

Automate the mundane

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I took a heavy course load in the second semester of my freshman year at Marywood University. One of the ways I made it through was to build the habit that as soon as I got back to my dorm room from back-to-back-to-back classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I would read the next assigned Sociology chapter. One time I was flying high after getting good grades on several tests and receiving a letter in the mail from my long-distance boyfriend (yes, I went to college before we all had email!). I decided I was going to treat myself to reading the letter and just relaxing a bit, instead of reading my chapter. Yet five minutes later, I was back in my dorm room, reading my sociology chapter. Why? Because it had become such a habit that I forgot I was going to break it.

It's been over 20 years, but I've never forgotten that example of the power of habit. And I've tried to apply that power to tasks much more mundane than studying sociology. When something is automatic, it's so much easier to accomplish.

One obvious example is automatic bill pay. Rather than having to set aside time to write checks or transfer money, authorize automatic withdrawal for your bills. If the amount is relatively stable and predictable (I'm thinking car payments, utilities, rent/mortgage, etc.) and you routinely have enough in your account to cover it, automate the payment. If you like to keep an eye on your finances like I do, you can still set aside time to balance the books. I do this on the 10th and the 25th of each month since that's when I get paid. But now instead of a tedious bill-paying process at that time, I'm just taking a quick look to make sure everything balances.

On the subject of finances, you can also automate saving by setting up a portion of your direct deposit to be put directly into your savings account - or if that's not possible with your employer, by scheduling a transfer of that amount into your savings a day or two after pay day.

Another great automatic habit is making your bed as soon as you get out of it. You're accomplishing something the moment you get up and then you never have to think "I should make the bed." You already did.

If you use Outlook at work, you can set rules for incoming email; you can automatically delete, forward, categorize, color-code, or put them in a certain folder. More info about this in my previous post on [learning the shortcuts](#). At home, open your mail next to the recycling bin so you can automatically eliminate most of it (and you will definitely get less mail if you move to online billing).

What else could you automate? When you get gas (I used to have a Wednesdays and weekends refueling habit), where you put your keys - every time!, how you respond to certain requests, when and where the kids do their homework, and so on. Every person's list will be different.

We all have a limited amount of time and energy. Why not automate the mundane so you have more energy and time for those things that are more interesting?

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