



# Elevate Your Action

By Knowing How the Brain  
Works

---

# Dawn Lacko, CBIS

- Executive Director – NOWCAP Services
- 28 years experience working in non-profits and serving on non-profit boards.
- Certified Brain Injury Specialist.
- Geek out on all things brain related – when it's working well and when it isn't.

# We are Assuming:

- Things you learned over the past day and a half are beneficial to you and your non-profit.
- You want to start putting what you have learned into action to improve your skills and to elevate your non-profit's work.
- You want to share what you have learned with key stakeholders like staff, donors, board members.

# Here's what can happen

## Elevation 😊

- A plan for what, when, how and where to implement change is developed.
- Key ideas and actions are started and focused on until they are part of the regular operations.

## Stagnation ☹️

- Materials brought to office and are buried under a mountain of in-box work.
- Key ideas and actions are started but never really gain momentum.

...and everything in between.



## Habits

We are going to talk about using habits to avoid stagnation and make change.

### Why Habits?

Having habits or routines that one follows without having to think about about each step frees of the brain to ponder other things.

By adulthood, 40 – 80% of daily activities are done by habit.

# Examples of Habits:

- Tying shoes
- Dressing
- Brushing Teeth
- Autopilot
- AM routine at home & work
- Bedtime routine



# How it works in the brain



- Basal Ganglia takes a behavior that has been repeated and makes it a habit or routine.
- Associated with OCD, Tourette Syndrome and addiction

# How it works in the brain



- The Infralimbic Cortex controls habits.
- Prefers to use habits and will continue to use even if no longer beneficial.
- Examples:
  - Rushed morning
  - Road Construction



# How it works in the brain



- The Infralimbic Cortex controls habits.
  - Will choose new habits over old habits, but old habits are still wired and can start back up again.
- Examples:
  - Addiction
  - COVID changes
    - Meetings
    - Masks

# Use Habits to Elevate New Knowledge into Action

- Repetition – by definition, this is how you build a habit.
- Reminders – so you don't forget to repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Linkage – to fit a new habit into an existing routine.
- Accountability – helps us stay on track.

# Books about Habits

- Atomic Habits
- The Power of Habit
- Tiny Habits
- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
- The Habit Blueprint
- Better than Before

# Repetition – repetition – repetition...

- After brain injury, re-learning skills via the Holistic Habit Retraining model means to do the same thing, the same time, the same way over and over... until it becomes a habit.
- Is there a magic habit “number?”
  - 21 days, 30 days
  - NO magic number, but very likely more than 21 days.
  - Think about it, you have been doing something one way for 2 years, it is unlikely to change in 21 days.



# Reminders – DON'T FORGET!

- Digital
  - Apps
  - Alarms
  - Digital assistants (Google, Alexa, Siri)
- Visual
  - Calendar
  - Signs
  - Sticky notes
  - Whiteboard
- People
- Location
  - In front of door
  - On top of keyboard



## Reminders – DON'T FORGET!

- Watch out for habituation – diminished response to a frequently repeated stimulus. (No longer hear traffic when living by busy road)
- Change it up if you are ignoring your reminders.
- Brain filtering information and deciding what's important – want someone to see the thing you put on the stairs and take it up – put it in the MIDDLE of the stair.



## Linkage – Habit pairing, habit stacking – linking the new behavior to an existing habit

- AM Routine
  - Put stuff away/down
  - Make coffee
  - Check calendar
  - Check in at front desk
  - Check mail box
  - Check voice mail
  - Check e-mail
- AM Routine
  - Put stuff away/down
  - Make coffee
  - Check calendar
    - Choose one donor to call today
  - Check in at front desk
  - Check mail box
  - Check voice mail
  - Check e-mail

# Accountability

## To self

- If you *MUST* – so easy to excuse yourself.
- Visual – white board
- Daily tracking on calendar
- Make it something you DO and SEE

## To others

- Board of Directors
- Co-worker
- Public display
- Meeting topic
- Accountabili-buddy



# Pitfalls



If your new practice isn't urgent or deadline driven, it's easy to put off – create deadlines by reporting at meetings or emailing progress to someone weekly.

Waning motivation – use motivational signs and change them out, use visual progress tracking, use rewards.

Rewards – intermittent rewards work best (slot machines). It's hard to fool yourself, so flip a coin or roll a dice for rewards.

Use habits to elevate new knowledge into action.

- Repetition
- Reminders
- Linkage
- Accountability