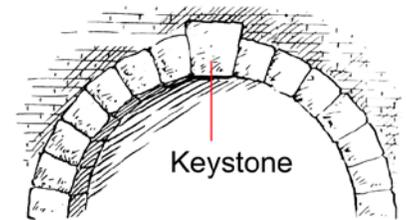


Each of us have attitudes, thoughts and behaviors that seem instinctual, meaning we do not have to think about them. They just happen. Some of these are healthy and helpful. Others are not. Learning how to recognize and assess them are invaluable skills, both for ourselves and for those with whom we work. We can also develop the capacity to help others do the same reflection in their own lives, whether in their relationships, spirituality, personal health and self-care, or work. Taking these skills into caring and helping relationships gives us more tools to be increasingly effective, and at the very least “do no harm.”

Recent research suggests that it actually takes on average 66 days to start or break a habit (more than twice as long as conventional wisdom has typically said). As an average, this means that some will move more quickly, while others may take much longer. This process is complicated when multiple habits are being changed at one time. For instance, when one decides to change health habits, diet, exercise, stimulant consumption all may need to change. In this process, it becomes important to determine which habit is the keystone habit.

### **Keystone Habits**

“Keystone habits” are those upon which everything else relies. They might also be called “lynch pin” or “cornerstone” habits. When looking at a collection of attitudes, thoughts and behaviors, which one is central? Which leads to the others? Which is most ‘habitual,’ i.e. you do it without even thinking about it? Identifying this and tackling it opens up greater resources for change in regard to the other habits that need to be changed. This then turns us toward the domino principle, in which we see the interplay between various habits in the change process.



### **The Domino Principle**

We are all familiar with the game of lining up dominos and watching them fall. Habits function in this way as well. We identify a series of habits that are related, and we choose one to change, realizing that the inertia of this initial shift will provide energy for future transformation. Add to this the insight from physics that a domino can topple another 50% larger, and we see how quickly we can tackle great obstacles by starting with something small. (A 2” domino topples a 3”, followed by a 4.5”, and a 6.75”, etc. the fourth domino is over three times larger than the first, and this incline accelerates geometrically. This suggests that if we have a difficult habit to change, we need to first identify a small and simple change that makes moves us toward the greater challenge, building on the energy gained with each small success.



### **Habitual?**

How does this relate to our relationships? Our attitudes, thoughts and behaviors (words and actions) are the stuff of our interactions with other people, the world, God, and even our own self-perception. Identifying what habits hinder our interaction and which ones will enhance it is vital to our effectiveness. Once we gain clarity in these areas, we need to strategize how to go about stopping old and starting new habits. We apply the keystone and the domino principles in this process. We then surround ourselves with individuals in situations that will increase our likelihood of success (the small dominos). A great starting place can be our spiritual habits. How is your prayer life? Do you practice meditation? What can you do to increase your peace, mercy and compassion on those in need, and deepen your reliance upon the Spirit while gaining greater skill and competence in the arts of living that are required for your work? All of these involve habits. Two great resources for further study of these ideas are the following recent publications:

Charles Duhigg. The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business (2012)

Gary Keller. The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results (2013)