HABITS – WHICH ONES DO YOU WANT TO KEEP OR CHANGE?

It doesn't matter who you talk to, know or meet we all have one thing in common – habits.

What are habits? We all have them, some we like and some we don't but each and every one of us have them. Habits are really behavioural routines that we run without really realising it. The habits that serve us well are ones we decide to keep whereas there are other habits that we don't want and, try as we might, find extremely difficult (or seemingly impossible) to break or change – smoking, over (or under) eating, not exercising are good examples.

Why can't I change it? It actually depends on what's driving the habit, therefore you need to think carefully about what it is you get as an outcome from using that habit. There will be something that you have an emotional response to as a result of using the habit that causes you to decide to continue doing what you do. Once you know what it is you can change the habit so that it gives you a different outcome, as far as possible one that is more beneficial than the existing one.

What do I do next? First and foremost – chose the habit you have that you want to change and then decide what you want in its place. Describe, in as much detail as you can, the new habit you want. The description should include how it will make you feel, and these feelings should be as positive as you can make them. As habits are behavioural routines and behaviour is driven by emotions then connecting a positive emotion to the new habit adds to its power. Therefore, it's important that the new habit is defined in positive terms. So instead of saying "I don't want always to be late for meetings", you could say "I enjoy being early for meetings because I feel more relaxed and able to take part more positively." Which sounds and feels better? The second one does, doesn't it?

Is that it? No. It can take the human mind between 21 and 31 days to change a habit and so we tend to form new habits in this sort of timescale. On average it takes about 28 days to form a new habit and so we need to put into place a process that can help us be really effective in that change. A useful tool to use is the Habit Grid. The Habit Grid is simple and effective and shows results immediately. It's about monitoring progress whilst at the same time creating a compelling and challenging reason to go on. Initially it's about using discipline but moving the focus towards habit. After all, the discipline of doing something is less painful than the regret of not having done it. Once the habit is formed the need for discipline no longer exists, and what we initially thought was a difficulty has become easy to maintain.

How do I use the Habit Grid? Start by writing on the top of the Grid what the new habit will be (remembering what we said about it being positive) – make it bold and colourful than place the grid somewhere where you can see it, somewhere prominent (PC, fridge, the wall, etc). Then each day you successfully complete the new habit you tick a box - *but only tick in pencil,* because if you miss a day you should rub out all of the ticks for that particular habit and start again at Box 1. The aim is to have an unbroken run of ticks in boxes from 1 to 28. Once you get to Day 10 you start to want to continue just so you don't have to start again! And soon, there's no way you will miss a day. Before long that discipline becomes a new habit. Then... celebrate.

My New Habit Is:

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28