

Habits – Good, Bad, and Mundane (Part 2)

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How can our personal habits hurt us? There is an infinite set of responses to this question. Some personal habits can degrade or damage our health—such as cigarette smoking, some can damage our relationships—such as excessive drinking, others can diminish our finances—such as habitual shopping, and on, and on.

However, there is another form of damage that can result from bad personal habits; damage that is not readily visible. Over time such damage can result in a total transformation of who we are and what we believe in. This is my primary focus in this 3-part EKTIMIS article.

This subtle, but continuous, form of damage is a breakdown of one's value system. The same value system that is responsible for forging our (personal) values and core principles can be systematically degraded or badly broken, over time, by bad personal habits. The effect of such a breakdown may be felt in the workplace, within our social circles, and most often at home, within our family.

The Power of Bad Personal Habits

Some bad personal habits, over time, can shape or transform who we are and what we believe in.

Often we are totally unaware of these (bad) habits that are obvious to others around us, and that reflect negatively on us. These habits may influence the behavior of others and at times put us at a disadvantage—without our knowledge. Let's return to our story (started in Part 1) about a time in the life of the Browne family—Laura, Peter, Mariah, and Michael.

Peter knew precisely why Laura preferred the yellow colonial house—the fully equipped exercise room built and installed by the current owners. Although the colonial has most of the features that Peter and Laura jointly seek, it lacks a few.

Laura also had her finger on precisely why Peter preferred the blue contemporary—the large landscape and the outdoor swimming pool. Likewise, the contemporary lacks just a handful of features that Peter and Laura both seek.

Late one weekday evening, after the children were tucked away, Laura brought up a discussion of their choices for a house. Time was on their side, but only to the extent that another competing bid was not accepted by the respective current homeowners of the colonial and the contemporary.

"I really like the yellow colonial Peter. It is exactly what I've dreamed of all my life."

"It's a beautiful house, no doubt. But, it has a very small yard. The kids will have more fun with a bigger yard. Don't you agree?"

"Now come on, the yard is not that small. The kids will have as much fun in the yard as they will in the contemporary one. The colonial has..."

But Peter cut her off before she could move off the topic of the yard.

"Laura! The contemporary yard is at least three times the size of the colonial yard. You can't tell me the extra space is not a much better thing for the kids."

"Okay, okay. So the contemporary has a bigger yard, but my point is that the kids can still get by with the smaller yard. They don't need a MASSIVE yard growing up. Face it Peter, the pool is what you really like. Isn't it?"

"The pool is fine, but it is fine because of the kids. Not because of me. The kids will have many good times in that pool with their cousins and friends. You know—good family fun. We do value our family, don't we?"

"Of course we do. And I intend to create a nice home for us and the kids in whatever house we buy, pool or no pool. How about the earlier house that we saw? You know—the burgundy colonial. That has a pool and a big yard. Why don't you prefer that?"

Peter was silent. He did not utter a word. He recalled the burgundy colonial that Laura was referring to, and clearly remembered the pool. But the pool was not as big as he had hoped. He was not going to wander into the trap Laura was setting for him. He opted to change the topic.

"The burgundy is a bust. Laura. Why do you prefer the colonial anyway? C'mon, let's be honest."

"The colonial has most of the requirements that you and I laid out. Right?"

Laura looked right at Peter, waiting for him to acknowledge her statement. He nodded.

"The neighborhood is great. I like the neighbors. They seem like nice people. The yard is big enough. We don't need a swimming pool. The kids can always enjoy swimming at their cousin's. We've been going to your brother's place now for over a year and the kids love it."

"And what about the exercise room? Does that factor into your decision at all?"

"The exercise room is a plus. It works for me. And also for you! I won't have to find a new place to workout daily and you can start working out regularly too. Right?"

Peter was on the verge of losing the debate. He realized that Laura's long-held habit of keeping physically fit (right in her backyard) was going to be hard to break. He thought desperately for any other strategy at his disposal. There was none. After a long pause he surrendered with a smile.

"Alright. The yellow colonial it is. I am sure you will make it into a wonderful home for the kids. And for us."

"Great," said Laura. "Let's tell the kids tomorrow evening. I am sure they will be excited."

"I wonder which house the kids prefer," Peter responded.

The next evening, during dinner, Laura turned to Michael and said, with a big smile on her face, "Guess what. Daddy and Mommy have picked our new house. Which one do you think it is?"

"The gray one? The one with the big tree in the front yard," said Michael, his eyes wide open.

"No! The yellow colonial. The one next to the house with the friendly kids that waved at you. Remember?"

Laura stared at Michael waiting for an acknowledgment.

"I don't like that yellow one. I don't like it. I like the gray one with the big tree. Can't we have that one?"

Laura and Peter both recalled the house Michael was referring to. It was a three bedroom contemporary, slightly smaller than the yellow colonial. It was located in a nice neighborhood, but it lacked several more features than the yellow colonial.

Peter was keenly interested in learning why Michael liked this gray contemporary so much. He promptly asked, "Why do you like the gray house son?"

"I just like it. It has three bedrooms—one for me, one for Mariah, and one for you and Mommy. You said I can have my own room...right?"

"Yes we did. But the yellow house has four bedrooms. You will still have your own room and we will have a spare room for grandma and grandpa when they come to visit."

Michael took a deep breath, looked down at the dining table and said, "I don't like the yellow house."

"Why?" said Laura.

"Because your room is far away from the other rooms. The other rooms are all the way on the other side."

Laura and Peter realized what Michael was referring to—the layout of the upper floor of the yellow colonial house. The master bedroom was located on the right side of the floor above the garage, while the other three bedrooms were located on the opposite side with a narrow hallway connecting both sides. But neither Laura nor Peter understood, for the moment, why this bothered their seven year old son.

Laura extended her arm, placing her hand over Michael's, and said, "It's okay Michael. Our room will be just down the hall from the other rooms. It isn't far."

"But I want my room to be next to yours...just like it is now."

"Why?" asked Laura.

Michael paused for a second, with a sad look on his face. Then he said, "Because I want to hear when you and Daddy are fighting."

Shocked by this revelation Laura glanced at Peter and they immediately realized what their son had uncovered. It all made sense now.

To be continued in Part 3.

About the Author



Niyi Taiwo is the founder of EKTIMIS and the lead editor for the EKTIMIS eLibrary articles. He is the author of several books, including the EKTIMIS Top Ten Laws series. He is a continuous improvement expert with over 21 years of industry experience – operational, management and consulting. He holds an undergraduate degree from WPI and a master's degree from RPI. He is a certified Lean Expert and an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt.