

Rituals take time, but they're worth it

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HAVE you ever had the experience of attending a conference and being inspired and motivated by what you have learnt but find that within a few days the enthusiasm has dissipated and you have returned to your original pre-conference self? This is known as “the Honeymoon Effect”.

Last week the Wholebeing Institute from Massachusetts held the residential component of their first Australian-based 12-month Certificate in Positive Psychology in Geelong.

More than 90 participants attended from New Zealand, Asia and every

Australian state and territory.

The course emphasises helping participants to adopt positive habits in their own lives in order to experience lasting change and transformation.

Signing up for the course, it had only added to my enthusiasm that Tal Ben-Shahar, who created the most popular course in Harvard's history, was coming to Geelong to co-teach a more modified version of this course.

It's not easy to change. Years of failed New Year's resolutions for many of us are proof of this. It takes practice.

We don't jump out of bed each morning and pump up the theme song to *Chariots of Fire* to motivate ourselves before running into the bathroom to brush our teeth. Brushing our teeth is a lasting habit that we do automatically each morning without thinking. It was taught and reinforced to us as a small child.

To help establish any new habit there are methods we can use to stack

the odds in favour of achievement.

A new positive ritual could be to start a nightly gratitude journal by listing three things you were grateful for that day. The benefits of gratitude are well proven. Gratitude increases happiness, bolsters self-esteem, improves sleep, reduces negative emotions and makes us more resilient. It has also been shown to reduce anxiety and depression.

Start with a ritual that is not time-consuming and that is easily achievable. Take one small step at a time.

A new ritual may involve writing down each night what was your best moment of the day or spending five minutes on a meditation practice.

Don't so much focus on cutting out a bad habit, but rather add extra positive habits to your life. If you are going through a challenging period, you might write a nightly list of three things you are looking forward to the

next day. Document your progress and periodically share your endeavour with a trusted friend. In the course we are starting with a 30-day challenge for our new ritual. We shall then add a second ritual each month once the previous ritual has been established.

Neurologically a new habit takes up to six months to be imprinted. Being accountable to a group of like-minded people is a key. We will likely be 75 to 85 per cent more successful with an accountability strategy.

The message is overwhelmingly optimistic. There is much we can do to improve our wellbeing and happiness.

It doesn't cost anything, it's not complicated, but it does require commitment and practice.

I recommend not waiting for New Year's Day.

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