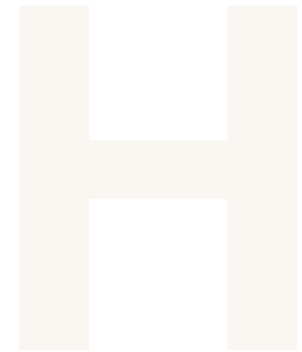


LAYER THREE PROTOCOL

Habit Loop Dissection Worksheet



Understanding what your behaviors are actually doing — so you can change them without willpower.

Why Discipline Fails

The person doomscrolling until 2 AM is not lazy. They are trying to quiet mental noise. The person overeating is not weak. They are comforting an overloaded nervous system. The person checking notifications does not care about them — their brain craves interruption itself.

That is why pure discipline fails. People rip away behaviors without understanding what emotional job those behaviors were performing. The behavior is not the problem. The behavior is a solution to a problem you have not named yet.

This worksheet helps you name it.

THE CORE INSIGHT

Every habit you want to break is solving a problem. Every habit you want to build needs a problem

Until you understand the cue and the reward, you are fighting your own nervous system. This worksheet maps the loop so you can work with your biology instead of against it.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Anatomy of a Habit Loop

Charles Duhall's model, applied through the lens of emotional regulation and nervous system science.



What Most Models Miss: The Emotional Function

Traditional habit science focuses on repetition and reward. It works for simple behaviors. But the habits that destroy people's lives — compulsive phone use, emotional eating, procrastination, substance use — are not driven by repetition. They are driven by regulation.

The behavior is not the point. The emotional shift the behavior produces is the point.

Doom scrolling delivers numbness. Overeating delivers comfort. Avoidance delivers relief from anxiety. Until you identify the emotional job the habit is performing, replacing it is nearly impossible.

Common Habit Loops Dissected

| BEHAVIOR | CUE (EMOTIONAL) | CRAVING (THE SHIFT) | REWARD (THE PAYOFF) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Late-night doom scrolling | Anxiety, loneliness, mental noise | Numbness, distraction from self | Temporary emotional flatline |
| Emotional overeating | Stress, emptiness, boredom | Comfort, sensory pleasure, fullness | Brief dopamine + opioid release |
| Compulsive notification checking | Uncertainty, FOMO, need for validation | Novelty, social connection (predicted) | Micro-dopamine hits |
| Procrastination on important work | Perfectionism, fear of judgment, overwhelm | Relief from pressure, temporary safety | Anxiety reduction through avoidance |

THE WORKSHEET

Part 1: Mapping Your Current Loop

Pick one behavior you want to understand. Be specific. 'Phone use' is too broad. 'Checking Instagram in bed before sleep' is specific enough to dissect.

1

Name the Behavior

What exactly do you do? Include time, place, and context.

Example: 'I open Instagram within 5 minutes of getting in bed, every night, and scroll for 45+ minutes.'

2

Identify the Cue

What happens immediately before? Focus on the emotional or bodily trigger, not just the external event.

Example: 'I feel the day is unresolved. My mind starts rehearsing conversations. I feel alone with my thoughts.'

3

Name the Craving

What state are you seeking? What feeling do you want to escape or create?

Example: 'I want to stop thinking. I want to feel something other than the weight of the day.'

THE WORKSHEET

Part 2: Understanding the Reward

4

What Is the Actual Reward?

Be honest. What does the behavior actually deliver in the first 2 minutes? The first 10?

Example: 'Immediate novelty. Predictable content. The illusion of connection. No demands on me.'

5

What Is the Cost?

Not the obvious cost. The hidden one. What does this behavior steal from you 6 hours later? 6 months later?

Example: 'Sleep quality drops. I wake up tired. Morning willpower is gone. I feel behind before the day starts.'

'I am training my brain to need constant input. Silence feels uncomfortable now.'

6

What Need Is Actually Being Met?

Beneath the behavior, beneath the craving — what human need is trying to get satisfied?

Common underlying needs:

- Safety / predictability
- Autonomy / control
- Rest / recovery
- Meaning / purpose
- Connection / belonging
- Competence / mastery
- Emotional regulation
- Self-worth / identity

My need: _____

THE WORKSHEET

Part 3: Designing the Replacement

You cannot remove a behavior without replacing its function. The new behavior must satisfy the same need with a lower long-term cost.

7

What Could Satisfy the Same Need?

Brainstorm 3 alternatives that address the same underlying need without the same cost.

Option 1:

Option 2:

Option 3:

8

What Is the Smallest Possible Version?

Big changes fail. Tiny changes stick. What is the 2-minute version of your replacement behavior?

Examples of tiny replacements:

- Instead of 45 min of scrolling → 5 min of journaling + 10 min of reading
- Instead of emotional eating → 3 min of box breathing + a glass of water
- Instead of procrastination → 2 min of the hardest task, then permission to stop
- Instead of binge-watching → One episode + 10 min of stretching + lights out

My tiny replacement: _____

IMPLEMENTATION

The 21-Day Tracking System

Awareness without tracking is just insight. Insight without repetition is just entertainment.

Daily Check-In (Check the box if completed)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Day 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed |
| Day 8 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 13 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 14 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed |
| Day 15 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 16 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 17 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 18 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 19 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 20 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | Day 21 <input type="checkbox"/> Completed |

Weekly Reflection

1 What patterns did you notice in your cues? (Same time? Same emotion? Same location?)

2 When was the replacement easiest? When was it hardest? What was different?

3 What need surfaced that you had not recognized before?

ADVANCED DISSECTION

When the Loop Is Hidden

Some habit loops disguise themselves as personality, productivity, or virtue. These are the hardest to see because they come with social approval.

| BEHAVIOR | HIDDEN CUE | HIDDEN REWARD | LONG-TERM COST |
|---|---|--|--|
| OVERWORKING | Fear of inadequacy, identity tied to output | The feeling of being 'enough' — temporarily | Burnout, relationships, health, creativity |
| PEOPLE-PLEASING | Fear of rejection, conditional self-worth | Safety through approval, avoiding conflict | Resentment, lost identity, boundary erosion |
| PERFECTIONISM | Fear of judgment, black-and-white thinking | The illusion of control, temporary relief | Paralysis, missed opportunities, self-criticism |
| CONSTANT LEARNING (no action) | Failure, imposter, syndrome | The feeling of progress without risk | No results, reinforced inadequacy, more learning |
| HELPING OTHERS (neglecting self) | Need for worthiness, avoidance of own pain | Feeling needed, moral superiority, distraction | Depletion, martyrdom, hidden resentment |

The Deepest Layer: Identity

Some habits persist not because of the reward, but because of who you believe you are.

'I am a hard worker.' 'I am a helper.' 'I am the responsible one.' 'I am the smart one.'

When a habit is tied to identity, removing it feels like dying. The worksheet above will not work until you separate the behavior from the self-concept. You are not your habits. You are the observer of your habits. That distinction is where freedom begins.

QUICK REFERENCE

The Habit Loop at a Glance

THE 8-QUESTION DISSECTION

Use this card when you discover a new behavior to examine.

1. NAME IT

What exactly do you do? (Time, place, context)

2. FIND THE CUE

What happens immediately before? (Emotion, thought, sensation)

3. NAME THE CRAVING

What state are you seeking? What feeling do you want?

4. IDENTIFY THE REWARD

What does the behavior actually deliver in the first 2 minutes?

5. COUNT THE COST

What does it steal from you 6 hours later? 6 months later?

6. FIND THE NEED

What human need is actually being met? (Safety, connection, autonomy, rest)

7. BRAINSTORM REPLACEMENTS

What else could satisfy the same need with lower cost?

8. GO TINY

What is the 2-minute version of the replacement behavior?

THE PRINCIPLE

Your habits are emotional signals, not proof you are broken.

Map the loop. Meet the need. The behavior changes itself.

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The B.E.H.A.V.I.O.R. Method | Layer Three: Habit Architecture