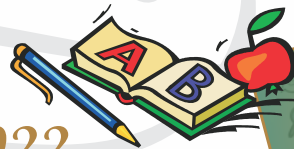


# Quality Education News

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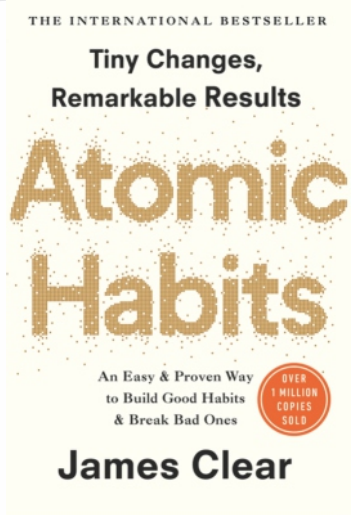
Issue 63

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education



## How do you eat an elephant?

It seems such a silly question. Nobody intends eating an elephant. Yet this question is sometimes asked at leadership and management workshops. Attendees give answers such as “bit by bit” or “bite by bite”. The rationale for the question is simple. We can all make huge changes even if they seem impossible. Just be prepared to make tiny daily improvement changes and the incredible “dare-to-dream” goals follow.

At the beginning of his book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear gives a dictionary definition (2018: v) of the word “atomic”. Anything atomic is an extremely small amount of a thing. It's the single irreducible unit of a larger system. Also, anything atomic is the source of immense energy or power. Think of the impact of two atomic bombs on Japan in the closing months of World War Two.

Clear's book shows that if you're prepared to make tiny changes to your daily habits, you can achieve astounding end results. There are easy and proven ways to build good new habits as well as break bad ones.

Too often, elephant-sized goals fail. They fail because they are seen as being overwhelming. There's too much strain and sweat. James Clear makes the point that if you really want the change, change towards it by a minuscule 1% every day. A single percentage point improvement is barely felt. Discomfort is minimal and there's no extreme rigour involved.

Every day in our classrooms and schools, we see young and old displaying their daily habits. They can be tiny but in the long-term, are significant. Imagine the language teacher who tells the class to spend ten minutes every day learning new vocabulary. Determined Dan makes it a daily homework habit. Lazy Larry gives it a miss. “After all, what difference will ten minutes a day make?” questions Larry.



1% better every day

In the figure the vertical line is the improvement in Determined Dan's marks in the language lessons during the year. The horizontal line is the habit times spent on getting just 1% better every day.

(Acknowledgement: Clear 2018: 16)

James Clear (2018: 15 -17) notes that a 1% daily improvement of any habit isn't really notable; in fact, it mightn't even be noticed. Yet over time, the improvement is huge. Clear describes habits as, “the compound interest of self-improvement”. He cites research that shows that if you get just 1% better at something each day, you'll end up nearly 37% better after only one year.

Every teacher knows the importance of stopping bad habits in the bud. A child hands in the homework but it's slightly untidy. There's been a tiny drop in the usual standard of work. The teacher lets it pass. When the next assignment is submitted, the work is marginally poorer than the previous one. Again, the teacher lets it pass. When it's too late, the child is producing totally shoddy work or not even bothering to do any homework.

The 1% daily habit, however, is like a two-edged sword. One edge is dangerous; the other harmless. As the impact is so slight from one day to the next, we don't feel whether its' edge is harmful or harmless. It's only over time, do we see the positive or negative outcome of a daily habit.

At school we are surrounded by children and colleagues who have their daily habits. We have them too. Discourage the bad habits but encourage the good ones even if it's atomic. As James Clear encourages us, even 1% a day is a great start. That one percent daily improvement across an entire school, makes everything about the school soar to spectacular heights.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

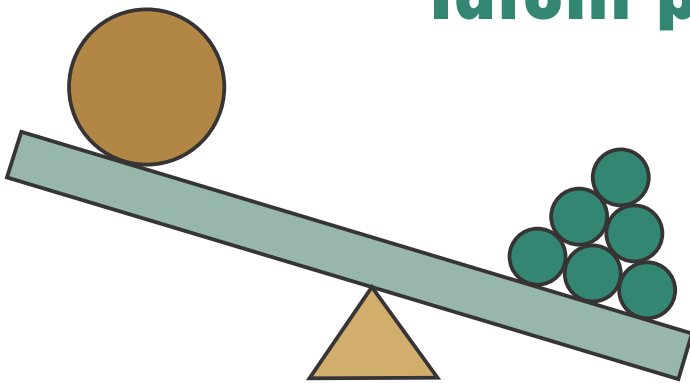
Clear, J 2018. *Atomic habits: an easy & proven way to build good habits & break bad ones*. London: Penguin.



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# Have you been a victim of the plateau of latent potential?



The effects of good habits remain unnoticeable until their weight becomes significant enough to tip the scale.

At the start of every year there's a surge in the number of people who join fitness and health clubs. The gyms are overcrowded. Yet before mid-year, the number of members who go regularly to the gym, falls off dramatically. One Johannesburg management team of a gym club, factors this behaviour pattern into their business plan. The team factors a 40% drop in attendance by June.

Similar patterns are seen in the number of people who excitedly enrol at colleges and universities. Midway through the year, so many of them drop out. South African universities have an overall fallout rate of between 40 to 50 % by the end of the first year. What's the explanation?

According to Clear (2018: 21- 28), the explanation is found in the theory of the Plateau of Latent Potential. When someone sets out to achieve a goal such as lose weight or improve their professional qualifications, there's the incorrect belief that their progress will be linear. Once the effort is put in, the person expects steady upward graph-like progress. Instant rewards must follow instantly after the hard work. Sadly, that seldom happens. There's a gap – and sometimes a huge one – between effort and achievement.

On our way towards our goal, we have to walk through the “Valley of Disappointment”. For all the hard work, we don't see tangible results. When people arrive at this plateau, they feel that there's no reward for the effort. They neither accept nor understand that it's part of the package towards eventual success. Arriving at goals happen after travelling long roads. Sometimes while travelling, there are too few refreshment stops of encouragement.

Another reason for non-achievement, is that there's too much focus on the goals. Rather, focus on the systems. If your systems are in place, you will eventually arrive at the goals. What is the difference between goals and systems? Clear describes the differences as:

*Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results.*

Imagine the teacher who wants to improve professional qualifications. The teacher asks the tertiary institution to post the prospectus and the relevant documents. When they arrive, all the paperwork and coursework demands, seem overwhelming. At this time, it's to remember how to eat that huge academic elephant. It's bite by bite. Do those assignments, assignment by assignment; those exams, exam by exam; those projects, project by project.

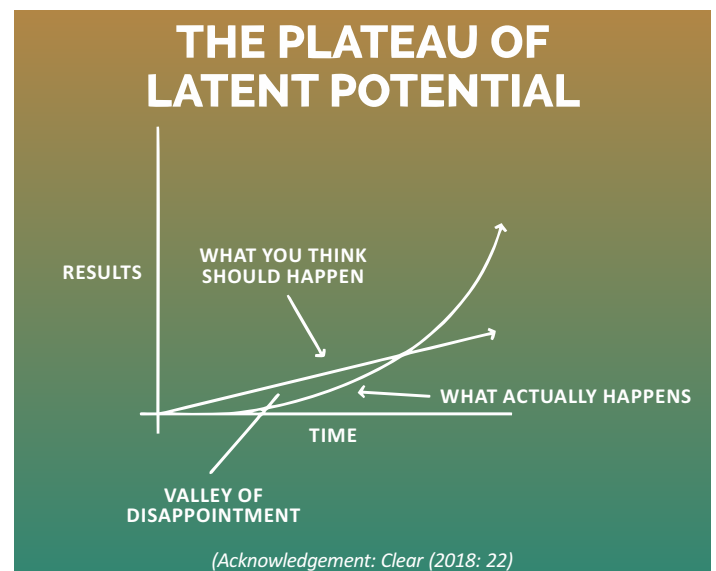
The teacher puts in place systems that lead towards the long-term goal:

- Have a daily or nightly study routine.
- Block in the diary those non-study days, weekends and holidays. (Study breaks help improve your work when you get back to the books and computer.)
- Have a comfortable study area where there are hopefully no distractions.
- Attend workshops organised by the college, technicon or university.
- Make contact with your course lecturer or supervisor when there are learning difficulties.
- Timetable the dates, days and hours for revision work.
- Stick to due dates for assignments.
- ... and try as far as possible to stick to the above!

Very few teachers are fortunate enough not to have hiccups on the way to getting a new qualification. They understand all the study material. All their assignments are commended and every exam is passed. However, most of us aren't so fortunate. There's the need to drag oneself through those valleys of disappointment. Press on. Yet when systems are drawn up and abided by, those long-term goals are reached. Stickability is rewarded.

## Reference

Clear, J 2018. *Atomic habits: An easy & proven way to build good habits & break bad ones*. London: Penguin.



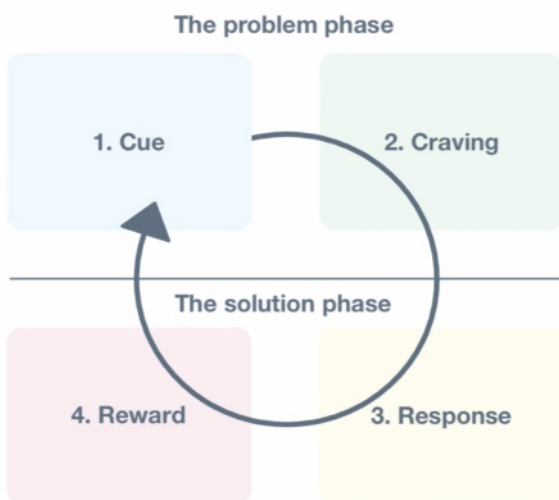
# How do we develop habits?

There's the routine that we follow most mornings when we wake up. There's the routine that we follow as we leave home and get to our workplace. A habit is an action that's automatic. We give little thought to doing it. Like the logo wording of the sportswear and sports kit advertisement, we simply, "Just do it."

Yet there are many times when something that we do today without giving it a moment's thought, wasn't a habit. In fact, there were those times when we gave much thought before moving in to action. Think of the first time you learnt to ride a bicycle or drive a car. There was much intense thought before tentative action. Hopefully, there were no bruised knees nor scraped cars!

Imagine that you have to pay absolute attention every time you go through the process involved in making yourself a hot drink. Much time would be spent doing each step of the process. In contrast, an ingrained habit does away with thinking about the process. Time is saved. The focus is on what needs to be done. Most of your time would be spent on enjoying the hot drink.

## The habit loop



As Clear observes, "The ultimate purpose of habits is to solve the problems of life with as little energy and effort as possible." According to him (2018: 43-55), there are four simple steps to build better habits. Use them to help develop habits that will make it easier to achieve goals. The four steps to follow are:

### 1 Cue (the problem phase)

In this first step, there is an awareness of a need. It could be something as basic as food or water. There could be the seeking of friendship or recognition of who we are and what we do. The cue triggers us to do something about it. There's a sense that we can achieve what we want. Out there, it's "gettable".

### 2 Craving (the problem phase)

The second step moves from an awareness of something that we'd like, to a craving. The craving moves us towards thinking of what action is needed to take away the craving. Remember that it's not the action that you want but rather the resulting satisfaction of getting a

desired emotion or feeling. So, for example, the intended action might be to switch on the kettle when arriving home from work. The aim or goal is that you can make yourself a relaxing soothing cappuccino after an exhausting day at school.

### 3 Response (the solution phase)

To satisfy your craving, you go to the third step. You decide on a response. If you move to action, your response can – if done repeatedly – become a habit. Switching on the kettle every time you come home from school, could become an unthinking habit.

There are, of course, those times when a desired response might seem impossible. A teacher might want to improve academic qualifications. However, there's a realisation that it involves getting into a daily study habit. There could be too many home commitments. The person might not have the means or motivation level to start out on the sometimes arduous road ahead. Not all cues and cravings are met. Therefore, a hoped-for habit cannot always be achieved.

### 4 Reward (the solution phase)

After responding successfully to the cue and the craving, there's the fourth step – the reward. The goal is achieved. In the short term, the person is usually contented and happy. The habit loop cycle is closed. Yet the cycle can be repeated using new habits. These new habits are built on top of already learnt ones. Further goals can be set. The teacher who obtained her goal of the new qualification, has increased confidence. A decision could be taken to carry on with more studying.

Continuous improvement in our personal and professional lives is dependent on developing an increasing number of good habits. Focus on the habit loop to get into good habits. Those good habits will help you eat your elephant-size goals.

### Reference

Clear, J 2018. *Atomic habits: an easy & proven way to build good habits & break bad ones*. London: Penguin.







# Crafting the unpolished Diamonds

SAPA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2022  
8 - 10 SEPTEMBER

MITTAH SEPEREPERE CONVENTION CENTRE, KIMBERLEY



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Conference Coordinator · Alta van Heerden · alta@sunlands.co.za · Conference Company · XL Millennium · sponsors@sapaconference.co.za

The South African Principals' Association (SAPA) will be hosting their annual conference in the Northern Cape this year. Northern Cape president, Mr Lebogang Malgas and his organising team, invite principals and deputy principals from across the country to join them around the "Big Hole" in Kimberley from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2022.



The conference will be held in the beautiful **Mittah Seperepere Convention Centre** where delegates will not only marvel at the beauty of the diamonds extracted in this area over the years. They will also be able to consider how they can, "Craft the unpolished diamonds" that they meet daily in their schools.

Tibetan philosophers see the diamond as a symbol of human progress. They believe that as a diamond moves from coal to a brilliant, long-lasting gem, so a human can become refined even with humble beginnings.

This conference offers great opportunities to learn from like-minded professionals and to share own experiences. Our joint efforts can reveal the true beauty of the "unpolished diamonds" that we see in our schools.

The conference will once again be opened by the Honourable Minister Angie Motshekga. Speakers include: Nicky Abdinor, Prof Mary Baxen, Prof Eugene Cloete, Dshun Deysel, Gavin Keller, Roxy Marosa, Mr M Mweli (Head of Education) and Mr J Ndlebe (Director DBE). Melee talks (20 minute presentations) will be given by practitioners and learners.

Visit the conference website [www.sapaconference.co.za](http://www.sapaconference.co.za) for registration, the full programme and details about presenters.

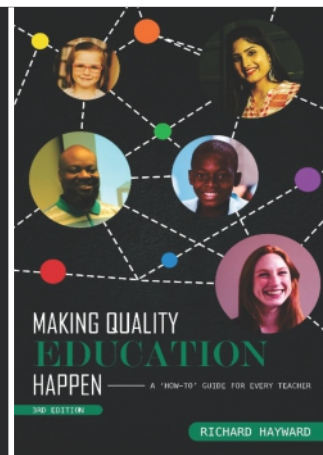


## A book for your staffroom library

Every quality school encourages professional growth. Improvement in qualifications is encouraged. New books are frequently bought for the staffroom library.

Your staff could find Richard Hayward's book, **Making Quality Education happen – a "how-to" guide for every teacher** of interest. He writes from decades of leadership and management experience in the classroom and the principal's office.

The book can be ordered from takealot at R 200 a copy. Amazon sells the book in kindle format for \$ 8.04. The colour paperback edition costs \$16.99. You can buy the book from Smashwords in e-book format for \$ 6.99. The Amazon and Smashwords sites give you a 20% free read of the book.



## A little learning is a dangerous thing

Street wisdom says that a brand new car loses 25% of its' value when it's driven from the showroom floor and the wheels touch the street. Maybe there's also a percentage loss of value in what we've learnt at college or university while studying to become a teacher. Much can become outdated and needs upgrading. There's a need to get back to 100%. In-service training helps.

SAQI (South African Quality Institute) has a number of SACE-endorsed Professional Development programmes. The facilitator is Dr Richard Hayward. Registered South African teachers earn CPTD points on their programmes. If you'd like details about the different workshops, please contact him at either [rpdayward@yahoo.com](mailto:rpdayward@yahoo.com) or 011 888 3262. Poor schools are sponsored.

You cannot be a master teacher until you are a master learner.



**SACE**  
South African Council for Educators

Towards Excellence in Education