

# KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY MASTERING ENTROPY

<https://www.2thepointnews.com/keeping-your-sanity-by-mastering-entropy/>

Entropy is a term from physics that

describes the tendency for matter to move from order into disorder. Life can be seen as deliberately working against entropy.

If you ever watched the old *Get Smart TV show* – or the more recent *movie* (which was actually pretty funny), the good guys were called “Control,” and the bad guys were “Chaos.” For living creatures like us, that pretty well describes the situation. Chaos is where entropy draws everything naturally; control is the conscious ordering, the structure that we have to impose on ourselves and our environment in order to survive and flourish.

For most living creatures, instincts take charge of a lot of the necessary ordering which life requires; finding food, mating, sleep cycles, protective behavior, etc. The Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger in his book, “What is Life,” proposed a molecule that directed these processes to counter entropy with “negative entropy,” and his hypothesis became an inspiration for Watson and Crick’s search for and discovery of DNA.

But we humans are different in a fundamental way: our basic survival tool is our mind, and unlike instinctual animals, we can choose to use our basic tool of survival... or not.

With our minds, we train our own brains to hold the structure of our lives. The habits that we practice daily, weekly, monthly; they are all based on neural pathways that we have established in our brain that make it easy and natural for us to follow these routines. These habits – if they are good ones – help us to resist entropy and have a sense of meaning, purpose and direction.

...and research is beginning to show the effects of our habits on genetic expression – which means that through our conscious choices and actions, we may actually be able to influence, to some degree, how our own DNA will direct us in the future.

The trouble is, many of the habits we develop are habits that we acquired by default – the routines that our family valued and practiced, or that our schools valued and practiced, or that any other influential people in our history have valued and practiced.

This can be wonderful if the people we learned from all had really good habits, great values, and were able to help us learn and practice the habits that would serve us the best. It can be awful if the habits that we learned are awful habits – whether we learn these directly through mimicking them, if we developed them in reaction to bad or hurtful events, or if we made and continued in bad choices along the way.

But even in the best of circumstances – a loving family, a supportive community, great opportunities for learning, responsibility, and growth – the habits that come easily to us may not be the best ones for our developing lives.

Our habits are like a work of expressive art, drawn with our neural connections, and on active display in the gallery of our unfolding lives.

We can't change what actually happened in the past; but we can understand the *meaning* we made of those events, and whatever habits we developed through those past experiences. Our habits today are often echoes of our past; reverberations of what we did and experienced and decided way back then that vibrate and amplify anew with our present-day routines.

When a child has to deal with physical abuse growing up, sometimes what they will do as adults is to continue to go toward the familiar, and find people in their adult lives that are also physically abusive. The early childhood history lives on in the present through current behavior.

The habits keep playing out the same story that was so hurtful and familiar back then; and the child within them suffers in the same way as they had earlier... it feels like home.

This is what can make harmful experiences so harmful over a lifetime; the tendency to maintain the same habits and behaviors that were adaptive back then but are not adaptive now.

Child abuse is an extreme example, of course. But the same principle holds true for all the everyday habits we maintain from our early years – good or bad.

Which of your habits serve to allow entropy to take charge, and which of your habits serve to create order and structure out of chaos?

If one of your habits is to mow your lawn every week, you will likely have a nice looking lawn. On the other hand, if one of your habits is to *avoid* mowing your lawn, then entropy will take over, and you will end up with a yard full of overgrown weeds.

Do you have habits that allow your life to deteriorate? Do you have habits that strengthen the integrity and the creative structure of your life?

Most of us have both. Where do you counter entropy well? What are the benefits that follow from those habits?

Where do you allow entropy to overpower you? What areas of your life have you tended to let grow wild?

We might counter entropy well at work, but not in our marriage. Have you allowed habits of complacency or inattentiveness to blunt the joy and love you could be experiencing in your relationships?

A plan is crucial. Without a goal and a plan to reach it, we'll certainly get somewhere, but whether or not it's where we want to go is really up to chance. And the chance isn't very high.

But without persistence, our plans are worthless. It is the persistence – the regular action taken toward our goals – that allows us to establish the habits that will guide us to completion. Without persistence, we have to continually use willpower to re-assert our will *against the entropy of our own status quo* every time we take whatever action we sporadically do take.

Persistence is what builds the neural pathways in our brain, and the habits that are the expressions of our

consciously chosen plans, goals, and values. When we have a plan, and we are persistent with that plan, our habits become our allies. They work for us to reach our goals, so we don't have to work against our habits.

Without using our conscious minds to create the good habits that support our lives, entropy wins. But each day presents new opportunities, and today we can begin to counter the entropy of our lives with a goal, a reasonable plan, and persistence. What we create through our own contest against entropy is what builds a life we can feel happy about; a life we can be proud of.

PS: *A Master's Course in Happiness* can help you to take charge of your habits and your life in ways you may not have thought possible; and my new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you grow a deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well.

And I'm now offering both at a lower price.

---

**Joel F. Wade, Ph.D.**, is the author of *The Virtue of Happiness*, *Mastering Happiness*, his new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions*, *A Master's Course in Happiness*, and *The Mastering Happiness Podcast*. He is a marriage and family therapist and life coach who works with people around the world via phone and video. You can get a **FREE Learning Optimism E-Course** if you sign up at his website, [www.drjoelwade.com](http://www.drjoelwade.com).

Copyright ©2024 **2 The Point News** unless otherwise noted.