

A wide green banner with a white stylized 'G' icon on the left side. The text 'Replace Bad Habits with Good Ones' is centered in white, with 'By Steven Crawford, Consultant' below it in a smaller white font.

Replace Bad Habits with Good Ones

By Steven Crawford, Consultant

“First we form habits, then they form us. Conquer your bad habits, or they’ll eventually conquer you.”

Rob Gilbert

Millions of people have bad habits they want to break; overeating, smoking, drinking, playing video games, biting fingernails, swearing, working too many hours, overcommitting...the list goes on and on. So, you are not alone if you have a bad habit you want to overcome.

Bad habits are, well...bad. We know they are bad, yet we continue to do them - and create more bad habits. These bad habits adversely impact our work, our health, our relationships and rob us of time that can be used more productively.

I think we can all relate to bad habits and how they impact us but it’s not always easy to set about making the changes necessary to overcome them. Let’s take a look at how to identify those bad habits and conquer them, lest we be conquered by them.

How did I form this bad habit?

“All bad habits start slowly and gradually and before you know you have the habit, the habit has you.”

- Zig Ziglar

Often, bad habits start with a simple act and then become a habit. For example, you may be a ‘social smoker’ in that you only smoke when having a drink and socializing. But what happens, over time, is you find yourself socializing more in order to drink/smoke more and ultimately the drinking/smoking is done far more often and even outside of social situations. You’ve formed a habit.

Sometimes, bad habits are developed over time as a way to overcome boredom or to escape from pressures of work or family. For example, you may find a game you like online, let's say 'Words With Friends (WWF)' and you enjoyed playing it from time to time. As you wrap up a rough day at work, you escape by busting out your phone and dropping words on WWF for a while. As time goes on, you find yourself playing WWF during work hours, in the bathroom, and even staying up late to make sure you get your high score. You've formed a habit.

There are many examples I can give, but I'm sure you can see what I'm driving at. These habits (or any bad habit) eventually take our time away from being productive at work, spending time with family, or doing things that are good for our health and relationships – good habits.

Bad habits can be hard to break, especially when there is a root cause to why you continue to do unhealthy things or things that pull you away from productive contribution. If you have limiting beliefs that drive your resistance to overcome bad habits, consider addressing those limiting beliefs. *So, how do I quit these bad habits?*

“The secret to permanently breaking any bad habit is to love something greater than the habit.”

Bryan McGill

Much like overcoming limiting beliefs with new paradigms (new positive beliefs) a bad habit is best overcome by replacing it with a good habit – as opposed to just trying to quit the bad habit. You need something to take the place of the bad habit in order to prevent relapse and to fulfill whatever benefit (or perceived benefit) the bad habit was giving you.

For example, if you get lost in a game on your phone to wind down after a busy day, consider replacing that habit with something more productive that provides the benefit (wind down/escape) you were getting from the bad habit. Maybe board games with the kids, reading a book, practicing learning a new language, taking walks with the family, etc. are options to consider. The key is to find a habit that is positive and contributes to good in your life.

A term I've heard used related to this is *sublimation* - simply interpreted as replacing bad habits with good ones by focusing on what you want as a result as opposed to focusing on quitting the bad habit. For example, instead of focusing on drinking less carbonated drinks – commit to drinking more water. As you focus on drinking more water, you'll drink less soda.

After you have found a replacement habit or habits, it helps to eliminate the temptation to fall back to the old/bad habit. In the game example, simply delete the application from your phone. That will help prevent the temptation to just 'play for a minute' and begin the cycle of addiction all over again.

Another tool to deploy is the buddy system or accountability partner. Tell someone about the bad habit you are breaking/replacing and have them help you be accountable. Even better, if that person is working on creating a new and positive habit as well, you can help each other stay accountable and encourage each other along the way.

It is important to remember that this is a process, it takes time and failures along the way are likely. That's okay. If it was easy, we'd all be free of bad habits. The key is to stick with it, celebrate your wins, and learn from your slip-ups. Staying positive, despite setbacks, will help you avoid falling into a mindset of negativity. Once your new/positive habit takes hold and becomes second nature, you'll enjoy looking back with satisfaction at the journey and the hurdles you overcame!

“Good habits are as addictive as bad habits, and a lot more rewarding.”

Harvey Mackay

There is no magic pill to correcting bad habits. The key is to determine what drives the bad habit and what needs are being met. Then find replacement behavior that not only satisfies those needs, but does so without negative consequences. It is even better if the replacement behavior has additional positive impacts, such as greater self-esteem, more quality time with family, better health, etc.