that the brain doesn't need to put a lot of effort into it. This idea is backed by multiple studies analyzing brain patterns in conjunction with habit formation.

Without getting into high-end jargon (which I also do not understand), what we need to know is this cycle:

TRIGGER → ROUTINE → RESULT.

The trigger creates the craving for the result. A person smokes when something triggers them, and they crave the sense of feeling they get from smoking. If they obtain that feeling through other means, their smoking might decrease.

So, connect your habit to some craving you have. I use the word *craving* for the lack of a better term. It could be for good health, a happy relationship, personal growth, or career growth. If there isn't one already, think about what you will feel when your intended habit isn't executed. How will it impact you? Think about how good you will feel when you accomplish it or the little treat you give yourself every time you show up.

Also, use any aspect which serves as reminders - Visuals, to-do-lists, accountability partners, alarms. I could build a chapter around this, but these tips are available all over the globe.

They can be useful if have that inner conviction to show up.

Summary: Create a craving.

Speaking of showing up, well, that is the next step.

Step 7 - 100% is never the answer.

"Slow and steady wins the race" cannot be further from the truth when it comes to building habits. My friend was hell bent to set up a workout routine. She started with a 30-minute workout every day, every day.

She burned out in a week because 30 minutes was stressful for her as she had never worked out before, and soon it felt like a strain.

Eventually, that exhaustion was what came to her mind whenever she wanted to work out. "Okay, let me give it a day's rest," turned into two days, then three days, and soon it became never.

Start small. Even if it's just 5 minutes, it's fine, but show up for 5 minutes every day. Then make it 10 minutes after that.

YOU.DO.NOT.HAVE.TO.SHOW.UP.100%.

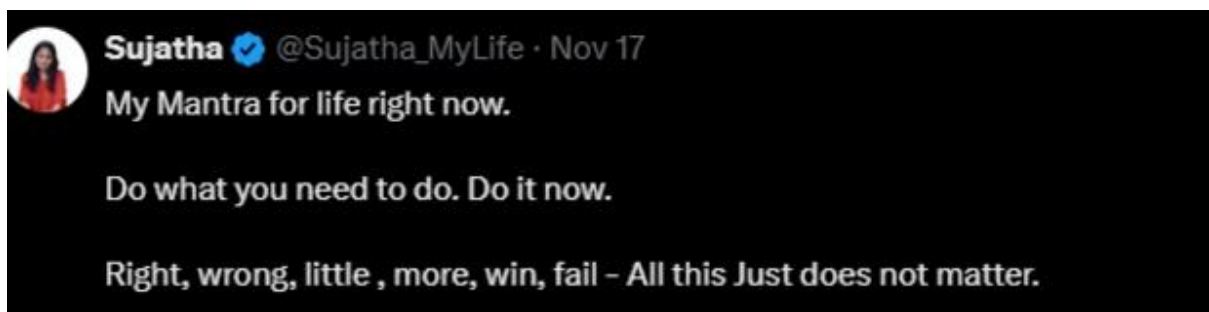
You just need to show up. This is what we discussed in step 2, when starting out. Even after you have progressed, if you feel like giving up, try to show up at least 5%.

The sense of progress and the results you see over time will be the only drive you need to keep going.

Progress over perfection. Consistency over complacency. Practice over talent.

My. Life. My. Responsibility. — This project, this handbook, the main book, my research, my interviews all function in this mode.

Sometimes I show up 100%, and sometimes only 1%, but I show up. Trust me, it works.



Step 8 - What about the days you ‘Miss them’.

This is the fly in the soup—or shall I say dragon in the soup. The only difference is that you would notice the fly or run away from the dragon (or attack the dragon as per your warrior skills :-)). Here, it is invisible. When you are building a habit, missing a day seems fine, missing two days seems fine too. On the third day, "Oops, I need to miss this for some 'so-called valid reason'," and on the fourth day, "missing the habit" becomes a habit. This is linked to step 7, as you can see, but with a little more perspective.

I have been through this cycle many times, and I am sure you have too (else you would not be reading this in the first place).

Do not break the streak two days in a row.

Take a break if you want but show up a little the next day.

Ok, sounds easy, but it’s never easy. I followed this when I started to realize that I needed to be serious about doing something daily.

(I guess it's a reflection of the regret for the years I let go by. Anyway... that story is not for today, but you can read it in this link:

[How I Goofed Up My Dreams and Realized It 25 Years Later](#)

Most new year resolutions dwindle before January 31st for this reason alone.

Now, if you miss the first day, you miss the second day, and the third—even a week is fine if you get back. But (and a big but) ...

If you do not get back to it, it means you need to rethink whether it is important to you in the first place. If it is important, you either get back to it, or if you don't, analyze why you don't.

It always comes back to this: How important is it to you? Nothing is wrong with having a frank conversation with yourself and eliminating it from your mental list rather than worrying about procrastinating over it.

The summary is this: You should not be dragging yourself for your habit. At some point, it should not be mental stress.

Step 9: Habits should not make you dull.

All work and no play makes anyone a dull person. Habit building should be anything but a chore in your head, yet for many, that is how it seems or feels.

This happens if you cannot connect to it in any way—either it should make you feel good, or it should deliver good results (like you might not enjoy walking every day, but you realize the benefit).

So, the solution for this is to go back to step 1—what is it that you want to do every day effortlessly?

It is your life, and you are the best person to make the choice.

Too much focus can make the entire process dull, predictable, and systematic. This should not become a blemish on the art of living. It need not be an entertainment package throughout (if it turns out to be great, even better), but at the very least, it should not feel like a chain on your legs.

Arav was passionate about food and loved eating a variety of dishes. When the weighing scale started showing increasing trends, he moved to repetitive, healthy meals. It soon got boring for him and started stressing him out. He was either stuck on a boring diet (which he did not like) or binge eating (which made him feel guilty).

Fed up with the swings in his weight and mood, he started experimenting with healthy food that he loved. The failures and wins of his recipes drove him more than the weighing scale did. He had a few days when he allowed himself to enjoy the food he loved.

This momentum helped him sustain his diet in the long run.

There are no hard and fast rules for any of these steps. It all comes down to your perspective. Remember, this is never about anyone else. This cannot be stressed enough.

Your Journey. Your Ownership.

Hard work? Yes.

Discipline? Yes.

Failures? Yes.

All these are part of the process, but they should never have a strong negative impact on your physical, mental, emotional, or financial health.

Summary: The habit you intend to develop should never have a negative feel to it.

Step 10 - Reflect and Reinforce

I stand guilty because I reflect on my growth only after years and realize the mistakes I made. Now I see them as learning opportunities, but they would have made a world of difference if I had done it every month or at least once in six months.

Any path you take will teach you lessons, but you need to be conscious enough and gutsy enough to revert what does not work for you or take action to make it work better for you.

Always remember, you are using your priceless assets—your time, your effort, your money—to make your life worthwhile.

You are only answerable to yourself on this journey.

Habit is only the means, never the result.

You own your life, and you owe it the best.

and to conclude...for now,

My Life, My Responsibility is a book that will be published in a few months, and this e-book is a sample of what you would get there. I hope (with crossed fingers) that this book is helping you build that one habit that will elevate your life even by a little notch.

It is a complete transformation to be what you want to be and shows that the only way to do it is by taking responsibility for it.

And now, my dear Reader, I wish I could tell you that you are all set to conquer the world, but no, I want to be truthful. You need to conquer yourself first. Reflect on what you have read, use what appeals to you, but take action.

I hope that every step adds value to your life, but what is more important is that you put into action what adds value to your life.

Remember, it is about you and always about you only.

This handbook is a small gift to show that your life is your responsibility alone.

My conviction on this is the central theme around which my book is being crafted – My.Life My.Responsibility.

Hoping to connect with you soon on that too.

Have a great life, my dear reader!

Recap to build your habits.

Step 1: Dig deep to know the reason why you want to make “that something” a habit. Will it elevate your life and be worth the time, effort, emotions, and money you will spend?

Step 2: Have a workable plan that you can sustain. Aim for the stars but learn to take the first step into the spacecraft. Start as soon as you decide to.

Step 3: This busy life of ours can make us forget. Fix it by linking it with another simple daily routine you never miss, like brushing, eating, or before hitting bed.

Step 4: As much as possible, make the process feasible to reduce the friction that arises within a few days. Want to walk? Plan to walk in a space close to where you live rather than deciding to cross a huge distance.

Step 5: Focus on what you can do every day rather than on the result. Consistent inputs deliver results better than focusing on the result and giving up.

Step 6: Decide what triggers you in the direction. Your desires, your sense of achievement, wanting to keep your family comfortable, career growth, health—anything could work. Keep reminders of them in front of you.

Step 7: What matters is your mindset to show up. It is never about showing up 100%. Build the momentum slowly. This way, the chances of sustaining your habit are high.

Step 8: Missing a day is okay. Missing two days is okay. If you are serious, you will not break the streak. Breaking for a week in the bigger picture does not matter, but if you cannot get back even after that, rethink whether it really matters to you.

Step 9: Find ways to make the whole process interesting. It should never feel like a chain around your legs. The whole purpose is lost if that is the case. Either the process must make you feel good, or the results should.

Step 10: At least once in six months, reflect on whether spending your most precious assets (your time, effort, emotions, and money) was worth the journey.