



# Mindful About Life

A better you via the science of positive psychology!

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## What CoronaVirus can teach us about Behavior Change

Do you remember back in 2009 when the H1N1 flu was going around and then President Obama told all Americans that we should sneeze into our sleeve instead of our hands? I remember thinking then that it was so simple and yet so important. And, all of a sudden, I had a behavior change.

Now, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am being asked to wash my hands for 20 seconds. I am neither a germophobe nor am I a slob. I wash my hands when appropriate but until now I was not meticulous about washing for 20 seconds. It seems I now have another behavior change.

Both of these situations have two things in common. Firstly, both are pretty high stakes. People can die from the flu or from COVID-19. Second, I was and I am being reminded repeatedly of the new behavior that I am supposed to adopt. These are the two basic things we need to change behavior. A really good reason and a non-threatening reminder.

There are other examples of this kind of behavior change. In 1964, the year the Surgeon General issued a report that smoking causes lung cancer and heart

disease, 42% of Americans smoked. 50 years later in 2014 that number was down to 18%. By 2018 it was down to 13.7%. What helped people to change their behavior? They had a good reason when they learned it was killing them and they are constantly being reminded that it is a good idea to not smoke.



So what behavior do you want to change? Let's say you want to change your behavior of coming home and just watching TV. You want to be more productive, perhaps write a novel or start a business. You would need a really good reason and non-threatening reminders.

In the coaching business we call the really good reason your "WHY". (I know, we are really creative bunch!) Why do you want to write a novel? To achieve immortality? Because you have a story inside you that you want to get out to the world? To make some money at being a writer?

After you have your "WHY" you have to create behavioral nudges that will help you get there. Perhaps tape a message on your TV to write for 1 hour before turning on the TV.

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None of this is rocket science. You have probably been hearing it forever and coaches have been using these techniques forever. And yet, here we are and all of us are still trying to change so many of our behaviors.

We will all have more time on our hands now that we should be spending less time in public thanks to COVID-19. So I invite you to take this moment to consider how you might use this time and how you might change your behavior. I would love to hear what you do with it!

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