

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jill Angie**

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who is midlife and plus sized and you want to start running but don't know how, or if it's even possible, you're in the right place. Using proven strategies and real-life experience, certified running and life coach Jill Angie shares how you can learn to run in the body you have right now.

Hey rebels, you are listening to episode number 76 of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. I'm your host, Jill Angie, and oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, I am just beside myself about today's guest. I had the privilege of sitting down with Gretchen Rubin, and Gretchen is the author of several of my favorite books, including the blockbuster New York Times best seller, *Better Than Before*, also *The Happiness Project*, *Happier at home*, and she has an enormous readership, both in print and online.

Her books have sold more than three million copies worldwide in more than 30 languages. She's on TV all the time, and she's in much demand as a speaker, so we're really lucky that she was willing to join us here for our little podcast. She also has a podcast of her own called *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*, where she discusses good habits and happiness with her sister, Elizabeth Craft.

She is also quite the expert on creating habits. She's written a book about it. She's got a podcast about it. She knows her shit. And you know that the one thing that is necessary to become a consistent runner is you need to create your habits and your routines. And we covered all that stuff in this podcast. There were so many a-has and takeaways, at least for me. I was literally taking notes the entire time.

But before we get to the interview, I do want to let you know that February is habit month in *Run Your Best Life*. And so we're going to go deep into

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

## **Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin**

that topic in February so that everybody in the group comes away with a routine that works for them.

Each month in Run Your Best Life we do choose a different area of focus. We spend extra time working on skills in that area, and the reason we chose habits for February is because in January everybody gets really excited about their resolutions, and that usually carries them through a few weeks and then we hit February and all the excitement dies down and then stuff stops happening.

So in February we're working on habits. So about a week from when this episode airs, we're going to start this serious business of building and maintaining habits that serve us, that keep us getting the results that we want. And we are going to do a book club discussion of *Better Than Before*. We're going to use some of the discussions in this podcast to kind of lead through the *Better Than Before* book club meeting that we're going to have in Run Your Best Life.

We're going to work on habits all month. And just in case you missed it, we have actually added another live call each week in that group so you're now getting two live calls a week in Run Your Best Life. Twice as much goodness, twice as much coaching, twice as much fun.

Anyway, check all of that out over at [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com). I really hope you join us for the fun, but without further ado, I want to get to the amazing Gretchen right now.

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Jill: Alright rebels, so I am here fangirling with the amazing Gretchen Rubin, who is the author of many books about habit and self-development and

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

happiness. The Happiness Project was the first book that I ever read of yours. And she's here to talk about her book, Better Than Before, which is all about implementing habits and just learning that consistency that we talk about all the time in the Rebel Runner Formula. So Gretchen, thank you so much for joining me, welcome to the show.

Gretchen: Oh, I'm so happy to be talking to you, thanks for having me.

Jill: And gosh, I would just like to dive right into this whole concept of habits. And maybe just - my listeners, some of them struggle with consistency. I think most people do. Runners, for sure, and I think that establishing habits is kind of the antidote to a lack of consistency. Is that a fair statement?

Gretchen: Yeah absolutely. The reason that habits can be freeing and energizing is that they get us out of the really tiring business of using self-control and making decisions. And habits are like the invisible architecture of everyday life. About 40% of everyday life is saved by habits. So if we have habits that work for us, it's a lot easier to be happier, healthier, more productive, more creative.

And we've all had days where you spend your whole day arguing with yourself. Should I go for a run now? Should I go later? It's better to go later, I'll have more energy, and then you spend - the whole day you're exhausted and you didn't even go for a run. Whereas a habit, you just get up, you go, it's on automatic pilot, and so it doesn't drain you the way constant willpower and decision-making can.

Jill: I love that so much. You just described a day in my life maybe 10 years ago before I really made running a super strong habit. So can you talk a little bit more about the energy and the decision-making? Because I don't

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

know if people really understand how much energy it takes to argue with yourself all day long.

Gretchen: Well, there's something called decision fatigue, which is that every time we make a decision, no matter how small, it takes something from us. And this is why you hear about people like Steve Jobs or Barack Obama wearing the same clothes all the time. They just are eliminating decisions, even tiny decisions because every decision that you don't have to make can free you.

And so for something like exercise, the more you can automate it, the less kind of drag there is on the system of when, how, what, where, how long, and a habit gets you out of that. And it's sort of like - compare it to brushing your teeth. You don't get up in the morning and think, "You know, I can brush my teeth now but I think I might wait an hour, I'll have more energy and I'll do a better job." Or, "I don't feel so good about brushing my teeth, I think I deserve a day off. Or, "I'm going to do so good starting in the new year, I don't need to brush my teeth today."

You just do it. You just put on your seatbelt or whatever, and that's just so much easier. Now of course, brushing your teeth is a much more straightforward habit than exercise, but we can learn a lot from the advantages of something like tooth-brushing as we're thinking about something that's more complex like exercising.

Jill: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. I love the toothbrush analogy because really, you never...

Gretchen: Question.

Jill: It's not even a question, it's something that's so ingrained.

## **Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin**

Gretchen: There's no decision, there's no willpower, you don't think about it. Your mind is elsewhere, you're just often doing it before you know you're doing it. That's what you want to get to with a habit, if you can.

Jill: And don't you feel like our days are full of habits, it's just that a lot of it is habits that don't serve us versus habits that we want to establish?

Gretchen: Well, that's a really excellent point, and sometimes people are like, "Oh, it's so hard to form a habit." I'm like, okay, have a donut before work two times in a row and tell me on the third day if you don't feel like you've locked into that habit. The brain wants to make habits because that's how the brain conserves energy. And when you do something as a habit, then it frees the mind to think about higher-level thinking or about anything that's novel or unexpected.

So if you're brushing your teeth and drinking your coffee in a very kind of habitual way, well then you can be thinking instead about okay, well what about that presentation I'm going to make in an hour. I can be going over it in my head or I can be thinking about what I saw on TV last night. My mind is free for other kinds of thoughts because I don't have to think through like, okay how do I make my coffee again? I know how to make coffee, I don't need to think about that.

So really, habits are very helpful to us in many ways. They have downsides too, but you're exactly right. We want to be mindful about the habits that we form because if we have habits that don't work for us, they really can become stumbling blocks because they can be hard to resist and they can be hard to manage. And so we really want to think about the habits that we're establishing so that we make sure that those habits really are making our lives happier in the long run.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Jill: Gosh, I love everything that you just said, and that reminds me of something that you said in the book where you talked about how there are foundational habits that we get sort of the most bang for our buck out of installing those - I use the word installing when I think about habits because I was a science major for a couple semester and so yeah. But can you talk a little bit about the foundational habits and the concept behind that?

Gretchen: So when we're trying to form a habit, we're really trying to get ourselves to do something. So we're trying to either ask more of ourselves or maybe deprive ourselves of something that we would otherwise want. So that takes something out of us. So the strategy of - Better Than Before is the 21 strategies that we can use to make or break habits, and the strategy of foundation is that there are certain aspects of life that go right to our self-mastery. They go right to our ability to be in control of ourselves.

So these are super important habits. So they're a good place to start if you're thinking like, "Well, I want to improve my habits, what should I do first?" First is getting enough sleep because if you're exhausted, everything is going to be hard. If you have enough sleep, it's just going to be easier to do anything, whether that's going for a run or not snapping at your children or eating properly or whatever it is it might be.

Another is getting some exercise. And you might say, "Well, isn't it a little paradoxical that I need to exercise in order to be able to exercise?" Well, it's true though. As you know, if you started running, exercise, it boosts energy, it boosts moods, it increases focus. It just - it's easier to stick to your good habits when you're moving around.

The next is eating and drinking, and you don't want to let yourself get too hungry or too thirsty, and we've all had the experience of like, skipping breakfast, skipping lunch, and then you're so hungry at three o'clock that

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

you just run to the vending machine and get the worst piece of junk food that you can because you're just so hungry you can't resist. So by eating properly, you don't get into that state where you're just going to grab anything.

And then the fourth thing - this isn't true for everyone but it's surprisingly true for a lot of people and it actually led to me write my next book, which is called Outer Order Inner Calm, which is that for most people, outer order...

Jill: I've already ordered it, by the way.

Gretchen: Fantastic, oh good. Gold star for you. I so appreciate pre-orders. Pre-orders gives such a boost to a book, thank you. Good, I hope you love it. But for a lot of people, when they feel in control of the stuff in their lives, they feel more in control of their lives generally. And you could say to yourself, cleaning out my coat closet is not going to help me go for a run. But actually, for a lot of people, they do say that cleaning out their coat closet makes it easier to go for a run.

That it's freeing, it's energizing, you just feel this sense of optimism and purpose. You feel lighter. And it's easier to find things, it's easier to put things away, it's easier to clean. Everything just feels kind of smoother and cleaner. It's like getting your veins cleared out of cholesterol or something. And a friend of mine said, "I finally cleaned out my fridge and now I know I can switch careers." And I know exactly how that feels. So it's not true for everyone, but for a lot of people, creating outer order can really contribute to a sense of being able to stay the master of themselves.

Jill: I completely agree. So I just moved in November. I moved from Pennsylvania to New Jersey and I work from home, as you can - our listeners can't see, but I'm in my home office here, which meant everything

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

has to be moved and unboxed and set up in a new location, and I couldn't work properly for at least two weeks because I was trying to unpack all areas of the house at once and my brain just short-circuited because everything was everywhere.

And visually, it was very, very distracting. It just sort of weighed on me knowing that things were not ordered. It's very distracting. So I totally believe that. And I don't know about you, I don't know if you started watching the new Marie Kondo...

Gretchen: Oh I want to. I haven't yet but I've heard a lot about it.

Jill: Yeah, I haven't started watching it either but I just love that whole concept of only keeping things around you that serve and spark joy and so forth.

Gretchen: Well it's interesting. I have a little bit of a different philosophy because I feel like that's very helpful for a lot of people, but she's very kind of like, there's one way to do it and that's her way, and I feel like there's a lot of ways to do it. So I try to say like, well you could do this way or you could do this way because one of the things she recommends is take everything out of the closet or everything off the shelves.

That works great for some people. I did that with the coat closet. I took everything out of the coat closet, it was really helpful. But then I talked to many people where they're like, "Oh my gosh, it's this huge disaster, I can't deal with it." It's like, I've created a monster. I'm like, "Well then maybe a different way would have worked better for you." Probably you knew that that would not suit you. So I love her stuff, I think she's fascinating, but I don't think it works for everyone. So I think there's a little bit more flexibility in how you can approach it.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Jill: And so I'm so glad you brought that up because one of the concepts in *Better Than Before*, and then in your other book, *The Four Tendencies*, is this concept of the four personality types and does that tie into who's going to be great with taking everything out of the closet and who maybe needs to do it a shelf at a time? And can you maybe explain what the tendencies are just for fun?

Gretchen: Yeah, the four tendencies is super helpful if you're trying to - it's bigger than habits but it's a very helpful thing to think about when you're thinking about how you might most successfully form habits. And I will briefly describe it but people can take a quiz. If they go to [quiz.gretchenrubin.com](http://quiz.gretchenrubin.com) or just look on my website for the quiz, 1.7 million people have taken this little free quiz. But even just from the description, most people don't even need to take the quiz because they can tell what they are and a lot of people in their lives. But there is a quiz because some people like to take a quiz.

So the four tendencies, it's whether you're an upholder, a questioner, an obligor, or a rebel. I argue that everybody fits into one of these four tendencies. And this is a very narrow aspect of your personality. So we don't know if you're creative or ambitious or analytical or adventurous or extroverted. We don't know any of that. All we know is how you respond to expectations.

Now, this sounds really boring but it's actually very juicy. So we all face two kinds of expectations. Outer expectations like a work deadline or a request from a friend, and then we have inner expectations, which is like, I want to keep my new year's resolution, I want to get back into meditating. So depending on how to respond to outer and inner, that's what determines whether you're an upholder, a questioner, an obligor, a rebel.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

So upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline, they meet the new year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them but their expectations for themselves are just as important. So the motto of the upholder is, "Discipline is my freedom."

Then there are questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense. So they're making everything an inner expectation. If it meets their inner standards, they'll do it no problem. If it fails their inner standard, they will push back. They're looking for reasons, justifications, they're very focused on efficiency, customization, they're asking why. So the motto of questioner is, "I'll comply if you convince me why."

Then there are obligors. Obligor readily meet outer expectations but they struggle to meet inner - oh, you're an obligor.

Jill: Raising my hand.

Gretchen: That is the biggest tendency. That's the biggest one for both men and women so you're in good company. That's the most common one. And it was actually running that gave me my insight into the four tendencies because - and into obligors because I was talking to a friend. My sister, Elizabeth calls me a happiness bully, and so I was sort of probing my friend's psyche about her habits and she said to me something that I couldn't forget. She said, "You know, I know I would be happier if I exercise. And when I was in high school, I was on the track team, and I never missed track practice, so why can't I go running now?"

And I thought, well why? Because it's the same person, it's the same behavior. At one time she had no trouble, now she can't do it. What's going

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

on? Well, she's an obligor. When she had a team and a coach expecting her to show up, she had no trouble. But when she was trying to go on her own, she struggled.

And then finally rebels. Rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do in their own way, in their own time. They can do anything they want to do, they can do anything they choose to do, but if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist. And typically, they don't like to tell themselves what to do. Like, they're not like, I'll go for a run at 10am on Saturday morning because they're like, "I don't know what I'm going to want to do on Saturday morning. And just the fact that somebody's expecting me to meet them at 10am is going to annoy me."

So if obligor is the biggest, which it is, rebel is the smallest. It's a very conspicuous tendency but that is the smallest. Upholder is also small. Obligor is big and questioner is big too.

Jill: So I'm like, fascinated by all of it, and I think the reason so many of my clients are obligors is because they are looking for someone to be accountable to because they're struggling with accountability.

Gretchen: Yes. Because exactly as you say, to meet inner expectations, what obligors need is outer accountability. That is the key thing. They don't need to work on motivation, they don't need to work on priorities, they don't need self-care, putting themselves first or any of that. What they need is outer accountability. And a lot of obligors, whether consciously or unconsciously have sort of figured out this pattern in their lives.

And so I bet a lot of obligors are like, "Hey, I know I would do much better if I were accountable to somebody. Here's a great person who I know is

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

going to help me meet my goals by holding me accountable," so it's a great solution for obligors. And since you're an obligor yourself, you get it. So you probably are speaking their language because you also are sharing that perspective.

Jill: Oh, for sure. Now, so one thing that I love because I've also read *The Four Tendencies*, and like I know that there are hacks for each tendency, and of course the obligor tendency, one of the hacks is like, hey, just find an accountability partner and you'll be fine. But do you think it's possible to change your tendency? Or is it like once you have a tendency, that's it, you just have to work within it?

Gretchen: You know, for the most part I think that this is hardwired. I think this is part of what you bring into the world with you. And I don't think you need to change. I'm like, if you feel like changing, it's because somehow, you're frustrated. And I'm like, don't worry about changing yourself, which is difficult if it's even possible. Change the way things are set up. Change your circumstances. Change your surroundings. That's easy and quick and fast. You could do that in a day.

And there's nothing wrong with you. You might be like, I don't want to - some obligors say it's weak, I don't want to depend on other people to give me accountability. I'm like, well look, this is 40% of humankind is like this. You don't need to change, there's nothing wrong with you. There's many, many strengths to being an obligor, there are certain limitations and weaknesses. Those are easy to fix. Other people have figured out how to work around that.

Just like, don't worry about fixing yourself, there's nothing wrong with you. Just set it up in a way so that you succeed. If you want to be more like an upholder, what you're saying is I want to achieve certain aims, so let's

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

focus on getting to those aims instead of trying to change your fundamental character, because you don't have to do that.

Jill: I love that so much because I do think like, when we believe that we're fundamentally wrong, that we should be different than we are, we're just arguing with reality and that's not super fun.

Gretchen: And all the tendencies face this because upholders often seem rigid, and so you might have an upholder saying, "Well, I should be more spontaneous," and I'm like - people say I'm like, I put no value on spontaneity, I don't want to be more spontaneous, I don't like spontaneity. I don't want it. And then rebels are like, "That's crazy, what is life without spontaneity?" I'm like, life is worth planning.

You know, it's like there's nothing wrong with me and there's nothing wrong with them. It's just that we have a different perspective. So I think sometimes it can reduce conflict too and increase understanding because you see - it's not that one person's right and one person's wrong or that one person's way is better. It's just like, well that works for you. What would work for me? And maybe we need to find a place that can work for both of us, but it's much easier to do that when it's sort of like - there's no blame here. There's no judgment.

It's just okay, given what we know is true of you and given what we know is true for me, how do we work things out in a way that works for both of us? Rather than feeling like you have to either feel like you're right and other people are wrong, or feeling like you're wrong and other people are right. Both are frustrating.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Jill: I feel like this could save a lot of marriages if this was just part of every marriage counselor's - when you're getting married, they sign the marriage license, they give you a copy of The Four Tendencies.

Gretchen: It can come up a lot. Well, here's - speaking of marriage and obligors, I should note, so we were just talking about how obligors need outer accountability. One thing you should realize is that sweethearts do not make good accountability partners for a very romantic reason. To an obligor, it's like I'm going to ignore you just the way I would ignore me because you're so close to me. You're part of me, so you don't count as outer.

And so let's say you want to run regularly, you might be able to have your sweetheart be an accountability partner, but if you find that that doesn't work, that's something that very typically doesn't work for obligors, so you might need to find an accountability system that doesn't draw on that person. For some people it works, but for a lot of people it doesn't work, and that's why.

And sometimes people get frustrated when they're like, "I don't understand why my obligor spouse ignored me forever, and then the doctor says to do it or his partner says to do it, and then all of a sudden he does it. What am I? Why am I not important?" It's like, no, you're almost too important. You're too inner and so you don't act like that accountability partner the way a stranger would.

Jill: Oh, that's so well said. And it kind of takes the pressure off too, then you don't have to feel like crap about yourself that this person doesn't care enough about your opinion. It's like, oh no, you're so close to them that it's just - I love that, it's too inner. That's so cool.

## **Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin**

Gretchen: It comes up in other combinations too. So I'm an upholder and I'm married to a questioner, and one of the kind of weird quirky things of a questioner, which is very annoying to people who are not questioners, is they often don't like to answer questions. They like to teach but they don't like to answer questions, and this is a really prominent aspect of my husband's personality.

And for years I was like, what's his problem? Why is he always jerking my chain? Is he going out of his way to try to annoy me? Because why is it that I say a simple question like, what time are we going to brunch? Or what are you making for dinner? He won't answer questions like that. And now I don't take it personally. I'm like, he's like that with everybody, this is a thing that many questioners do. It's annoying for all of us but there's nothing - it's not a reflection on our relationship. He's like that with everybody. And so it doesn't feel like a signal about the strength of our love. It's just like, it's just a quirky thing that I've learned to put up with.

Jill: And I just think that's so cool, if you can be understanding that other people just come from different places then it's like oh, alright. You don't have to make it mean anything about you. So beautiful.

Gretchen: Well, it's sort of like with rebels, a lot of times people's feelings get hurt because rebels don't want to make plans with them, and they're like, this is one of my really good friends and I keep saying let's go out to dinner, let's go to a play, and they keep saying, "Oh, I don't want to make plans." And I'm like, yeah, rebels don't like to make plans. It's nothing about your friendship. They don't like to make plans.

Now, that's kind of hard to make plans with somebody who doesn't like to make plans. There's definitely workarounds, and again, the four tendencies, in the book, I talk about all of the different things you could do

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

to work around these things. But again, it might be annoying or inconvenient, but you don't have to take it personally. It's not a reflection on your friendship or your romantic relationship. It's just a thing about rebels. They don't like to make plans, they don't like to lock in. So deal with it.

Jill: You just deal with it.

Gretchen: You deal with it, but you don't have to feel bad about it.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. I love that. You're giving everybody new thoughts to think about this, which is beautiful.

Gretchen: Excellent.

Jill: So good. Okay, so I have a couple questions about establishment of habits, just to kind of switch back into that topic a little bit. Just some things that I wrote down as I was reading your book that kind of blew my mind. One is - and this is probably a tiny little - I don't know if you even remember writing this, but you said that getting ready to do the thing can often be more challenging than doing the thing.

Gretchen: Yes. Well in fact, somebody just quoted me the proverb, "The stewing is worse than the doing." And one thing about this that I've noticed comes up a lot with exercise is convenience. The more slippery it is to just start exercising, the less friction that you have, whether that's you're going to a closer gym than a gym that's slightly further away or here's something that I had not heard of until I started writing this book and hearing from people.

So you know you hear the classic advice like, "Oh, put your exercise clothes out by your bed, get it all laid out the night before so you don't have

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

to figure out what clothes you're going to wear." Turns out a lot of people wear their exercise clothes to sleep in.

Jill: It is a thing.

Gretchen: It is a thing. So they just wake up and go. And I'm like, whatever works for you. I mean, okay, you just put on your shoes and you're ready to hit the track. Yeah, so that's just - anything to eliminate the kind of steps between you and the behavior is good, and that's the strategy of convenience.

Jill: Yeah, because it goes back to what you were saying about decisions. If you have to make the decision like, okay I have to get out of bed and then I have to rifle through my drawer to find my sports bra, and then I have to do all these things, if you've made those decisions ahead of time or completed those tasks ahead of time, then it's just less energy.

Gretchen: Well, and you know, a kind of related strategy that I've been - this came to me so naturally that I almost didn't even articulate it as a strategy, and yet it's a strategy that many people have told me has been transformative for them. And that is the strategy of pairing, and that's the idea that you only do - two things go together.

One is not a reward for the other. It's just that they only happen together. So when I was in college, I had a rule for myself that I could only take a shower on a day that I exercised. So I could go a day, I could go two days, but I mean, especially in college, I wanted to take a shower so I had to exercise because I could only do those things together.

And like now that people love podcasts so much, there are all these super compelling podcasts, say to yourself, I'm only going to listen to

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## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Homecoming, I'm only going to listen to Dirty John, or whatever your - Binge Mode Harry Potter, my current favorite podcast. I'm only going to listen to it while I'm running. I can't listen to it in the car, I can't listen to it while I'm walking the dog or doing the dishes, whatever. It's only when I'm running, and they go together.

And so again, it's like because you want to do one - or like my sister who loves The Real Housewives, she can only watch The Real Housewives when she's on her treadmill. And so it's like that reinforces the habit because it's just something that you want to put together.

But it's like okay, you break your leg and you can't go for a run, does that mean you get to watch Real Housewives? No, because Real Housewives only happen on the treadmill so now you're just out of luck. Oh, it's bad weather, are you off the hook and now you can do it? No, because those things always go together. And that's something that has really been helpful to people.

Jill: I mean, that's awesome. I think I used to do something similar to do that because I used to save my favorite songs for when I was running...

Gretchen: Yes, I do that. I definitely do that.

Jill: But now I don't listen to music when I run, I listen to podcasts, and I feel like I just do not have the willpower to save my favorite podcasts for running. That's so funny. Brilliant idea. So I had one more question for you, and it kind of ties into one of the things that my listeners and my clients struggle with, and that is the concept of rewards not necessarily being the best way to motivate yourself.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Because I have so many of my clients will sign up for a marathon, they'll train for the marathon, they'll cross that finish line, they'll get that medal, they feel so good, and then two weeks later they're like, "I don't understand why I can't run anymore." And it's because everything was driving towards that. So can you touch on that topic a little bit?

Gretchen: This was one of the most difficult things to kind of understand and grapple with as I was writing the book. In fact, that very example was something that got my focused on it because somebody said, "I don't understand it, I trained for the marathon, I ran the marathon, it was amazing, and I haven't run since." And I was like, okay, I don't understand that.

So it's really about this idea of reward. And you have to think of a finish line as being a kind of reward. So I'm going to give up sugar for Lent, I'm going to do a 21-day yoga challenge, I'm going to train for the marathon. So these are things that will come to an end. Lent will end, 21 days will end, you will run that marathon.

And the problem is once you reach the end, if you keep going, you have to start over, and starting over is often harder than starting. And rewards undermine habits because then it's all about getting the reward, even if the reward is something like if I go running for a month, 30 days in a month, I'm going to buy myself a pair of expensive black boots. You're telling yourself the reason I'm doing this is to get those black boots. Then you get the black boots, why would you keep running?

You're not building a habit, you're working towards a goal. So a reward is a great way to hit a goal, but usually with habits, we don't want to hit a goal, we want to do something indefinitely. You don't want to think about that too much because it can get a little overwhelming, but you really want to be

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

running forever. You want to be eating healthily forever. It's not about Lent, it's not about a 21-day challenge. It's about building a habit that will sustain you for the long-term.

So what you want to do is a couple things. One is you could think about a milestone. In a life of running, running a marathon is a very exciting milestone. That is super exciting, exhilarating, but it is just one of many milestones that you will pass in a lifetime of running. And so you haven't stopped, you're going. And in fact, my yoga instructor - because in New York a lot of times people go away for the summer, and people will say, "I'm going to quit and then I'll call you when I start again in the fall."

And he says no, you're not quitting, I'm going to take you off this week, this week, this week, this week, this week, this week, but on September 4th or whatever it is, I expect you to be here at 10am just as always because you haven't quit. You've missed some days, but you haven't stopped. And that helps people because a lot of times - because they're like, oh, somebody's expecting me to show up at 10am on September 4th, I haven't quit. But this idea that I've stopped doing yoga, well, you might not start again for like, three years.

There are two kinds of rewards that do work. One is the very obvious reward, which is the habit itself. If you say to yourself, "Oh my gosh, I love that relaxed feeling I get when I've run and it just feels so good to get into bed, that's why I run, I love that feeling," that's the reward that comes from within the habit. Then you can also give yourself a reward that only deepens your relationship with a habit.

So you've been doing so much running, you need a new pair of running shoes. Or you want a cute hoodie because you're going running all the time. Well, that's something that's only useful because you're running. Or

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

you might say to yourself, "Well, I decided that I wasn't going to eat fast food for lunch, I'm going to cook and bring my lunch from home, and so I'm going to buy myself a really wonderful set of kitchen knives. I'm going to splurge and buy some really expensive knives," but what is the point of knives? The point of knives is to do more cooking.

So that's taking you deeper into the habit. The pair of black boots, totally unrelated. And so that kind of works against the habit. So you could have something that takes you into the habit. A yoga mat, yes. An iPad, no.

Jill: That makes perfect sense. So whatever it is that furthers the habit or further addicts you to whatever it is that habit is. I know, okay, I'm going to sign up for - I can't sign up for this race until I finish the race before or something like that, that like - where you kind of - it sort of builds on itself. I love that so much.

And honestly, I never really thought about a reward - you just said it so beautifully. You said a reward undermines a habit. It never really occurred to me that that's exactly what's happening, but you're so right. If the only reason you're doing it is to get the thing...

Gretchen: What research shows is that if you reward people for doing something, eventually a lot of times, once they get the reward, they'll stop doing it. And often even before they start getting the reward, they won't do it because you decide, you know what, I don't really care about those black boots after all. They did really interesting research with children who were rewarded for coloring, which is something that children love to do on their own. And what they found is if you reward children for coloring, they do less coloring and they do less good coloring. Their coloring quality actually drops.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

Or if you say to children, if you read 10 books, we'll give you a coupon for a free pizza, what you see is that children start - they will pick much simpler books and they will race through them to get the coupon, but they're not building the habit of reading. It's like, well of course I'm just reading the books to get the pizza. Whereas what you could do is you could say, what is the reward for a book? If you read 10 books, we'll give you a free book. Well, that's cool because what is the reward for reading? More reading. And so that doesn't undermine it in the same way because it's like, it's just more of the same. And it's like, of course it's such a pleasure, of course you would want that extra book. Who wouldn't want another book to read?

Jill: Right. And somebody who doesn't love to read isn't going to do that challenge.

Gretchen: Right, but they're not going to be undermined. They're not going to be taught, well the only reason a person reads is to get a pizza because that doesn't help anybody. What you want to do is give people the idea, this is something that people are excited to do on their own.

Jill: And so you mentioned just a moment ago that another reward is the habit itself. Can you speak a little more to that?

Gretchen: Well, one thing to do is to really allow yourself to experience the joy of that habit. So I have a podcast with my sister, Happier with Gretchen Rubin, and we talk about the to-do list but we also talk about the ta-da list. And a lot of people really benefit from a ta-da list, from really reveling in the things that they've crossed off the list.

And you know, if you're running, let yourself first of all really give yourself that gold star for having done it. Pat yourself on the back, and allow yourself to experience what it is that you're doing this habit because

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

somehow it's making you happier or healthier or more productive or more creative or for some reason. And so let yourself experience that, and that will help keep you engaged in the habit.

You know, something like running, there's so many great things that come from it. You could think, I love being in touch with the natural world, I love the chance to feel the wind in my face, I love the chance to look at the clouds, or I love the chance to listen to music that I've never listened to or catch up on a podcast. Or, people are always talking to me, this is the only time I can get by myself, or I want to spend time with my friends, this is a great way to spend time with my friend, or my dog is in bad shape, I'm going to do it for my dog.

Or like, just getting in bed at night, gosh it feels good to lie down and go to sleep right the minute your head hits the pillow because you've really got that exercise. Or like, I just feel so much more focused. A lot of times people have better anger management control when they're exercising. Allow yourself to really say, I feel the benefit that I'm getting from this, I feel why this habit is making me happier because that's also going to make you want to stick to it.

Because if you're just beating yourself up all the time and being like, "You should do this, the doctor says you have to exercise, you have to do it," it might give you kind of a sour feeling. Or even something that happens with a lot of obligors - so obligors could have a thing called obligor rebellion, which is when they meet, meet, meet expectations and then suddenly they snap and they're like, "Well this I won't do."

And maybe it's something like, you know what, I'm just not going to answer your emails for two weeks. Yes, I've heard of that. I've heard a lot of obligors deliberately sitting in their car in the parking lot to be late for work

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

on purpose because that's a form of obligor rebellion. Or it could be huge like breaking up with a spouse or ending a long-term friendship or quitting a job. It can be very dramatic.

But one thing that obligor rebellion can do is sometimes it's turned toward the south. And this is when people will say, "I'm so good at meeting expectations for everyone else, I run around meeting everybody else's priorities but when it comes for me to exercise, I just can't stand the fact that people are asking me to do it. I feel enraged, I feel so resentful, I'm trying to make myself do it but I won't do it, I can't do it," and there's just this kind of energy, this negative emotion around it that for me was very mysterious until I understood obligor rebellion.

But what it is is people who feel like they want to resist these outer expectations, they feel like they can't, and so they're resisting an expectation very powerfully that's coming from within. And if you get caught in that, you really want to go out of your way to treat yourself, even if you need outer accountability to treat yourself, or find ways to do things that will not stoke that sense of resentment and kind of being pushed around. Because once that gets started, it's very hard to master and it can - it's meant to be beneficial. It's supposed to protect obligors, and it often does, but it can be destructive and frustrating too for obligors.

Jill: Oh, that's fascinating. So that sense of resentment like everybody's always wanting something from me and here's what I'm going to do about it.

Gretchen: Well, you said - I see this with eating. I don't know if you've ever experienced or been around somebody where they're eating food that's clearly not good for them and that they wish they weren't eating, but it's almost like they're punishing themselves by eating it. And there's kind of

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

resentful, I'll-show-you aspect to it, but there's also kind of a sad angry aspect to it.

This kind of eating was very puzzling to me about obligor rebellion. It's like, you're telling me to do everything, you're making me do everything you say, you're pushing me around, well this you can't control and watch me, I'm going to do it. There's a deep affinity between obligors and rebels, that have a lot in common. If rebels pair up, they almost always pair up with obligors, and this is a way that obligor rebellion can show up in a way that's often mysterious to the people who are experiencing it. A lot of times people are very relieved to find out that this is a common pattern. It's not some kind of private pathology that they're experiencing, but a very widespread pattern that people experience.

Jill: I think we need to start a support group for the obligor rebellions.

Gretchen: Well yeah, I have this app called the Better app, which people can join for free, and there are lots of groups there and the obligor group is very active because obligors like to talk about how did you find accountability for this and what do you do about your obligor rebellion and how do you deal with all - how do you deal with people who don't respect your boundaries, and it's hard to have boundaries when you're an obligor, what do you do about that? Stuff like that.

Jill: Oh my gosh, this is amazing. This is actually a good segue into all the amazing stuff that you are putting out into the world to help people. What they want from themselves. So let's just talk about all of it. So there's a ton of books, right? So can you kind of rundown the books that you have and then maybe especially talk about the one that's coming out soon? And I feel like because I'm having you on the podcast I should get a copy now,

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

right? Can I obligor you right into that or reverse obligor you? I'm totally kidding.

Gretchen: I will send you a galley. Yes, absolutely.

Jill: I'm kidding, it's coming from Amazon, I'm all good.

Gretchen: Good. I so appreciate pre-orders, they really do help. So my first book, and I think one of the books that I'm probably best known for is a book called The Happiness Project, which came out 10 years ago. I just had a 10th anniversary edition come out. And that was a, I have to say, number one New York Times best seller, that was very exciting. And that's about a year that I spent working on a different theme every month about how to be happier and kind of the concrete resolutions that I made and why I picked the things that I did based on science and ancient philosophy and pop culture and everything about how to be happier. And that sort of maps out like how do you think about happiness, how might we become happier in our everyday lives without spending a lot of time, energy, or money. My stuff is always very like, stuff you can do tomorrow without having to plan ahead of go to a silent meditation retreat or anything like that.

Then I wrote a book called Happier at Home, where I really went deep into home because for most people, home is really at the core of happiness, and so this looks at things like time, possessions, body, neighborhood, really going deeper into happiness and in particular - The Happiness Project is kind of an overview of happiness and this goes deeper into home.

But then after I wrote The Happiness Project and Happier at Home, people kept saying to me, "But how did you get yourself to follow all those resolutions? How did you get yourself to do all that stuff?" I was like, I don't

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

know, I just did them because I thought they'd make me happier. And that got my focused on habits, and that was the book you opened with, *Better Than Before*, which is about the 21 strategies we can use to make or break our habits because a lot of times people know perfectly well that they'd be happier if they went for a run, they were happier if they got more sleep, but the problem is for some reason they're having trouble forming that habit.

And then studying habits, that's what led me to *The Four Tendencies* because that's where I started noticing these really different patterns and how people successfully formed habits and how people failed to form habits. So for instance, obligors need accountability, it's crucial for them, but rebels often it's counterproductive to give a rebel accountability. They don't like the feeling that somebody's watching them, that makes them want to resist. So the very same strategy could be excellent for somebody and terrible for another person. So that's how I got to *The Four Tendencies*.

And then running throughout all this was this idea that why is it that for most people, outer order contributes to inner calm? It just seemed like why does it matter if you've got an overflowing in-basket? Why does that bring you down? I'm always trying to help my friends clear clutter because I get like a vicarious buzz from it...

Jill: Me too.

Gretchen: Yeah, I mean it's so much easier than your own stuff too. It's like all the fun and none of the emotional torture. But so I went over and helped a friend clear her closet. I found out later she was so thrilled with her closet that she had a dinner party and she made every friend from the dinner party walk by her closet and admire it. That's how fired up she was. And I was like, why is that? Why do we experience this connection? And then also how do you create outer order and then how do you maintain it?

## **Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin**

You just moved and probably everything gets put away and then everything gets messed up again. You clean up the kitchen and a week later it's like, everything's out of place again. So how would you maintain order once you've created it? So Outer Order Inner Calm is coming out on March 5th, so that's my most recent book.

Jill: And so you also have a podcast with your sister, which is like, super fun to listen to, but can you kind of explain to folks what the podcast is about?

Gretchen: It's called Happier with Gretchen Rubin and spoiler alert, it's about how to be happier. And I do it with my sister. My sister is a very prominent TV writer and show runner in Hollywood and so I'm an upholder, she's an obligor. She's very messy also, that comes up a lot. And so we talk about different things to think about about how to be happier, so we always have a try this at home, which is a simple concrete thing you could try at home to make yourself happier. We have a happiness hack, which is some kind of quick fix or shortcut that we've learned about. We'll have a know yourself better question, we'll have an interview, we do listener questions and also listener answers.

Sometimes we will - our audience is really engaged so sometimes we'll take a question from - one really interesting question we had was, "What's the best resolution you ever made? What gave you the biggest happiness boost?" and we threw that out to our audience and got so many interesting responses, and then of course a lot of times people get ideas from each other. We can all learn from each other. We talk about happiness stumbling blocks, the things that bring us down or the kind of nagging things that can get in the way of happiness. We talk about the four tendencies a lot, I give a lot of four tendencies kind of like, consults, when people have very specific questions.

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

## **Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin**

Now people will often say like, "I'm a questioner married to an obligor and I want to know..." so that's a weekly podcast that we've done for more than three years and yeah, it's a super fun podcast about how to be happier.

Jill: I just love that. And now there's an app. I did not know anything about this app.

Gretchen: Yes, so the Better app is a place where you can go. It's free, and you can find it, [betterapp.us](http://betterapp.us) if you're on desktop or you can just search in the app store for like, Better Gretchen Rubin. And that's a place where a lot of it is about the four tendencies, either like rebels only talking amongst themselves or it's teachers or medical professionals, that kind of discussion group. And then there are people just doing happiness projects and talking about happiness generally, like different aspects of it.

There are accountability groups if you wanted - sometimes people want accountability and either it's inconvenient for them to do it or maybe they're introverted and they don't want to do something like take a class or workout with a trainer because they want that time to themselves. So this is a way that you can create - this is one of many ways that you can create accountability. And yeah, there's just a lot of cool conversations happening there about happiness and good habits and the four tendencies.

And then I'm also on social media on every platform under the name Gretchen Rubin. Again, right on the nose. And I love hearing from listeners and readers and viewers, so engage with me. And then on my website, [gretchenrubin.com](http://gretchenrubin.com), I write a ton about all these things, and there's also a lot of resources if you want discussion guides or I have a one-pager called *Exercising Better than Before*, that just focuses on what of the 21 strategies of habit change you might think about in particular related to exercise, and then there's a lot of stuff about the four tendencies. So if you're like, I want

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

to know more about being a questioner, an obligor, whatever, tons of free resources there.

Jill: So good. And I just want to say thank you for putting this work out into the world because I mean, I really think it's life-changing, especially for people who have just been trying to like, beat themselves into submission.

Gretchen: I know. And that's - one thing, there are people who are so discouraged and so frustrated because they've kept making and breaking the same resolution over and over, and I look at these people and I'm like, there's nothing wrong with you. This is a very common issue that you're facing, you just have set it up in a way that's not right for you. Let's set it up in a different way and I think you're going to see a very different result. And it's just so exciting for people to realize, first of all, there's nothing wrong with them. They're in good company. All the tendencies, there's lots of people in that tendency, and also that there are other ways to achieve these aims. You don't have to do it the way everybody tells you that you should do it or the best way to do it. There's a lot of ways to achieve our aims. And so we just have to figure out what works for us because we're all different.

Jill: So good, so fabulous, all of it. So thank you so very much...

Gretchen: Oh, this is so fun. I feel like we could talk all day. Thank you so much for having me.

Jill: Yes, and so I'll have all the links to everything that we've talked about in the show notes and yeah, thank you very much for joining me.

Gretchen: Thank you.

## Ep #76: Forming Habits for a Happier Life with Gretchen Rubin

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Hey rebels, I hope you enjoyed my chat with Gretchen and if you want to get more of her magic, you can find her on Instagram @gretchenrubin, on Twitter @gretchenrubin, on Facebook at facebook.com/gretchenrubin, and of course, her website, which you guess it, is gretchenrubin.com. You can also find links to her podcast there and of course all of her books and the app too. I totally forgot to mention the app that we talked about.

So all of the links are also going to be in the show notes at [notyouraveragerunner.com/76](http://notyouraveragerunner.com/76) and don't forget in Run Your Best Life this February, we're working on building habits and routines for you. We start very soon on that. This podcast is going to drop on the 24th and we start on February 1st, so if you're listening to this now, if you're listening to this on the day it drops, you've got a week to sign up. If you're listening to it later, you have less time, so go to [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com) to get in on the fun.

And here's the great thing; if you're listening to this three months later, maybe it's March or April or June, the beauty is we record all the calls and all of the challenges and all of the skills work that we do is in the group and recorded. So just because you're listening to this after February doesn't mean that you can't get help with all the work that we did on habits and routines. So it's never too late to join and get in on the fun. Go to [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com) to experience all of it and I will talk to you next week.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you liked what you heard and want more, head over to [www.notyouraveragerunner.com](http://www.notyouraveragerunner.com) to download your free one-week jumpstart plan and get started running today.