

Katy Milkman How to Change

Katy Milkman: [00:00:00] that was just a great aha moment because all these barriers to change that I write about that I studied, no, none of them are curable, right. Will always be present by insight. You can't take a pill and make that go away, you know, I'll always be a bit forgetful. I will always, you know, prefer the path of least resistance. I will always struggle with confidence and challenging situations. And so if these barriers are part of human nature and not curable, then instead of thinking we need sort of a, a one month or a one-time Dilution, I think the right way to think about behavior change and durability is thinking about tools and tactics and techniques that will help us manage and treat, , those barriers successfully in a way that's not burdensome, but that it's constant.

Jill Stoddard: That was Katy Milkman on psychologist off the clock.

Diana Hill: We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and [00:01:00] science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

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Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast, I'm Dr Yael Schonbrun a Boston- based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book of ACT Metaphors.

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Jill Stoddard: so visit our offersPage@offtheclocksite.com.

Jill Here with you, Well, to introduce today's episode with Katy Milkman, where we talk about her book, how to change. And I found there were so many useful nuggets in this episode and in Katy's book and Yael. I'm curious what your thoughts about the episode?

Yael Schonbrun: well, I loved it. What was so fun about it was, it kind of felt like it was coming full circle. We had Angela Duckworth on for our 200th episode? and she mentioned a [00:03:00] story that had happened in the past week of going to get Katy Milkman flowers for the release of her book, how to change. And so it was really fun to have Katy on and talking about her book, but I.

Love the science of behavior change. And one of the things that you and Katy talked about that I thought was really fun was the idea of questioning, like how valuable are self-help books in prompting behavior change. And it got me thinking about a study in a couples field that I had read a while back that looked at.

What kinds of interventions do people do couples pursue when they're struggling in their relationship? So it looked at how often do people. , go to marriage retreats. How often do they go to couples therapy? And how often do they just pick up a self-help book and surprise, surprise? The dominant thing

that people do is pick up a self help because it's easy, it's low price, it's not hard to schedule around. And she mentioned that she and Angela Duckworth are interested in doing some kind of a large randomized control trial of self-help books [00:04:00] that are based in science. And I think that's such a cool idea, but I think in the meantime that we can feel fairly confident. Yeah.

That picking up books that have a scientific backing and trying out some of these interventions that have been studied in large trials and shown to work for a large percentage of people can help us to make positive changes in areas that are important to us. So. To me, I think I was sort of encouraged by that conversation and, and just by the kinds of books that Katy Milkman and Angela Duckworth, and a lot of the authors that we have on here, because we're such a evidence focused podcast that we're trying to promote and share information with the public, , that has been studied and shown to work for lots of things.

Jill Stoddard: Right. I couldn't agree more. And one of the things I love most about doing the podcast is reading all these books. I mean, I don't know about you, but prior to the pilot, well, even still, you know, I have this like gigantic Tubi. Pile, you know, all books I [00:05:00] really want to dive into and just have a really hard time finding the time to do it.

But for the podcast, it's, you know, it's like homework that I need to do. And it's really allowed me to read so many books that I probably would otherwise have on my pile and not get to. I personally have benefited so much from so many of these books and I'm still actively implementing things that I learned from, you know, Kelly McGonigal, , in her joy of movement book and near a y'all and his indestructible book.

And as I mentioned in the episode today that I now floss my teeth. Thanks to Katy Milkman. So even without the RCT, you know, we, we, I think know, even from our own personal experience, that these books can be really helpful in developing our own growth and change. Have you had that experience yourself?

Yael Schonbrun: oh, a hundred percent. I mean, I've long been somebody who's interested in the self-help genre. I will admit, I don't really like the fluffy stuff. [00:06:00] I'm very into the evidence backed books, but I like evidence backed books that are fun and engaging. And I, I mean, my sense is that all four of us co-hosts pick books and authors who have had a huge impact on the way that we live.

Our daily lives, the way that we parent, the way that we work, the way that we approach our health, the way that we approach our relationships and. , that opportunity to bring to the podcast and to bring to a large audience, the kinds of ideas and practices that have helped us to grow our personal lives in positive ways and helped us to support our patients in, in really powerful ways.

It's just so value consistent and so vitality inducing. And so, , absolutely.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I hope our listeners may be engaged in some temptation bundling. There's a little teaser with some really cool self-help books. Maybe some of the ones you've heard featured [00:07:00] right here on psychologists off the clock. So enjoy this episode with Katy Miller.

Jill Stoddard: Hey everybody. It's Jill here and I'm so excited about today's topic. If there is a quintessential psychologist's off the clock topic, this is it. I have Dr. Katy Milkman, who is the author of how to change the science of getting from where you are to where you want to be.

Dr. Milkman is the James G Dinan professor at the Wharton school of the university of Pennsylvania, host of Charles Schwab's popular behavioral economics, podcast, choiceology, and the former president of the international society for judgment and decision. She is the co-founder and co-director of the behavior change for good initiative, a research center with the mission of advancing the science of lasting behavior change, whose work is being chronicled by Freakonomics radio.

Over the course of her career, she has worked with or advise dozens of organizations on how to spur positive change, including Google the U [00:08:00] S department of defense, the American red cross 24 hour fitness, Walmart and morning. And award-winning scholar and teacher, Katy writes frequently about behavioral science for major media outlets, such as the Washington post, the New York times USA today and scientific American, she earned her undergraduate degree from Princeton university, where she studied operations research and American studies and her PhD from Harvard university, where she studied computer science and business.

Katy. Welcome. I'm so excited to have you here today.

Katy Milkman: Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

Jill Stoddard: So I absolutely devoured this book. I loved it. , and my it is behavior change. So incredibly complex. I thought, how on earth is she going to get this topic into a 200 page book? and I really commend you for it. I mean, you tackle the huge subject in a completely digestible way, which is not an easy thing to accomplish.

Katy Milkman: Thank you.

Jill Stoddard: I loved the way you chose to [00:09:00] organize the book. So. You basically tackled the obstacles to change. And I thought that was so brilliant and clever because so often as humans, like we know what we want to do, we just struggle to get it done. And I think, you know, we may have. Reasons that look like obstacles like, oh, I, I just don't have enough time or, or money or whatever these external issues are when really it's the internal obstacles, like our own thoughts and feelings that seem to most get in the way.

And so in the book you talk about impulsivity, procrastination, forgetfulness, laziness, confidence, and conformity as the main obstacles. And of course, there's no way we'll be able to get to all of those. And I really hope people buy the book to get all the. There is so much helpful information in here, but if you had to choose one of those to kind of start and talk about that, like maybe it would be the most helpful for our listeners to [00:10:00] understand, or to overcome in the service of their own behavior change.

Where might you start?

Katy Milkman: I think that would probably start with impulsivity, but I do want to just for one moment, Mentioned that while I really appreciate your kind words about the book. , I do think it's really important to note that the book, while it focuses on internal obstacles to change, I would not argue that those are the only important obstacles to change.

They're just the ones that I have expertise in can help control. Right. Social inequality, , you know, finance, finance, so resources, time, those are huge barriers to change. They're so important. I definitely don't want to say that they aren't, it's rather that I've sought to provide insight into these internal barriers where I can add value based on my research.

So I just wanted to put that out there as an important caveat, um, in terms of [00:11:00] my. My number one pick of the obstacle that might be most useful to your listeners to think about. As I said, impulsivity comes to mind because I think it's so universal. It's actually quite rare to see anyone who's struggling with change.

And doesn't face this to some degree. And by impulsivity, I'm really talking about what academics called present bias or the tendency. We have to focus more on the immediate experience we have. When it comes to pursuing a goal or pursuing change and underweight the longterm benefits of that change when it comes to making our decisions.

So this is true when it comes to our finances, our health, really in every walk of life, we dramatically overweight instant gratification, the instant experience and, and under weight. Those long-term consequences. As part of the reason that we end up with people who choose to smoke, even though they recognize it's [00:12:00] really not good for your health and, , you know, people who spend when they get a paycheck on things that are, you know, shiny and bright and new, but aren't going to put it.

The best financial position to deal with emergencies or ensure that they can have a secure retirement. So I think that's one of the most pernicious biases and in terms of what we can do about it, because it stands in the way of so many goals. , I actually, there, there's sort of two approaches you can take.

One is to actually try to sweeten the experience in the moment I call it sort of the Mary Poppins approach, because she's things about a spoonful of sugar making the medicine go down. So change the, the way that you're approaching our goal. So it's actually more instantly gratifying to do the thing that is in your long-term best interests.

That's approach one. And I'll get a little more into that in a minute if you'd like, , the other approach. Is really the opposite. It's the stick approach, create structures, constraints, [00:13:00] incentives for yourself that actually increase the price of your vice. So that doing the wrong thing becomes even costlier.

So that even if you overweight the instant gratification, now there's instant pain that's associated with it or such a large long-term cost that even. Under weight that eventually it's going to come into the calculus in a more serious way. So those are kind of the two approaches at a high level. And then I'd love to get

into the details on either one, whatever you think would be most interesting to your listeners.

Jill Stoddard: Let's do that. I, I have to say first, I'm so glad that this is what you chose, because this is the thing that stuck out most to me, because my co-hosts and I, you know, we're all clinical psychologists and we practice a therapy called acceptance and commitment therapy. And one of the most important aspects of this is that we look at the function and the cost of behavior.

And this is exactly what you're talking about. And the way I talk about it with, with clients is, well, it works [00:14:00] or you wouldn't do it, you know, procrastination or drinking or smoking or whatever that behavior is. You're engaging in, , or not engaging in. I don't floss my teeth or I don't exercise. When you give yourself permission to do or not do it, you get something from it, you get relief, you get it right.

You, you withdraw some kind of negative feeling. , and so what we look at in that therapy is what is the function of this behavior? Recognize it works, or you wouldn't do it in the short term, but what's the cost in the long-term. And that's a huge piece of, of what we work on in therapy. So I love that.

That's the one that you picked, that's like perfect for, for our listeners to most of them. Are now used to us talking a lot about acceptance and commitment therapy. , and I would love for you to dig in a little bit more in terms of, of what to do there rather than, I mean, you talk a little bit about the benefits of , the path of least resistance, but then also what we can do to change some of these more unhelpful kinds of behaviors.

Katy Milkman: Yeah. And I'm so glad that this [00:15:00] resonates and that, that you like my top pick too. , in terms of concrete steps, we can take. So, let me start with the, the, make it fun approach. And I want to credit, I yell at Fischbach of the university of Chicago and Katelyn, Willie at Cornell university. For sure, truly brilliant research they've done on this showing a number of things.

One that most of us, when we pursue a goal, we, we focus on. A path that we think will be most effective and get us there sort of fastest, , a very small fraction of people instead, try to approach a goal in the way that they think will be most enjoyable. So think about, say the goal of going to the gym and burning calories and getting fit.

, most people would sort of look for that. The most direct route to that, they'd say, you know, I'm going to do the maximumly punishing StairMaster and get, get to my goal as fast as I can, but a small fraction of people would approach it, looking for the fun. And they might say, I'm going to go to Zumba classes with my friends.

So you can see that that's a real, really different approach. What their work shows is that it's a mistake [00:16:00] to look for the most effective route. If people are encouraged to, to pursue their goal and the most fun way they actually persist longer because. The momentary experience you have is enjoyable. And that turns out to matter tremendously for persistence, far more than we appreciate.

So we make this mistake. We think I just need to get there as fast as possible, as efficiently as possible. We neglect the, the importance of making the path enjoyable, and then we quit sooner than we would. And we don't accomplish as much as we would if we looked for fun. , one way that I've specifically studied how we can.

Pursuing our goals more fun is through a tactic that I call temptation bundling. And the idea is really simple. If there's something that you're dreading, that feels like a chore that helps you reach a long-term goal, a way to sweeten the activity is literally doing it at the same time as something else you enjoy and actually reserving the temptation you enjoy.

For, , combined use. So to be concrete, when I was struggling [00:17:00] to get myself to exercise more regularly, I started only letting myself indulge in the entertainment I craved while I was at the gym. Right. So, you know, only binge watching bridge written while you're on the elliptical. Otherwise it's awful.

Suddenly the elliptical becomes a source of pleasure. You're looking forward to finding out what happens next time flies while you're at the gym. And in the case where the it's a guilty pleasure, you've combined, there might be an added benefit if you're not wasting time, , binge watching TV in some other contexts where you should be safe, focusing more on family or getting work done.

And it's not just about exercise though. I think a lot of us apply temptation bundling naturally. To exercise, but we can do it in other parts of life. Only listen to your favorite podcasts while doing household chores only visit a

favorite restaurant whose meals you crave, but maybe feel a little guilty going there either.

Cause it's it's pricey or bad for your waistline, whichever you only get to go there. When spending time with someone, you should see more of like a difficult relative, , or, you know, only allow yourself to have a glass of wine while [00:18:00] making a homemade meal. For your family, something that you, maybe you don't love doing, but feels important.

And you can give yourself a little treat while you're in the process. So those are all different examples of ways that we can bundle temptations to help make it more instantly gratifying to do whatever it is. We know we should do to reach our longterm goals. And then present bias starts to work for us rather than against.

Jill Stoddard: I love this idea so much and what it made me think of, and this happened a few different times while reading the book is I had the thought, oh, I'm kind of already doing that, but not consistently and not intentionally. So it made me think, oh, right, like when I'm on the treadmill and also reading a book, I liked being on the treadmill because I.

To read and, you know, some, some of these other examples too, and I thought, gosh, if I do this with a real intention, and it's more of a, you know, you only get to read this book or do this activity when you're doing engaging in this other behavior, that might be hard [00:19:00] to motivate to do that. It would just increase the power of motivation there by so much.

And I want to tell you too, I've really wanted to start flossing my teeth and I. I mean I'm 48 years old and I've just never been a flosser. And I started flossing my teeth every day, but I'm not doing anything specific. So there was something about just. Reading this book, all about behavior change and all about the different strategies that one can implement for behavior change.

And I don't know if it's maybe because then I became more aware and so, you know, just observing a behavior can cause it to change as you talk about. , but I've now become an everyday flosser.

Katy Milkman: That's so interesting. That's really interesting. It's funny. And it relates to, , Mike Good friend and collaborator who actually wrote the forward for this book. Angela Duckworth. Who's a really brilliant psychologist at the university of Pennsylvania with me.

Jill Stoddard: She was on, she was a guest on the podcast and was [00:20:00] the, and she talked about you during her interview and that's how we ended up reaching out to you. Yeah.

Katy Milkman: Well, that makes sense. Well, my closest friends and collaborators, and now it all comes full circle and make sense. We spend a lot of time talking to each other about behavior change, thinking about behavior change strategies. And recently we've been talking about, how interesting. Yeah. That she and I have both and many others too, have written books where the goal is to communicate about science with a broad audience and help them change in various ways for the better.

But we actually, even though we're scientists and we're trying to present that present evidence on change, we don't have any evidence on whether or not reading these kinds of books improves outcomes for people we've been talking about. I think we should run some randomized controlled trials where we evaluate whether reading these books.

Does create change. And so it's anyway, very reassuring to hear in light of that, that you found it, , did create some change for you, even though it wasn't necessarily by deliberately employing a tactic, but it does hit another couple of things that are in the book. One, [00:21:00] as you mentioned, is awareness and sort of attention as a driver of change and, and maybe that's what happened.

Another possibility is an idea. That's the shift of some kind. So, , in the way you self identify or in your belief and confidence in your ability to make a change after reading a book about it, you felt maybe more like I am the kind of person who changes because I'm reading books about the, this obviously you're off.

Giving advice to others about it, but maybe, maybe the book was a catalyst in some way for that identity. And that's part of what happened. So, so many hypotheses it's really an interesting.

Jill Stoddard: I love the idea of doing it. An RCT on the actual efficacy of reading the book. It's a good idea.

Katy Milkman: We were talking about a random assignment trial with different books that have different philosophies and approaches and kinds of science that they advocate, right? Like Carol Dweck's mindset, which is such a powerful book. And, you know, I touch on. Briefly and, and how to change, but you know, [00:22:00] how, how would reading that differ in terms of the tools it

gives you from reading a book like influence by Robert Cialdini, which teaches you about the tools you can use to have better social interactions and better outcomes.

When you are negotiating with others, friends, or grit like Angela's book, which is about, you know, building passion and perseverance versus how to change. So I think it would be really interesting to understand, do do each of these books, do any of them have any effect that's positive and if they do.

Depends, and you know, what kinds of outcomes you're measuring, maybe, you know, mental health responds better to some exercise habits respond better. Some, interpersonal relationships might respond better to some, so anyway, just a thought.

Jill Stoddard: it. It's a great idea.

Katy Milkman: Maybe we'll talk about it in a decade. If I have results.

Jill Stoddard: you'll come back on. So you were talking about the, the other way to address, this [00:23:00] impulsivity or the Present bias, and is that, is that the commitment devices? Is that where, where that section was? Okay. Yeah. So tell us a little bit about that.

Katy Milkman: Yeah. So the flip side of impulsivity really is procrastination. And so, you know, because of present bias, Reach for things that are exciting in the moment and focus a lot on instant gratification, but we also tend to put off doing the things that aren't so good for us. And in terms of thinking about that flip side, there is sort of a, another approach we can take, and that is very counterintuitive to most people.

And I think it's one of the most fascinating and underused strategies that we can use to improve our own outcomes. And basically involves treating ourselves the way we're used to. Other people treating us who want to manage our behaviors, like a policymaker, who for instance, sets up speed limits because they know we might be tempted to speed, but it's bad for us.

It's bad for other people. They're going to find us if we [00:24:00] don't actually follow them. So we're really used to having other people set rules and constraints and, and create incentives for us to behave well. But we're not so

used to doing that to ourselves. And there's this large and growing literature showing when we do it can be very powerful.

So let me give you a concrete example of what I mean, , one kind of constraint we can put on ourselves. That, again, sounds really counterintuitive is something called the cash commitment device. A cash commitment device involves. Putting money on the line that you will forfeit. If you fail to achieve some goal that you choose.

For instance, say you want to, I'm going to stick with exercise cause we've used a couple of exercise examples. So now my mind is going there. So you want to go to the gym more regularly. So you want to go three times a week. You could say I'm going to put money on the line. Maybe \$50. I'll get a \$50 fine every week that I don't make it to the gym.

Three times you can declare a referee. Or actually you can even use in some cases, [00:25:00] technology to be the referee, that somebody who will be able to monitor whether you're attending the gym, and maybe, , personally trainer, you're going to have meetings with when you're there. And then you'll forfeit. If you fail to achieve that goal and the referee reports on you, and there are various websites that actually allow you to set this up, like stick.com is one fee.

Minder is another, , at, at stick, they have a clever feature where you can literally. , send your money to a charity you hate. So they have charitable organizations on either side of hot button issues. So say you really believe in gun control. You could send your money to the NRA, or you really, you know, are, are in favor of, , of, of gun rights.

And so you could send your money to a, , a charity that is trying to work on gun control. So you pick your poison and that makes it, so now there's a huge. If you don't follow through on your best intentions. , and that I think is a really useful tactic and not just, I think research shows is a really useful tactic for improving outcomes for the [00:26:00] obvious reason that it aligns incentives more strongly and, and makes the present cost of your vice higher there's one study.

I particularly loved demonstrating the efficacy of this. That was done by, um, Dean Carlin and Jonathan's Zinman and exavie GNA. And what they did is they randomly assigned smokers either to just the standard program where you're encouraged to quit smoking and given some tools to use, or that standard program, plus an enhancement, which is you can put money into an account.

That you'll then have to forfeit six months later, if you don't pass a urine test for nicotine or coat mean. And what they found is just giving people access to an account where they could stash money that would disappear. They didn't achieve their goal. Increased quit rates by 30%. So just shows you how powerful it can be when you sort of treat yourself the way a policymaker manager, parents would often treat you by setting rules and boundaries and creating fines.

We can, we can actually manage our own outcomes effectively that way.[00:27:00]

Jill Stoddard: I love it. That, that it's really clever. And I had the thought initially when I was reading it, I thought, you know, depending on what it is, I could see being like, oh, forget it I'll deal with not paying the \$50. And because I just really don't. Exercise today until the part about sending it to a charity you hate, you know, that would be the thing that I'd be like, Nope, Nope, can't do it.

This is, I got to get my butt to the gym. So I just, whoever came up with that initially that is an extremely clever device to keep people on track.

Katy Milkman: I couldn't agree more. And I think it was the founders perhaps of stick, both of whom were behavioral economists, , in errors at Yale and Dean Carlin at , Northwestern. So you have them to thank for that clever innovation.

Jill Stoddard: and I, you know what I want to say too, this is just a slight aside, but I really noticed and appreciated the extent to which you made sure to not just of course site the researchers who. Done certain studies, [00:28:00] but your assistance, your, you know, your research assistants, your graduate students, I mean, it came through so strongly in the book that how much you were making sure that credit was given where credit was due, even if they were people who are working for you or working under you.

And I have never seen that in any of the, you know, many books of this nature that I've read. And I just so appreciated that. And I'm sure all of the people who are mentioned in there really appreciated it too.

Katy Milkman: Yeah. Thank you for saying that. I, I appreciate you appreciating it. And it was a little bit of a battle because I know it's not the norm, but I do think, as a particularly, it's interesting as a scientist,

communicating about science. There's a lot of thought that goes in. I'm sure you think about this too, right?

To what are, what are the most responsible ways to do this? Especially if there's a complex topic and you need to boil it down. , and what are the sort of principles I'm going to abide by? And one of the things that I decided was really important to me, just making sure that it was clear who, , who the brilliant lines were behind the [00:29:00] ideas.

It often, in fact, most of the time, my mind doesn't mind the ideas I'm sharing. I made some contributions, of course, that I get to write about. I learned so much from others and wanting to make sure that I was lifting them up. And particularly there were a lot of junior scholars whose work I had the opportunity to reference and I wanted them to be credited for that.

So thank

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And it's, it's certainly not the norm, but it should be. And I love that, you know, you're modeling that in your

Katy Milkman: Thank you for saying that. I hope it will become the norm

Jill Stoddard: I do too. I do too.

Hey everybody. It's Jill. If you are a clinician and have been wanting to learn more about act, I have an upcoming full day CE workshop through PESI called breakthrough act techniques and experiential exercises, a clinical roadmap to help clients overcome psychological distress. You can either join me live on Friday, October 8th, from eight to four.

Pacific time, or you can watch on demand any time to register, just visit my website, [00:30:00] jillstoddard.com and click on learn from Jill conferences and workshops. I hope to see you there.

I am jumping around a little bit here, but I was immediately sucked in when I first started reading the book. And you were telling a story about Andre Agassi and how he was, you know, this protege and everyone expected so much of him,

but he actually ended up really kind of failing in some ways that he, he was not doing super well.

And worked with a coach and, you know, the bottom line was what he learned was, you know, you can't go for the knockout every single time, but that you have to know your adversary. And I thought that this one. Fascinating. And I thought, you know, how do we apply knowing our adversaries to behavior changes, you know, like exercising that we've talked about, or maybe like let's take being a more patient parent, because I thought sometimes my children feel like they're my adversaries and I, this is probably the thing that I struggle [00:31:00] with the most, that at the end of the day, when we're all tired, And it's been a long day and the two of them are fighting and I'm super irritable.

You know, even when I feel irritable, I want to be able to act more patiently with them. And it's such an uphill battle. It's something I really struggle with. And I thought, Hm, maybe of all the lessons in the book, knowing my adversary is what I, what I need to know there. Of course they're not my adversaries, but you know, in those moments, It's it's sort of feels like that.

You have to know like what you're going up against in a way. So I didn't know if you had some thoughts about that,

Katy Milkman: It's wonderful. Yeah, it's a really interesting application. I should say. I have a five and a half year old who, , constantly teaches me that in spite of being an expert on behavior change, I actually know very little about at least out of jail. Children's behavior

Jill Stoddard: right?

Katy Milkman: different. It's a different zone. , so I think it's a really great point.

The, the [00:32:00] message I was trying to convey with that opening story is that too often, when we want to change our own behavior, we look for a one size fits all sort of solution, right? Like just set big audacious goals and everything else will follow or visualize success and everything else will follow. And that in my.

Experience in my research, what I've seen time. And again, is that when we look for sort of one size fits all approaches to. We don't get, as far as when we try to diagnose what is the underlying barrier to change and how can I

strategically design a solution that addresses that issue. So I think what you're saying about understanding your adversary, I most meant it internally, but it certainly applies to understand it.

, how to solve any complex situation you're sort of talking about in negotiation with your children in a sense, right. And absolutely this is a key insight from the negotiations literature is that [00:33:00] if you're going to, if you're going to have a negotiation, maybe one of the most important things you can do is do your research on who you're negotiating with, what are their.

Key goals, objectives. What do they value most? What do they value least so that you can compromise effectively and try to find ways to sort of expand the pie. And, and so thinking about that with kids and applying that same lesson makes lots of sense. I don't know that I do it all that well myself.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah.

Katy Milkman: But, but to the extent that we, I, you know, we, we know that intuitively also about our interactions with other people, when you recognize and sort of think about your friends and your friendships and what you expect of whom, , re we, we have different expectations of different friends and that we, we know some have certain strengths and weaknesses and part of what makes relationships work is that you start to accommodate and say, okay, this person's always late.

Yeah, either. I'm going to cut them out of my life because that drives me crazy, or I'm going to be accommodating and I'm going to expect it. And when we have an interaction, I'm just not going to worry about that. , so yeah, [00:34:00] again, knowing, knowing who you're working with and what their pressure points are and being strategic and thoughtful about that, I think always gets us farther in interpersonal interactions just as it does when we're trying to accomplish our goals where we face internal barriers.

Jill Stoddard: Right. Well, in the, and the idea behind one, size is not fitting all, you know, of course that's the case with parenting. And when I think about my two children, they could not be more different as human beings. And yet I often end up responding to them in the same way as if they're sort of one. Fighting unit.

So I think probably, you know, recognizing the differences in them and you know, what is it that I need to do to change rather than focusing on trying to change them?

Katy Milkman: you're making me laugh. I literally just started this morning listening to an audio book that just came out from a great science reporter called, , how to raise kids who aren't assholes. And I'm really, really excited because I [00:35:00] need some. Because on this, I want to make sure it's so hard, especially when you have a little kid not to, you know, see the, some of the, you know, their prefrontal cortex is not fully formed.

And so they do these things where I'm like, oh my God, he's going to go to jail. This isn't going to be a long run, but of course that's not right. And that they're developing and understanding the science, , and how you can tailor your reactions and your strategies to, to best support their growth at, at these different stages where they have different shells.

It was obviously so important. So anyway, I don't have a lot of tips yet, except that I'm, I'm, I've loved the introduction and I love the title, so

Jill Stoddard: Well, and I, I am pretty sure that she's actually scheduled to come on to our podcast too.

Katy Milkman: amazing.

Jill Stoddard: when, but, but we're having her at some point , I'll Send you the, the episode

Katy Milkman: me the episode. Yeah. By then. Hopefully I'll have gotten through the entire book. I, I temptation button. My listening, I will say, , actually, well, I don't know if it's some patient bundling, it might just be bundling, but every morning when I'm [00:36:00] getting ready, I, you know, I have one of those waterproof in the shower speakers.

I get to listen to different podcasts and audio books so that every moment is, , used for something fun.

Jill Stoddard: Yes. joyful in some way. I love it. , so here's a question. I, you know, I was thinking about the fact that with large quantitative studies, it, you know, we don't know much about individual differences. Of course, there's studies that tell us maybe about predictors and things like that. So I, I found

myself being curious about whether certain strategies, like, do we know from research, whether certain strategies are better for some people than others. And what made me think of it for example, is my husband is a big gamer and he got a Peloton, as many people did during the pandemic and he loves it. And the thing he loves the most about it is the gamification. And, you know, I've done this many or row and now I get a t-shirt and I got some badge and some that, and I honestly.

Could not [00:37:00] care less about things like that. Like, it does nothing for me. , and I don't like riding the Peloton. I like walking at the beach where I can hear the ocean and feel the breeze and the sun and, you know, see other humans in person. So is there, like, what do we know about, about that? I mean, I guess this goes back to like one size doesn't fit all in a slightly different way.

Katy Milkman: Yes. Yeah, no, absolutely. It certainly does. , It's a great observation. First of all, I should also caveat and say, my training is really not as a personality psychologist at all, but rather, , you know, in computer science and economics and, , , the way I was trained was mostly look at average effects rather than individual differences.

So at some level, I'm the worst person to answer this question. On the other end. I know a tiny bit about it, but just enough to be dangerous and probably say something that's slightly inaccurate. , one thing I can tell you is that the research we did on temptation bundling, we [00:38:00] did find one thing that sort of left out of the data as an individual difference in that was that it was a more useful strategy to people who had busier skills.

So, , maybe they needed that extra motivation, that extra tug to get to the gym with something that was fun, even more than others and benefited more from being strategic, because it was, it was difficult to manage so many, so many things. And I know there's also a literature on, , you know, sort of goal directedness and that some people, those kinds of external rewards and bells and whistles are more attractive.

To some types of personalities than others. I haven't seen it explicitly linked with the intervention research I cite in the book. For instance, there was a really wonderful study that I love showing that families that were randomly assigned to either have their step count goals, gamified. So they could, you know, level up as a family and win awards that improved outcomes [00:39:00] relative to families that just track their steps and had much more basic.

Feedback mechanisms. , but I don't know of any specific analyses that tried to look at personality types or family types to see differences. But I do know in general to responsiveness, to goals and external, , praise and so on. Some people respond better to it than others. So what you're saying naturally follows then that if gamification is all about finding joy and the badges and the bells and whistles that even if it works on average, it may be particularly effective for some types.

And that might be sort of what's lifting the average effect. And there may be some people for whom it's not as useful.

Jill Stoddard: Well, I think what's great about all these strategies is they're really easy to try. And so, you know, like if listeners were to buy the book and read through all these different things, You know, here's what we know about averages in big groups. So go ahead and try it and see what works for you. And there will probably be, , some things that are really helpful and stick, and it might just be the top one or [00:40:00] two or three things.

And the rest, you know, maybe, maybe not so much, , it's like we can all do our own little single case experiments.

Katy Milkman: I think that's great. And I think another thing to keep in mind is that the principles are pretty universal. Even if the tactics might be effective for different people, depending on their tastes and preferences. So the principle that it's going to be important to make it instantly gratifying, to engage in the behavior that's aligned with your goals.

So that you'll pursue it. That's really, you know, I don't think there's going to be individual differences that are terribly large on that, but you know, what makes it fun for you might be different than what makes it fun for me. Right. So I love listening to tempting audio novels, you know, Harry Potter and the hunger games at the gym while I'm exercising.

Fabulous. And I love bridge written, but you might really prefer mystery novels or, , say that actually what I really like is a good, , reality TV show. And so it's just, you know, we have to pick what are the things that, or I like social. I want to be there with my friends. That's what does it for me, if once we understand the principle.

You know, we make this mistake. [00:41:00] We think that we can just push through and do it the most effective way, but instead we need to find ways to

make it instantly gratifying. Then we can find our own solution based on our own tastes.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, Do you know. Readiness for change and how important that is, because this is, you know, making me think a little bit about how often people are ambivalent about change. You know, even that a lot of times it's like, well, I should exercise more or drink less or quit smoking or whatever it is And, and really there's a part of me that really does want to do this because I know it'll be good for me, but also I really like.

Not exercising or drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes, you know, there's that like ambivalence and we know, you know, there's, Prochaska and DiClemente have their stages of change model and talk about how you have to be at a specific stage of change to make change most likely. And I don't remember if that's initiating change or maintaining change, but do you, did you come across that in your work?

Katy Milkman: Yeah, this is great. [00:42:00] I was actually going to mention the stages of change clinical model, which I should say, you know, that's not for my discipline again. We're well outside, you know, there's this clinical psychology, which I've learned a tiny bit about thanks to my collaborations with Angela Duckworth, who does have a lot of training in this and I've read.

, a few papers about the stages of change model. It's really, it's a very distinct literature from what I build on and where these interventions that I'm proposing come from. But I do think the insights in it are really interesting and important about, , and it aligns with this idea that there are, there's a need to understand, , what are your barriers in order to fix them at the barriers in the stages of change model, it's pointing out that those barriers evolve as you, , you evolve in your journey from.

You know, I'm not even aware that there's a problem to, I recognize it, but I'm not ready to act to, you know, initiation to, okay. Now I'm working on it actively to maintenance. So the, I think even though I don't know, , I don't know how well that will help readers of this particular [00:43:00] book or how effective it is to know that model.

If you want to change your behavior, I've never seen research showing that that knowledge of that is useful, but, , But I think it's aligned in that. I agree at different moments, we have different barriers. And you might think of that as, as relating to the stages of change in terms of your specific question, though, I

want to sort of back up, you were saying, how do we even get motivated to change?

And are there moments when we're not necessarily ready to begin? That is absolutely true. And I think, , I want to say two things about it. One there's lots of research, or I should say a growing body of research suggesting we probably change too little in life that, , we tend to be status quo, biased.

We send a stick to whatever we're used to, , more than we probably should. There's a topic that's also been studied called escalation of commitment, where we overweight, sunk costs. Anything. You know, any investment we've made that's irrecoverable in the past. You know, I spent so much time at this [00:44:00] job. , I can't just leave it now, but, but what you really want to think about is what are the costs and benefits from here on out, whatever time you've spent, that's, that's gone, you can't get it back, but would you be happier in a new role, , than you are in the current role?

That's the key question and we focus too much on sunk costs. And as a result, we, , change too little from, , from the perspective of what would be optimal. , And there's research showing that if we allow ourselves to change a little bit more, it might increase our happiness, which is really interesting.

One of the things that I write about in the book and that I've studied is that there are some moments, there are some points in time when we are more willing and open to change. And so to the extent that change just deciding to is hard, and maybe we under do it. We were too likely to stick to our old ways and not open enough to making change when it might make us happy.

This concept could be useful. And those moments, I call them fresh start moments. And this is based on research. I've done with Hank Chen die of UCLA and Jason Reese of behavioralize, where we found that, , [00:45:00] at, at moments in our lives that feel like a newbie. Where we feel like we're turning in your chapter.

So we're all familiar with new year's. And the sense of that is a new beginning. And lots of people make resolutions around that time. That's sort of would be the canonical example, but there are lots of other fresh start moments too, that, that motivate us spike in gold pursuit that we've shown in our research.

, and when people are particularly knowledgeable towards change, if you want to give them the tools that might help them, and those include dates like the start

of a new week or the start of a new month, the celebration of a birthday, , they also include. Making a move. You, you know, you've, you've moved to a new community or you've gotten a promotion at work or literally a new job that, that has the added benefit.

Not only the psychological. Openness to change that comes with these special dates where you can say, oh, it feels like I've turned a page. I have a new chapter break and I can say sort of my old failures, that was the old me before. And this is the new me. And the new me can do it. Zumi is different. When you physically move or have a physical job change.

Not [00:46:00] only do you have the psychology of a fresh start working to help you make a change that you might otherwise be hesitant to make, but, , your little, your literal circumstances have changed and you, you may have more of a blank slate to write them. So you wanted to change your eating habits and you've moved, well, maybe the donut shop that was right around the corner that was, you know, sort of bad habit to go by.

Well, it's no longer down the corner, so you truly have a blank slate to write on and it's easier to make a change for that reason as well. So, Anyone who's thinking about initiating change, but it's hesitant to do so sort of the two points I would say are one, we under do it and we should know that. So try to push yourself off the ledge even more than you naturally would because all of our biases, these are working to prevent change instead of to promote it and to looking for these moments.

When we have this natural increase in motivation to change these fresh starts, these chapter breaks in life. That can be a time when you're more able to motivate yourself to, to take the first steps.[00:47:00]

Jill Stoddard: Well, so now I have to ask you the dreaded question that I wasn't going to ask, but since you brought. New Year's resolutions. I talk in the book about how, you know, so when people say I'm going to make this change on new year's these new year's resolutions, it's a great Kickstarter for behavior change. And we also know that most people don't keep their new year's resolutions longterm.

And you said, everybody asks you this question, sort of like a, why bother what's the point if we're not going to keep it. So I want to fold two questions in

here. One, I kind of do want to ask that question because I loved the way you responded to it in the book. And I think it will be natural for listeners to go.

Yeah. But new year's resolutions don't work. So like, let's answer that question. And then also we're, we're just about getting to the end of our time. And I did want to end on, , how I also loved the last chapter and thinking about the way you conceptualize, how to maintain change. So I think these two things [00:48:00] can kind of go hand in hand.

Katy Milkman: Great. Okay. I'll try to do both. Hand-in-hand. That's a great, great cues. Okay. So in terms of the dreaded question, which, right, like, you know, why, why bother make new year's resolutions? Because I do really get this every year at new year's. I get like, I'm I'm famous for 15 minutes. Every, every new year's because of my work on fresh starts and all, you know, my inbox is flooded with requests, for interviews, for our reporters who want to do their new year story.

I need a quote for me since I've studied this and they always ask, yeah, why. Why should we make them don't they all fail. And, and my, , my number one answer to that is if you don't try, you can't succeed. So I'm a big fan of resolutions, because if you don't make an attempt to change, you're going to get nowhere.

Okay. Maybe 90% of it. At new year's resolutions fail, but 10% succeed. That's a lot more success than if zero attempts were made. So I'm a fan of whatever gets you started [00:49:00] and change is hard. It has setbacks. , I don't know that I've never seen data saying or attempt to change or any more successful at any other time.

I was here besides new years. So, , there's, there's nothing damning about using this particular. Moment to give it a shot. And then I think that the key is going to be recognized that change is hard. If we can use the best scientific tools to give us the best shot, you're better than the 90% failure rate.

Maybe we can take it on 80%. , and then, you know, we're ready to get back up. Can try again, because that's a big part of successes. It's, you know, it's probably not going to work the first time and you might need to try a few things. We've talked about experimenting with the different tactics in the book to figure out what does work for you.

And you can look for that next fresh start on the calendar. , maybe, you know, the start of spring or a birthday, or just a Monday that is meaningful to you is going to be able to give you the next, the next attempt. , I actually want to say one other thing about fresh starts before I talk about durable change though, which I think is really important.

And that is that, , while. [00:50:00] They're only as useful as you make them by sort of deploying other tools in combination. Cause just motivation. Won't take you very far. You now need to build the scaffolding that will create durable change and use the other tools and tactics that I've described. One tool actually will take you really far.

And that is if you use that temporary motivation to do something, that's a one-time act. That is a really big consequences. Change. So let me give you a couple examples of that. And some of these might make you laugh, but the first one won't make you laugh. The first is, you know, maybe you aren't setting aside money, , consistently for retirement in a, , in something like a 401k, a tax advantaged account.

Maybe you can create an auto deduction from a paycheck and do that just one time and it'll happen forever after if you use the motivation, you feel at a fresh start and set that up. You never have to think about it again and magically good things will happen. It's a set it and forget it type solution.

[00:51:00] So when we use that temporary motivation to take an action that really has huge long-term consequences, like a snowball effect, it can be really powerful. , another example in the domain of health, is there something. Things that we just need to do once with huge benefits. I've been studying vaccines, right?

Getting a vaccine. If you're feeling fresh, start motivation. That is a thing that can really really matter in the long run. Right. Here's the one that makes people giggle get a colonoscopy. If you're overdue for one, they save lives, right? It's a, one-time kind of uncomfortable procedure, but if you have that motivation, you do it once.

It's not a behavior you need to be constantly feeling motivated to do so. I just want to point out that fresh starts can not only be harnessed to sort of kickstart others. Chains of good behavior by creating scaffolding and using tools to build, build your workout habit or, , you know, figure out how to not snap at your kids.

They can also be used to make one time decisions with huge

Jill Stoddard: Hm. [00:52:00]

Katy Milkman: Okay. The second thing I know you wanted to talk about was durability. How do we create lasting change and. As I described in my book, I think I was misguided for maybe the first half of my career on this topic, in that, , you know, it was, I was the guy looking for a silver bullet, you know, fountain of youth styles sort of cure where if we could just find the right suite of tools to put in front of people or tactics to share with them or programming.

Maybe we could work with people for a month or offer them these tools for a month and sort of forever after they'd be changed for the better when it came to habits or around exercise or, , you know, medication adherence or study habits, or, you know, what have you. And, , that was really what I was looking for and what I have discovered.

And this is thanks in part to. A really enlightening [00:53:00] conversation I had with a colleague who's a medical doctor, but I've come to appreciate is that was just probably the wrong way to think about behavior change. My colleague, Kevin bull, who's an MD PhD, and I were talking about a study. I'd run that didn't work out the way.

I'd hope where, you know, we gave people all these tools and a program for a month and about 33%. The behaviors that we changed in that month endured. So, you know, better than nothing, but a lot of relapse. And I was, I was devastated. I said, Kevin, why isn't this lasting forever? Because the a hundred percent, , retention.

And he said, you know, Katy, one thing that I think is really interesting about the way you're conceptualizing behavior changes, how different it is from the way we think about treating patients with physical. , elements. Right? A lot of the times we've a patient comes in and they have a chronic disease that they're, , diagnosed with, say diabetes.

And we don't put them on insulin for a month and expect it to cure them forever after, right. Some things have a cure. Like maybe I can give you a lotion for a rash and it'll go away. But a lot of things require, you know, constant management [00:54:00] because there our body, or are we're built to sort of fight against the solution and we need to constantly provide.

Treatment. Why do you think behavior change it'd be curable rather than chronic and something that we need to demand? That was just a great aha moment because all these barriers to change that I write about that I studied, no, none of them are curable, right. Will always be present by insight. You can't take a pill and make that go away.

, you know, I'll always be a bit forgetful. I will always, you know, prefer the path of least resistance. I will always struggle with confidence and challenging situations. And so if these barriers are part of human nature and not curable, then instead of thinking we need sort of a, a one month or a one-time.

Dilution, I think the right way to think about behavior change and durability is thinking about tools and tactics and techniques that will help us manage and treat, , those barriers successfully in a way that's not burdensome, but that it's [00:55:00] constant. So I wouldn't expect if I. Encourage someone to temptation bundle, to build an exercise habit that if they did it for a month, right?

If they watch their favorite TV shows for a month at the gym, and then I took away the TV and they're not allowed to do that anymore, suddenly they would love the gym forever after. No, it's no longer going to be fun to go to the gym. Once you stopped temptation bundling. It's it's a habit then you need to build that.

I will continually make the gym enjoyable by linking it with something. That's a pleasure. So that's kinda my philosophy on behavior change and how to make it last. And I think, you know, study after study reinforces that we can create durable change so long as we're providing durable solutions. When we try to do sort of a one and done.

It doesn't work very well with the rare exceptions of these kinds of things. That can be a set it and forget it, or a one-time solution with longterm consequences.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, there are skills that we have to return to again and again and again. And you know, it's how I think about psychotherapy too. And when [00:56:00] we're trained to do psychotherapy, it's like this many sessions and then you terminate and then you're done. And I've more recently thought about it, similar to what you're saying about Dr.

Volpi. Is, well, wait, when, if we get physically ill, we go to the doctor and we do what we need to do to get better. And then we don't go to the doctor until we get physically elegant. And then we go back to the doctor and, you know,

maybe therapy should work a little bit more like that. Right. And I do have clients where, you know, I practice a short-term therapy model.

I want you to be able to go out in the world and see that you're able to do this on your own without me and progress. Isn't linear. Shit happens. And sometimes life gets really hard. And your ability to practice these skills may decrease during certain points of your life. And then you can come back and we'll return and refresh and figure out how to get these skills and practices back into your daily life and how you can return to them again and again.

And it's this, you know, sort of like [00:57:00] bumpy road. I always say progress isn't linear, but as long as the slope of the line is going in the right direction, You're all set. And so I loved that. I think that that's such an important point to make, and it's not really the way I think we're sort of trained to think like, you know, there's this, well, I should be able to just do this thing this one time and be forever quote, unquote, fixed or changed.

And that's just not reasonable or realistic. So I really appreciated the way that you auntie conceptualized. That was

Katy Milkman: Thank you. I'm glad it resonated. And what a wonderful example that you shared and way of thinking about it. So that helps me too.

Jill Stoddard: Well, everything resonated and really like I so enjoyed the book and I, I need to, I took so many notes. I mean, you should say I write in my book and you should see it also. I, I was writing notes when you were talking about. The red Sox. And I think it was the year that we ended up winning the world series.

And I, we were in grad school in Boston, [00:58:00] I think at the same time.

Katy Milkman: That's so fun.

Jill Stoddard: yeah, so it was personally enjoyable and professionally enjoyable. and so I need to go

Katy Milkman: Oh, I'm so glad.

Jill Stoddard: and set an intention to sort of try out all of these different things. I'll have to figure out what's making me philosophy, see how long it lasts.

Katy Milkman: I love that. It's wonderful. Well, I think now you have the identity as a flosser and you believe you can. So

Jill Stoddard: That's right. That's

Katy Milkman: it won't fall apart, but if you find new barriers, then you can update your

Jill Stoddard: I know where to go. That's right. So, I mean, it was just, there's so much juicy stuff in here. It's so great. I really hope people do check out the book. , where else can people find you? I know you have your choice, ology podcasts. Awesome. So many great guests, so many great topics, really nicely produced. So anyone who likes psychologists off the clock is going to like choice ology.

So I definitely recommend checking that out. And then where else can people find you?

Katy Milkman: Thank you. , my website is probably the best place to [00:59:00] find everything from, you know, if you really want to get into the nerdiness of the papers that I write to, you know, episodes of true psychology, I have a newsletter that you can subscribe to. They're called Milkman delivers. Um, and the website is katymilkman.com

Jill Stoddard: That's awesome.

Katy Milkman: Thank you. I will, I should say that I really struggled to go, like to lean that far into the ridiculous of newness of my last name, but my students overwhelmingly insisted when I gave them different choices. thank you. So the website is [Katy Milkman.com](http://KatyMilkman.com) Katy with a Y like Katy Perry, not an I E. And if it's got all that good stuff there, so that's a great place to find out more.

And thank you so much for having me. This

Jill Stoddard: Thank you for being here. I, this is, I mean, just, I love nerding out about behavior change and it's so great to talk to you. I really appreciate your time.

Katy Milkman: Thank you. It was, I love nerding out about it too.

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