

# CHANGING HABITS with BEHAVIORAL DESIGN

**A deep dive into Stanford  
Professor's behavioral model  
and its effect on your  
marketing.**



**BRIAN MASSEY FEATURING BJ FOGG**

**The best way to really learn something is to teach it to someone else.** In 2012, this lesson rang true. BJ Fogg, Professor at Stanford and Author of *Tiny Habits: The Small Habits that Change Everything*, walked onto the stage, at the Conversion Sciences West Conference, wearing a colorful robe.

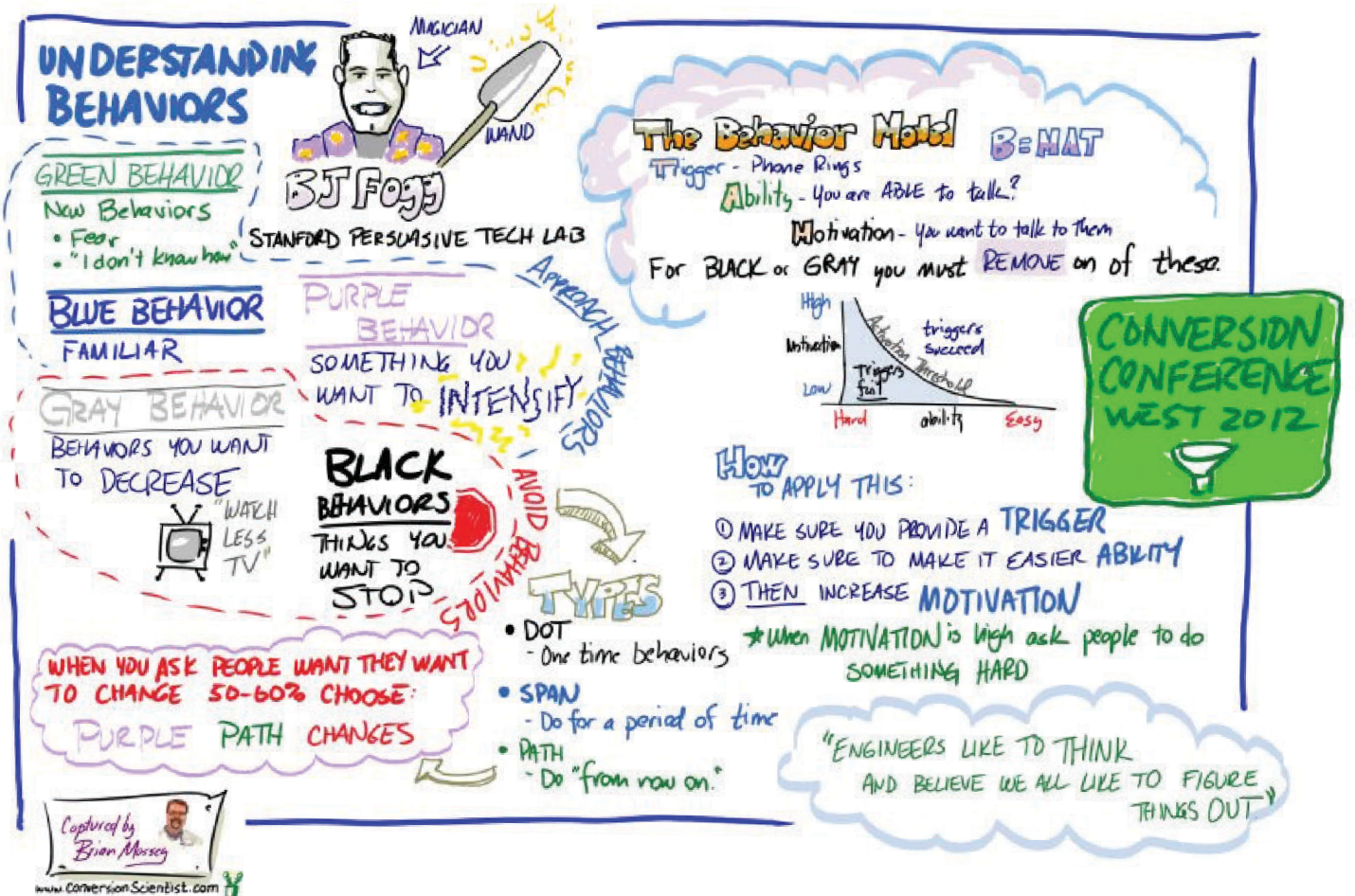
# INTRODUCTION

In his hand was a small oar. He claimed it was his magic wand and he was here to perform said magic. The magic he performed was to teach an important model for changing behaviors. Before the hour was over, he asked us to teach the person next to us what he had shared his behavioral model.

Having taught it to the person next to me the behavioral model is one I won't forget. In the conversation captured between Brian and BJ you will learn the behavioral model from the magician himself.

BJ. knows behavioral design. As a professor at Stanford, he founded the behavioral design lab to study human behavior. Each year, his course tackles issues big and small. And while it may not seem like it, if you're in marketing then you're also in the business of behavioral design. Before we jump into understanding the model he so famously teaches, how did BJ get started on the journey to become a leading thought leader on behavioral design?

BJ grew up in a religious tradition fostering a sense of responsibility for helping and serving others. "You're here on this earth to serve. And even though I'm not part of any religious tradition now, that upbringing shaped who I am on that sense of things."



# THE THREE TINY HABIT HACKS

According to Fogg, the tiny habits are basically three hacks you do to form habits easily and quickly.

## FIRST HACK

Take the new habit you want to form and scale it way back. For example, say you want to drink more water. You scale it way back to maybe just pouring a glass of water. Here I am picking up a glass of water that I poured it this morning as my habit. I don't drink the water at this point, just pour it. Let's say you want to do pushups. Don't start with 20 pushups. Start with two. You always start really, really tiny.

## SECOND HACK

Find where this newly formed habit fits naturally into your day. You're looking for a routine you already do reliably. We call it an anchor. Start by attaching the new habit to the anchor. In the case of pouring the glass of water, you might anchor it to your existing habit of placing breakfast on the counter. After that, pour the water.

## THIRD HACK

This hack wires in the habit. What causes habits to form is not repetition. Many people believe this, it's not accurate, according to Fogg's research. What creates habit is **emotions**. Once you have executed a tiny habit, you deliberately fire off a positive emotion. This is called a **celebration**. It may feel strange at first, but if you do it effectively, that habit will be substantially wired into your brain. Fogg has taught thousands and thousands of people this method. Some people resist the celebration. But it is crucial to making your habit stick.

This idea of celebration is really already well-known in marketing circles. Marketers use gaming concepts where a reward is generated for website visitors for even the smallest success. Mailchimp famously released components on their interface so that whenever you successfully send an email it would give you an animated high five. So simple, and yet effective. This celebration concept is not as strange as you might think.

Once you understand that it's the emotions that create habits, you will start to see it all around you in successful systems.

# RESEARCH

Fogg initially stumbled across the celebration insight in his own life. Like a lot of research, you have a sense in something. You ask, “What’s going on here?” True to Fogg’s next step was teaching this to someone else. In his case, it was thousands of people. This provided qualitative feedback, which is not an experiment. Fogg developed a true experiment in the Tiny Habits platform, an online community he created.

Here, people do a five-day program. This made it easy to split people out into two groups, a control and variation group. Within a week's time, Fogg can run a true experiment. One group did not include celebration in their habit-forming tasks, and the other was encouraged to celebrate these tiny habits. The results were clear. The people who were instructed and encouraged to celebrate did much better at creating the habits they wanted than those who did not. To be clear, this is not a direct measure of emotion. Rather it's measuring the technique of celebration. **But it does point at the importance of emotion in the habit-forming process.**

# TINY HABITS AND BEHAVIORAL DESIGN

**Fogg's** book *Tiny Habits* is really about behavioral design which is the term used at Stanford for the broader umbrella of the new models of behavior change, including the Fogg behavior model. The Fogg behavior model looks at three things that come together at the same moment.

A person must have the **motivation** to do the behavior, they must have the **ability** to do the behavior, and there must be a **prompt**. If you want a behavior to happen, you have to make sure all three of those things are present at the same moment. This simple behavior model can actually become the cornerstone for a foundation of *understanding* behavior.

Exercise number one in *Tiny Habits* is to write down three habits you'd like to stop. You want to be very specific. Then for each habit, think of ways you might remove or avoid the prompts, think of ways that you might make it harder to do, and think of ways that you might reduce your motivation. Tell me why I'm focusing on making it harder rather than making it easier?

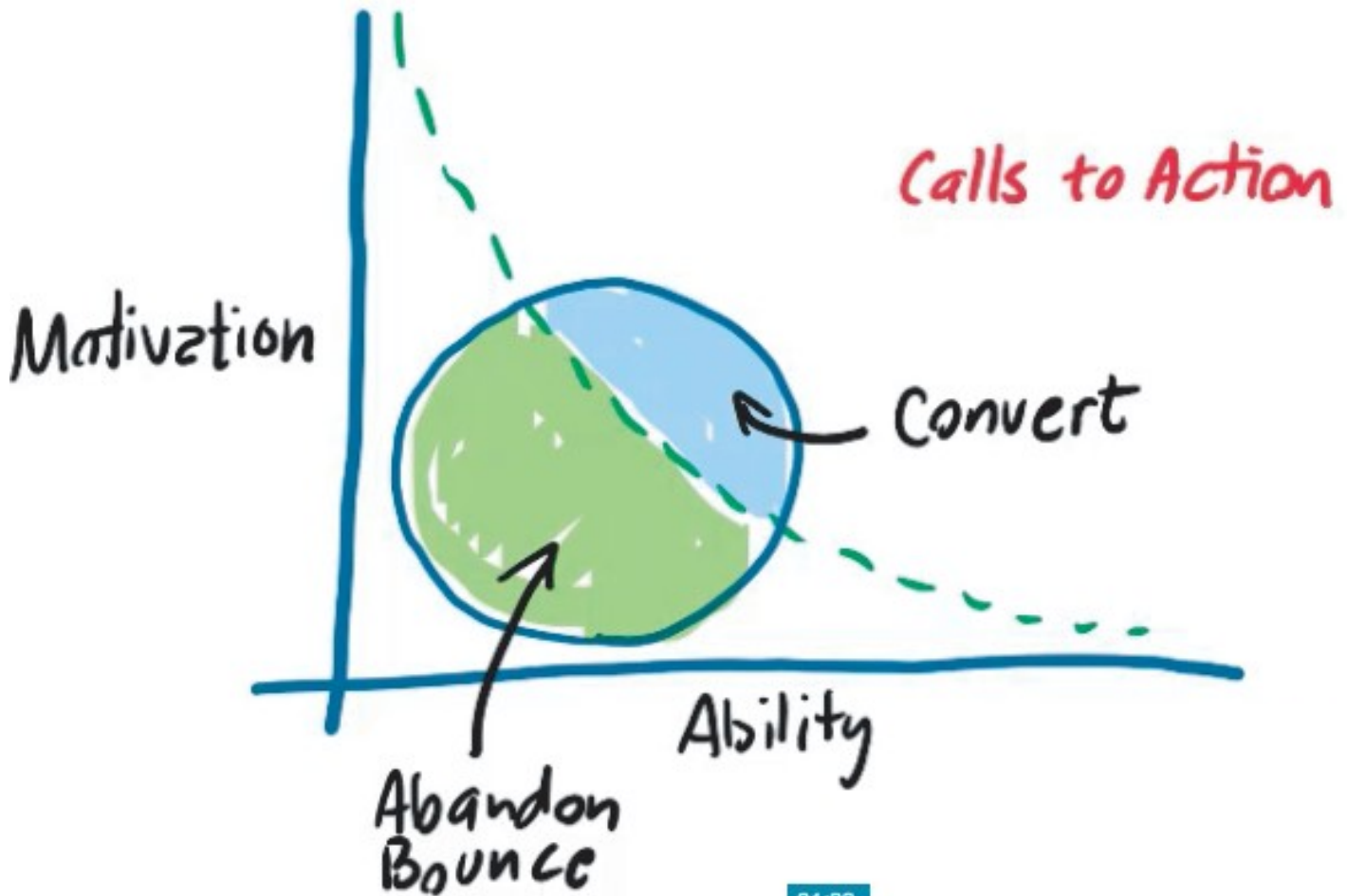


# START WITH YOURSELF

**The model in *Tiny Habits*** can be used to do lots of things with behavior, including stopping a behavior. This book is helpful for marketers, but it's actually written for everyday people. First and foremost, there is a behavior, everyday people want to stop. People working in conversion, of course, don't want to stop buying behavior. They want it to continue. It's helpful to see the application of the behavior model in a domain you care about, rather than just thinking about marketing. For example, how do you stop snacking? How do you stop getting mad at my kids? How do you stop using Facebook so much? If you remove the prompt, make it really hard to do, or remove the motivation -- any one of those three things -- you will succeed. Once you understand the model personally, you can begin to apply it professionally. It can be applied to increasing the motivation, increasing the ability of people to buy our products, to be able to sign up or become leads.

**Fogg** teaches business people behavior design. It's helpful and practical. In the bonus business chapter of *Tiny Habits*, you will see Fogg's behavior model.

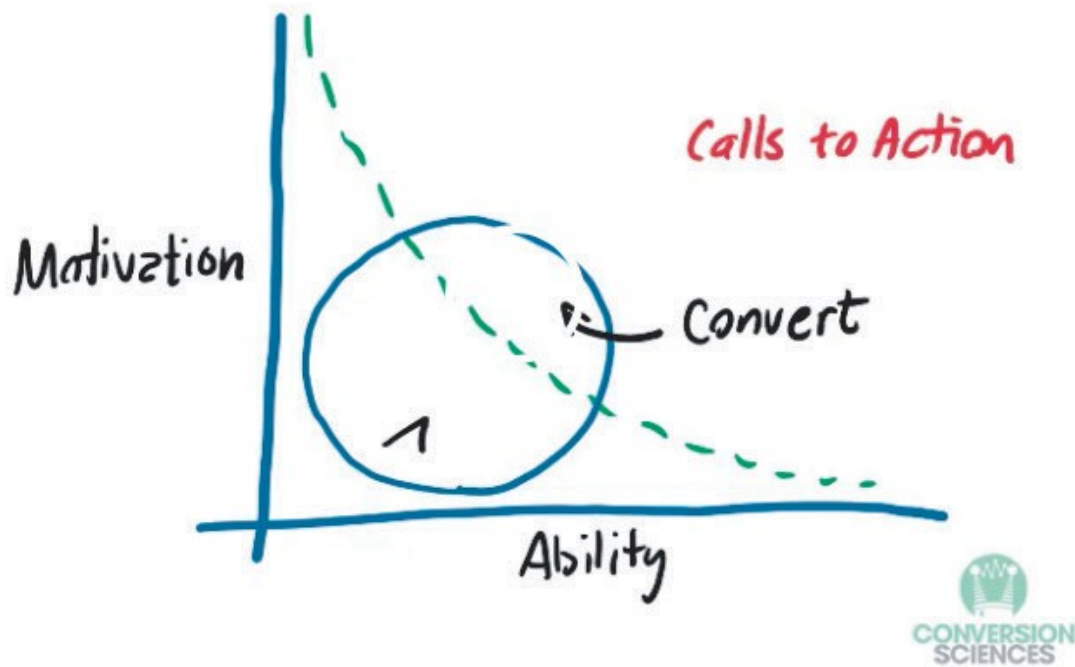




2 Motivation vs. ability. The dotted line is the Prompt threshold

Let's say 40 percent of the area of the circle is above the action line and 60 percent is below. That's how you might visualize any step in your conversion funnel. Let's say you want people to sign up for a newsletter and you send people to a landing page. By some miracle, 40 percent of people who show up are signing up. We have 40 percent of people converting like we want them to, whereas the other

60 percent are below the action line, not converting. They're either lacking motivation or they're lacking ability. You could design a test to see if you can make it easier for them to convert. You'll understand how much increase in conversion you will get. You can test an offer that is more motivating to see how much increase you get. The book focuses on a behavior model as an individual person, but you can convey the same application to how you run and test your conversion funnels.



<https://conversionciences.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/bj-fogg-bmap.mp4>

# THE TWO MAXIMS OF BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

**Fogg** is inviting people to look at their behaviors in a more scientific way. The two broadest statements from Tiny Habits are called maxims.

One: Help people do what they already want to do.

Two: Help people feel successful.

These two maxims map to tiny habits. That's what the method does. And it also maps to other kinds of engagement. Those maxims are key. You have to have these two maxims for any winning product or service. If you fail on either of those two things, you won't be successful. You're aligning whatever behavior you want them to do with something that they want.

For most products and services, you want ongoing engagement. Success comes from helping people feel successful. The way you do that is to celebrate, affirming that the person is succeeding. Celebration wires in the habit and motivates them do more with that product or service or brand.

But we can't necessarily celebrate by sending an e-mail that says 'congratulations'.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING FOR EMOTIONS

We chose to call this emotion-generating event a celebration. This is really important. Do not use the word **reward** in behavior design. It's a messy word. The use of it today has at least two meanings. One example is when you reach a certain level on a video game and you see animations and get points. That's a type of reward. And that is the kind of reward that creates habit. It happens instantly in that moment. And your brain associates, whatever behavior you did with that positive feeling. The reward only works if it creates a feeling. So that's one use of the word reward and it's the right technical use.

There is a wrong use of the word “reward.”, For example, “if you meditate for 30 days, you’ll get a trophy to put on LinkedIn.” That's not a reward. That doesn't wire in a habit. Rather, it's an incentive or a prize that comes at the end of a 30-day journey. If there is a distance in time between the behavior and the thing that's supposed to make people feel great, it's not going to wire in the habit. And then technically not a reward.

**This could be a problem for Amazon.** The reward comes when a package shows up on your doorstep. Amazon wants to reward you in the moment you push either 'add to cart' or 'buy now.' That's the habit Amazon wants to wire in. The proximity and time

need to be right when the behavior happens. That's when you need to help people feel successful and certainly not unsuccessful. If I click a button that said 'buy now' and I didn't get any confirmation the purchase went through, then I would be confused. The reward, the reinforcer, the thing that creates the happy feeling has to happen right there.

Keep in mind that it doesn't have to be hugely dramatic. It can just affirm that somebody has succeeded. In doing so, it's wiring in the habit of using that system.

## STOPPING HABITS

**Tiny Habits**, tells the story of a woman who wanted to stop "scrolling" – surfing social media -- in bed. What did she do to celebrate those nights when she didn't pick her phone up?

**Fogg says that we're** talking almost two opposite things here. One is that the 'buy button' is to create the habit of people pushing 'buy' on your website. The scrolling woman was trying to stop a behavior. In her example, the question is how does she get herself to stop scrolling? Ultimately what worked for her was to put her phone in the kitchen to charge, not on her nightstand. And in that way, she couldn't just reach over and grab her phone because it wasn't there on the nightstand.

She'd have to go to the kitchen. For her to stop that behavior, the key was to make the behavior harder to do.

## HOW TO CELEBRATE

Do something that makes you feel happy and successful and positive. For some people. It's a fist pump. Think Tiger Woods. For other people, it's just saying the word awesome or raising their hands over the head. Some people like doing a little dance that makes them feel happy. It's really anything that brings a positive emotion and signals you've succeeded. It's different for different people. Part of creating the change is to figure out what works for you that fires off a positive emotion so you can wire habits in new on demand. In *Tiny Habits*, Fogg guides people through a process so they can figure out what they can do to create this positive emotion on demand. In some ways the most important skill that someone can have to create habits in their own life is identifying the celebration for themselves.

This celebration piece seems to be the hardest piece because it is emotional. It isn't easy to celebrate when you're at the arm's length across a digital connection with your visitors

**Fogg invites us to** look at systems that are working through the lens of what are they doing to affirm or confirm success.

Focus on what other systems do to affirm that people have succeeded. Again, it can be a simple thing. It can be a confirmation screen that is clear about what a visitor got done, what they were trying to get done.

# APPLICATION

When you get back to the office, let's see if you can develop some tiny habits around experimenting. For example, if the habit you want to change is considering data when we begin any creative project. In applying BJ's model, the change doesn't need to be big. In fact, we should make the change very small, tiny. The prompt or trigger is before you sit down to write copy, or design an ad, or even a web page. You should simply add the behavior of logging into your analytics. Don't look at any reports and don't worry about doing any analysis. Simply log in, log out and begin your project. According to BJ Fogg's **Tiny Habits**, you'll begin to think about data more often and something will begin to change. Now behave like a scientist.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

**Tiny Habits** released January 1, 2020. You can find out more at [tinyhabits.com](https://tinyhabits.com) or [bjfogg.com](https://bjfogg.com). The transcription was edited to be more readable, find the full conversation on the **Intended Consequences** podcast.