

EAO Newsletter- February Issue

Intro:

Last month, we discussed the science behind habit formation. Cues unconsciously drive behaviors, which create results that can be both positive and negative. Over time, the cue-behavior-result loop become a habit. You have the power to change your habits. Some ways to start changing your habits include creating an action plan, making it easier to pursue healthy habits and harder to pursue unhealthy habits, and creating specific, accountable goals. Click [HERE](#) to review last month's newsletter.

In addition to the strategies we shared last month, these tips may help you solidify a new habit or break an old one.

- **Consider combining habits together, or "habit stacking".**

If you're having a difficult time forming a new habit, consider pairing it with another habit that you really enjoy doing. Researchers call this habit stacking, and it is proven to help you build habits more quickly.

For example, you may want to start a new habit of folding your laundry as soon as it's dry. If this habit feels like a chore, you could pair it with something you're excited to do, like listening to a new episode of your favorite podcast or your favorite music. By associating the task you enjoy with the task you don't, it's more likely you'll integrate them both into an unconscious routine.

- **Connect new habits to your body using physical, auditory, and visual cues.**

Habits that connect to our body and senses, like the chirping pop-up notification of an app or the act of putting on gym shoes, are easier to build and maintain.

If the habit you're interested in cultivating is not very physical, consider finding a way to create a physical action that can become second nature. For example, if you want to start a new habit of writing out a to-do list at the beginning of your work day to prioritize what you'll do that day, have a special notepad and pen that you can feel, or set a unique alarm to indicate that it's time to complete that task.

- **Be patient.**

Just as it took time to develop a harmful habit, it will take time to develop a new habit. Practicing your intentions is crucial to rewiring shortcuts in your brain and creating a new habit can take weeks or months.¹ Many people give up on a new habit before they've had the time to fully build the new habit loop. Remember to be persistent and patient.

If you would like additional support, consider reaching out to employee assistance and other trusted resources. Trained counselors can help you reflect on your current habits, create new intentions, and stay accountable to your goals.

¹ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ejsp.674>

Habits in the Workplace

Often, we hear habits in the context of New Year's resolutions and personal goals. However, habits can be just as powerful in the workplace as they are in our personal lives. Managers and leaders can harness these habit-changing tools to do more effective work.

Consider a manager experiencing this ongoing habit loop:

Cue: A team member brings bad news to the supervisor.

Behavior: The manager panics and overreacts, sometimes even blaming and punishing the employee who delivers the bad news.

Result: The manager doesn't hear about problems when they first arise, which provides her with a short-term reward. However, this can lead to issues later on, as team members are scared to bring up bad news in a timely way. Small problems can turn into crises because the team isn't acting proactively to solve issues with the manager's input.

This manager could break this habit and form a healthier working relationship with her team by considering a simple when-then statement:

When my team brings bad news to me, **then** I commit to taking a deep breath and starting my response with "Thank you for telling for letting me know".

Over time, the manager will re-wire her initial response to this cue. By thanking an employee, even under less-than-ideal circumstances, her brain will be launched into a very different kind of conversation. By interrupting the normal habit loop, the manager has a chance to be conscious of her response and behave differently.

Managers can harness the power of habits to streamline their work, become more efficient, and live out their values as a supervisor more easily. While changing habits takes time, these tools will help you to support new habits and achieve your goals.

Conclusion:

Habits can help you achieve your goals, be more effective at work, and live your best life. If you'd like support in pursuing new habits, employee assistance is here to help. You can contact trained employee assistance counselors through the EAO and LifeMatters.

Contact the EAO at 608-263-2987 or eao@mailplus.wisc.edu. Contact LifeMatters at 1-800-634-6433 or by texting "Hello" to 61295.

Learn how to use mindfulness to slow down and reduce stress

LifeMatters and the Employee Assistance Office are offering a virtual webinar, Mind-Body Wellness, on Tuesday, March 20, noon-1 p.m. via Zoom. Mind-Body Wellness offers attendees an opportunity to slow down and learn practical mindfulness exercises, including:

- Conscious breathing
- Gentle stretching
- Guided relaxation

This webinar is offered at no cost to all UW–Madison employees. [Register online](#) to receive the Zoom link.

Upcoming LifeMatters Webinar Opportunity

The CALS Wellness Committee has partnered with [LifeMatters](#) to bring you self-care webinars in the first months of the year. Their next offering is Stress Management: Personal Resilience on Thursday, March 9, from 11:00 a.m. - noon.

Once you register, you will receive a Zoom link for the session. Register for Stress Management: Personal Resilience [here](#).

LifeMatters Monthly Promotions and Resources

Our affiliate partner, LifeMatters, offers promotions, newsletters, webinars and more! Go to [mylifematters.com](#) and sign in with Bucky2. Webinars are located under “Quick Links.”

This month's promotional content includes:

Flyers:

- Chronic Pain
- Self-Care: Making Time for You
- Giving Feedback (for Managers)

Posters:

- Pain Management
- Time for You
- The Right Place

New Podcast Resource

Our partners at LifeMatters are excited to bring you “OnTopic” a podcast dedicated to overcoming challenges in times of uncertainty. Employee assistance counselors will be talking to industry experts from a wide variety of fields to explore the issues of the day and steps individuals and organizations can take to become more resilient. OnTopic will be released every other Wednesday. The first episode of OnTopic is available now and focuses on talking to children about violence.

You can access OnTopic on [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), or anywhere else you get your podcasts.