

In our last lesson, we learned a simple exercise to help you retrain your brain to “think in systems.” We also identified the primary reason why most people don’t.

But that lesson had you looking at the systems around you and the routines of other people.

In this lesson, you’re going to identify the invisible routines you *already* practice but might not be aware of. You’re going to find both the micro routines *and* the macro routines that are already part of your life.

By identifying these routines, it’s going to make it easier for you to see how they came to be and also understand the ways these organic routines improve your life... and the ways they might hold you back.

In order to do that, we need to clarify three concepts.

1. Order over chaos.
2. Solomon’s Paradox.
3. Micro leads to macro.

Let’s start with order over chaos. What do I mean by that?

What I mean is that, in general, the world is chaos and we’re the ones who bring order to it through planning and effort.

In fact, the second law of thermodynamics states that entropy—which, in case you’re not familiar with the word “entropy,” it means disorder or chaos—so the second law of thermodynamics says that entropy in the universe is always increasing.

Basically, the world is perpetually falling out of order.

But we humans were gifted with the ability to plan and execute ideas. So, even without consciously thinking, you’re always making order from the world around you.

If you have a pile of laundry sitting in the corner of your bedroom, you put it there with a purpose—even if you didn’t actually think about it. And if you needed a pair of underwear, you probably know how to dig through that pile to find what you need.

This is the idea of “organized chaos.” You’ve probably heard that term before. What looks like chaos to someone else may actually be quite orderly to you. If you look at your messy neighbor’s desk at work, you might think, “Yikes, how does he find

anything he needs? That would make me crazy.” But he probably knows—within a few guesses anyway—where everything he needs is buried.

His desk is a kind of organized chaos.

So, even if you’ve never thought about systems or routines. Even if you’ve never built one on purpose, you’ve still built many of them because, as a human, it’s impossible not to.

Entropy—or... dirty laundry and unfiled papers—is always increasing, and you and I are always subconsciously trying to stay one step ahead of the disorder.

When you realize that, it gets a little easier to start spotting the repetitive things you do and the tools and resources you default to using all the time.

Those are your systems. Those are your routines.

Another little puzzle that holds most of us back from really understanding ourselves is a concept called Solomon’s Paradox.

The idea behind Solomon’s Paradox is that it’s always easier to troubleshoot someone else’s problems than it is your own.

The name comes from the biblical character, King Solomon, who was very wise when it came to solving the problems of his people, but very unwise when it came to solving his own problems.

And that was, eventually, his undoing.

The reason it’s easy to see and solve your friends’ and family’s problems but so hard to solve your own has mostly to do with what I call “emotional distance.”

You’re like an executive when it comes to other people. You can look at their issues from a 10,000 foot view without getting emotionally attached to those problems. And that distance gives you clarity.

You’re able to formulate better solutions because you can offer *new* ideas—something that we rarely offer to ourselves.

When you’re working out your own problems, you’re very emotionally close to them. You have a lot of personal investment in them. You may have even come to depend on those problems for comfort. They become part of the story of your life. And changing that story is uncomfortable.

Maybe you're so close that you don't even realize you're trying to solve the *wrong* problem.

This happens to all of us, so what can you do about it?

There are two things. First, you can ask for advice from someone you trust. They can look at your problem with a different perspective and give you wise advice. They can take on that executive role. Of course, you might not follow that advice. So, here's another idea. You can talk through your problem with yourself in the third person.

So, if I were having trouble waking up when my alarm clock goes off in the morning, rather than saying, "Gee, I never get out of bed on time. I'm just not a morning person. How am I supposed to fix this?" Instead, I would say something like, "Well Tyler, you keep sleeping through your morning alarm. There are lots of ways to fix this, and you need to try a new way. Here are four ideas. Which one do you want to try first?"

Talking to yourself in the third person—funny as it sounds—gives your brain the ability to increase your emotional distance from the problem, which allows you to see more viable solutions.

You'll see why this is important to this lesson when we get to the exercise.

But before we do that, let's quickly go over the micro leads to macro concept.

What I want you to understand here is that your default routines exist on a spectrum. That spectrum runs from micro routines like putting your dirty shirt in the hamper before you go to bed to shopping for a new shirt at a specific store or collection of stores when one wears out.

Your life, whether you see it or not, is *filled* with systems and routines, and many of them are interconnected.

A small, mundane routine that you do every morning can be connected to how an entire day's routine plays out. And that day can determine the routine you follow for the rest of the week. That week can direct your month. So on and so forth.

What's important to take away from this is that micro routines can have a profound impact on your whole life.

Students who are just getting started building their own systems and routines usually want to tackle something enormous. They want to change their lives, so they focus on their macro routines.

It makes sense—those are the big trends that are easy to see. But they're also the hardest to change. They're hard to change because they're made up of dozens or even hundreds of micro-routines and habits.

Without changing the micro routines that direct the macros, you don't have any hope of making a big shift.

My grandfather, who grew up in The Great Depression, used to always tell me, "If you take care of your pennies, your dollars will take care of themselves." What he was trying to instill in me is to focus on what I have control over the most often.

The only way to save \$1,000 when you don't already have \$1,000 is to save smaller amounts until you do.

This is something that the legendary basketball coach, John Wooden, understood. He would spend practice time teaching his players how to properly tie their shoes. And he'd make them practice it until they had perfected it.

He did that because he knew it was a fundamental building block that would help his players excel at every other skill down the line.

And his strategy worked really well. His teams won 10 college titles and never had a losing season for 29 years.

So, if you're here to make big changes to how you operate so that you'll have more free time or lower your stress levels, that's fantastic. But, in order to achieve that, you're going to have to take the counterintuitive step of focusing on the tiny and often invisible actions you do every day.

As you start to practice this, it won't take long to see how big results can come from small changes.

Okay, so here's what we learned in this lesson.

First, we learned that the world is always working to create disorder. It's even a scientific law. And, because of that, we're always working to create order. We have systems and routines that we operate automatically even if it feels like we don't.

Next, we learned about Solomon's Paradox and why it's so important to create emotional distance from your own problems when you're trying to solve them. Why we need to pretend like we're giving a friend advice when we're trying to give it to ourselves.

And, finally, we learned how our invisible micro systems and routines have incredible power over the whole spectrum of our lives and why it's important to focus our energy there if we want to make big changes.

Now here's what I want you to do with this lesson. I want you to complete a little exercise.

Set an hourly timer on your watch or your phone. Or whatever device you have handy.

When the timer goes off each hour, I want you to answer three questions to yourself:

1. What am I doing right now? Okay, so, what activity am I currently engaged in?
2. What happened *just before* I started doing this? This answers the question of "how did I get here?" Whatever it was you were doing just before this was the trigger that got you to start doing what you're doing now.
3. What will I do right after doing this? Or, what am I most likely to do after this?

Those three questions will help you identify some of the micro-routines that are running your life. And you'll start to connect those to the bigger systems and see how they fit together. How one thing runs into another.

And if you want to take it a step further, you can answer two additional questions whenever you spot a routine.

First, ask yourself, "How is this routine serving me?"

Like we already learned, it didn't develop by accident, even if you didn't create it on purpose. It came to be in order to solve some problem. So what problem is it solving? Or, at least, what problem was it *supposed* to solve?

Then, ask "How is this routine holding me back?" Are there some ways that it is keeping you from your bigger goals? Is it distracting you from something important?

You don't have to do anything with the answers to those question right now. But you will soon, so go ahead and start thinking about them.

See you in the next lesson.