

The Seven Top Habits of Appreciative Advisers

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Abstract

Appreciative Advisers are change agents who inspire, mentor, motivate, and advise students to become the best version of themselves. Given the increasing workloads of academic advisors, it is important for advisors to establish good habits that will facilitate focus on the needs of their students. The purpose of this article is to provide Appreciative Advisers with information about how to successfully adopt good habits by addressing James Clear's (2018) Four Laws of Behavior and by providing seven specific habits to consider adopting.

Keywords

Appreciative Advisers, academic advising, Four Laws of Behavior, habits

Appreciative Advisers are committed to working with students to help them make the most of their educational opportunities (Bloom et al., 2008). They empower their advisees by making them feel welcome (Disarm), getting to know their stories (Discover), unearthing their dreams for the future (Dream), co-creating roadmaps for accomplishing their dreams (Design), helping them deal with challenges and setbacks they incur during their journeys (Deliver), and encouraging them to always strive to be their best selves (Don't Settle; Bloom et al., 2008). Because advising caseloads have become increasingly high due to the Great Resignation² (Seltzer, 2022), it is imperative that Appreciative Advisers adopt good habits and effective systems that will help them to advise students effectively and efficiently. The purpose of this article is to provide Appreciative Advisers with information about how to successfully adopt good habits by addressing James Clear's (2018) Four Laws of Behavior and by providing seven specific habits to consider adopting.

What are Habits?

James Clear (2018) defines *habits* as a routine or practice performed regularly, an automatic response to a specific situation. Habits make up around 40% of a person's daily behaviors, according to Duke University experts (Clear, 2018). Habits develop when a new behavior or situation arises that the brain needs to resolve. For a habit to become effective, the behavior must be repeated at least 66 times to become automatic (Lally et al., 2010).

What are the Four Laws of Adopting a Habit?

Clear's (2018) four laws of how to adopt a new habit are: to make it obvious, make it attractive, make it easy, and make it satisfying. The first law is to *make it obvious* and involves providing clear cues or reminders for completing the task. *Making it attractive* is

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² The Great Resignation refers to employees voluntarily leaving due to low compensation, burnout, and lack of work options available.

based on research that has shown that humans are motivated by the anticipation of a reward. If individuals see it as an advantage to obtain recognition, it is more appealing for them to change. The third law is to *make it easy*, which reflects the fact that people gravitate to doing things that require minimal effort. Finally, the fourth law is to *make it satisfying* which involves making the completion of a habit feel good.

Top Seven Habits of Appreciative Advisers

The following suggested seven habits of Appreciative Advisers will be divided into three different categories: beginning of the day habits, advising appointment habits, and end of the day habits. Although many of these items may seem obvious to Appreciative Advisers, one can make these acts attractive, easy, obvious, and satisfying (Clear, 2018). Creating these habits can “clear up space” in advising professionals’ heads so that they can be fully present with students and attend to their needs.

Beginning of the Day Habits

A good habit for an Appreciative Adviser to implement is to tidy up their office each morning when they walk in the door to ensure that the office is attractive and inviting. A crucial aspect of the Disarm phase of Appreciative Advising involves intentionally creating a warm, welcoming environment for one’s advising session whether it is one’s physical or virtual office (Bloom et al., 2008). Decorating one’s office/virtual space with inviting colors, pictures of loved ones, and objects that reflect one’s hobbies and interests meet Clear’s (2018) four laws of adopting a habit—it is obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying both for advisors and their students. For an advisor, a decorative office featuring meaningful objects may make coming to work more attractive, easy, and satisfying because one spends so much time in the office. For students, a carefully decorated office can be perceived as welcoming and helps them realize that their advisor is a real person, too.

Advisors must take a moment to engage in the work of the day, which may include organizing the office before starting to answer emails and engage in the work of the day, and it is essential to take a moment to reaffirm one’s role. Leadership specialists like Simon Sinek (2011) often reinforce the idea of reflecting on one’s “Why.” Essentially, knowing why one does something is at the heart of doing it well. Advisors can reflect on questions such as:

- When I first applied for this job, what was it that excited me about this opportunity?
- Why did I choose to pursue this career?
- What do I love most about this job?

Congruent with Clear’s (2018) first law, advisors who spend a few moments each day reflecting on their “Why” make obvious the importance of their work. It is easy (second law) to take a few moments to reflect and it can be satisfying (fourth law). This simple step of advisors reflecting on their “Why” is congruent with the Appreciative Mindset components of practicing gratitude and remembering our power (Bloom et al., 2008).

Advising Appointment Habits

Before welcoming students into the physical or virtual office space, it may be beneficial for Appreciative Advisers to review the student’s academic profile and any notes from previous meetings. Advisors can read through the documents with an Appreciative Mindset and reflect on questions such as:

- What types of classes has this student excelled in previously?
- What indicators are there that this student has the potential to excel in certain areas?
- Why has the student appeared to have struggled last semester in two of their classes?

By focusing on the student's strengths and being curious rather than judgmental (Brown, 2017) about potential areas of challenge, it puts the advisor in the right mindset for taking an Appreciative approach to each advising appointment. Getting into the habit of taking a few moments to prepare for the meeting by asking reflective questions can make the work seem more attractive and satisfying.

For those who meet with students physically in-person, meeting the student in the waiting room and accompanying them back to the office from the waiting room is another habit that Appreciative Advisers can engage in that will help students feel seen and welcome. Not only does walking students back to the office give advisors a chance to get up and experience a change of scenery (attractive), it gives them a few moments of quiet as they walk to the waiting area (easy), and it can be satisfying to see students' reaction to being warmly greeted in the waiting room.

As Appreciative Advisers ask students questions, it is imperative to listen to student responses without formulating their response prematurely. Especially at the end of a long day of advising and what may feel like repeatedly answering the same questions, it can be easy to think that advisors know exactly what the student is asking before they even finish the question. One habit that advisors can establish is not replying until the student has stopped talking completely and then count to three before answering the question to see if the student has more to say. Doing so demonstrates to the student that one is fully present and focused on them.

At the end of the advising appointment, Appreciative Advisers should get into the habit of asking if the student has any questions, thanking them for coming in, and then walking them back to the waiting room (Bloom et al., 2008). This habit helps to create a positive last impression of the advisor, which may increase student-advisor satisfaction and make it more attractive for the student to return.

End of the Day Habits

Before rushing out the door or on their drive home, academic advisors can get into the habit of asking themselves reflective, Appreciative questions about their experiences and strengths that day, such as:

- What was the highlight of my day?
- When did I feel like I really made a difference in a student's life today?
- What did I do well today?
- What is one thing I can do even better tomorrow?

By asking these Appreciative reflective questions, including a Don't Settle question (like the last one on the list), it reminds Appreciative Advisers how satisfying it can be to see, empower, and learn from their students. Advisors are blessed to have the opportunity to impact students' lives and spending a few minutes reflecting at the end of the day can help to avoid burnout and stay focused on why being an academic advisor can be such a fulfilling job.

Conclusion

According to Clear (2018), for a habit to form an act needs to be repeated numerous times to become automatic. James Clear's (2018) Four Laws of Behavior practices—make it obvious, make it attractive, make it easy, and make it satisfying—can assist Appreciative Advisers with establishing purposeful habits (Clear, 2018). Small changes can lead to sizeable effects over time. With enough practice, advisors can change the direction of how they approach and connect with their students. Adopting these habits can increase the mental capacity dedicated to focusing on each student and to deal with unexpected challenges that arise each day.

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