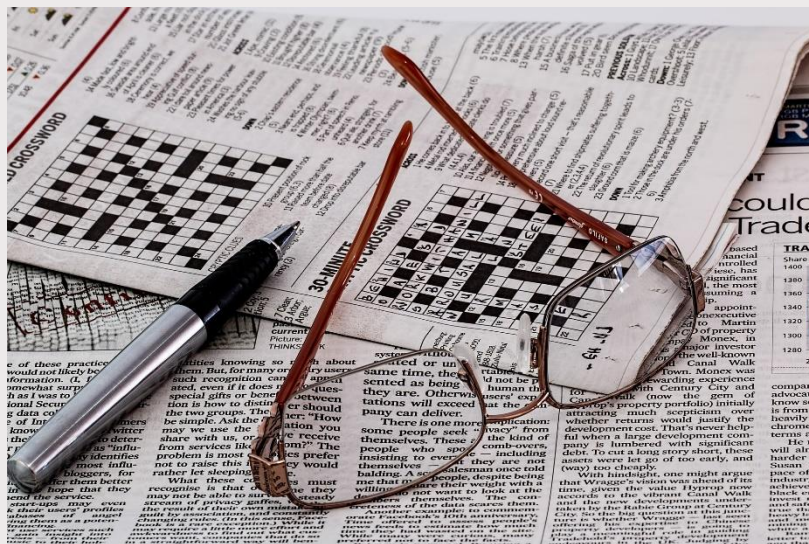


## Rituals for success

Rituals are described as a series of actions that are performed in a prescribed way regularly, the etymology traces back to 1600s and was related to religious ceremonies. However, I think rituals are truly relevant today in daily and corporate lives. How, you may ask - well, identifying a series of actions that are beneficial to your body and mind and training yourself to perform this regularly until it becomes a habit is the best way to incorporate the benefits of those actions in daily life.



Let me give you an example. I grew up watching my father perform an interesting ritual every morning before he went to work. No, it wasn't anything religious or even spiritual. It was completing the Times Cryptic Crossword every morning. How is this beneficial, I hear you ask? Firstly, it helped him because he enjoyed it immensely. Secondly, it was a challenge to his little grey cells and there would have been a rush of happy hormones in his mind when he overcame that challenge. Thirdly, it's easy to get into a mindless routine where you start your day with chores like a zombie - incorporating a ritual like this gave him the discipline of starting the day with a bit of joy and challenge. And biased as I may be, to me, Dad was one of the most special human beings I knew - and he was widely respected by a wide range of people.

Then as I started a foray into corporate life myself, I started reading books where successful people are well known for starting the day in a particular way. Bill Gates is known to use exercise and reading as rituals, and I've read about how Oprah Winfrey uses meditation at the start of the day. There are various successful CEOs who schedule in thinking time every day into their diaries to have a ritual where they exercise their minds in a way that becomes a habit. I was quite fascinated by this - but when I was younger, I did find it a hard act to emulate. That extra 30 minutes of sleep felt too precious to lose and it was easy to fall into the habit of rushing around to get ready to go to work or school or



PRIYA HUNT  
*Executive Coaching*

whatever it is that you do. Then, I moved into a job that was exciting but involved a huge amount of travel - so I never could have a daily routine - or so I thought to find myself an excuse.



Like most other human beings, I went through some trials and tribulations in my life, and it was at this point that I felt the need to have something, a crutch, a support mechanism, which could help me get through my day. I found yoga particularly pleasurable and helpful. But there's one thing doing yoga occasionally and another thing converting it into a ritual. As a child, I had been an avid bookworm but when I grew up, I found less time for books and had completely got out of this habit. I have J.K. Rowling to thank getting me back into books and boy, did I come back with a bang! Books have always transported me to another world, and I found that I could relax so much more when I read at night. As a good six-sigma practitioner, I kept a record of my mental health and performance when I did yoga and read and found systematic evidence that I was way more effective when I did these. And I found a way to make them into a habit and for the last 15 years of my life, I have built a set of rituals that help me cope.

So, I thought I would share some ideas on how you could build some rituals in your life to help succeed.

1. Find something that stimulates the body or mind or both. This is crucial. For my dad, his crossword puzzles stimulated his mind, for Oprah, it was meditation. For Bill Gates, it was his exercise in the morning. For me, it's yoga - which combines both body and mind.



PRIYA HUNT  
*Executive Coaching*

2. Find something that gives you pleasure. There's no point in doing yoga as your morning exercise if you enjoy running more. There's no point in forcing yourself to do something you don't enjoy as it will be an uphill struggle to make it a habit.
3. Be clear on the goal and what the rituals are there to help you achieve. For me, having a ritual like yoga in the morning helps me in two ways - stretching my body and having some quiet time for self-reflection so that I can be my best self in the day. The reading ritual I have at night helps me get ready for a relaxing night's sleep. Being clear on what are you trying to achieve by incorporating these rituals in your life is crucial.
4. Keep it to the same time and keep it short. Doing an hour of exercise better than doing 20 minutes of it. However, it may be much harder to find an hour daily whereas it's easier to find 20 minutes. Kaizen, the Japanese technique of overcoming laziness is just this - they suggest you do something for 1 minute a day, every day at the same time. Even if you are lazy, 1 minute is not a burden and you can easily form this habit. So, find your own Kaizen - for me it was 25 minutes. I started doing Yoga every morning for 25 minutes, no more. This was much easier than forcing myself to do it for longer. If you find that you struggle to do it for the time you've selected, try shortening it and see how long you can keep the habit then.
5. Be flexible and open to modifications. You will have days when you are not feeling well, you had a late night, or you are in a rush. So, find a suitable alternate - it could be a shortened version of your practice, it could be an alternate - you spend 10 minutes writing in your journal or meditating or listening to a positive podcast. But keep to an activity that gives you a similar feeling to what your original ritual does so it feels aligned.
6. Make it easy and remove distractions. For example, if you want to run every morning, get your running gear out and ready nearby when you wake up. I keep a yoga mat in my bedroom, so I don't form excuses about having to find one. Keep your devices away from your bed so you don't get distracted into looking at your email or the news instead of performing your ritual.
7. Know that you have already been successful. Most of us have formed some simple rituals since childhood - e.g., we brush our teeth when we wake up, we have a cup of tea or coffee etc. So, know that you can do this - what you must do is find the right ritual and get into the habit. I find that doing it in the morning (when you wake up, irrespective of time) and at night (before going to sleep, irrespective of time) are the easiest way for me to form a ritual.

I would love to hear from you about the rituals that have made you successful in whatever you do and do feel free to share your ideas on how you've made your rituals stick. Good luck