

Mel Robbins

# The High 5 Habit



**It's Time to  
Cheer for Yourself**



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by Mel Robbins

12-minute read

### **Synopsis**

*The High 5 Habit* (2021) offers a startling proposition: A single change to your morning routine can help upend your outmoded, self-limiting attitudes and kick your life into top gear. Interwoven with personal anecdotes and scientific research, this blueprint for life transformation makes self-improvement seem easier than ever.

### **Who is it for?**

- Self-improvement and personal-development fanatics
- Anyone who wants to change but needs a strong dose of pep and energy
- Armchair psychologists interested in the workings of emotional growth

### **About the author**

Mel Robbins is a best-selling author and personal-development pundit who lives in New England with her husband and three kids. She's the creator of the number-one podcast on Audible, *Start Here: Pep Talks for Life*. Her other books include *The 5 Second Rule*.

## **What's in it for me? Discover how one simple habit can change your life.**

How do you feel when you wake up in the morning? Besides feeling tired and groggy, how's your mood? Are you on top of the world? Feeling like a million bucks? Yeah, not likely. Most of us feel daunted at the thought of the day ahead, and want nothing more than to crawl back beneath the covers for a few more hours of rest.

But what if there were a way to change that? Not a tedious, complicated method, but a simple habit that you could adopt today – a habit that might improve not only your mornings but your entire life?

If that sounds appealing, then let's get into it – and learn how to harness the power of the High 5 Habit.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why you should apologize less;
- how high fives can change the structure of your brain; and
- why changing your mindset is like doing the laundry.

### **Start the day by high-fiving your reflection.**

When you stand in front of the mirror each morning, brushing your teeth, what thoughts do you have about the person staring back at you? Do you congratulate yourself on the person you've become? Do you think about how great you look, or marvel at all the wonderful things your body can do?

Or do you, like most of us, spend those morning minutes criticizing yourself and finding fault with your body?

The author, Mel Robbins, used to do that, too. First thing each day, she would stand before the mirror and pick apart her appearance – criticizing her chin, hating her neck, loathing her stomach. This self-flagellation would continue until she moved on to the second routine of her morning: fretting about the day's many pressing tasks.

But then something unexpected happened. One day, things went differently.

### **The key message here is: Start the day by high-fiving your reflection.**

On that morning, Robbins didn't criticize or fret. Instead, she raised her hand toward her reflection in a kind of salute. Then she stuck it out and high-fived herself in the mirror.

Why? It wasn't an easy question to answer. She was stressed and tired and dissatisfied with herself. She needed some support. But she knew the support had to come from within. In a way, the high five was a demonstration of self-belief.

It seemed corny, sure – but it felt good. She made the high fives a habit, and every morning she came away from the mirror feeling a little bit better about herself.

In fact, there was something about the act of high-fiving her reflection that made Robbins pause and reevaluate some important things. Wouldn't life be better, she thought, if she cheered for herself a little bit more? If, instead of voicing self-criticism, she showered herself with words of love, praise, and encouragement?

When you look in the mirror tomorrow morning, you'll face a choice. You can spend the time mulling over your failings and lingering on life's problems – or you can take a minute to congratulate and encourage yourself.

Choose wisely, and high-five your reflection.

### **Scientific research backs up the power of high fives.**

What memories do high fives bring up for you? Celebrating some childhood achievement, like scoring a goal or hitting a home run? Congratulating a friend for getting a promotion, or for finally dumping that toxic partner?

For Mel Robbins, one specific memory sticks out. It was 2001, and she was running the New York City marathon. She was tired, sore, and underprepared. And then, about seven miles in, the blisters on her feet tore open, and each step started to hurt badly.

But Robbins didn't give up. Not because of her superhuman strength or steely determination; no, the thing that kept her going was strangers' encouragement – especially the high fives she received from everyone she passed along the way.

That simple gesture made all the difference – and research can shed light on why.

### **Here's the key message: Scientific research backs up the power of high fives.**

In one experiment, researchers gave a bunch of schoolkids some tasks to carry out, and motivated them in one of three different ways. Some kids were praised for a trait, with researchers calling them smart or talented. Others were praised for making an effort; the researchers complimented them on their hard work.

But the kids in the third group were motivated in a different way – with high fives. Can you guess which group felt the best about the work they put in, and kept going the longest? It was the kids who got high fives.

But what about high fiving yourself – can that be as beneficial? Absolutely. According to research in a field called *neurobics*, high-fiving yourself can actually change your brain at a structural level.

Neurobic research suggests that when you combine a familiar activity, like brushing your teeth, with an

unfamiliar twist, like high-fiving your reflection, you put your brain in a heightened state that makes it easier to form new neural connections.

So, when you high-five yourself in the mirror, your brain understands that something novel and unfamiliar is happening; put simply, it starts paying attention. If you combine that act with thoughts of love and self-encouragement, the positive attitude becomes more likely to really stick.

Try it for yourself: for five days, high-five your reflection every morning. You'll be surprised by the difference it makes.

### ***Negative thoughts can create a spiral of negative behaviors.***

Mel Robbins might be a life coach now – but when she was younger, her own life sometimes seemed out of control. As a young woman at law school, she was lucky enough to land a great opportunity: a summer internship at the attorney general's office in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

As part of her work there, Robbins was asked to carry out a project that involved looking at criminal reoffense rates in the state. It was a topic that mattered a great deal to her, one she would have truly enjoyed exploring – but she just couldn't bring herself to do it.

Why? In short, she felt overwhelmed: Robbins's fear of failure was so powerful that she never even started work on the project. When the attorney general called her into his office to complain, she made up some excuses – and then simply left for good, without even bothering to quit the job.

### ***The key message is this: Negative thoughts can create a spiral of negative behaviors.***

Robbins allowed self-doubt to turn an amazing opportunity into a source of stress. And after she left the job, she only felt worse about herself. Her fears had come true: she'd been trusted with an important project, and she totally screwed it up. She felt like a failure.

Unfortunately, things only got worse. Another summer Robbins landed work at a legal firm in New Mexico – but, once again, this great opportunity brought on powerful feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. A week before she was due to fly out and start, she called the firm, told them a made-up story about experiencing a family emergency, and said she couldn't take the job after all.

Now, this might all seem worlds away from high-fiving the mirror each morning – but in an important way, that habit and Robbins's behavior are connected. You see, Robbins's self-destructive behaviors were rooted in deeply ingrained habits of ruthless self-criticism and self-doubt. Every time life presented her with an

opportunity, the same thoughts arose, undermining her sense of competence and courage.

Eventually, with the help of therapy, Robbins put in the work necessary to strengthen her self-belief. What she learned there was that messing up can make you hate yourself, and hating yourself can make you more likely to mess up. It's a vicious circle that keeps you trapped in patterns of failure and self-loathing.

The antidote? Being kind, supportive, and encouraging to yourself – in other words, being the type of person who high-fives her reflection.

### ***Your RAS can get clogged with unhelpful information.***

When you put your laundry in the dryer, odds are you also take the time to clean the lint filter. It's not a big deal. It's just a feature of dryers; over time, drying clothes creates lint, and if you don't clear the filter, the dryer can't do its job.

It's a simple process – but have you ever considered doing something similar for your mind?

You see, the mind also has a filter – the *Reticular Activating System*, or RAS – and its job is to filter the information your brain processes, ensuring that only the most relevant data reaches the level of conscious thought. And sometimes, just like the lint filter in your dryer, your RAS could also do with a thorough cleaning.

### ***The key message here is: Your RAS can get clogged with unhelpful information.***

So what's the "lint" that's blocking up your RAS? In brief, it's your negative and self-limiting thoughts and beliefs – the kind that stopped Robbins from making progress in her legal career.

Rejection, setbacks, disappointments, insults – all of these can get trapped in your RAS, leading your mind to focus on negative information while disregarding positive input.

Thankfully, we can actually clean away this emotional residue. The High Five Habit, and the patterns of self-acceptance and self-love that Robbins recommends, are the psychological equivalent of peeling away a thick layer of lint.

One of the criteria that your RAS uses to filter information is importance. If the RAS thinks you see negativity as relevant and significant, it'll highlight it even more. But if you start looking out for positives, your RAS can learn to treat them as important instead.

That last point is worth repeating. You're not just at the mercy of your RAS: you can teach it what to look for, and train it bit by bit to highlight all the positives in your life. Your new habit of high-fiving your reflection is the first step in this direction, but it's not the only one you need to take: in the next blink, we'll look at a powerful

technique you can use to make your RAS work in your favor.

### **Interrupt your thoughts, use a mantra, and act like the person you want to become.**

At this stage, you might find yourself feeling a little skeptical. Sure, high-fiving your reflection might feel good in the moment – but surely it can't kick-start any real changes in your mood and self-belief. Right?

Well, if you feel that way, you're not alone. In fact, that's what Mel Robbins's daughter thought when she first heard about her mother's new habit. How could something as simple as high-fiving herself in the mirror begin to change long-standing attitudes and beliefs?

Robbins explained it like this. Have you ever noticed that things you pay attention to seem to crop up more often in life? You buy a new car and suddenly notice that there are many similar models on the road. Or maybe you fall in love, and suddenly notice how many love songs are played on the radio.

Well, when you practice the High Five Habit, the world suddenly seems to present you with positivity.

### **Here's the key message: Interrupt your thoughts, use a mantra, and act like the person you want to become.**

There are three key steps in training your RAS to see the world differently. The first one is simple: interrupt your old thinking patterns.

The next time you feel yourself engaging in self-criticism or feeling self-doubt, pause and say to yourself, "I'm not thinking about that." It sounds simplistic – but by refusing to rehash those same tired thoughts, you train your RAS to disregard them in the future, too.

But it's not enough to weaken your existing thinking patterns. You've got to replace them with something better – something kinder, more supportive, and more realistic. That's where a mantra comes into play. But you have to be careful in choosing it.

If you don't think your mantra is true, your mind will reject it entirely. Choose something that you think is both encouraging and accurate. For instance, try one of these: "Every day, I'm getting a little stronger" or "I deserve to feel good today."

The final step is to act like the person you want to become. You can't change ingrained attitudes without taking action of some sort – and seeing yourself behave differently proves to your mind that your new belief is true.

So let's put it all together. Next time a negative thought pops into your head, interrupt it and tell yourself you're not going to think about that. Then, repeat a supportive and accurate mantra to yourself. And finally, act in a way that shows your new belief to be true.

### **Replace apologies with gratitude.**

How often do you find yourself apologizing? For some of us, it's a tic that can prove hard to shake. If we have to cancel plans, if we need a helping hand, even if someone else bumps into us in the street – the word "sorry" seems to be constantly on our lips.

On the face of it, it's a harmless habit. After all, who do you hurt by saying sorry? But if you dig a little deeper, the impulse to apologize can suggest something a little more worrying: an overactive sense of guilt that can make it hard to live a truly fulfilling life.

The thing is, living bravely and authentically means that you might disappoint people sometimes. It also means you'll have to depend on others from time to time – for moral support, for the odd favor, even just for a sympathetic audience. So stop apologizing, and start saying *thanks* instead.

### **The key message is this: Replace apologies with gratitude.**

Being exposed to gratitude feels a lot better than being exposed to guilt. In other words, it's nicer to be thanked than apologized to.

In fact, people who constantly say sorry can sometimes be a little bit annoying. One of the author's friends is like that – the type of person who feels the need to apologize every waking minute.

One day, the author realized her friend's habit was actually irritating her a little: every time she apologized, she shifted the focus onto herself. Instead of thanking the author for her generosity or patience, she was just seeking reassurance that she wasn't mad. Compared to a sincere "Thank you," her apologies began to feel a little underwhelming.

Don't be that friend. People who love you want to help and support you. If they go out of their way to do something nice, don't say sorry: show your appreciation.

Saying thank you doesn't just highlight the generosity of the person you're speaking to. It also allows you to acknowledge your needs without expressing guilt about them. It communicates to the world, and to you, that you don't have to feel guilt for having needs and desires of your own.

It's hard to have a high-five attitude when you're constantly apologizing for existing. But gratitude? Gratitude and high fives go hand in hand.

### **Final summary**

The key message in these blinks is that:

**The simple habit of high-fiving your reflection every morning can be enough to kick-start positive change in your life. It's a gesture of**

**support and self-belief with scientific underpinnings. And to really capitalize on the power of the High Five Habit, pair this gesture with deliberate efforts to shake up your existing mindset. Train your mind to highlight the positives in life, act like the person you want to become, and start thanking people instead of apologizing to them.**

And here's some more Actionable advice:

**Give yourself three weeks before you make that big change.**

When it comes to making big changes in life, it's easy to procrastinate for too long. Months, years, even decades can go by before we make our move – and sometimes we never act at all. That's why Mel Robbins recommends giving yourself a deadline of three weeks. It's long enough to make a plan and work out the details, but not so far off that you can delay taking any concrete steps.

