



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business

**“ A fascinating exploration of our pathologically habitual society—we smoke, we incessantly check our BlackBerrys, we chronically choose bad partners, we always (or never) make our beds. Duhigg digs into why we are this way, and how we can change, both as individuals and institutionally.” ~ The Daily**

#### Summary

A young woman walks into a laboratory. Over the past two years, she has transformed almost every aspect of her life. She has quit smoking, run a marathon, and been promoted at work. The patterns inside her brain, neurologists discover, have fundamentally changed.

Marketers at Procter & Gamble study videos of people making their beds. They are desperately trying to figure out how to sell a new product called Febreze, on track to be one of the biggest flops in company history. Suddenly, one of them detects a nearly imperceptible pattern—and with a slight shift in advertising, Febreze goes on to earn a billion dollars a year.

An untested CEO takes over one of the largest companies in America. His first order of business is attacking a single pattern among his employees—how they approach worker safety—and soon the firm, Alcoa, becomes the top performer in the Dow Jones.

What do all these people have in common? They achieved success by focusing on the patterns that shape every aspect of our lives. They succeeded by transforming habits.

In *The Power of Habit*, award-winning New York Times business reporter Charles Duhigg takes us to the thrilling edge of scientific discoveries that explain why habits exist and how they can be changed. With penetrating intelligence and an ability to distill vast amounts of information into engrossing narratives, Duhigg brings to life a whole new understanding of human nature and its potential for transformation.

Along the way we learn why some people and companies struggle to change, despite years of trying, while others seem to remake themselves overnight. We visit laboratories where neuroscientists explore how habits work and where, exactly, they reside in our brains. We discover how the right habits were crucial to the success of Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, and civil-rights hero Martin Luther King, Jr. We go inside Procter & Gamble, Target superstores, Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church, NFL locker rooms, and the nation’s largest hospitals and see how implementing so-called keystone habits can earn billions and mean the difference between failure and success, life and death.

At its core, *The Power of Habit* contains an exhilarating argument: The key to exercising regularly, losing weight, raising exceptional children, becoming more productive, building revolutionary companies and social movements, and achieving success is understanding how habits work.

Habits aren't destiny. As Charles Duhigg shows, by harnessing this new science, we can transform our businesses, our communities, and our lives. (From the publisher.)

#### Charles Duhigg

- Birth—1974
- Where—the State of New Mexico, USA
- Education—B.A., Yale University; M.B.A, Harvard University
- Awards—see below
- Currently—lives in Brooklyn, New York City, New York

Charles Duhigg is a reporter at the New York Times where he writes for the business section. Prior to joining the staff of the Times in 2006, he was a staff writer of the Los Angeles Times. He lives in Brooklyn, New York City and is a graduate of Yale University and Harvard Business School.

He is currently working on a series titled "The iEconomy" about Apple, and the company's influence within the U.S. and abroad. He wrote the series "Toxic Waters, Golden Opportunities," and was part of the team that wrote "The Reckoning."

Duhigg's book about the science of habit formation, titled *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, was published in 2012. An extract was published in the New York Times entitled "How Companies Learn Your Secrets."

#### Awards

2007 George Polk Award

2007 Heywood Broun Award

2008 Hillman Prize

2008 Gerald Loeb Award

2009 Scripps Howard National Journalism Award

2010 National Academy of Sciences Reporting Award

2010 Society of Environmental Journalists Investigative Reporting Award

Awards from the Society of American Business Editors and Writers, the Deadline Awards, and the John B. Oakes Awards.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Why was E.P. described as "a man who would spend much of what we know about habits"? What did researchers learn from him?
2. What ability do patients with basal ganglia damage lose?
3. Thinking back to the example of McDonald's restaurants presented on page 26 in the book, how does this company use cues and rewards to trigger habit loops in its customers?

4. What cues and rewards can you identify when you've been to fast food restaurants? What about other settings, like movie theaters, or clothing stores?
5. Using the graph on page 19 as a guide, diagram your own habit loop for entering a password on your email account or your pin number at the ATM. Identify the cue, routine, and reward for this habit.
6. Can you diagram the habit loop for when you go into the cafeteria, or have a meal at home?
7. Do you think it was ethical for psychologists to study E.P.? Was he able to consent to research conducted on his memory and habits? Explain why (or why not) the benefits of this research outweigh the negative effects it may have had on his life.
8. On page 21 the author writes, "Habits are often as much a curse as a benefit." What are examples of habits that are beneficial or detrimental in your own life?
9. The author writes that it is possible to reawaken a habit, and that habits never disappear, but are changed by new cues, routines, or rewards. Describe a habit of yours that has been changed or replaced. Do you agree or disagree that this habit can be reawakened? Why? What would it take to reawaken your habit?
10. Psychologists have learned a great deal about habit and memory from studying individuals who have memory deficits. How are lessons from people like E.P. and H.M. relevant to your life?
11. Make a plan for a new habit you would like to develop. Identify what you can use as a cue, the steps involved in creating a routine and the reward this new habit will deliver.  
(Questions issued by publisher.)

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