

## **James Clear – Constructing Habits & Systems**

- Jim: [00:03:25](#) Well, hello, everyone. It's Jim O'Shaughnessy with my colleague Jamie Catherwood for another edition of Infinite Loops. Today, I am super excited to have James Clear, the bestselling author of Atomic Habits, over a million copies sold. That is very rare these days.
- Jim: [00:03:54](#) I write about habits a lot. I saw this quote before I jumped on here from Buffett, which I thought really fit very nicely. It was, "The chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken."
- James Clear: [00:04:16](#) That's a great one. I feel like Buffett's quoting maybe John Dryden. I saw a lot of these quotes as I was researching the book. Regardless of who said it, it is interesting the way that habits weave their way into our lives. We're all building them all the time whether you're thinking about it or not, whether you're conscious of how to design them or not, and because we're all building them and because they're such a central part of our daily lives, I feel like it's important to understand what habit is and how it works and how to adjust it, basically, so that you can be the architect of your habits and not the victim of them.
- James Clear: [00:04:52](#) A lot of us feel like our habits are happening to us. I think we all implicitly know or have felt that habits are a double-edged sword. If you know how to have the right side of the blade working for you, then they can be really powerful, but if you stumble into them, then you often find yourself in a place that you were hoping you were not.
- Jim: [00:05:11](#) Yeah. I couldn't agree more. I've written a lot about habits and processes, et cetera. I have found through the people I've spoken with the latter seems to be the more true. In other words, they don't really think about their habits. They let them accumulate, and then they wonder, "Why haven't I been able to get anything good done here?"
- Jim: [00:05:36](#) I think that's why your book is so important because you really go step-by-step with how to identify a habit, whether it be a good one or a bad one, but more importantly, you talk about this habit loop, a cue, a craving, a response, a reward. Could you talk a little bit about that?

- James Clear: [00:05:55](#) Sure. So, I like to divide a habit into those four stages, and I think if you understand them, then you understand how a habit works, but you also understand where to intervene. It's actionable. You have four different places, four different levers that you could pull.
- James Clear: [00:06:10](#) So, just a real quick example to illustrate the framework. The first stage is the cue, and so that's something your brain notices. So, you're driving on the road and you hear an ambulance come up from behind you. The siren is an auditory cue. That starts the habit of pulling to the side of the road or your phone buzzes in your pocket. That's a physical or a tactical cue. That starts the habit of checking your phone or you walk into the kitchen and you see a plate of cookies on the counter. That's a visual cue, starts the habit of eating a cookie. So, you want to give me any of the senses, but the cue gets your attention. You notice something.
- James Clear: [00:06:42](#) The next step is that I refer to it as the craving, and sometimes we use the word craving to describe habits. You might say, "I'm craving a donut," or "I'm craving a cigarette," but I mean it in an even broader sense, and perhaps the more scientific term to use would be a prediction.
- James Clear: [00:06:59](#) Basically, you see cues all throughout your life and then your brain makes predictions about what they mean. So, for example, you see that plate of cookies, visual cue, and then prediction, those will be sweet, sugary, tasty, enjoyable. It's actually the prediction that your brain makes the meaning that you assign to that cue that motivates you to act. So, the motivation happens in that second stage, and then you walk over and take a bite. That's the response. The third stage is the action that you perform, and then finally, "Oh, it is in fact sweet, sugary, tasty, enjoyable." So, that's the reward.
- James Clear: [00:07:31](#) Now, I do think it's worth mentioning. Not every behavior in life is rewarding, right? Sometimes things have a consequence or a cost. Sometimes they're just neutral and don't mean a whole lot, but if the behavior is not rewarding, if it's not followed by a reward or some positive emotional signal, it's unlikely to become a habit. Your brain needs something positive to associate with that action, so that you're like, "Oh, you should do this again. Next time you see that cue, repeat that same process."
- James Clear: [00:07:58](#) So, essentially, it's interesting, we're on a show called Infinite Loops. Your habits in many ways are an infinite loop. There are feedback loop that you go through again and again. The more

that you cycle through those four stages, the more firmly the behavior gets embedded and the more strongly the habit gets established.

Jim: [00:08:16](#) They show up everywhere. I love to read. So, it's a literary device screwed at all. The idea that oftentimes we are almost prisoners of our habits, right? So, I think what's so important about what you write about is, A, that's not true. You can change your habits. B, you can become aware of what your habits are. I've talked to a lot people who aren't even aware of what ... They don't think about it that way.

Jim: [00:08:53](#) So, how much more important are the concepts that you've written about in the book now with people working from home, with more people probably permanently working from home. Falling in love with boredom is the phrase you used. You want to talk a little bit about that?

James Clear: [00:09:10](#) Yeah. I think habits were critical and important before the pandemic. They have continued to be critical and important during, and they'll probably continue to be so after this if we ever find our way out. They're one of those fundamental pieces of human nature. Jeff Bezos talks about things like what's not going to change. I think the importance of habits is not going to change.

James Clear: [00:09:32](#) That said, anytime the environment changes in a big way, behavior tends to change in a big way. Sometimes that means you have a baby, you move to a new city or you change careers, and those are big changes that tend to lead to changes in habits.

James Clear: [00:09:47](#) The pandemic is something that led to many changes for all of us at the same time. So, if you're working from home, your environment, your context has shifted. Suddenly, your kitchen table is your office or it used to be that the pantry was miles away, now it's right around the corner and you can snack whenever you want. So, the behaviors that are obvious and available and easy, the behaviors that are the path of least of resistance have changed because the environments changed.

James Clear: [00:10:20](#) Often, our behavior follows that path of least resistance. The structure of the environment around us, whether it's the structure of the physical environment, the people that are surrounding you or the digital environment, the icons in your phone or the things that you see, whatever the path of least resistance is, it tends to be followed over time.

James Clear: [00:10:36](#) So, I think one thing that is more important, although the importance of habits in general has remained, one thing that is more important now is asking yourself, one, "What are the behaviors that are most important for me, that would lead me to be productive, et cetera?" and two, "How has the environment around me, the path of least resistance changed now that I'm living in the pandemic and do I need to redesign that environment so that the good habits are more obvious and available and visible and easy to do and the bad habits have higher friction and more steps between me and them?"

Jim: [00:11:13](#) So, have you done that?

James Clear: [00:11:15](#) Yeah. So, a couple other things I want to do, I realized I was going to be spending a lot of time at home. So, I figured, "Well, I might as well use that time somewhat productively. I'd like to read a little bit more."

James Clear: [00:11:25](#) So, I did a couple of different things. I bought a variety of books off my reading list and sprinkled them around the house. So, I've got four or five next to me on my desk here. I have a couple in the coffee table, a couple by my bedside. I also took my phone and I took all the icons off the home screen, moved them to the second screen, and then I took Audible and put it in the home bar so that it would be the first thing that I would see when I'd open up my phone.

James Clear: [00:11:48](#) We had been circling this topic, so I'll just go ahead and mention it explicitly now. We talked through those four stages, cue, craving, response, reward. In order to operationalize that or make it actionable, I have a step for each stage or what I call the four laws of behavior change, and I want these four things to happen, which is obvious, available, visible, easy to see like moving Audible to the home screen. You want to make it attractive. So, in this case, it's me picking books that excite me or that are relevant to what I want to achieve. Those are more attractive to read.

James Clear: [00:12:28](#) The third thing is you want to make it easy. The easier, more convenient, frictionless habits are, the more likely you are to perform them. That's a lot of what we've been talking about just last few, making it the path of least resistance.

James Clear: [00:12:39](#) Then the fourth and final thing is you want to make it satisfying. So, if there's some reward or payoff. In my case, the payoff is related to my job. If I read something interesting, that's usually fuel for interesting thoughts, and so then I can tweet something

out and get a lot of likes or send out an email and people will enjoy it or write a book or whatever.

- James Clear: [00:12:57](#) The point is those four things broadly make it obvious, available, make it attractive, high level framework for how to get a good habit to stick. So, the reading one is just one example of how I've used that during the pandemic.
- Jim: [00:13:12](#) Fascinating. I think you're absolutely right about making things easy. It's just so funny. I've talked to many, many people and the minute you introduce effort into the equation, they're like, "Oh, you mean I got to do that everyday?" or whatever. I always try like you did brilliantly in your book to say, "No, no, no. Here. Just do these things and they will naturally evolve, and you might not even notice yourself doing it."
- Jim: [00:13:47](#) So, you speak to a lot of different groups and organizations. What have you noticed as the most interesting or typical thing that the organization or group might have been habitually doing or made part of their routine without them really noticing it and how receptive have they been to you saying, "Okay. Here's something that you're doing that maybe you don't think about, but maybe we should talk about it"?
- James Clear: [00:14:23](#) Well, so first just to make sure everybody's on the same page, usually when I work with organizations, it's typically in some keynote or speaking capacity. Maybe we're doing workshop or something. So, I don't really do consulting or longterm stuff. So, there's not too much of me troubleshooting and saying, "Hey, you need to change this workflow or something like that."
- James Clear: [00:14:41](#) However, I will say and I think it's a good question. What are some of those interesting things that top performing organizations do or high performing organizations do? I would say one of the surprising ones is having a habit of curation or a habit of editing and refinement.
- James Clear: [00:14:57](#) So, focus is the art of knowing what to ignore. There's a lot of stuff that creeps in, and it doesn't for individuals, but certainly for companies. There's so much baggage and old processes and old thinking and previous tasks that just hang on like dead weight. If you don't have a process of editing and curation, if you don't have a way to refine that and trim the fat and continually revisit this idea of what is essential, what should we be ignoring, what do we need to trim and curtail, then you end up ... It's almost like running with a weighted vest on or something.

James Clear: [00:15:38](#) The organizations that continually do that, continually revisit that and trim those things away, they're always working on the highest leveraged thing. That's really valuable.

James Clear: [00:15:49](#) The other thing is philosophy of trial and error or a habit of experimentation I guess we could call it. You never know where the next great insight is going to come from. So, you have to somehow simultaneously hold these two seemingly opposing thoughts in mind, which is whatever the highest leveraged task is we found so far, whatever the best option is that we know right now, we need to be consistent about it, and build habits around it, and be focused on it, and probably spend, I don't know, say 80% of our effort or 90% of our effort focused on that.

James Clear: [00:16:22](#) Then we also have to be intellectually humble and realize that we don't know where the next great insight is going to come from. Our current business model may not be the ones optimal. So, we have to use the other 10% or 20% to experiment and try things and stumble around and make a lot of mistakes, but occasionally come across a good insight.

James Clear: [00:16:41](#) I feel like if you have those two, calling them habits is maybe being playful with the word because it's not going to be automatic and mindless the way that brushing your teeth is, but if you do, so to speak, have a habit or a routine of editing and curation, trimming away the fat, and experimentation and trial and error, trying new things and always looking for next edge, I think those two things can take you a long way.

Jim: [00:17:07](#) Yeah, I agree. There's a funny story about my mother when I was growing up. Whenever she made ham, she would cut off a portion of the ham. I've always been pretty curious and obnoxious by why, why, why. So, I was no different then.

Jim: [00:17:27](#) "Mom, why do you do that?"

Jim: [00:17:29](#) She goes, she smiled and chuckled through herself and said, "My mom did."

Jim: [00:17:34](#) I went, "But what's the reason?"

Jim: [00:17:37](#) She's like, "I don't know."

Jim: [00:17:42](#) So, she called my aunt, her sister, and I still remember it's Thursday. I was a kid, but I was watching her. She breaks out into just this uproarious laughter and says, "Thank you. Yeah,

yeah, I'll tell him." Hangs up. She looks at me and she goes, "Your grandmother's pan wasn't big enough."

- Jim: [00:18:09](#) I love that story to illustrate the fact that probably more than we even think, right? We do a lot of things because that's where our family did them or because that's what we grew up doing. How do you get people to get into the right frame of mind so that they're constantly engaging with why and/or is this leading to a good result?
- James Clear: [00:18:41](#) It's an interesting question. We are creatures of imitation in a lot of ways. It largely serves us as the human race. I mean, as babies, we imitated how to chew our food and eat and what our parents are doing. As we grow up, we become teenagers and learn how to drive. We imitate stopping at stop signs and stopping at red lights, and that helps keep us safe and all sorts of things.
- James Clear: [00:19:05](#) There's a reason you have to ring doorbells or knock on a door, but you imitate it because you see your parents do that and that's how you appropriately go into someone's house.
- James Clear: [00:19:13](#) So, it usually is the safe strategy, but we end up overapplying it or overfitting it in a lot of ways. It's challenging to question that or figure out when to question and when to imitate. So, I think that's a balance that is largely the quest of a lifetime to a certain degree. It takes a long time to figure that out.
- James Clear: [00:19:35](#) What you realize over time as you develop a little bit of confidence and start questioning things more is that there's ... Even if you're imitating the leaders in your field, there's value in that, but there's also a risk, which is if you copy blindly, then you're also copying mistakes. You're cutting off the end of the ham just because the pan used to be too short, and you don't realize it.
- James Clear: [00:20:00](#) There's another challenge, too, which is that you need to be sure that you're going to be imitating strategies that fit with where you're currently at or the situation you're currently facing. Sometimes the world changes and so the things that previously work don't work anymore.
- James Clear: [00:20:15](#) Also, imagine you're a young basketball player right now. You're, I don't know, 16, 17 years old, and you're looking at LeBron James, and you find out his diet. You're like, "Oh, I'm going to eat like LeBron because then I'll be able to be more likely that I'll follow his habits and strategy."

- James Clear: [00:20:28](#) LeBron is in year 16, 17 of his career. Maybe he has very different goals at this point. He may be trying to lean down so he's lighter in his joints and has better longevity when you should be trying to bulk up. So, imitating even the best in the world can be a dangerous strategy because what got them here isn't necessarily what they're doing right now. So, there's a lot of danger to that.
- James Clear: [00:20:54](#) So, for that reason, I don't know, but this is a strategy that's worked well for me, which is I tend to prefer questions over advice. What I mean by that is when you take advice from people like how to cut the ham or what to eat like LeBron or whatever, advice is fairly brittle in the sense that it only applies to the situation at hand. If the world changes or if your circumstance is a little bit different, even if it's good advice, it doesn't apply anymore.
- James Clear: [00:21:28](#) Questions, however, tend to be fairly anti-fragile, and robust, and flexible in the sense that you can use them in a lot of different situations. So, for example, rather than somebody telling you, "This is how you should live your life," you could spend each morning asking yourself the same question, which is something like, "What do I really want?"
- James Clear: [00:21:49](#) If you answer that question again and again, which I've done this for a couple of weeks in a row now, I've opened up a page, written "What do I really want?" at the top of it, and what's surprising is how useful it is to ask yourself the same question again and again because your answer changes. You get more precise. There are things that you thought were important, but they turn out actually to just be middle steps, and you can cut them out entirely.
- James Clear: [00:22:10](#) Some other questions that I like that you can carry around with you to different environments. One is, "What is the work that keeps working for me after it's done?" So, this is the way to find the highest leveraged task. So, say, for example, you're a teacher and you're teaching a second grade class. The downside is even if you give the world's best lecture, as soon as you stop speaking, the work is no longer working for you, but if you record that lecture and put it on YouTube, that same hour is now suddenly can be viewed by a million people. It can be viewed in a year from now, three years from now.
- James Clear: [00:22:44](#) So, just by recording that, the work is now working for you in a much more meaningful way. So, that's a way to reveal some higher leveraged stuff regardless of what you're working on.

- James Clear: [00:22:54](#) I like the question, "What would a healthy person do?" I have a reader who she ended up losing over 100 pounds, and the way she did it was largely by just carrying that question around with her to different environments throughout her day. She's deciding what to order at lunch, "What would a healthy person order?" She has her next meeting, "Do I walk five blocks or do I take a cab? What would a healthy person do?"
- James Clear: [00:23:16](#) So, by coming back to the ... If you have some good questions that you can come back to again and again, they're very flexible and help you find the right answer for you rather than hoping that, I don't know, someone on high will come down and give you a perfect piece of advice.
- Jim: [00:23:30](#) I love that. I work with some younger people in our field just to give back, right? Ne of the things that I often do is your idea of "What do I want today?" So, what I have them do is I have them write. They're trying to figure out where they want to end up in asset management or investment banking, et cetera. So, what I have them do is very similar to your exercise, which is I tell them, "Every day, write out, and it doesn't have to be perfect or punctuated or anything, but just every day, write out, 'What is my ideal job?'"
- Jim: [00:24:09](#) I do a little trick. I say, "Do it for 30 days and don't read all of them until you get to the last one. Then read them all together. Underline what shows up in almost all of them. Put that in a piece. You're going to get much closer to what you really want as opposed to what you think you want."
- James Clear: [00:24:32](#) It's surprising how often, and I think I fall victim to this, too. So, I've certainly made this error many, many times. People don't really know what they want. They generally know what they want. People want to be happy. We want to be in loving relationships. We want to reduce stress, make more money. We know broadly, but we don't know precisely what we want. What exactly do I want my day to look like? What exactly kind of work would I like to do or people would I like to be surrounded by?
- James Clear: [00:24:58](#) Those answers are going to change over time, which is fine. That's totally natural. You go through different seasons in life. What you want right now is probably different than what you wanted 20 or 30 years earlier in your career. That's totally normal, and it's another reason to keep asking you that question again and again because you need to surface those insights as things change.

- James Clear: [00:25:18](#) I don't know that, and again, myself included, that we do this enough, that we are precise enough about what we really want because the next step that I do after I ask that question is I try to come up with a list of, it doesn't have to be much, but three or four things that I can actionably do to make those things happen.
- James Clear: [00:25:35](#) Last week, I've made one of them happen, which is just surprising to me. It's like, "Man, I wanted this for so long, but just wasn't precise enough about it, and then now I am, and I can suddenly do something about it." Being precise about what you want, working backwards for a magic, working backwards for what the magical outcome would be suddenly gives you more control over your future. It gives you the ability to act on that immediately. That's something that I think we all want, but we just don't take the time to be precise enough about it and unearth where exactly we could apply the effort.
- Jim: [00:26:07](#) It also gives you, I think, paths that you shouldn't go down, right? If you're very careful about what you write out ... My grandfather taught me this thing called premeditating, right? So, he wanted me to premeditate everything, but that also meant thinking about, "Okay. This is what I think I want," and as you premeditate it, if all of a sudden a lot of things show up that say, "Maybe I don't want this," and that's good, that's good, but also you could see paths that seem good as you're writing it, but when you continue asking, you find out they aren't so great.
- Jim: [00:26:47](#) So, I think that that habit alone, if you could just get people to ask a simple question, and it can be whatever is right for that person like, "What would a healthy person do?" If you want to get in better shape, what would somebody who is extremely do in this circumstance?
- Jim: [00:27:07](#) What was the light bulb moment that ... Most people don't just say, "You know what? I'm going to write a book that I think will sell a million copies." What was the light bulb moment that you were like, "I think that this might work"?
- James Clear: [00:27:22](#) Well, I mentioned that I think habits are one of the things that won't change. I do like writing about topics that are timeless and evergreen. I've tried to do that even before I wrote the book. I wrote at jamesclear.com for a few years and have continued to write there, but I started writing online before I wrote the book. Even there, with the articles, I want them to be fairly timeless.

- James Clear: [00:27:44](#) What's funny is that I thought I was too late. At pretty much every stage, I thought I was too late. I thought I was starting a blog and a newsletter too late. This was in 2012. It felt like it had already peaked and I had missed it. I thought I was writing the book about habits too late. I thought all the great habit books have already been written.
- James Clear: [00:28:00](#) So, I don't know. There's something about that that's deceiving. The internet is in something like the second inning right now. It's very early. So, you want to get in the game because there's a lot of fun ahead. I thought I was behind the curve, but actually in retrospect maybe it was still very early.
- James Clear: [00:28:19](#) So, anyway, I wrote on the website. I wrote at jamesclear.com for three years, and I did a new article every Monday and Thursday. It was really that writing habit that ... I mean, it did a couple of things. It honed my skills. It developed my voice. It was a period I mentioned earlier, the importance of trial and error. Tried writing about a lot of different things, but it turns out what I liked writing about the most and what the audience also wanted to hear about, the overlap of that Venn diagram was mostly about habits and strategy and choices and decision making. So, those are the things that I enjoy writing about and people enjoy hearing about. So, I started writing more and more about that.
- James Clear: [00:28:56](#) After about three years, the audience was large enough, and I was looking for the next challenge or the next thing to do, but I had a couple of agents reach out or a publisher to reach out and say, "Hey, if you ever thought about writing a book, we're interested."
- James Clear: [00:29:10](#) Once I heard it from five or six different people, I was like, "Okay. Maybe I should take this more seriously."
- James Clear: [00:29:16](#) What's funny, though, was I never set out to be an author. Even until the book was actually physically published, I didn't really identify as an author. Then I had to like, "Okay. I guess I am because it's physically here." So, yeah, it's been a gradual evolution and a finding your way along the way.
- James Clear: [00:29:35](#) To your point that you just made about how it's often easier to know what you don't want than what you do want, about avoiding the lifestyle that you don't want to have, the way that I think about this question of "What do I really want?" and trying to think about your ideal future is I want to be clear about what I'm trying to achieve, but I want to be very flexible about how I get there.

James Clear: [00:29:57](#) So, the thing that I wanted was control over my time. I wanted to have the opportunity to engage with interesting people. I wanted to spend my time reading and engaging with interesting ideas. What exactly that looked like, whether it was running a newsletter or writing a blog or writing books or, I don't know, a million other things, being a podcaster, I didn't really care too much what the path was as long as I got to that outcome.

James Clear: [00:30:21](#) So, again, there are these opposing truths you need to hold in mind. You need to be both precise and flexible. I think if you can somehow manage that balance, it can really pay off.

Jim: [00:30:31](#) That's really great advice because I often will talk to people and as far as the precise of being finite, "Well, what do you want?"

Jim: [00:30:41](#) "I want to be rich."

Jim: [00:30:42](#) "Well, what do you mean rich?"

Jim: [00:30:44](#) "I want \$10 million in cash."

Jim: [00:30:46](#) So, I walk them through a series of questions where it turns out just as you've said. They don't want \$10 million in cash. They want freedom. They want flexibility. They want the ability to control their own destiny. Those are very different things, right?

James Clear: [00:31:03](#) You could skip an awful lot. You could spend 35, 40, 50 years trying to make \$10 million in cash or you could come up with a lifestyle that gives you that in two years if you find the right job and organize things the right way.

Jim: [00:31:14](#) There you go. Yeah.

James Clear: [00:31:15](#) You can really save yourself a lot of time if you're very precise about what you're actually trying to achieve.

Jim: [00:31:20](#) Yeah. The only way to get there is either to have somebody else ask you that question or for you to get in that habit of asking yourself that question. I luckily got in that habit. I've been journaling since I was 19 years old. It's very helpful because if you can't write it out what you think and mean, you don't know what you think and mean. So, I've always been an advocate for that.

James Clear: [00:31:49](#) Yeah. Writing is an antidote to confusion. If you can't write it out, you're still confused, and along the way, you figure it out.

Writing is hard because thinking clearly is hard. So, it takes you a while to get through it and get the ideas sorted out.

Jim: [00:32:05](#) Exactly true. Some people who have not written or don't like the idea of writing, they can't get that. I've demonstrated it with people time and again. I say, "Well, tell me something you believe," and they would tell me, "Whatever."

Jim: [00:32:21](#) Then I'd say, "No. Write it out."

Jim: [00:32:23](#) They would sit there and you can see the frustration growing in their face. We're all the same. It's not like I'm this great clear thinker. It's that I'm in the habit of writing it out until I can understand it and make other people understand it.

Jim: [00:32:40](#) Have you ever thought right now, your book's been out for a while, and you've talked to a lot of people, millions of people have read it, if you could go back and change any aspect of the book, what would it be? Would you remove a section, add a one?

James Clear: [00:32:55](#) So, there's one topic that, I think it's chapter 10. It's about the influence of family and friends on your habits. So, it's about the influence of the social environment. I knew it was at least somewhat important, which is why I wrote a chapter on it, but it's the one thing that since the book has come out the importance of the social environment on habits and behaviors is it's even more important than I realized. So, I would add more on that if I could.

James Clear: [00:33:23](#) Just to give you the short summary of where my thinking is at on it right now and the punchline or takeaway is that we are all part of multiple tribes. Some of them are really big like what it means to be an American or what it means to be French. Some of them are small like what it means to be a member of your local crossfit gym or a neighbor on your street.

James Clear: [00:33:43](#) All of these groups, large and small, they have a set of shared norms, a set of shared social expectations for how to act. If there's anything that gets habits to stick for the long run, it's the expectations of the people in your tribe.

James Clear: [00:33:58](#) Say, you move into a new neighborhood, you walk outside on a Tuesday night and you see your neighbor mowing their grass. You think, "Oh, I need to mow the lawn." You may stick to that habit for the next 30 year or however long you live in that

house. We wish we could have that level of consistency with our other habits.

James Clear: [00:34:19](#) The main reason that you do it partially it feels good to have a clean lawn, but mostly you do it because you don't want to be judged by the other neighbors in the neighborhood for being the sloppy one or having an unkept house.

James Clear: [00:34:32](#) There's so many behaviors that are like that, that we do it because the people around us expect us to do it. If you really want a habit to stick, I think the punchline is you want to join a group, to join a tribe where your desired behavior is the normal behavior because if it's normal in that group, it's going to be attractive for you to stick with it because it becomes a signal to the other people, "Hey, I get it. I fit in. I'm part of this."

James Clear: [00:35:01](#) You could get a job on Wall Street and wear a bathing suit, but that would be weird. It doesn't prevent you from doing the the job, but it does violate every social norm that is part of that group. So, all of these choices, what we wear, how we act, the things we do are signals to the people around us.

James Clear: [00:35:20](#) If people have to choose between "I get to have the habits that I want to have, but I'm cast out, I don't fit in with the crowd," or "I have habits that I don't really love, but I fit in and I belong," most people will choose belonging over loneliness. It's one of the deepest needs that we all have. Most people, the power to belong will overpower the desire to improve. The desire to belong will overpower the desire to improve.

Jamie: [00:35:47](#) What would you ... Sorry. Go ahead.

James Clear: [00:35:50](#) So, with that in mind, I think it's very important to choose or if you can't obviously find it, create tribes where your desired behavior is the normal behavior. You don't have to choose between the two. You don't have to choose belonging or improvement, but you do need to be intentional or careful about creating a group of people that have that desired behavior.

James Clear: [00:36:17](#) I think that's probably the one thing I would add more on to the book because I feel like it's so important to get it to stick. If you want a habit to last for decades, that's one of the key things that will get it to happen.

Jamie: [00:36:29](#) Was there something that made you change your view on how important it was since publishing it and now? Was there that

moment or it's just something you thought about more since publishing?

James Clear: [00:36:38](#) Yeah. I think it's mostly just I've thought about it more. A lot of the things that I was thinking about when I was writing the book were, "How do you get a habit started? How do you get off square one? How do you get going?" I think Atomic Habits is great for that. There are a variety of strategies in the book that talk about how to be consistent for the long run.

James Clear: [00:36:58](#) I started toying with that idea of, "Why does some habits last for ... Some people will literally go to church every Sunday for 55 years of their life. Why is that? That's interesting." You start to realize whether it's the mowing your lawn example or this religious example. It's often social expectation. They see their friends at church. Their neighbors expect them to be there, whatever it is. So, there are a lot of things built into that, but I think in many different areas, habits that are very long lasting tend to have a really strong social ties.

Jim: [00:37:29](#) I've done a lot of studying of mimetic behavior. It is, as you've mentioned earlier, it is, generally speaking, not a bad heuristic, right? I mean, you see someone else doing it, not going to steer you to wrong unless you're watching somebody who's really insane.

James Clear: [00:37:52](#) It's also very fast. If you have to relearn everything on your own, I mean, the fact that we can inherent and imitate the discoveries of our ancestors allows human civilization to move forward. You don't have to rediscover the lessons of life all on your own, but as you're, I think, alluding to and getting to, it doesn't work in all cases and there can be a real edge in not imitating the people around you.

Jim: [00:38:16](#) So, we had Rory Sutherland, the fellow who wrote the book about-

James Clear: [00:38:25](#) Yeah. Alchemy?

Jim: [00:38:26](#) Alchemy, yup. He made a comment during our session, which I thought was really interesting. It has to do with this whole idea of fitting in with your group, right? He made the comment that sometimes people who are very high in a social hierarchy will intentionally dress like people three wrongs down or do some kinds of things.

- Jim: [00:38:54](#) I had an exchange with somebody on Twitter earlier, and they were talking about this idea of power. The fellow said, "Well, the people who are wearing the suits versus the people in the polos, you know who's more powerful."
- Jim: [00:39:38](#) So, what do you think about that? I mean, what do you think about belonging versus being just slightly a little bit different? I mean, that can be a dangerous strategy in certain regards, but it could also be one that is at least fun.
- James Clear: [00:39:54](#) Well, I think Munger has some quote, which I'm definitely paraphrasing here. I can't remember exactly how I phrased it, but it's something like, "I'm very plain and ordinary in my dress, so that I can be violent and original in my thinking and strategy," and so on.
- James Clear: [00:40:09](#) I think there's probably another hidden lesson in there, which is you got to imitate enough and go along with the flow of the crowd enough to fit in and get along with people. I mean, social skills are an important part of life, and social expectations are directly related to that.
- James Clear: [00:40:26](#) So, you do want to knock on the front door before you barge into someone's house. You do want to stop at stop signs. You do want to say please and thank you. Yes, you're imitating to a certain degree, but you're also functioning well in the world. So, I think the key thing is it's very helpful to be interesting and different and go against the grain, but you need to pick your spots and be clear about, "What are good social skills to have and allow me to function well in society and get along with people and be likable, and what are the one or two or three areas where this is where I try to make my mark and be a little bit different?"
- James Clear: [00:41:06](#) There's your point about that Rory said about someone really high status trying to lower their status. There's a book called Impro by Keith Johnstone, which is about acting in the theater and improvisation. So, it doesn't like it would fit, but there's a really interesting chapter in there where he talks about raising and lowering status.
- James Clear: [00:41:23](#) It happens all the time. He has some example, somewhat. It goes something like this, which is somebody comes in and they're like, "Oh, I just had to see the doctor because I've had this head cold recently." That's them trying to actually elevate their status a little bit and get praise or pity from somebody else. We all know people like this.

- James Clear: [00:41:44](#) Somebody else might say, "Oh, well, you wouldn't believe what I have. My hip has been bothering me for weeks now." So, now suddenly, they're playing the status game. They're actually trying to one-up them. Then there are other times where people do the dressing thing, and it's like, "Actually, I don't want to come in here and roll in as if I'm worth \$100 million. I would have knock myself down a couple of pegs."
- James Clear: [00:42:03](#) So, there's all this interesting raising and lowering of status that goes on. I think people do it in both directions but with the same goal, which is to be likable. You don't want to come across the wrong way to people. So, people who are very advantaged in some way may try to knock themselves down a little bit to be more likable, and people who are disadvantaged in some way may try to build themselves up to be more likable.
- James Clear: [00:42:33](#) Ultimately, it's about getting along well with others. So, I think you see that status game biological and evolutionary. It's funny that we say so often, "Don't care what others think of you," because that's only, again, I think the key question is when should you not care what others think of you because we actually all want others to think very well of us because, generally, if people have good opinions of you, it helps you in life.
- James Clear: [00:43:02](#) So, in that sense, what other people think of you is actually quite important. It's just, again, knowing when to pick your spots and when to go against the grain. So, there's definitely a ... I'm starting to notice that more of this theme has come as we've talked a little bit, which is you have these opposing truths, you both want to care what others think of you and not care, but the key thing is not that they're both true all the time. It's when are they true. So, it's knowing when to use ideas. That is where the real art and dance of life integrates itself and status is definitely one of those areas.
- Jim: [00:43:36](#) It's also one of the most playful and used of the comedic devices, right? I'm thinking of Monty Python, where they're all sitting around and one says, "Well, I didn't have a home at all. I was raised on the roadside."
- Jamie: [00:43:55](#) I'm literally just thinking of that scene.
- Jim: [00:43:59](#) "I was raised at the bottom of a well."
- Jim: [00:44:02](#) "Oh, wow! Aren't you fancy?"

Jim: [00:44:05](#) They get it to the point where the last guy was consistently beat up all of his life and [crosstalk 00:44:14] these guys are trying to one-up each other.

Jim: [00:45:51](#) Tell me a little bit about your collegiate athletic career and how it influenced your habit formations.

James Clear: [00:46:03](#) Yeah. So, before I was born, my dad played professional baseball. I played in the minor leagues for the St. Louis Cardinals. So, throughout my childhood, sports played an important part of my definitely. I, of course, wanted to be a baseball player like him. In high school, I suffered a really serious injury. I was hit in the face with a baseball bat. It was an accident, but I had to be air-carried to the hospital. I was intubated, couldn't breathe on my own.

James Clear: [00:46:29](#) The fallout from that was long and extensive. I had months of physical therapy, couldn't drive a car for the next nine months. All I really wanted was to get back on the baseball field, but my return to baseball was not smooth at all. I got cut from the team the next year. I barely got to play the year after that. I did end up weaseling my way onto a college team and came off the bench my freshman year, a starter in my sophomore year. I was a team captain my junior year, and then senior year, I made the Academic All-America team, which is about 30 players around the country or so.

James Clear: [00:47:03](#) Actually, a funny little story, if anybody is a San Francisco Giants fan, Buster Posey was on that same All-America team. Later, he was MVP of the National League, and I was starting a blog. So, slightly different trajectories, but we were together for that moment.

James Clear: [00:47:22](#) Anyway, the way that it influenced my thoughts and experiences with habits is that that was the time in my life, the first major time when I was forced to start small. My first physical therapy session, I was practicing basic motor patterns like walking in a straight line. Once I eventually recovered and got back into the swing of things, as any college athlete would tell you practice and habits and routine is a big part of developing your skills and progressing.

James Clear: [00:47:49](#) So, I think I really came in to habits as a practitioner before I came in to them as a writer or a researcher. So, I learned a lot through that experience. I didn't have a language for it at the time. I wouldn't have said, for example, "Oh, I'm trying to get 1% better each day." That is what I was doing, but it wasn't until a couple of years later when I started writing about habits and

eventually worked on the book that I was able to put words to what that experience was like and better explain what I was doing to build good habits throughout that period, but it was definitely an important time for me to actually try the ideas out in real life.

- Jim: [00:48:25](#) So, I've told your 1% better everyday to some mathematician friends of mine, and they will quickly get a look on their face and say, "Well, you're going to be Superman in 30 days." So, what you need to explain, I'll let you explain it, it's not that it's not going to compound if you get 1%. It is going to compound, but it's not going to compound in a linear fashion.
- James Clear: [00:48:56](#) Your habits are not a mathematical formula, right? Real life is not exactly like compound interest, but as a philosophy, I think it's a great one. As a mode of operation for daily life, there are almost always ways to get 1% better each day. There are all kinds of opportunities to improve. So, looking for those small advantages, those little edges, those ways that you can find some way to improve in a meaningful way today, I think that's a great idea to carry around with you.
- James Clear: [00:49:25](#) The other thing is that your habits don't compound, again, in some mathematical way, but they do advance more than just a linear fashion. So, let's say, for example, at work, the person who always gets one additional task on each day or always makes one extra sales call, on any given day, that doesn't really count for a whole lot. Over the course of their career, yeah, that can actually be quite meaningful or the person who has 10 extra minutes to read each day.
- James Clear: [00:49:58](#) Well, reading for 10 extra minutes is not going to make you a genius, but over 20 or 30 or 40 years, that can lead to some really significant insights, particularly when you start to finish more and more books and you do get this compounding or a network effect kind of thing where each book is like a node in the network and the more that you add another book to it, you're not just gaining the insights of that one new book, you're also gaining a new perspective on every other book that you've read.
- James Clear: [00:50:27](#) This is even more true when thinking about your past experiences. Your personal history is fixed. You cannot change the events of your past, but your memory is flexible. You can change the way you interpret your past. Reading new ideas, having new conversations, going through new books, they can give you a new lens through which to look on your old experiences. So, suddenly, your life can take on a new meaning.

That to me seems like a much greater leap than just a linear improvement from reading one more book.

James Clear: [00:50:58](#) So, in that way, the effects of your habits, again, it's not a linear curve where you just read one more book and you step up one more level. Early on, as you're performing the habit, you're at the bottom of that compound interest curve. You don't see a whole lot of gains. This is a hallmark of any compounding process, which is that the greatest returns are delayed. It's not until later that you get into that hockey stick growth.

James Clear: [00:51:24](#) So, again, your habits are not a mathematical formula, but the greatest results of them are delayed. It is by sticking with it and showing up again and again that suddenly you're surprised by how meaningful it is and how big of a difference it's made, whether it's in your productivity or your knowledge or your health or whatever. So, in that way, I do think the idea of getting 1% better each day is a very good explanation of what habits are and how they work.

Jim: [00:51:51](#) Yeah. It's the time preference that bedevils me when I'm trying to get people to understand that. We all axiomatically have a time preference for now, right? "I want that now," and we violate every economic rule in the book when we choose this now rather than that year from now.

Jim: [00:52:17](#) It's a challenge for me because you're absolutely right. You can go along doing the same thing and it just doesn't feel any different at all. Then that hockey stick kicks in. I've been fortunate to have that happen in my own life several times, but how do you explain to people who genuinely really do want to get better and really do want to improve their habits? Do you talk about that whole time preference?

James Clear: [00:52:50](#) Yeah. So, I think without maybe realizing or without using the same words, you're basically explaining why bad habits tend to form readily and easily and why good habits are hard to build, which is we have this time preference for immediate rewards and pretty much every behavior in life produces multiple outcomes across time. So, broadly speaking, let's just call it an immediate outcome and an ultimate outcome.

James Clear: [00:53:15](#) For your bad habits, 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 that is unfavorable or even something like smoking a cigarette. Smoking, the immediate outcome might be you socialize with friends outside the office or you curb your

nicotine craving. It's only the ultimate outcome that is unfavorable.

- James Clear: [00:53:38](#) With good habits, though, it's often the reverse. So, what is the immediate outcome of going to the gym for the first week? Not a whole lot. Your body looks the same in the mirror at the end of the night. The scale hasn't really changed. If anything, you're sore.
- Jim: [00:53:51](#) Exactly. Might even be [crosstalk 00:53:53]
- James Clear: [00:53:53](#) Yeah, yeah. Exactly. It's actually a cost upfront. It's only two or three or 10 years later that you get the ultimate outcome. That gap between immediate outcome and ultimate outcome, which I sometimes would describe by saying the cost of your good habits is in the present. The cost of your bad habits is in the future.
- Jim: [00:54:12](#) That's right.
- James Clear: [00:54:14](#) It's that misalignment between the immediate reward and the ultimately reward that makes it so easy for us to build bad habits because we have this immediate time preference, and sometimes difficult to build good ones. So, you need to find a way to get that preference to work for you. That's largely the game of building good habits and breaking bad ones is finding ways to pull the longterm rewards of your good habits into the present moment.
- James Clear: [00:54:42](#) So, you feel good right now and then you want to repeat it, and finding a way to pull the longterm consequences of your bad habits into the present moment, so you feel a bit of pain right now and you want to avoid it. So, that's a deep strategy and a way to do that or an explanation of that time preference and now it connects to habits.
- James Clear: [00:55:01](#) The other thing that came up while you were talking, which I think you mentioned that you've experienced that slow, slow, slow and then you get the hockey stick growth. I experienced it with Atomic Habits. I wrote these articles on my site and build up the audience for two, three, four, five years, and then suddenly, I released a book and sells millions of copies.
- James Clear: [00:55:20](#) It was like, "Where did that come from?"
- James Clear: [00:55:22](#) It really was the writing was building up the potential energy that was going to be released later. I think that this is something

that we all experience in life with habits, but it's worth mentioning because a lot of people quit too early. There's a quote that hangs in the San Antonio Spurs locker rooms. They won five NBA championships. It says something to the effect of, "Whenever I feel like quitting, whenever I feel like giving up, I think about the stonecutter who takes his hammer and bangs on the rock 100 times without it splitting in two, and at the 101st blow, it cracks open, and I know that it wasn't the 101st that did it, but all the hundred that came before."

James Clear: [00:56:03](#) Your habits are exactly like that, right? It wasn't the last article that I wrote that sold a million copies. It was all the ones that came before. It wasn't the last workout that made you fit. It was all the ones that came before. It wasn't the last sentence that finished the novel. It was all the ones that came before.

James Clear: [00:56:18](#) That work that you're putting in, if you've worked on a habit for three months and you don't have the results you want yet or six months and you don't have the results you want yet, that work is not being wasted. It's just being stored. It's like potential energy that's building up and gradually accumulating to be released at some later time when you hit that hockey stick growth curve.

James Clear: [00:56:39](#) So, again, habits don't exactly work like that mathematical formula or that graph, but all of those experiences I think we've all had them in various ways, and it helps explain that longterm payoff and that low time preference and maybe why we should be a little more longterm thinking and longterm focused, particularly with our habits, but I think generally in life as well.

Jim: [00:57:03](#) Yeah. I-

Jamie: [00:57:04](#) One thing I wanted to ask you about was how you navigate everything you've talked about and social media because as someone who posts content and writes and I write as well and posts stuff on Twitter and spend too much time on Twitter, I don't know if you're the same-

Jim: [00:57:17](#) Of course.

Jamie: [00:57:18](#) ... but I know you have a social media presence. I feel like that's the easiest way to fall victim to bad habits because it's just so easy and right there and it's so easy to spend too much time on. I feel like most people would say they want to spend less time on social media, what level of enjoyment they get out of it. So, how do you design systems and cues to keep yourself from also

getting into that trap of getting obsessed with likes and engagement and that kind of stuff, which I know a lot of people fall victim to?

James Clear: [00:57:46](#) Yeah. So, two different questions there. The likes and engagement one is a hard one answer. If you want, we can come back to that, but I'll focus on the first part for now. So, let me give you two or three things that I do. So, the first one that I've been doing for the last year or two is I leave my phone in another room until lunch each day. It's a small thing, but it really works well for me because I can spend the morning working on my own agenda and not responding to everybody else's or putting out fires or looking at texts or, usually, browsing Twitter.

James Clear: [00:58:20](#) So, that little bit of separation, what's interesting to me about this, and this is I think true about a lot of habits and environment design changes like that like leaving your phone in another room is that if I have it next to me, I'm like everybody else. I'll check it every three minutes just because it's there.

James Clear: [00:58:38](#) I have a home office. So, if I leave it in another room, it's only 30 seconds away, it's not far away, but I never go get it and so I'm like, "Well, did I want it or not?" In the one sense, I wanted it bad enough to check it every three minutes when it was next to me, but I never wanted it so bad that I would work 30 seconds to go get it.

James Clear: [00:58:56](#) It's surprising how often habits will do that. Same thing happened with me with beer. If I buy a six pack of beer and I put it in the front of the fridge where I can see it, I'll drink one every night just because it's there, but if I tuck it down at the bottom and it's underneath and it's in the back shelf and I got to bend down to see it, and I can't really see it right away, sometimes it will sit there for a month before I remember that I even bought it. So, there is definitely something to making your bad habits invisible, to making it less likely for you to see it or fall into that. So, that's one thing I do.

James Clear: [00:59:27](#) The second thing that I do is social media can be incredibly powerful. Well, it is incredibly powerful, whether you do this or not, but essentially, when you're [inaudible 00:59:37] making the people to fire their own little city and you need to be very careful about who you let in to your city.

James Clear: [00:59:49](#) This is particularly true the more time that you spend on social media because pretty much every thought that we have is downstream from what we consume. There are very few

thoughts that just arise on their own. I mean, even if you're sitting in the middle of the woods and no one is around you, it may be the rustling of the leaves or a squirrel on a branch or the sunlight coming through and the rays that spark like it's observing something, consuming something that sparks the idea.

James Clear: [01:00:17](#) So, my point that I'm getting to is the people that you choose to follow are crafting your information flow, and that also means they're crafting your thought flow. You need to be very careful about who those people are. So, I have spent what probably seems like an unreasonable amount of time curating my Twitter feed. I would guess that in all likelihood, it's probably over 100 hours at this point that I've spent deciding who to follow, looking at who people that I like who do they follow, and then what about those accounts, should I add those or not.

James Clear: [01:00:48](#) Recently, I've added some more. I do this bulking and cutting thing, where I'll add a bunch and see how that goes, then I'll go back and I'll cut, and then I'll do it all over again. The end result of doing that, of spending an unreasonable amount of time on that is that, yeah, that was a big investment to spend 100 hours figuring that out, but I probably spend an hour or two looking at that feed everyday. So, that pays off in a very big way to make sure that you're getting good ideas.

James Clear: [01:01:18](#) So, for me, Twitter started to feel like less of a burden. I judge myself less for it because the people that I follow are really only people that are giving me high value, high signal to noise. So, that means I'm getting a lot of good thoughts out of it. I would say almost daily I get at least a handful of thoughts that I take notes on, write ideas about, and could be the spark for something else that I work on or something I want to read or whatever.

James Clear: [01:01:44](#) So, heavy curation and refinement I think is the second thing that I would add. Then this third one, and it applies to social media, but it's not directly about social media, which is the question to ask I think is, what do you do when you have nothing to do or what do you do when no one is expecting something of you?

James Clear: [01:02:03](#) So, there are a lot of little interstitial moments throughout the day. You are watching television show and a commercial break comes on. You got three or four minutes there or you're waiting in line at the store and you got three or four minutes there or your next Zoom call is in seven minutes, and so you got a little gap while you wait for that to start.

- James Clear: [01:02:24](#) Now, most of the time, I think most people, what they do with that extra space when no one is expecting anything of them, when they don't have anything to do is they check their phone. Largely, they browse social media. So, what I've tried to do and I don't do this perfectly, but I'm trying to get better at it is just pick one productive behavior that can be your default for what you do when you don't have anything to do.
- James Clear: [01:02:46](#) So, if you want to get in shape, maybe it's doing 10 burpees or maybe it's doing a set of pushups or whatever. Every time you got that seven-minute gap or that three-minute gap, you drop down and you do a set or in my case, the thing that I've chosen right now is I'm working on my second book. So, I always keep that Google Doc open and whenever I have an extra few minutes, I jump in and I do something with it.
- James Clear: [01:03:09](#) Maybe I only edit one sentence, maybe I just work on one paragraph, but those seven minutes and four minutes here and eight minutes there, they add up in a fairly significant way. I think it's important to just have one thing that's always the default, so you don't have to think about, "What am I going to do?" You just always go back to the same thing, but that alone, one plant crowding out another. It naturally crowds out your social media habit because you're spending time on a more productive thing and there's only so many minutes in a day. So, those are fewer minutes for social. So, anyway, those are some of the things I've done to try to both make social more valuable and make sure that it's not taking up too much space in my day.
- Jamie: [01:03:54](#) The last one is really interesting, to come up with a default.
- Jim: [01:03:56](#) Yeah. You'll have me to tell you to get back to work, Jamie. James, you wrote an article I'd like you to talk about a little bit because it's something that I really believe. The title is Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds. Will you talk about that a bit?
- James Clear: [01:04:15](#) So, I came across this idea at some point. I can't even remember where I first write it. I feel like it was something Steven Pinker said or some quote there, but the idea was that, well, first, I should back up. If you consider yourself to be a rational person, if you consider yourself to be someone who likes to wrestle with the facts and try to get things right, then you often find yourself wondering, "Why are people acting this way? Why are they being so emotional? Why are they ignoring the facts of the situation?"
- James Clear: [01:04:45](#) That's an experience I think all of us have had, and it can be maddening and frustrating sometimes. Other times, it's just

confusing and you're like, "I don't ..." Sometimes you feel like the crazy one. You're like, "Am I the one who's not seeing the world in the right way?"

- James Clear: [01:04:57](#) So, I had felt like that in a variety of different situations, particularly it seems like in a lot of political discussions I often feel that way. Anyway, I came across this idea that, actually, the reason that people believe things is not necessarily because they are true. That sounds somewhat surprising when you first hear it because you're like, "Well, doesn't truth help? Wouldn't that help you operate better in the world?"
- James Clear: [01:05:23](#) To a certain degree, yes. You do need to have at least some reasonably accurate view of reality. If you think that the road is actually five feet to the left, but it's not, well, you may get hit by a car because of that. So, there is a certain amount of truth that you need to have in order to survive and operate well both physically survive, but also socially survive, get along with other people, and so on.
- James Clear: [01:05:48](#) However, within that, there's a wide latitude for you to believe other things that aren't necessarily true, but they don't hurt in the way that you would think. The reason comes back to the social piece that we were talking about earlier. The reason is that people will believe things that are not factually true if they're still socially accurate or socially true.
- James Clear: [01:06:11](#) What I mean by that is holding this belief, it may not be factually true in the sense that it doesn't agree with science or how the laws of the universe works, but it might be very true that it is also what your friends believe or it's what the people that you work with believe or it's how your family operates.
- James Clear: [01:06:29](#) So, holding that belief allows you to get along better with the people that you're around and the people that you work with and so on. For that reason, you will often see people doing very different things than what you would expect.
- James Clear: [01:06:44](#) There's an element of this that you could say it aligns directly with incentives. Essentially, the incentive to be accepted by the people around you or the incentive to keep your job is higher than the incentive to just be true for the sake of being true, to understand the facts for the sake of the facts.
- James Clear: [01:07:06](#) I think once you understand that, it gives you a little bit more maybe grace with people. It allows you to be a little bit kinder because you realize why they might believe something.

- James Clear: [01:07:16](#) Somebody who maybe they have very strong views that climate change is a hoax and they don't think pollution is a problem, but then you come to find out that they work at the only factory in town, and if that factory left, not only would they be out of work, but all their friends would be out of work.
- James Clear: [01:07:32](#) You're like, "Okay. Which incentive is more important to them? Is it more important that they keep their job and are able to retire in 10 years or is it more important that in 20 years there's going to be severe pollution and the environment will be ruined or in 200 years?" That, again, comes back to that time preference piece that we're talking about.
- James Clear: [01:07:51](#) So, it's very likely that people will believe things that are not factually true if they serve them in another way or in a more immediate way. I think the way that I ultimately came down on this in the article, the punchline that I had is that you want to be ... A lot of people will state these arguments, open up these conversations, and what they want to do is they want to prove that they're right. They want to show the situation, that this is how it actually works.
- James Clear: [01:08:25](#) In fact, I think we're often better served by being kind first and by being right later because the reason that people believe those things right now is not because of the facts. The reason they believe it is because of their friends or because of the other incentives that they have.
- James Clear: [01:08:39](#) So, your best chance is actually to become their friend and then you can start to talk about the things that maybe you disagree on, but if you just come in guns blazing and try to change their mind with the facts, it usually runs up against a very harsh reality. So, yeah, anyway, it was a very interesting article to write. I feel like I learned a lot through it.
- James Clear: [01:08:59](#) It's a very deep topic, and there's a lot that's going on there, but I think it's definitely true that people do not believe things only because they're true. There are many other reasons to hold a belief.
- Jim: [01:09:13](#) Yeah. I actually write about that a lot and have thought about it a lot. I love your answer about it's better to be kind than to eventually be right, right? People who need to be right in my opinion are missing the boat on a lot of really great relationships that they could have, and they're missing the ability to be helpful to people. I think that ties into ego.

- James Clear: [01:09:44](#) That ties into habits, too. I mean, I mentioned that the fourth stage of habits is the reward. The opposite of that is the consequence or cost or a punishment. To have somebody come in and tell you, "Your belief system is wrong. What you think is inaccurate," nobody likes to feel bad. Nobody likes to feel punished. So, there's no reason for them to want to repeat that experience, and if you want to have it to be repeated, if you want a behavior to be repeated, it needs to be rewarding in some way. That is not a very rewarding experience to be reprimanded for what you believe.
- James Clear: [01:10:17](#) So, I think finding a way to ... and in many ways, that's a super power to be able to frame a conversation, to be able to frame bad news in a good way or to be able to deliver a dissenting opinion in a way that doesn't feel like criticism.
- James Clear: [01:10:31](#) That's the social super power because people want to feel good and now you're finding a way to conduct a conversation with them without making them feel bad. I think that skill many of us, myself included, would probably be much better served if we were better at that skill.
- Jim: [01:10:47](#) Yeah. I totally agree. Well, this has been absolutely fascinating, James. We always end with two questions for our guests that are kind of fun. They are these. Let's assume that, theoretically, you are made emperor of the world for a day and you can do promulgate two things that people are going to go along with. You can't be evil. You can't hurt anybody, but what would the two things that you would promulgate and have people go along with that you think would vastly or even slightly improve the world, society, humanity?
- James Clear: [01:11:34](#) Okay. I think the first one would be some form of everybody has to exercise each day. You can choose whatever form of that you want, but I think that's some variance of that. Then I think the second one, I'm trying to figure out the best way to phrase this so that it would make a good ruling, but something that requires the incentives to be aligned immediately.
- James Clear: [01:12:01](#) So, for example, if you're a manufacturing facility and you put waste water into the local river, you're required to take in water for your facility downstream from where you put the waste in. So, you're the first one to feel the effects or that's actually an example from Donella Meadows who she's got a bunch of good ones from Systems Thinking.
- James Clear: [01:12:26](#) Another example. I heard the story recently that Boeing, when they first switched from manual control of the wings, when they

first switched to an all-software wing control, the engineers that designed the software were required to be on the first test flight, and partially that was because they got to adjust the programming and they were testing a few things, but also that's some serious skin in the game, right? You're going to make sure that you're doing it the right way.

- James Clear: [01:12:55](#) So, if I could have some pithy ruling that required for the people that do things are also the first ones to feel the effects, that the incentives are aligned in an immediate fashion, I think I would do that. I feel like a lot of behavior would change because of those two things.
- Jim: [01:13:12](#) I think those two are great. I think that they would add significantly and quickly to bettering of society. Where can we find you? I know you're at jamesclear.com. You're on Twitter. What's your handle on Twitter?
- James Clear: [01:13:27](#) Yeah. So, you can find me on pretty much all social sites, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, @JamesClear. I think the best place to go, if you've enjoyed this conversation, you want to explore habits more, Atomic Habits is probably the best thing to check out first. You can just go to atomichabits.com. If you want to check out my other writing or newsletter or any of that stuff, you can go to jamesclear.com. If you click on Articles, I have them organized by category, so you can poke around and see what's interesting to you, but, yeah, those are probably the two best places to start.
- Jim: [01:13:59](#) Perfect. Well, I did so and had a lot of fun reading them. You're a good and clear thinker.
- James Clear: [01:14:06](#) Thank you very much.
- Jim: [01:14:07](#) Thank you for being on the show and look forward to your ... When is the next book coming?
- James Clear: [01:14:13](#) Oh, it would probably be a while, depending on how you measure it. Atomic Habits took me between three to five years to write. So, hopefully, it won't be that long, but also, I used up all of my good ideas in the first book, so I need to somehow figure out how to live like a stuff in there. So, thank you so much for having me on.
- Jim: [01:14:36](#) Thank you so much, James. We're good.
- Jamie: [01:14:36](#) Thank you.

Jim: [01:14:37](#) Thank you so much. That was really great.

James Clear: [01:14:40](#) Perfect. Thanks, guys. Yeah, I really appreciate it. It's great.

Jim: [01:14:43](#) Congrats on your baby.

James Clear: [01:14:44](#) Thank you. Yeah. We're excited. Meanwhile, let's see. It's funny life is totally normal right now, but then in a month, it will not be at all. So, it's very interesting to know that the switch is going to be flipped.

Jim: [01:14:55](#) Oh, what a switch it is.

James Clear: [01:14:58](#) Yeah. Exactly.

Jim: [01:15:01](#) All right. Thanks. Thanks. Bye-bye.

James Clear: [01:15:01](#) All right. Great. Well, thank you both.

Jamie: [01:15:02](#) Thank you. Bye.

Jim: [01:15:03](#) Can I stop?