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Dave Asprey: That a powerful question, right?

James Clear: It's not saying it's 50/50. It's not saying it's your fault. Maybe it was like 98% luck and you only brought 2% which happened to be your attitude in that given day. Even if your attitude was positive, maybe the outcome wouldn't have changed, but in every interaction we have in life, we bring something into that moment. I think that question of, "How did I collaborate in my own defeat, how did I collaborate in my success, how did I collaborate in this conversation or situation?" what it does is even if it's not strictly mathematically true, that it's all about your habits or it's all about luck, it raises the question of the awareness around, "What is within my control and what can I impact in this situation?"

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a State of High Performance.

Dave Asprey: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that photography has completely changed how we look at our world. It's easy to forget that, "Oh, yeah, we didn't use to have camera on our phones," but when you get into the very high level of microscopy and taking photos, you realize we've now learned what's going on inside cells, inside all these things that you never would have imagined or been able to see. There's a new technique from someone who calls herself a microphotographer named Teresa Kugler. She combined fluorescence microscopy and stereomicrography, if you can even say those words, to create a vivid portrait of a developing turtle embryo.

What the heck? How would you do that? It turns out this amazing glowing image and you can see that on the daveasprey.com webpage of a little turtle and you can see in color which parts of it are doing what. The embryo was only 2.5 cm long and you couldn't get it in just one image, so they stitched together hundreds of images focused on different locations and layers of the turtles. You can see something that your eyes and no eyes on Earth could ever capture using technology. They won an award in 2019 for The Small World Photomicrography competition. It's incredible because that's 45 years that that competition has existed that you wouldn't know about.

When you take that you look at what's going on in your retina, what's going on in a neuron, we are just visually using incredible tools that you would never know we're in the background to let you see the very essence of biology. I'm completely astounded by the changes in the world. What has that to do with today's show you might be asking yourself? Well, number one, small things are worth your notice, things you might not see but that might actually really matter. When I was doing my research for today's episode, I found out that today's guest is an accomplished photographer in normal scale as well as a best-selling author, who's really focused on profound changes that happen when you change very small things.

In fact, even the art and science of changing the environment around you and inside of you so that you have control of your own biology, that is the definition of biohacking. The very best biohacks are the small changes that make the biggest difference. Small tweaks, big outcomes. Can you guess what today's episode is going to be about? Probably not based on that. Then again, you probably clicked on this on iTunes in a second we're going to talk about, so the surprise has been ruined already, but that's all right.

Today's guest is also a New York Times best-selling author, the best-selling author of *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*. His work is grounded in just really meticulous research and he's going to teach us today about habits can help you fulfill your potential. You've probably seen mentioned in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *CBS This Morning*, maybe at a Fortune 500 company if you work there. This is a guy who's gone out there and rang the bell for habits in a meaningful way and almost half a million people subscribed his email newsletter and make it a habit to read it. James, you didn't even laugh at my joke there.

James Clear: Thank you so much for having me. It's good to talk to you.

Dave Asprey: I was just cueing it up and handing it to you. Do you make it a habit to just-

James Clear: That's a softball by telling this.

Dave Asprey: Do you just make it a habit to ignore good humor on podcast? Is that right?

James Clear: Total [inaudible 00:04:55].

Dave Asprey: You're, "No, actually I don't make that a habit. It just wasn't good humor." Anyway, I got to understand, why are obsessed with the habits of human performance? If you care enough to write a book about something, you really, really care more a little bit. Why?

James Clear: Yeah, that's right. For anybody who's written a book, you realize how deep that question actually is. Depending on how you measure it, *Atomic Habits* took somewhere between three and five years to write. Any project that you commit that amount of time to, man, it better be worth it. I think from my vantage points, habits, there may be a dozen topics or so that are probably worth that amount of effort, maybe a few more, but habits is certainly one of them. One of the reasons I feel so strongly about that is that most of the results that you have in life can be viewed as a lagging measure of your habits.

Your knowledge is a lagging measure of your reading and learning habits. Your physical fitness is a lagging measure of your eating and training habits. Even the clutter in your bedroom is a lagging measure of your cleaning habits. Your bank account is a lagging measure of your financial habits. You can apply that idea that the outcomes, the results that we also badly want in life or talk about

achieving are often downstream from the habits that precede them. Certainly, there are other factors that influence outcomes in life like for example decision making, "What habits do I work on?" or, "Where do I leave? What career do I build habits in? What industry am I in?"

Certainly, choices also are a big factor and also luck and randomness. Luck and randomness and uncertainty impact our outcomes in life, but luck by definition is not within your control and your habits are. I think one of the only reasonable approaches is to focus on what you can control. Given that your habits are upstream of your results and they so meaningfully impact the trajectory that you have in almost any major domain in life, I think that makes them worthy of investigation, worthy of understanding and in my case worthy of spending five years writing a book on it.

Dave Asprey: What's the difference between a habit that drove an outcome versus a decision, like, "I decided to go to business school and I have a bigger check"? It doesn't seem like a habit, but it seems like a measurable change in outcome.

James Clear: Good question. I think of your decisions and your habits as two big pillars that are within your control that influence your outcomes. Decisions, like you mentioned, sometimes it can be a one-time decision, like going to business school or what career to start out in, what job to take, what city to move to. The most extreme example is probably who you marry. That's a one-time choice that impacts your happiness and habits-

Dave Asprey: Some people make it a habit if it's almost always a bad one, if you do it lots of times.

James Clear: ... many years down the line. There are single choices like that. Now, if we want to be very particular about the language, we could say, well, technically every time you choose to do a habit, doing one push up or meditating for one minute, that is a decision. That is somewhat true, but if we're just trying to keep it fairly clean here, we could say habits are repeated actions or maybe repeated decisions whereas the single one-time choices are in a different category. The way that I differentiate this, imagine you have two entrepreneurs and one entrepreneur decides to start a tech company, a software company, maybe some email marketing service or some kind of technology product.

Then another person decides to be an entrepreneur and they're going to start a brick and mortar shop like a local pizza parlor or something. At that moment, when the decision is made, you can imagine like a dotted line emanating out into the future that would be your trajectory. Most of us I think would imagine that the software company would have the more exponential potential curve, the more exponential future ahead of it. Your decisions determine the potential available to you, but your habits determine how far you walk along that line, how much you realize that potential.

It's possible you could start a local pizza parlor. If you have really killer habits, you could execute and have a great business. Somebody who has a great idea for a software company but has terrible habits is unable to capitalize on it. Your decisions create potential energy. Your habits capture that potential energy.

Dave Asprey: As a funny example there, you could also found or become CEO of a computer security startup or you can start a coffee company-

James Clear: Hypothetically speaking.

Dave Asprey: ... and decide which one of those has a better outcome? I would say, I made the wrong choice if I was a rational person, but I've done pretty well on the coffee side. That said, the habits that you chose or that you, I don't know, instantiate maybe is a better word, those better be in alignment with the type of decision you made about a career. My habits if I was a tech entrepreneur still would be a different set of habits than the habits that I would build around being a coffee entrepreneur or a human performance entrepreneur which is really what I am. Coffee is just one manifestation of it, but-

James Clear: I like to think about it as the collection of habits that you build which is what you're referencing here, that different collection of habits if I was a human performance entrepreneur versus a tech entrepreneur versus whatever. That collection of habits is sometimes you call it your daily routine. I think we'd call it your system and your system needs to change based on the outcome that you want. I think we could even say like your current results in life, you're a natural byproduct of the system you have. Your current system is perfectly designed by definition to deliver your current results. If you want the results to change, you need the system to change, you need that collection of daily habits to change.

Dave Asprey: I think there's an asterisk in there around luck. "I had the perfect system and then a comment hit my backyard." You're like, "Oops."

James Clear: For sure.

Dave Asprey: I feel there's some amount of social Darwinism in what you're saying that maybe isn't a positive thing.

James Clear: The way that I think about luck, there are two sides. The first is the common and the backyard point is like bad luck. You need to do the best you can to reduce your exposure to harm. The best way I know to do that is to have a margin of safety. You start a business. The larger the emergency fund you have saved up, that's a margin of safety for customers not coming up or you picking the wrong business or not figuring it out slowly or building a great reputation. If you're well known and provide value to people, then that provides a margin of safety for you slipping up and making a mistake or saying something stupid accidentally.

The more that you can build that margin of safety, the more that you are insulated from the risk of misfortune. Then the other side is exposing yourself to the upside of good fortune, of good luck and I think that's mostly about like trying to place asymmetric bets or putting yourself in an opportunity where you create a product that can scale. For example, with your coffee product, you could just have a local coffee shop where you serve that, but that doesn't scale that well. Instead, it's available through the power of the internet and the magic of distribution all around the world.

Really same product, but by the format that you chose, you expose yourself to the luck of that taking off and people talking about it and so on. There are strategies you can use for both to insulate yourself or to expose yourself to the upside, but ultimately of course, nobody has control over what particular event happens and how luck shows up.

Dave Asprey:

I definitely recognize my incredible good fortune in the success I've had and it's been a huge amount of, in retrospect, right decisions and good habits. What I wouldn't want to do though is have someone who made equally good decisions with equally bad information and developed good habits and didn't have the outcome they wanted to think, "Oh, I built the wrong system." Sometimes shit happens. I know there are people listening to this who have been struggling for decades and are like, "Argh, you know what? You probably have some bad habits in there and they may be the major contributing factors and you don't know it," because we're mostly blind to our habits almost by definition.

If you read Atomic Habits, it's pretty that habits are the things you do automatically, right? How do people know? How would measure whether you have ... In fact, you talked about something called the quality of our habits. How do you know if I have quality habits? What's the measure?

James Clear:

First of all, just putting a bow on this whole conversation about luck and randomness and so on, you can certainly make the right choice and have the wrong outcome happen. I think I for many years had a career through college playing baseball. Like baseball, they're round ball and round bat. You can make the right choice. Especially as a coach, you can choose that you can play the numbers, but the ball just bounces the wrong way. That kind of thing can happen like a lot. I think that there are some things that are useful to believe even if they aren't strictly mathematically true.

For example, it is probably mathematically true almost certainly that luck and uncertainty and randomness are playing a role in whatever outcomes you have in pretty much any domain in life, but it's probably still useful to ask yourself the question, like I this question, "How did I collaborate in my own defeat?"

Dave Asprey:

It's a powerful question.

James Clear:

Right? It's not saying it's 50/50. It's not saying it's your fault. Maybe it was like 98% luck and you only brought 2% which happen to be your attitude on that given day. Even if your attitude was positive, maybe the outcome wouldn't have changed. In every interaction we have in life, we bring something into that moment. I think that question of, "How did I collaborate in my own defeat? How did I collaborate in my own success? How did I collaborate in this conversation or situation?" what it does, even if it's not strictly mathematically true that it's all about your habits or it's all about luck is within my control and what can I impact in this situation. I think that's probably helpful.

Your question about how to measure the quality of the habit, that's an interesting one for a couple of reasons. One, you can imagine any behavior is producing multiple outcomes across time. You could probably speak and you can put into two buckets say the immediate outcome and the ultimate outcome. Well, people often say, "Well, if bad habits are bad for me, why would I do it?" Some people will also say this, "How do we even define what a good and a bad habit is? How do we define what quality to assign your habit?"

I think the way that I distinguish is the reason we do bad habits is because the immediate outcome is often favorable. The immediate outcome of eating a donut is great. It's sweet. It's sugary. It's tasty. It's enjoyable. It's only the ultimate outcome if you continue to eat donuts that is unfavorable. Similar with smoking a cigarette. The immediate outcome of smoking a cigarette might be that you get to socialize with friends outside of the office or you get to reduce a little bit of stress or you curve your nicotine craving. It's only the ultimate outcome two or five or 10 years down the line that is unfavorable.

With good habits, it's often the reverse especially in the beginning. The immediate outcome of going to the gym is you're sore the first workout. Your body looks the same in the mirror. You don't have really anything significant to show for it. It's only if you show two or five or 10 years later that you get this outcome that you want. There's like this valley of death in the beginning when you're building any habit that you need some kind of external validation or some way to show up. Once a habit has been built and it starts to become part of your identity, then actually you can like ...

I just went to the gym a couple of hours ago before we do this call and that was actually quite enjoyable for me. My body again does not look really different in the mirror. Scale has not really changed, but I enjoy it because going to the gym is now part of who I am. I get to reinforce being the person I want to be. I do get some immediate satisfaction now, but I don't think that usually shows up for people when they first start to build a habit. That's how I would define the quality of habits, how they differ. I would usually define it by the ultimate outcome, not the immediate outcome.

Dave Asprey:

When you're deciding on a habit, there's some risk here and I'm going to tell a personal story actually related to what you just said that you made me think about. When I weighed 300 pounds and I'd had two knee surgeries before I was

23. I am eating my low-fat diet and doing my best. I said, "I don't ever want to have another knee surgery. That was so painful to get a screw in my bone. I'm done. It is my top priority." I said, "Here's my habit. I work out 90 minutes a day no matter what six days a week. I don't care if I'm sick. I don't care if I slept for two hours. I'm going to the damn gym." I did this for 18 months straight, so definitely enough to become a habit.

People thought I was nuts. "Like seriously, Dave? You have a sinus infection." "I don't care. I'm going to the gym. I'm not going to have another knee surgery." At the end of 18 months, I still weighed 300 pounds. I could max out all the machines and I said, "All right, I have these quads and I'm good." I went and I played laser tag. High risk for it, right? I kneel down and I twist and I blow my ACL the first time I did any sort of non-gym, non-PT activity. I was like, "All those hours, all that sweat and I'm still fat and I still had to have another knee surgery."

That's the example of a well-intended habit that probably didn't work. A lot of what I do with Bulletproof is, "Okay, here's the system upon which you are designing your habits. If you know more about how it works, you will make better decisions and design better habits." I read Atomic Habits and it's so abundantly clear. If you make high-quality habits and effective ones that you will get results and it's less painful and it's less work to do it. Like you said, "You built in your identity." I built in my identity. I go to the damn gym.

When the results didn't hit, I had like a crisis of conscience and it's one of the things that motivated me to start Bulletproof years later. The question is here, at what point do you know that your new habit, like say veganism or something, doesn't work? How do you know when it's time to reevaluate a habit that you think is working that you're bought into emotionally and psychologically and socially?

James Clear:

My broadly-speaking answer is we need to close the feedback loop. The only way you can close the feedback is to choose the right form of measurement. In the case of your first example, the measure was, "Am I going to the gym or not?" That was how you were measuring as the habit of success. It's like, "I will always go. As long as I show up, I know that's a success." In order to know if a habit is serving you in a way that you want it to, and again this entirely depends on, "What I'm optimizing for?" it sounds like in that case what you're optimizing for is knee health and weight loss. You want to not be 300 pounds. You want to not blow your knee out.

Actually, maybe the signal of progress, the measurement that we needed to look at was not, "Am I showing at the gym?" but, "Is my knee getting healthier or the loads or forces on my knee reducing? Is the scale moving down?" This is actually like a real important question to ask yourself. I think the first question is, "What am I optimizing for?" You need to be clear about that. There are a lot of goals and outcomes and results in life that we inherit from the people around

us. Many people are chasing a borrowed goal. They look at what other people do or what society tells them to do and they pick that up.

That first question is like, "What am I optimizing for? What is genuinely important to me here?" not, "What does society tell me I should be doing about this problem?" Once you decided that, then the next question is, "What is the best measurement to determine if I'm moving toward the thing I'm optimizing for?" The measurement really matters because in many cases with habits in particular, the measurement is too slow to get people to, "You're not getting signals of progress consistently enough." When signals of progress decline in frequency, motivation declines as well.

What you find is that in many areas, people are working very hard even if it's like a really challenging situation. If they're getting signals of progress, usually their motivation stays fairly high, even if their habit to work hard because it's like, "Well, I'm getting the results I'm looking for." Sometimes you need to come up with very creative ways to measure that. Like in your case, in this example, measuring how often you work out is often for many people a great measure, but in this particular case, it was not the right measurement.

I don't know if you need to go to a biomechanics lab and measure the forces on the knee and whatever. We can come up with different scenarios, different alternatives, but what we were trying to optimize for and that did not match the measurement and the challenge of choosing the right measurement is twofold. One is you need to tell us what we're trying to optimize for. The other is over time we start to tie our identity to the measurement. This happens almost all the time, right? It's like, "I will not miss a workout. I will always show up."

By doing that, then that starts to become your measure of self-worth and then you blow the knee out and then actually you feel guilt and shame and feel bad about yourself. It's like, "Man, I was being the person I thought I needed to be and it still didn't get me the thing I wanted." I think that it's because there's a misalignment between what we want genuinely wanted optimized for and what we're actually measuring.

Dave Asprey:

The idea that we're going to form a hypothesis that a certain habit is going to create a certain outcome and then we create the measures of the outcome and then see if when we engage the habit whether the outcome happens. A micro-example of that I'm a huge fan of, my wife, Dr. Lana, read Atomic Habits and a couple of other books and was just examining her own set of habits. She decided that when she was blending her Bulletproof in the morning, while she's sitting there with the blending running for 30 seconds, she was going to do squats.

She won't let me post this on social media, but it's like in the morning, she's doing there like hand on the lid of the blender so it doesn't spray butter on the ceiling and she's doing squats. I tell you after three weeks of that, her pants fit differently. It was very noticeable. In part, thank you, James, for my wife's

curves because they changed. When I asked her about it, she was like, "I was going to stand there for 30 seconds anyway, so I added this habit." There's great value in that, not just for her or for me, but just in general this idea that you can apply a habit on top of something you already do and double down an X amount of time.

Do you have any advice for people who might want to find opportunities? What are the low-hanging fruits for areas where you can add a habit?

James Clear:

Yeah, this concept, this idea that you're talking about where you layer a new habit on top of something you're already doing, I referred it as habit stacking. The original idea came from a Stanford professor named BJ Fogg. He calls it anchoring because basically how he describes this is you're going to anchor this new habit on top of something you already do. The blender in the morning is a good example. Another one I often use is like say you make a cup of coffee every morning, you could say, "When I'm brewing my cup of coffee, I will meditate for 30 seconds." You're inserting that meditation habit into the habit you already do.

The key point here though, habit stacking is actually if you look at it from an academic lens, it's actually a specific version of what researchers call an implementation intention. An implementation intention, it's exactly what it says, it's a sentence that you fill out that states your intention to implement a particular behavior at a given time. A common example, exercise studies, they have the cohorts fill out a sentence that says, "I will exercise on this date, at this time, in this place." Just that sentence increases the odds that people actually follow through with the workout usually two to three X more than people who don't fill it out.

The same thing, there are a hundred of studies in implementation intentions. They've been used for to increase the odds that you go to the polls and vote, to increase the odds that you get your flu shot, that you will exercise more, that you recycle or even to quit smoking, all kinds of habits. The point is just whether we're talking about filling out that sentence or coming up with a habit stack is that it makes it very specific when and where to take action. A lot of people feel like what they lack is motivation, but what they really lack is clarity.

They have this vague notion of they'd like to change, they will say things like, "This time it will be different," or, "I'll just work harder," or, "I'm going to eat better." All those are fine worthy causes, but they're very vague. By having to specifically say, "No, I go to the gym at 5 p.m. on Mondays," or, "10 a.m. in my studio is where I do my journaling habit," by getting very specific about that, the moment of action is less likely to pass you by. That I think is the real value of an implementation intention or a habit stack.

You asked about the best place to insert, I have two answers. The first general one, this doesn't always work, but generally speaking, earlier in the day is better

particularly if you don't have kids. If you have like a four-year-old running around, they don't really care that-

Dave Asprey: Your morning is screwed.

James Clear: They don't care what you're trying to maintain at 7 a.m. There's like running around with their underwear. Broadly speaking, for most people, the earlier in the day, the less likely it is that you're responding to everybody else's agenda and the more likely it is that you have control over that time. Everybody has the same 24 hours, but not every hour is under your control to the same degree. Generally speaking, the hour from 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. is probably more under your control than the hour from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. when you're in the middle of the workday. Broadly speaking, earlier tends to be better.

The second thing is that habits by definition are a behavior that gets tied to a particular context. That can mean a lot of different things. For example, the habit of tying your shoe could just mean the context of, "I have an untied shoe on my foot." You could also say something like, a lot of people for example, what's an example, say you watch TV, you're watching Netflix at 7 p.m. and that's your normal habit. You get down with work. You come home and then you watch television for an hour or two. You want to build a journaling habit or an exercise habit, take whatever you want.

You come home tonight and it's like 7 p.m. and you sit down on the couch and you open up your journal to journal or get ready to start doing pushups on the living room floor. Even if you don't say it specifically or think it consciously, you're nonconsciously being pulled to picking up the remote and turning on Netflix. It's like you have a behavioral bias in that environment because that's what usually happens in your living room at 7 p.m. My second suggestion is first do it earlier in the day if you can, second do it in a new context where you don't have a previous habit already tied to that environment.

For example, you could leave work, go to a coffee shop you don't normally go to and that space becomes the journaling coffee shop. You walk in. You turn your phone off. The only thing that happens is you journal for 20 minutes there and then you go home. Because you don't have that same behavioral bias, because you don't have this body of habits that you're trying to turn the ship against, it generally is easier to build a new habit in a blank slate, a new environment.

Dave Asprey: I really like that idea of just changing or saying that this is a habit associated with a physical space. That's pretty important. In the broader context there, you talked about not really setting a goal versus setting a system. I feel like there's value in setting a goal because otherwise you don't know what system to design. Do you ever work with people or what is your set of advice for people around how to make your system match the goals that you've said? For context, I remember I'm 16 I read Think and Grow Rich. It was pretty valuable. I wrote the goal on my mirror and all this stuff.

I was thinking about it and I was making decisions about it, but I'm sure I had really bad habits along the way because I never thought about the system. Talk to me about your view on the limitations of setting goals, but also when to do it in making a system. I think most people are unclear on this.

James Clear: I think the way that you phrase the question 30 seconds ago or so where you said, "How do we get the system to match the goal?" That's really ultimately what we're going for here. Before I criticize goals too much, I should say this is coming from someone who was very goal oriented for a long time. I would set goals for the grades I want to get in school, the weights I want to lift in the gym, how much revenue I want to earn in my business, like all kinds of stuff. Eventually, what I realized is that sometimes I would achieve the goal and sometimes I wouldn't. Clearly, setting the goal was not the thing that made the difference.

Dave Asprey: That's so logical.

James Clear: We realize is this thing happens all the time.

Dave Asprey: That was just so logical. Clearly, that's not with Dave, but that's mind blowing.

James Clear: You see this in most domains actually. If you have a job opening and a hundred candidates apply for the job. Presumably, every candidate has the goal of getting the job, but only one does. If you have 30 teams that are in a sports league and they're all competing to win the championship, presumably every team has the goal of winning the championship. The goal is perhaps necessary, but it is not sufficient for success. A goal is useful. We asked that question earlier, "What am I optimizing for?" That really what's that's asking you is "What is your goal? What target are we trying to hit?"

That I think is what goals are useful for. It's not the goals are useless. They're useful for clarity, for determining where you want to allocate your attention and effort, but the problem I think that arises is that we live in a very outcome-drive society. We live in a society that's very results oriented. Whether it's social media and seeing everybody's highlights and results on there or the news, nothing becomes a news story until it is a result. You only hear about The Broadway Show once it becomes a hit. You hear about the book once it hits the best-sellers list. You're never going to see like a news story that is like, "Man eats chicken and salad for lunch today." It's only going to be a news story after like after a man loses a hundred pounds.

Dave Asprey: Right.

James Clear: Once you get to the result, then it becomes news worthy. I think because we see results so pervasively throughout society, so often our daily lives, we tend to overvalue the result and undervalue the process. We tend to overvalue the goal of, "Oh, I want to lose a hundred 100 pounds. I want to double my income. I

want to get a million followers." Certainly, the world is very results oriented. This is one of the things that makes us tricky and I think an easy pitfall. Results do matter, but if you make it about the goal, you might win one time. If you make it about the system, you can win again and again.

Goals are for people who are maybe more immediate or short-term focused. "I have a goal of running the marathon." Okay, great. That's only about the marathon. If you have a system that allows you to become a runner or become an elite runner, then suddenly we can start talking about winning multiple races and showing up again and again. Again, it's the shift from the outcome-based focus to a more habit-based focused. That I think is how I would define the difference between the two. The goal is your desired outcome. The system is the collection of daily habits that will get you there. Ultimately, as you just referenced in your question, what we want is for the two to be aligned.

The insight that I had when I realized that setting these goals for myself was not necessarily leading to a result was that you do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. You can have great ambitious incredible goals for yourself and that can be very valuable, but how far you go along that path, how far you rise is determined by the collection of habits to the system that you follow. That's how I think about that distinction.

Dave Asprey:

I love that. Now, I believe that emergent behaviors of systems of micro-decisions actually create almost all outcomes in our lives that we're unaware of 99% of them so that there's a tiny little operating system running inside each cell, making little tiny decisions, quadrillions of times a second and that's why you eat the bagel. That's why you do all the things that you didn't want to do and that habits are a way of interrupting that evolved system that's been evolving for billions of years in life.

When you have a habit, you take yourself out of the decision loop so you don't have to decide and it's just what you do. You basically put those little decisions on autopilot. Does that line of thinking about emergent behaviors from decision making line up with your philosophy of Atomic Habits or is there some difference there?

James Clear:

We're building habits all the time throughout life. If you never read Atomic Habits, if you never think about how to structure a habit, if you never sit down and read an article on it, you're going to build tons of habits anyway. The reason that that is true I think there's this evolved system going on. Habits allow you to solve the problems of life with less energy and effort than you needed previously. The first time that you put a shoe on, it was untied that in a small sense that's a problem that needs to be solved.

At first, your parent or an adult teaches you how to tie the shoestring and do it well and then after you do a hundred or 500 or a thousand times, you can tie your shoes while you're having a conversation or thinking about your to-do list for the day or whatever. You can solve that problem with less energy, effort,

attention than needed before. This is the benefit that habits provide. We use them all the time so that we can solve all these little problems we're facing and then allocate our conscious attention to whatever the task at hand is. The organism that can solve more problems on autopilot is better suited to handle more problems.

If you can handle more problems, you have a greater likelihood of survival. You can handle some in autopilot. You can think about some consciously. Gradually over the long arc of evolution, we have moved more and more toward automating whatever behaviors we can. Habits serve a very central role in our survival. Honestly in our day-to-day life, day-to-day functioning, we don't think about it. They're not unconscious most of the time. Depending on how you measure it, depending on what study you look at, most researchers think automatic behaviors like that account for about 40 to 50% of our daily actions, but I think the true influence of your habits is even greater because those automatic actions often determine what you spend the next chunk of conscious time doing.

For example, you might stand in line for checking out or something and you're staying over 10 seconds, then you automatically habitually pull your phone out to check in. The next 10 minutes, you might be playing a videogame or answering email or checking social media or reading an article. You might be consciously thinking about how to respond to that email and so on, but the habitual action of pulling the phone out of your pocket actually determine like the menu that you're looking at of possible choices of what to do.

That one action was automatic and nonconscious, but it determined what the next chunk of conscious time look like. For that reason, I don't know what we want to put the number at, 70%, 80%, 90%. Even your conscious behaviors are heavily influenced by the nonconscious habits that follow or precede them. In that way, I think habits play a very important role and you're right. They are this evolved behavior that dramatically influences our day-to-day lives.

Dave Asprey:

There are habits like walk in the room and checking for exits and looking for threats. I've been to Urban Escape and Evasion training. After one of Neil Strauss' books called Emergency many years ago, I did that. The guy who's there, they're like, "This is the habit you must have. You have to have situational awareness at all times." I'm like, "Actually, I think I don't want to develop that habit because of the cognitive load compared to other things I do isn't worth it. I just want situational awareness when it's a threatening situation. The rest of time, I'm not going to worry about it." The choice was to not worry.

Then I did a psychological study looking at your ability to recognize unhappy or angry faces and happy faces. I could correctly identify them most of the time, but I was four times faster at identifying the angry faces. My body has a habit, I have no conscious awareness of, of recognizing angry people before happy people. What the F, right? Is that habit or is that a conscious behavior?

James Clear: I would define that and I don't know exactly the study or exactly how it's defined, what you're describing to me, I would define that as an instinct rather than a habit. The way that I would determine the difference is instincts are inherited, habits are learned. If I throw a ball at your face, you duck out of the way or your hand goes up to deflect it. That's an instinct. You didn't learn that through repetition or something. Tying your shoes or brushing your teeth or unplugging the toaster after each use, that's a more careful learned behavior.

Dave Asprey: I'm two or three standard deviations away from normal on that. I did learn it.

James Clear: For the speed with which you can identify an angry face, is that what you mean?

Dave Asprey: Yeah, it's a one behavior.

James Clear: That's interesting. Right. It makes sense to me that you would be able to identify a negative reaction faster than a positive one.

Dave Asprey: Well, everybody can. I have superpowers at that.

James Clear: You could just do it much faster.

Dave Asprey: That's probably because I was bullied. I had to be perfectly honest, so I learned it when someone punched me in the face who looked angry a few times. That's the most likely reason for it.

James Clear: It's fascinating. You're like on high alert for anger.

Dave Asprey: Right. We can measure all sorts of outcomes on parasympathetic versus sympathetic dominance. I measure all that stuff and I've been able to hack a lot of it, but even the habit of walking the room and looking for who is most likely to take me out, I don't have that anymore, but there might have been a time as a very young man, an older teen, you walk in like always be prepared because someone might want to do something bad. I feel like ultimately I had a habit of looking for destruction, right? Changing that, some habits are hard to change than others, but it's also possible to make a habit of like Mr. Rogers talked about. His mom would show him when he was a kid and you see like a fire or a war scene on the news.

He's a little boy and his mom would just say, "Oh, anytime you see a disaster or something bad happen like that, here's what to do. Look for the helpers." She engrained a habit in him, "Oh, notice that there's always someone rushing to help when bad stuff happens." That was a habit that became a part of who he was. I feel like there's a way to go in and change some of what we think are unconscious habits to become more conscious habits and what I want from you as an expert in habits, what are the habits I could do that would make it easier to reprogram the tough stuff, if I'm just putting you on the spot, if you were to solve that problem, anything come into mind?

James Clear: I like to divide habits into two categories. We've got habits of actions. These are the things most of the time we talk about. Do one pushup, write one sentence, meditate for one minute, whatever. Then we have habits of thought. That's what you're talking about here with Mr. Rogers's idea, right? Look for the helpers. I think with habits of thought, they happen so quickly, there's an infinitesimal small space between the prompt, the cue, the situation and your response, what exactly you think that means.

In between those two, in between stimulus and response, we have in my model at least, we have what I call craving or prediction, you need to make a different prediction about what that means. Most people watch a war scene and they predict, "The world is going down to tubes. This is terrible darkness, negativity, etcetera." Mr. Rogers sees that same scene and he predicts, "Where are the helpers? I know they're there. I need to look for them." Essentially, what we're trying to do is to learn who to tell a different story about the same experience, how to have a different internal narrative about the same thing that's happening. Sometimes this happens with an epiphany. I would almost describe his mom telling, I don't know how often she told him or how repetitive it was.

Dave Asprey: It's just a story he repeated. It could just be maybe marketing from him.

James Clear: Yeah, yeah. Sure. Maybe she told him a bunch over and over, but it's possible that maybe she just told him one time and he had a little bit of an epiphany and it stuck with him. Sometimes it can happen to a very powerful story or conversation. Another example I have of this famous executive named John Malone, a CEO of a cable company. He's been a very successful entrepreneur. Early in his career, he focused heavily on cost cutting. Early on, he took over this cable news station in Buffalo, New York and they told him in one of his first days, "Hey, we need to repaint the building. We have to repaint the building." He said, "Okay, only paint the side that faces the street."

That story became a thing that perpetuated throughout the entire company as he rose the ranks over the next 20 or 30 years. It was like, "How much do we care about cost cutting? We care about it so much that we only paint one side of the building." Having something like that, having a good story can perpetuate the habits of thought that you have. In that case, this is the case of this company, an example of this company, every time we're thinking about budget constraints, every time we're thinking about, "Do we buy this or not?" that story can arise. That internal story, that example can be used.

I think having a powerful story, a powerful narrative that you can revisit again and again, that's one way to do it. Having this epiphany is another way to do it, but epiphanies are rare. They're hard to rely upon. I think another way that you can do this is what I would call like a mindset refrain for example. Here are a couple of different examples of it. You could say, "All right, I'm going through my normal day. I have to wake up at 7:00. I have to take my kids to school. I got to finish this report for work and then I have to work out and then I have to drive my kid to practice," or you could say, "I get to wake up at 7:00. I get to

take my kids to school. I get to finish this report. I get to work out and I get to take my kid to practice."

The difference between I have to and I get to is only one word, but it's like a world apart in the sense of how you view the responsibilities and obligations throughout your day. One way of use, everything you face is an obligation, "I have to do this," and the other way, you view everything as an opportunity, "I get to do this." That's one example of a mindset refrain. Another example, I was researching the book and I came across this person who was struggling to build a running habit. Whenever they thought about running, it always felt like a hassle. It felt like, "Argh, God, I have to get up and go run. Maybe it's raining. It's a lot of work."

Instead, they started to say, "Well, instead of telling myself, 'I need to go run,'" they would view running, mindset refrain, as an antidepressant. They would tell themselves each morning, "I get to take my antidepressant now." Just that little mindset refrain allowed them to look at running into a much more positive productive way. Third and final example here, a lot of people get nerves when they have to present to a big group or present a report or a project at work or whatever. You could interpret your nerves as, "I am anxious. I am nervous. This is bad. My palms are sweating, whatever," or you could say, "My heart rate is accelerating and I'm getting excited because I know this is important to me and that's a sign that actually I'm wired and I'm ready to go. I'm energetic and feeling good about this opportunity."

It's the same feeling, but you just give yourself a different way to interpret it. I think in all of these examples, what we're trying to do is to find a way to tell a different internal story when those habits of thought arise so that you can interpret or make a different prediction about what the experiences in your life mean.

Dave Asprey: That's really a helpful advice for people. One of the things I hear and you must here a lot when people are saying, "All right. I wanted to do the meditation in the morning," and Hal Elrod has been on the show, *The Morning Miracle* and a collection of just really good people talking about all these good things you could do, but a lot of people say, "I lack self-control." You write in *Atomic Habits* very specifically about what self-control is and how it ties to habits. Can you share that knowledge with me and with our listeners?

James Clear: I have a chapter called the Secret to Self-Control. The standard narrative around habits and behavior change is well maybe if you really wanted it, then you would do it. "Maybe if I had more discipline or will power or grit, perseverance, then I would stick with it." Certainly, grit and will power and persistence are very important qualities in life. There's an interesting body of self-control and will power research and one of the lessons from it is that the people who exhibit high self-control and the people who exhibit low self-controlling, actually aren't that different. The primary difference is that the people who exhibit high self-control are tempted less frequently.

It is an important quality in life to have persistence and grit and self-control, but the most effective way to increase that ability is to design an environment where you're less tempted, to practice what I call environment design. This can be simple things. Basically, it comes on two things. You want to make the distractions less obvious and you want to increase friction of the negative tasks. Then the inverse is also true for good habits. You want to make the cues of your good habits more obvious. You want to reduce friction, make the path of least resistance.

If you live and work in an environment where the good habit is the path of least resistance and the most obvious choice, well suddenly sticking to good habits becomes a much easier thing to do.

Dave Asprey: What's the role of a coach, a friend, a spouse, a partner of some sort in helping to create extra friction when you're doing this?

James Clear: You're going to have positive peer pressure or a negative peer pressure, right? I have a chapter in the book on social environment. I think it's How Your Friends and Family Influence Your Habits. I knew it was important. I wrote a whole chapter on it, but this is a topic that since the book has come out I think is even more important than I realized which is the influence of the social environment on your habits. From a high level, you can think about yourself as being a member of multiple tribes. Some of the tribes are big, like what it means to be an American or what it means to be a Canadian.

Some of the tribes are small like what it means to be a member of your local CrossFit gym or a neighbor on your street or a volunteer at the elementary school. All of those tribes, large and small, have a set of shared behaviors or common expectations, what we sometimes call social norms for how to act. Take like your neighborhood, that little tribe. Well, why do we mow our lawns and trim our hedges and care about the flowerbeds? To a certain degree, it looks nice and it feels good to have a clean yard, but largely, it feels good to have a clean yard because you don't want to be the neighbor who's judged by everybody else in the neighborhood.

It's actually that social expectation of how to act that initiates and sustains the habit of mowing your lawn every week for 25 years or however long you live there. You go to a job interview and you were a suit and tie or a dress or something nice. There's no reason you have to do that. You could wear a bathing suit, but that would be weird because it would violate the social norms of the situation. The expectations of the other people who are in the tribes that you belong to are probably one of the strongest long-term factors for either getting a habit to stick or feeling like you're fighting an uphill battle and running against friction.

I think the key takeaway here, the summary, the takeaway point that I always give for social norms and for that influence on your habits is you want to join a group where your desired behavior is the normal behavior. If it's normal in that

group, then actually it's going to become very attractive for you to stick with it because every time you do the habit, it's going to be a signal that you belong, that you get it. If you are friends with half a dozen jazz musicians, well suddenly practicing music six nights a week sounds like a pretty normal habit because everybody else around you is doing it too and it's like a sign of, "Hey, I'm in the friend group. I get it."

Whereas meanwhile if you're in a family that nobody plays musical instrument and you want to practice, then you're just the kid who's making noise in the room. You're running against the grain of the habits of the group. That I think is the takeaway here. When the habits match the social norms of the tribe, they're very attractive to stick with because they help you belong. When the habits go against the grain of the social norms of that group, they're very unattractive to stick with because they make you stand out, you don't fit in anymore.

Most people if they have to choose between, "Would I rather have the habits that I want, but I have to be alone or I have to ostracize from the group?" or, "Would I rather have a set of habits that I don't really love but I get to belong?" most people would rather be wrong and with the crowd than right and by themselves. Most people would rather belong than be lonely. In that sense, it requires a lot of courage to branch out and run against the grain of social norm.

It requires courage in two ways, either you have to ignore the norms of the group that you're in which I don't really think is a good long-term strategy because if you want to belong with those people, eventually I think the desire to belong overpowers the desire to improve in the long run if you want to fit in or you need to have the courage to find a new group, to join a new tribe, to show up at the gym on day one or to go to the yoga studio even though you've never been there before or to branch out and go to a conference and say hello to people who are in the industry you want to be in even though you're not there yet. I think it requires a certain amount of bravery to either run against the grain of the social norm or to find a new group.

Dave Asprey:

That's why I created Biohacking and made it a community and a movement, why I didn't trademark the name Biohacking which I could have. No. This seems to be a thing like a community and that's why I started a conference and there's a few thousand people a year would go to it because I wanted the stuff that I do. Yeah, I wear my colored glasses before I go to bed because my sleep quality is measurably higher. It's a habit that actually changed my life, but if I'm the only guy wearing red glasses at a bar, then I'm probably either a rock star or a goofball. Yeah, I'm okay with either one, but that's also because I've just developed that as a habit of giving less craps about whether people like what I'm doing as long as it works for me.

James Clear:

That's a good example though. In your tribe, that's a very normal behavior to do. It's a very understandable one. In the wider world, it doesn't fit in at all. It's the tribe that you're in determines what habits seem normal and attractive and standard.

Dave Asprey: It's interesting when you look at things like antiaging. If you're in a group of older people who are all committed to getting younger, it's shocking how it will be completely something that happens. If you're in a community of people who are committed to sitting in rocking chairs, the outcomes are very predictable that it's an environment variable that drives the habit. I've seen such profound results that was why my latest book is about that sort of stuff.

James Clear: It's massive. You want to join a group that has the desired habits that you want. You can rise together. If you go against the grain of that, man, it's hard to fight that in the long run. You might be able to overpower your environment in the short run, but it's really hard to overpower in the long run.

Dave Asprey: There's even studies about the long-term success of your relationship that I referenced in *Game Changers*, the book before this. It turns out that one of the things that is the primary determinant of whether your relationship would be successful is whether you have the support of your community. If you're in a gay relationship and you're in a community of people who are like, "You can't do that. You're bad." Even if you really love the person you're with, you're not going to have the same chances of success if you're in a community that says, "We support the person you're with and support your relationship."

Here's the question for you though. Is it a decision to join a community of people who will be supported of what you want to be or is it a habit to join communities?

James Clear: I think it's a decision to join. It's a habit to remain to practice the norms of that group. It's a decision to join a new gym and go there. It's a habit to show up and do the workouts of the group each day or each week. It's a habit to go to the social hours continually or whatever. It's a decision to join. It's a habit to remain. I think a powerful thing too about both decisions and habits, they both compound. Your habits compound over time as they start to layer on top of each other and increase over time, but your decisions, if you imagine your life is like a string of decisions, those decisions can compound for you or against you too.

The benefit of making a single good choice is fine, but the benefit of making a string of good choices can be significantly better. You're really trying to string those two together.

Dave Asprey: James, one of the things that you write about in *Atomic Habits* that is right of my alley is dopamine, the neurotransmitter. Can you tell me your take on dopamine and habits and what you share in the book?

James Clear: This is something, dopamine gets brought up a lot with habits and I do think there is a key insight about it that is relevant to the discussion. I'll come back to the in just a second, but before I get to that, I want to add this caveat or I think a big picture view which is dopamine is just one of many neurochemicals that are

involved in the process of performing a habit. It often gets most of the real estate or most of the discussion for whatever reason. I don't know why it's become the most powerful one, but there are many things involved.

Imagine if you have like an apple on a table and we had a separate conversation about picking that apple up and doing like a bicep curl with it. Then you would say, "Actually this region of the brain is involved in doing this and these are the exact pathways that are followed in order to pick the apple up and curl it." You can't actually do any of that unless your muscles are working well in your hand and you have a strong enough grip to do. What if your bicep muscles atrophied and you couldn't actually raise your forearm and so on?

The point I'm getting at here is the body is a complex system. There are many things that are going on. To attribute habits singularly to dopamine I think is a mistake. However, there is one very key insight that I think dopamine reveals or helps showcase. I divide habit into four steps. The first step is the cue, the thing that gets your attention. The second step is the craving which is like the prediction that you make. Then the third step is the response and then finally there's this reward. I want to focus on the first three.

Let's say that you walk into a kitchen and you see a plate of cookies on the counter. Cue, visual cue, the cookie gets your attention. The next thing that happens is that you actually make a prediction in your mind about whether, "Oh, that cookie is tasty, sweet, sugary, enjoyable. I should walk over and get it." It's actually the prediction that leads to the third stage of the response when you walk over and pick it up and take a bite. This is true about pretty much any behavior that we have in life. We think that life is reactive in the sense that, "Things happen and then I do them," but actually life is mostly predictive in the sense that, "Things happens and then I predict what response would be favorable or what action I should take next."

The reason I'm bringing up dopamine here is that what scientists and researchers have found is that dopamine actually spikes before the action is taken, not after. The very first time you do it, it's like the first time you take a bite of a pancake or the first time you taste what chocolate is, it's a surprise. There's no rise in dopamine before that. You take a bite, then boom. There's this big spike, "Oh, wow. That takes good. That's sweet, sugary, tasty, enjoyable. I should biologically market this in my brain as something I should repeat again next time."

The second and continued third, fourth, fifth, a thousandth as you built these habits, the next time it's when you see the chocolate or see the pancake or some of the studies that were done. Gamblers get a spike of dopamine when they see dice, not after they roll them. Cocaine addicts get a spike of dopamine when they see the powder not after they take a hit. It's actually the prediction that is leading to. The reason I bring this up is my four-step model differs from many other habit models in the one sense that most of them have three steps and I inserted this second stage of craving and prediction.

One of the reasons I did that is because of the lessons of these students that showed that there is actually a different brain state going on here. There's this rise of dopamine that signals there's a prediction going on. The higher the spike of dopamine, the greater the craving to perform the behavior. Interestingly, pretty much all of those habit-forming actions, taking meth, taking coke, playing videogames, drug addiction-

Dave Asprey: Watching porn.

James Clear: Yes ... watching porn, drug addictions, almost all those addicted behaviors lead to some of the highest spikes in dopamine possible. I had a graph for this. I decided not to put it in the finished version of the book, but it's crazy to see the amount of spike that happens for watching porn or playing videogames or taking meth compared to say taking a bite of bread which there is at pretty much any behavior and pretty much any action even the smallest thing like choosing to pick up a piece of toast. There's some low-level spike of dopamine there in the sense that you have some motivation to do that. You have some prediction, "Hey, picking up the toast would be tasty for me," but the level of desire, the level of craving and prediction associated with that habit is much lower.

The insight here is that behavior is predictive, not reactive and there are some motivational force which we can at least partially track through the dopamine levels in the brain that is occurring before each action. The higher that spike is, the greater the motivation you feel and the more likely you are to take the response.

Dave Asprey: I love that perspective on dopamine. Are you a believer in dopamine resistance? Have you looked into that?

James Clear: Yeah, I haven't looked into it too much. You're referencing there's all this new stuff in San Francisco talking about taking a dopamine fast or like needing to reset your-

Dave Asprey: Dopamine fasting, I think there's a lot of marketing around that, but there is real research that says when you get incredibly high dopamine spikes, especially around porn and things like that it probably desensitizes your dopamine receptors and it makes a behavior more addictive.

James Clear: Yes, I think that's true from what I've seen.

Dave Asprey: I'm not sure that a dopamine fast is anything more than Vipassana meditation or any other quiet contemplative practice, but good hack on printing there, guys. But I'm [inaudible 01:02:59] you're proven wrong if I see some reason for it. I'm thinking in terms of habit formation, maybe the people who are best at making habits and sticking to them are the ones who are more sensitized to dopamine and some of that is actually genetic.

James Clear:

There are a lot of interesting things to uncover here. I think I have one chapter on the book on the influence of genes and personality on habits and behavior. I think a lot of the science is on the cusps, it's on the edge right now where we're getting some very interesting insights. We don't know everything. There's a lot still to be discovered, specifically with dopamine. Dopamine, actually it often declines with age. The amount of dopamine that you have when you're 40 or when you're 60 is not nearly what you have when you're 25. Many addicts will actually age themselves out of addiction.

There will be addicts in their 20s and 30s, then as they get into their 40s and 50s, they just don't experience the wave of desire as much as they did before. It's easier for them to curtail or even discard those behaviors entirely as they continue to age and their natural dopamine levels drop. There are a lot of touch points here, Parkinson's is another very dopamine-dependent disease. As you start to take drugs to regulate your dopamine levels, if the drugs are out of whack, if the dosage is incorrect, there are some very interesting stories, RadioLab has a fascinating episode with a Parkinson's patient who basically their drugs turned them into a porn addict.

By taking the drugs with the wrong dosage, dopamine levels were all out of whack. Suddenly they had these intense cravings and they'd spent all day looking at porn and wrecked their career and homelife and all types of things. There's a very fine line there. It's definitely clear that there is a strong link between habitual behavior and dopamine driving those actions.

Dave Asprey:

The reason I want to have you on the show, you've got 20 chapters in the book and you talked about genes which is important. In fact, there's a company called the DNA Company who will tell you what your dopamine genes are like and how those are likely to affect your behavior. I was pretty astounded and they're very predictive for me. I thought you've covered not just, "Hey, you're starting to make good habits," which is really important, but you went in to, "All of the things that I am aware of," that you put it on one book which is pretty cool including the genetics and the biological side of it as well as best practices.

It's a body of work worth reading. You can tell you put three to five years into really pulling it together and you can see a slapped-together book versus, "This matters and people are going to read that I better get it right." You nailed it.

James Clear:

Thank you so much. That means a lot. My hope is in the long run it can be the most comprehensive and practical book on the subject. I view this in a weird way like my polished first draft. At some point, 10 years from now or something, I'll do an expanded and updated edition and hopefully keep it on that leading edge, but thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

Dave Asprey:

You're welcome and you're listening to the show. I recommend a good number of books on here. The number of books that I go through and the number of things that I have my team help me with, it is an exceptionally large stack of literature that gets sent to me and that what you just said there, James, around

comprehensive and actionable or practical, that's what makes a book great. There's lots of books that are comprehensive, but it's like reading a medical textbook. It's too out there. What I'm saying, what can you do now based on this new knowledge that now you can grasp and that is a high bar and I think you nailed it. I just want to thank you for your book there. I've got one final question for you which isn't the question long-time listeners are going to expect which is normally, "How long are you going to live here?", but I want to know what is the one bad habit that you have that you have not yet broken, the hardest one?

James Clear:

Oh man, I have a bunch. I say this in all sincerity like my readers and I are peers. We're both going through it together. We're trying to figure it out. We're experimenting. I'm learning this just as much as everybody else is. My publisher had a good line. She said, "We write the books we need." I wrote about it because I wanted to learn about it. I'm still going through it for sure. I'll give you one though I struggled with a lot when I was writing the book which is I guess for lack of a better term, a power down routine.

I have this cardinal rule where I won't cheat myself on sleep. I try to get eight, nine hours a night, especially if I'm training heavy in the gym. I also have this problem though which is I like the work that I do and get the second wind sometimes around like 9 or 10 p.m. I'm like, "I'll just check email or I'll work on this chapter for a little bit." All of a sudden 9 p.m. turns into 1 a.m. It's like, "Where do I make the tradeoff here?" I always choose to get to sleep which I'm glad that I do. If I go to bed at 1:00, that means that my day isn't starting until like 9:00 or 10:00.

I would prefer to get up earlier, but that's one that I still haven't quite kicked. I think as one final useful exercise or point, I think you could do this not just for what I'm struggling with but also for pretty much any habit which is walk back the behavioral chain of what leads to that. You might look at that, I might look at this and say, "Well, I think the real problem is that I'm not sleeping. The problem is I'm going to bed at 1 a.m.," but then you are like, "Well, okay. Why am I up at 1:00? Well, actually I'm up at 1:00 because I'm staying up answering emails. Why am I answer emails? Well, I'm answering emails because I do a bad job of shutting down at 6:00 and I don't have enough of this automated and there's a bunch of emails to answer still."

Then you start to realize like, "Okay, maybe the real answer is we need a better system for processing email and I actually need a better habit of shutting down at 6:00. I don't need a better power down habit. I need a better end-of-workday habit." Walking back that behavioral chain to get the root cause I think could be a very useful way to try to solve some of the problems we all struggle with so much.

Dave Asprey:

I really like that perspective. You look at the system and you're like, "Where is the system broken?" because it's probably not what you notice upstream and to some, almost always upstream.

James Clear: Right.

Dave Asprey: James, your website is jamesclear.com. The book is Atomic Habits. You are one of the two men, the guy you mentioned on the show by the way is BJ Fogg, whose books influenced my wife's ass. Thank you. Thank you very much for that. If you're just catching this end of this interview, you think I'm crazy, I'm talking about her new habit of doing squats while she's blending her Bulletproof. In all seriousness, she actually read your book and it was like, "Oh, I'm doing this." Thank you. Thanks for your work.

James Clear: That's great. Well, tell her thank you and I'm happy to help whatever I can. I'm glad that you all found the book useful. Thanks for the opportunity.

Dave Asprey: If you like today's episode, you know what to do. Leave a review. Pick up a copy of the book. In fact, make it a habit of listening to the very highest ROI podcast in the universe. I would like to say that Bulletproof Radio is there. If it's not, give me a favor, leave me your reviews, send me a note on Instagram or something, tell me what you like to see because if it's not worth your time, I want you to not listen. If it's worth your time, it's a good habit. Have an awesome day.