



*(Adapted for SusanJeffers.com monthly newsletter.
Based on the writings of Susan Jeffers, PhD.)*

GETTING OUT OF OUR HABIT ZONE
Adapted from the works of Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.

All day long, each and every one of us relies on habits, whether we recognize them or not. Drinking a cup of coffee first thing in the morning, parking in the same spot every day at work, brushing our teeth before bedtime – all of these are part of our routine, our habits.

Habits are an important part of dealing with our day-to-day life. While there is a lot of focus on bad habits and changing them, we all have a lot of good habits as well. We all form habits as a way to manage the sometimes overwhelming amount of stimulus going on around us at all times. Habits and routines allow us to focus on what we must handle at any given time by ignoring some of the other things going on around us.

Susan often encouraged us to create good habits for ourselves - especially creating a habit of talking to ourselves positively - but she knew that sometimes routines can take over our lives. "I've noticed how certain habits can control our lives ... even if we don't realize we are being controlled," she said in her writings.

Sometimes habits, even really good ones, like getting to sleep on time or working a lot, can become a hindrance to learning new things, exploring all life has to offer, and living a balanced life. Susan called this the "pull of our habits." The pull of our habits lets our patterns take over our lives until we forget that we started these routines to help ourselves in the first place.

Habits and routines, because they help us to sort out our daily lives, are comfortable. But when we are comfortable, we sometimes fail to notice new things that come into our lives. We get so set in our ways, it becomes nerve-wracking to interrupt our routines, even for something we might enjoy. As Susan wrote in *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, "So many of us short-circuit our living by choosing the path that is the most comfortable." And in the case of habits, we often don't even realize that we are doing it!

Susan used herself as the perfect example of someone whose habit had taken control of her life. She was an admitted workaholic. "Now there's nothing wrong with my "habit" of working hard. I get a lot done. And I enjoy my work. In fact, it is incredibly fulfilling," she said. But Susan went on to explain:

"What's wrong with this picture is the unhealthy 'pull' of the habit of over-working. For example, if a friend wants to have breakfast or lunch with me, I can feel the discomfort in my body as I realize my routine will be interrupted. Too often, I say no. I 'lie' to myself as I convince myself that I have too much work to do; but in reality it is the pull of the habit of work that is dictating my decision."

As with all self-improvement, the first step is realizing that you might have a problem. Susan did and as she discussed it with her workaholic husband, Mark, they decided that they needed to act and took the first step towards breaking that "pull of habit." For Susan, breaking the habit was about creating more balance in her life. She and Mark decided to take Friday afternoons off and to go see a movie each week. It was tough at first. After all, we all know how hard it is to break any habit, but as Susan wrote:

"As you might expect, it took a few Fridays to resist the pull of our work. But the good news is that we can now feel ourselves being slowly pulled toward play ... and a more balanced life. And it truly does feel good. Are we getting behind with our work? No, because - guess what - we have creatively found ways to handle the pile on our desks without jeopardizing our Friday afternoons of fun. And was everything we were doing THAT important? *Not at all*. In fact, a lot of work we were doing in the past, we were doing out of habit!"

Where in your life is habit getting in the way of leading a balanced life? If you look closely, you will probably notice that there are things you do every day that do not necessarily lead to a balanced life. For example, Sara spends every night after work cooking dinner, doing the dishes and getting her kids' lunches ready for the next day. But when she stops to look at her habits, she realizes that by spending all this time every night in doing a service for her family, which she wants to do, she is actually missing out on spending quality time with them.

Another example is Peter who, for years, spent every Sunday afternoon playing racquetball with his friends. When he has to cancel one Sunday to go to a relative's wedding, he feels really resentful. It takes him time to see that the pull of his routine is the cause of his resentment and when he really thinks about it, he is actually looking forward to the special time spent with his family and friends.

There are as many examples of the "pull of habit" as there are people. Yet it is important to look at your own routines from time to time to see if you are missing out on a key part of a balanced life in order to stay comfortable in your own habits. For, as Susan wisely said:

"A life that is filled with the riches of play, intimacy with family and friends, alone time, personal growth and so on is a balanced life. Make sure you are fully committed to all aspects of your life."

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Adapted from Susan's writing in *End the Struggle and Dance with Life*.