

5 steps to breaking bad work habits

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We all have our own bad habits at the office. Maybe it's gossiping or complaining Or checking e-mail incessantly. Whatever the habit, we'd be happier without it. To break and replace those tendencies, follow these simple five steps: Step 1: Identify your bad office habits Routine makes us feel safe, but don't hide under the umbrella of familiarity for too long. The problem with habits is that we let them control us. Our subconscious kicks in and tendencies take over--without us even thinking about them. Monitor yourself for a full week as you go through average work days. Jot down any potential habits in a job journal. Whether it's an arbitrary ritual like tapping your toe three times before you enter the building or sipping on an afternoon diet soda, include it on the list. The point here isn't to nab every habit and routine, but to find a starting point

Step 2: Determine which habits are hurting you Let's shoot big; identify the habit that affects you most negatively. It could be wasting time, putting physical or mental stress on your body, fatigue ç-2&ž (from that diet soda), etc. Look at the short-term and long-term picture and prepare to face your worst habit head on. Step 3: Stop your habit dead in its tracks Sometimes stopping a habit is as simple as recognizing it. Next time you find yourself carrying out the habit, say to yourself, " Stop!" If you have the luxury of yelling it aloud, do it. If you're in a public office, say it in your head (rather than risk looking bonkers). Create a physical or graphical reminder that represents the negative outcome of the habit, and access that reminder when you need it. With the soda, for example, hang a picture of decaying teeth near your desk (or maybe in a drawer you open often, where your co-workers won't see it). Next time you reach for that soda, you'll at least consider drinking water instead. [See The

Vanishing Lunch Break.] Step 4: Replace your bad habit with something awesome Because office life is conducive to repetition, the same routine that created your habit might help you replace it with something useful. Instead of reaching for a coffee or candy, or rather than participating in gossip and complaints, do something that's good for you. Here's one example: every time you receive a new email, instead of dropping what you're working on, take a deep breath and clear your mind. Another positive work ritual, one that helps reduce eye strain, is practicing the 20/20/20 rule. For every 20 minutes of staring at a computer screen or document, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. From breathing to stretching to resting your eyes, there are a million positive things you can do while at work. [For more career advice, visit U. S. News Careers.] Step 5: Hang in there Some habits are deeply embedded, so don't expect to replace them overnight. Instead, focus on vigilantly monitoring your habits and routines for weeks or months. Consider making "habit inventory" a weekly ritual. Habits can be powerful, so why not have them work for you rather than against you? Master the art of habit replacement and watch your work experience improve. Andrew G. Rosen is the founder and editor of Jobacle. com, a career advice blog. He is also the author of How to Quit Your Job.