EPISODE — JAMES CLEAR

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:18.1] LC: Welcome to today's episode of the Art of Authenticity. Today we have James Clear joining us. For those of you who haven't checked out James's site, he is a writer on habits and behavioral change. He has 250,000 e-mail subscribers, he has a million people coming to his site per month, unbelievable. And the reason so many people are hoping over there to check it out it's because he's writing about behavioral psychology, habit formation, performance improvement and the way he phrases it is, "I write about how small habits can change our lives and society for the better."

So many of my clients ask the question, "How do I implement, have the discipline, the motivation to change my life?" James talks about all sorts of ways to think about goal setting, taking action, changing habits, from very practical things about putting your gym shoes next to your bed before you wake up so that you can run, to sleep habits, but then also the psychology behind why we set goals but we can't actually follow through them.

We think it's us. We think we're lazy, we think that we're not motivated. If that's you and you want to improve on this in this area of your life, check out today's episode. I know you won't be disappointed. You can check out James at jamesclear.com. I know you'll love his content as much as I do and thank you again for tuning in. If you have any questions or anything I can help you out with, feel free to send me a note, laura@lauracoe.com. Thank you so much for tuning in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:02:00.8] LC: Welcome to today's episode. I am so excited. Today we have James Clear joining us. Hey James, how are you?

[00:02:08.9] JC: Hey Laura, I'm doing well. Thanks so much for having me. It's great to be here.

[00:02:12.3] LC: It is so much fun to have you here. James, for those of you who haven't checked out his blog, although I don't know how many people are out there that are left. You've 250,000 coming is that per month?

[00:02:23.6] JC: Actually, so there are about a million people who visit the site a month and then about 300,000 now on the e-mail list.

[00:02:31.3] LC: Oh my God, sorry I think I got the older statistic then and he focuses on habits and behavioral psychology and if you haven't checked it out, there are so many interesting blog posts filled with content information. It's useful, it's practical, you can put it into everyday life so definitely check it out jamesclear.com. But James too, I know your back story. I've listened to a lot of podcasts and I've read a lot of your content. I find it personally so valuable but I think your story if we could just step back a little bit, hear your personal story, how you got interested in habits in the first place, right? It's something that happened in your life where you had a major medical issue?

[00:03:13.0] JC: Yeah. So my sophomore year of high school, I was hit in the face with a baseball bat that ended breaking - totally fractured both eye sockets, broke my nose, broke behind my nose, I couldn't drive in the next eight to nine months. I had multiple seizures, had to get air carried to the hospital, I couldn't breathe on my own. Anyway, so it was a very long sequence of events to get back and before that happened, I was a baseball player.

My dad played in minor leagues with St. Louis Cardinals so growing up, I wanted to be a professional baseball player like him. Anyway, I lost the whole next year basically. I couldn't play anything like I said, I couldn't drive and then eventually made my way back. I ended up playing baseball for a small college in Denison University in Granville and then slowly continued to progress and get better and my senior season, I ended up being named Academic All-American.

So that five-year span from not being able to drive or play anything. I could walk but there were still a lot of, just a very slow long road to get back to becoming an Academic All-American. I feel like fulfilling my potential as a baseball player even if I didn't get to play professionally. I learned a lot about habits and behavior change in that process. I write a lot now about the power of small steps and how they can accrue in the significant gains in the long run.

And so that was my first fore into having to put those ideas into practice and to see what that looked like in the real world and I didn't realize the lessons that I was learning at the time but looking back now, it's clear how much that personal experience shaped and influenced a lot of the scientific research and ideas that I write about and share today.

[00:04:51.4] LC: That's what I was going to ask. So when you're going through this challenge, you just instinctively started with small things, well also you had to but was there a part of you that was just drawn to doing it that way or are you reading about it at the time? How did that work out during that phase?

[00:05:08.9] JC: Yeah, so I think there are multiple factors. The first is, you're right, I didn't really have much of a choice. The first thing that we worked on after I had surgery and recovered from the initial injury a few weeks later was going to the ophthalmologist and trying to work on overcoming double vision which I had acquired after the injury. So it wasn't like I was going to jump right into training for baseball again. I had to work on just figuring out how to get my eyesight handled. So I was forced into small steps that way.

[00:05:38.4] LC: And you're only 16 years old, so it must have taught you a lot about patience and perseverance.

[00:05:44.5] JC: Yeah and when you're at that age and I had just gotten my license not too long before that and so there's this whole period of independence and then suddenly you lose that and kids can be dramatic in high school anyway. There are a lot of hard parts to that process emotionally as well as physically. Anyway, I've progressed through that certainly I was forced into small steps but some of it I think was probably genetic or biological.

I think that I tend to be a person that sees the glass as half full and focuses on more positive things and maybe that's a cultural influence from my parents and the way that I was brought up. Maybe that it's more genetically primed that way, I'm not sure. But so that was part of it. I would just focus on whatever small wins that I had and then try to build upon that momentum and then the third piece which I think is just as critical and to be perfectly honest, in my case was probably a good amount of luck is that I ended up going to a school and having teammates who

were a perfect fit for me, the environment is right. I got a chance to play right away, which meant that I could slowly improve myself over a four-year span. I didn't have to ride the bench for a while and the teammates that I had, when you go and play on a college team, you don't get to choose the guys who get recruited with you. It's like family, you don't choose who your cousins are. They're just there.

[00:06:57.6] LC: Yeah.

[00:06:57.9] JC: And so sometimes, you can have your teammates and sometimes you can have bad teammates and I was really lucky to have great teammates. So because of that, we were able to feed off of each other and get better and they wanted the same things. This is true not just for baseball but for pretty much any team that I have been a part of and I think it extends to all organizations.

One of the most important things is that everybody in the boat is rowing in the same direction. If people want the same thing then success comes way easier both for individuals and for the group as a whole. If you want different things and you're rowing in opposite direction, then you're just stuck in the middle of the water all the time.

[00:07:30.9] LC: Yeah, I can't tell you how much, you know, I mentor entrepreneurs as I had a company at one point and people are like, "Oh my God, I love my friend and we're just going to start a business," and they just have totally competing views on the goals of the company, right? And they're like a canoe going around in circles.

[00:07:48.4] JC: Yeah, it's interesting how, I mean I've been a single founder for the six years that I have been an entrepreneur now and it's been great. It comes with its own challenges, but it's interesting to me how many co-founders I've seen who are both smart and both have good ideas and want successful businesses but they want different things.

They want different types of successful businesses and those relationships get tense and derail what would be otherwise good companies very often. So anyway, that was the third factor, was this fact that I was placed into a great environment with people who wanted the same things as me and we were able to build on each other's success.

[00:08:24.7] LC: That's incredible. So how did you move from school and baseball and basically having this big comeback and personal triumph into creating a business around this?

[00:08:36.0] JC: So once I graduated, I needed to figure out what I was going to do and I went to grad school and while I was in graduate school, I got MBA and my job, my graduate assistantship was to analyze venture capital investment in our region and so through that graduate assistantship, I saw all of these men and women starting businesses and rolling out their ideas and that is where I got the itch to start something myself.

I didn't know it going in but looking back, I've displayed a lot of entrepreneurial behavior throughout my life without ever labeling it as such. For example in undergrad, I designed my own major, which is a fairly entrepreneurial thing to do. You look at the list of 50 options that they have and you say, "I don't really like any of those. I'm just going to come up with one," and so I didn't have any entrepreneurs in my family and so I don't think I ever thought that way or put a word to the way that I was acting.

Also when I was in graduate school, I was the first person in my immediate family to go abroad and to leave North America and then I went to six countries in 12 days on a solo travel trip and stuff and there's nothing unique about that in the wider world but in my little bubble that I had grown up in, that was a fairly adventurous entrepreneurial thing to do. So I think my appetite for uncertainty led me towards that.

So anyway, once I started studying all these businesses that we're starting all these venture capital investments that were being placed, I was like, "Oh this seems like something that would interest me that would be a great fit," and so I graduated. The first two years were spent with me wasting a lot of time and trying many terrible ideas which I think is pretty typical of most entrepreneurs. Every entrepreneur has their little start-up story where they flopped and tried a bunch of ideas.

[00:10:22.2] LC: Absolutely.

[00:10:23.5] JC: And I look back on that now as a period of incubating my skill set. I needed a time, when I graduated I had no skills when it comes to running a business and I needed time to build those skills so that I could create something of value and that's what those first two years were spent doing. I didn't know what the website was.

So I taught myself how to code. I didn't know how to get anybody to come to my website or be interested in the products I was selling, so I learned how to build an e-mail list and that's what led me into writing and then now it all spiraled into this path that I am on now.

[00:10:57.7] LC: Do you feel like there was a turning point? I feel like a lot of entrepreneurs, like you said, there's this stumbling around in the dark trying to figure it all out and then there's the serendipitous, something starting to really take hold here. Did you have a phase where you're like, "Huh, I am hitting something here."

[00:11:15.0] JC: Yeah, so like I said, the first couple of years has been incubating my skill set and I tried a lot of ideas like I launched an iPhone app and that totally flopped. I tried to start a couple of different websites around random ideas and nobody paid attention and then I had one that took off a little bit more and I was at least able to learn how to build an audience but it wasn't until about two years in that I decided to start jamesclear.com.

Once I started writing there, first of all, there was a big difference in my level of motivation whereas previously, I was trying to build skills because I didn't know what I was doing. This time, I was using those skills to work on something I really cared about, which is writing about behavior change and high performance and how to make better decisions and generally live better and taking scientific ideas and applying them to self-improvement.

That was something that lit me up inside, so it was much easier for me to get really invested in the work and not just see it as a way to train myself for the practice and that turning point that you mentioned, it happened about six months in. After three months, I had around 3,000 subscribers on the e-mail list. After six months, I had around 6,000 and then that seventh month, I added another 6,000. So suddenly the business has doubled in size.

[00:12:23.9] LC: Wow.

[00:12:24.4] JC: And so that and from then on, it is never slowed down. I've never had a month less than that since then. It was probably a snowball effect where there was a phase transition where it's like heating an ice cube to 29, 30, 31 degrees and then suddenly get to 32 and then everything changes and it melts and it's like that. I think I was putting in a lot of work that just wasn't coming to fruition yet and then it hit this little hockey stick curve or the snowball tumbled over the edge and we went away.

[00:12:53.1] LC: Well I heard you also say that you took those skill sets and you placed them into something that you are really passionate about. So I would assume that also took your interests and focus and motivation to a whole new level.

[00:13:07.2] JC: Yeah, it definitely did. The advantage that I had when I started, I started jamesclear.com from scratch but at least I knew what I was doing. I knew where to put the forms. I knew how to write an article, I knew how to code the website. I didn't have to learn that stuff again and so because of that, I was able to make strides way faster than I could than any of the previous projects I've worked on because I was trying to learn just how to do the work not just doing or getting the work done.

[00:13:35.4] LC: Yeah and so I'm assuming those habits that you've created over the previous year's really helped push through the difficult phase and sticking two things and I want to get into the brass tax. I know everybody probably wants to hear your best tips and we'll get into that, but setting the goal to persevere, push through, try another business until one hit has to take a certain amount of focus and dedication.

But let's just start with this idea of goals, because you set off to start a business, several didn't work. People come to me and say, "I want to lose weight, I want to change jobs," they have these goals. They have this broader thing they want to do and then something falls apart. Can you talk a little bit about how you view goals and setting goals and thinking about that process first?

[00:14:24.1] JC: Sure. So I will say two things. The first is, and this is with reference to entrepreneurship in general and the sticking with starting with new business ideas. At some

point, and for me it was about 11 months in, you have to flip the switch when you just trust that you're going to figure it out and if I was going to describe entrepreneurship in any sentence, that's probably what I would say. It's the willingness to trust yourself that you will figure out how to make it work.

Because there is no road map for any entrepreneur and so, there's always some point of uncertainty further out on the curve of your growth that you will be facing. No matter how long you've been in business. I have a friend who says that entrepreneurship is one of the three great teachers of life and so it's marriage, entrepreneurship and having children and the reason that they are the three great teachers is that you're never out of the woods on any of them.

You can be a parent for 20 years but that doesn't mean you get to stop being a parent now and you can have a business for 35 years, but your business can still take next year. Same with your marriage. You always have to put work in on them.

[00:15:26.6] LC: Okay, I have all three of them. I've been in a 20-year relationship, I have a 10-year-old and I've been in business for 20 years. I need to meet that friend that's brilliant.

[00:15:35.6] JC: Yeah, so anyway, the willingness to trust that you'll figure it out I think is essential because you will never be — there is no finish line. There's no way to get to the, unless you sell your business and then decide not to have one anymore. For as long as you're going to be running it, there's no way to get out of it. So accepting that fact, not saying that it was depressing but realizing that that is reality I think is essential for understanding how to operate without having the stress bearing down on you at all times.

[00:16:03.1] LC: Yep, that's a really great point and I just want to slow down there for one second just to say because part of being an entrepreneur is you're always setting new bigger goals so you can get stuck in the trap of feeling like you're never where you wanted to be, is that right?

[00:16:15.9] JC: Yeah and that actually dovetails very nicely with the second thing that I wanted to say which is to answer your original question about goal setting. So I don't think goals are useless. I think goals are very helpful for setting direction and deciding where you want to

allocate your effort and energy and talents and motivation and understanding what direction you're moving in, like what you were talking about earlier, rowing in the right direction with that boat is very important.

But once you have decided on what that true north is going to be, then it doesn't really matter what the goal is. You set the goal on a shelf as long as you are moving in that direction. What matters are the systems that you commit to or the process that you commit to and so the way that I think about goal setting now is, as long as I am moving in the correct direction, I focus far more on the system or the process that I commit to each week and not on setting some ambitious goal for myself.

Because in reality, goals are just guesses. They're just made up milestones that we hope to achieve and whether or not you achieve that goal is contingent upon many things, some of which aren't under your control. Many of which are not, and almost all of them you cannot foresee until you are facing the challenge and so as an example, I could have set a goal of getting a million people to visit my website. But setting that goal has no bearing on whether or not I achieve that outcome.

Instead what I decide to focus on was letting me write one article every Monday and every Thursday and just commit to that system and by committing to that system for three years, I have a million people visiting the website but the focus was on executing on that system each and every week and not worrying about the outcome or the goal that I had set for myself.

I think that what you mentioned just a minute ago about always setting another goal for yourself and always pushing happiness off until the next milestone is a downside of our focus on goal setting and smart goals and all of that. We are implicitly telling ourselves, "Once I get to this outcome then I'll be happy. Once I reach this milestone then my business will be successful."

[00:18:19.2] LC: Yes.

[00:18:20.5] JC: And systems help invert that because you can look back on your current week and say, "Did I commit to the system or the process that I was focused on?" And if you did, you

can feel great about it rather than saying, "Happiness is something I will achieve at some point in the future."

[00:18:34.5] LC: I love that. I mean I work with people who are so successful. They have checked off so many of their goals and they are so unhappy because they keep setting a new goal and setting a new goal and setting a new goal and they don't ever have that moment of satisfaction and like you said, pushing happiness off into the future but how do you then balance? So say, for example, you've decided to stick to the system of Monday, Thursday for your blogs and it's not moving. You're getting no traction.

[0:19:06.9] JC: Yeah, that's a great question. So first thing is, most experiments that you run in your business will not work. They will be, like I remember, this is my first year of starting a business, I was trying to drive traffic to my website. So I would look up all these articles and talk to other people and you would have a list of 50 things to do to drive traffic and I would try them and they wouldn't work for me.

I was like, "Well, are they making this up or am I doing it wrong? What's going on here?" What I've come to find is that results are very contextual, it depends on your situation, your business, your product, your marketing style, your voice, all of these things impact whether or not a particular strategy will drive results for you. That's true not just for business owners but also just in life in general.

So when you understand that, you realize that the answer is that you have to experiment with a variety of things and then see which ones actually pan out in your given situation with your particular set of characteristics. That can be frustrating because it means you need to run a lot of experiments but the answer and I think the key to what you're saying or what you're asking about is that you have to measure something. You need to be able to track your progress.

And what I think is useful, and this ties in with this idea of not pushing happiness off to the next milestone, is rather the measuring forward, we should measure backward and what I mean is that. Often with goals, we set forward facing measurements for ourselves, "I want to earn X amount of money in the next quarter, I'm going to lose 40 pounds in the next three months, I want to complete a marathon in October," whatever it is.

[0:20:38.8] LC: If I see one more place on the internet that says, "How to make six figures in a month."

[0:20:43.6] JC: Right, yup. It's all forward facing if you think about the milestone that we want to achieve at some point in the future. Instead, what I think is much more useful is to measure backward rather than forward and so for example, every Friday, I sit down with my team and we look at the topic, metrics in my business for the last week. Traffic, subscribers, sales, conversion rate, revenue, expenses, all that stuff. By looking at this few key metrics and what happens specifically last week, we can make decisions for next week on how to course correct and adjust and improve and tweak over time.

The key with measuring backward is that it has to be over a short time span. If I was going to look at the performance of my business of this week last year well, too much has changed, it's not really that useful but when I look at just the last seven days, that's very useful. Another example of that is, this is what I do when I go to the gym. For a long time, I used to pick out programs that I should follow at the gym and I would map out what I was going to lift over the next 12 weeks and where — project how much weight I was going to squat or bench or whatever. Some point in the future and then we would go through. Basically, I was goal setting.

In the sixth week I would get sick or in the eighth week I would have to travel for work or whatever, there will be a variety of you know, different extenuating circumstances that might force you to not follow that pattern perfectly. Then I would get to the end of 12 weeks and I look at where I was actually at versus where I was supposed to be at and I would feel upset, even if I was stronger, even if I was getting better because I didn't hit this projected mark that I set in the beginning, this made up goal.

Instead, what I do now is I look at what I lifted during the last three workouts and then I'd choose the weight that I lift for this workout based on that. So I'll increase by five pounds by three reps or just some small improvement from there so I'm measuring backward rather than projecting forward and by using that backward measurement, I'm always making choices based on how I can improve off of what's actually happening, not off of some dream scenario that I hope the world will follow 12 weeks from now or whatever.

[0:22:56.2] LC: Absolutely, great information. I can hear from the kinds of clients I've had, the person out there who is saying, "Oh my god but then I have to like set all these up and I have to sit down on Fridays." What about the person who just feels totally overwhelmed, "I don't have the willpower to, the motivation, the organization to set that all up." What would you say to that person who feels that way?

[0:23:23.2] JC: It's a good question, I think the first thing is we often, the situations that we often ascribe to having too little willpower are actually a case of being in a poor environment. For example, there's a great book called *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 I think or 1997, somewhere around there.

[0:23:42.4] LC: Yeah, good book.

[0:23:43.1] JC: One of the analysis that he does in that book is he talks about how quickly agriculture spread across the continents. For example, agriculture spread two to three times faster, across Europe and Asia, which is just one big land mass than it did up and down the Americas. Like Canada to Florida to South America and one of the primary reasons for that is that the axis of those land masses for Asia and Europe, it goes east to west so basically the climate, the amount of sunlight, the type of weather patterns, the growing climate for the crops, it's the same across the whole stretch from like France to China more or less.

Whereas the access for South America and North America is north-south. So imagine trying to grow tomatoes in Canada compared to Florida, for example. Weather pattern then the amount of sunlight, the climate, it varies wildly and so you could have farmers in Canada who said, "I just can't grow tomatoes, not enough willpower, I'm not motivated enough." But really…

[0:24:40.9] LC: I was like, "Where is he going with this?"

[0:24:43.7] JC: But really, it's not a factor of willpower, it has much more to do with the climate or the environment that they're in.

[0:24:50.4] LC: Got it.

[0:24:50.6] JC: You find that this plays out in everyday life as well. Someone for example who, let's say you have two people and they both want to work out. The first person leaves their work and on the way home from work, literally on the drive home, there's a gym between their office and their home and then the second person, on the way home from work, there are five fast food restaurants on the commute and then their gym is actually, it's only five minutes from their house but it's five minutes past their house, it's not on the way.

So the difference between those two environments makes it much less likely the person B will pass the fast food restaurants, go pass their home when they're tired after a long day at work and continue on to the gym versus person A where it's literally what's called path interruption, it's in between a process they're already doing, they don't have to do anything extra, they just pull into the parking lot on their commute to go to the gym on their way home.

Now, you can't shift everything in your environment, you can't change where the fast-food restaurants are located or where your office is but there are a variety of things that you do have control over that you can shift. So for example, you can prime your environment to make it easier for you to go to the gym in the morning, you can have your shoes set out, your water bottle set out, you can have all that stuff ready.

Most living rooms in America, people complain that they're exhausted when they come home from work and they sit down on their couch. But where do all the couches and chairs and every living room face? They all face the television so it's like, what is that room primed to get you to do? Now I'm not saying that you have to change your entire home but you certainly could put your TV inside of the cabinets or the doors in front of it so you don't see it and you're not as primed to turn on, you can put the remotes inside a drawer. You could shift the location of your favorite chair so that it's next to a table with a book on it rather than a remote control.

This principle of priming your environment to make the good behaviors easier and the bad behaviors harder. At least kind of effortless or mindless behavior change. There are a bunch of great books on that's *Mindless Eating* is one for health and nutrition where he talks about how some of the simplest ways to eat less are to change the environment. For example, the size of plates has increased by 22% since the 1970's.

[0:26:55.8] LC: Isn't that amazing? It's incredible.

[0:26:57.8] JC: Buy smaller plates and you serve yourself less food. This is, I want to make a distinction that this is different than willpower because people would say, "Well why don't I just put less food on my plate or why don't I just eat less?" But that completely misses the point here which is that studies have said that if you no matter what size your plate, you will fill 90% of it and no matter how much food you put on your plate, you will eat 94 to 95% of it. So basically, you're not — it doesn't have to do with willpower, you're just responding to the environment, you're responding to the size of the plate, what you serve yourself.

So this is the long-winded way to say that environment often dictates our behaviors much more than willpower does and so if you are feeling that way, feeling like, "I don't have the motivation to do this," what I would encourage you to do is look around your environment and think about how you can make this steps to good behavior shorter and easier, the steps to bad behaviors longer and more difficult and see if that doesn't help you get past the initial friction of starting these new behaviors

[0:27:58.9] LC: Absolutely and you have a book *Transform Your Habits: The science of how to stick to good habits and break bad ones* and there is all sorts of information around this. One of the things that you discuss in there is how to make time for new habits even when your life gets crazy because I feel like the other huge pushback resistance point that I hear is I just, "I don't have time to think about this." So you're saying, "Look around your house, think about the things that are the obstacles." But people say, "You're telling me to do more and I don't have any more time." How do people find the time?

[0:28:33.8] JC: Yeah, that's a good question. I think the first thing is you can focus on what I like to call keystone habits, Charles Duhigg talks about this in his book *The Power of Habit* as well. The basic idea is there is a cascade effect that happens in your life, you don't have to change everything at once because often if you change one or two key behaviors, it influences a lot of other areas as well. For me, that keystone habit is working out.

I know that if I work out, yes, I get the benefits by exercise but I also tend to eat better just naturally, I don't want to waste it for some reason, it kind of primes me to eat healthier. I have this period of post workout high where I have much better focus. I sleep better at night before I'm tired from working out which means I wake up in the morning and I have better energy. At no point was I trying to build better sleep habits or focus more or increase in the amount of energy or better nutrition habits that I had, they all came as a side effect, as a natural consequence of just focusing on this one keystone habit.

[0:29:27.6] LC: I love that idea so much because what you're essentially saying is find one —so for you it's working out, for somebody else who could be taking the time to go for a walk or journaling. You're basically saying find something that is replenishing enough for you that it has like a domino effect, is that right?

[0:29:47.7] JC: Yeah, exactly and the examples you gave are good ones. Walking is a very common one, especially for creatives. There's a great book called *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey that goes over the rituals of 200 plus artist and creators and scientists and so many of them had a daily walking habit.

[0:30:03.2] LC: They do, it's crazy. Or showers are a big one for them.

[0:30:08.3] JC: So walking. Another common one is meditation. You hear a lot of CEO's say, "Oh if I get five or 10 months of meditation in, I feel much better and primed to take on the challenges today, visualization is a common one, especially for performers, a lot of comedians, for example, will visualize how they want to perform before they step out on the stage and if they get that pre-game ritual set then a lot of times the rest of the dominoes fall into place. Then the very common one was budgeting. If people get their finances in order, it's like they start working out, they clean the house, they do all kinds of stuff.

[0:30:37.6] LC: Really? That's so funny. I've never heard that before.

[0:30:40.1] JC: Yeah, I don't know if it's just a carryover like a sense of personal agency. You feel like you're in control of your life and so now you start enacting that control on different areas but what it is for any individual, this are just examples, right? So what I would encourage

someone listening to this to do is to write down what goes right on the days when you're at your best? What are the things that you commonly do?

If I were to think about, what's an ideal day for me or when do I perform the best? Working to would definitely be on that list. Now some other things might be on there too and maybe you'll need to experiment with two or three of them to figure out which one is the right keystone habit for you. But generally, a little bit of introspection will clarify what you should try to focus on first.

[0:31:20.6] LC: Yeah, I love what you're saying so much because say for me, getting a full night of sleep is critical for me but I can't sleep as well if I haven't worked out. The keystone habit is really more the workout than it is to sleep because the sleep will get taken care of from the workout and if you're not somebody who works out, find maybe the subset of things that are meaningful to you and then see which one is contingent on the other because…

[0:31:45.3] JC: Maybe for some people, the sleep is the keystone habit and so they have to put all their energy into getting the light shut off and being in bed by 10 or whatever. So as long as they do that one thing, they know they've set themselves up for success for the next day. It can be different things for different people but the strategy that you're explaining or that you're agreeing with is, I think works.

[0:32:05.3] LC: Yeah, it's wonderful, I love that and speaking of you talk a lot about sleep and I love that you talk a lot about sleep because so much of this get it done mindset that you would think about when you think about habits, sometimes goes flies in the face of sleep. The suggestion is to push harder, get more done, be more productive but nobody mentions sleep.

You really dive into it if you guys are interested in getting more sleep, thinking about sleep, understanding sleep, James, you've got like the entire circadian cycle on your website to check out. But this is such an issue for people, falling asleep, getting enough sleep, feeling like, "If I am sleeping I'm not getting things done," are there some kind of indulgence quality to sleep.

What inspired you to focus so much on sleep and what are some of the mistakes people are making around the idea of getting a good night's rest?

[0:33:00.2] JC: The first thing that sparked my interest on it was that I came across the study that showed, it was from the university of Pennsylvania and what the researchers found was that they had three different cohorts, they had a group that got eight hours of sleep for a few days, they had a group that got six hours of sleep a night and then they had a group that was woken up after four hours of sleep. What they found was that, and this is what blew me away and what got me interested in it.

The group that slept six hours of sleep per night for two weeks straight — so each of this groups are for two weeks. The group that slept six hours of sleep per night for two weeks, their performance mentally, cognitively, physically declined to the same degree as if they were to stay up for 48 hours straight. So just to summarize, if you get six hours of sleep at night for two weeks in a row, your cognitive performance declined to the same amount as if you were to stay up for two straight days.

[0:33:54.3] LC: Amazing.

[0:33:54.2] JC: That' blew me away. I was like — because there are a lot of people who get six hours of sleep at night.

[0:33:59.0] LC: A lot.

[0:34:01.4] JC: The second finding of the study, which makes sense and is particularly useful for this case, is that when people were tested and asked how their performance declined, for the first two or three days that it did it, they said, "Yeah, I can tell I'm a little bit slower, my performance is getting worse." But after that, for the remainder of the two weeks, they thought, "Oh no, I'm back to normal, I'm fine now, I just needed some time to settle in."

So their performance kept declining but they were blind to it and I would imagine that a lot of people who are listening to this, if they were getting six hours of sleep at night, probably are saying that very thing. That, "Oh well, yeah that might be true for most people but I can handle it." In fact, what researchers have found is that there are very few people, from a biological standpoint, who can operate at their full capacity while getting less than about seven hours of

sleep per night. That's about the tipping point. Seven to eight. For me, maybe I just love sleep, I don't know, I usually sleep about nine hours a night.

[0:34:55.9] LC: So do I.

[0:35:57.9] JC: A lot of people, that's the standard, it's like, I don't remember the exact number, I think it's right around 94, 95% of adults need to sleep at least seven hours per night. Seven to nine is usually the window they give for optimal function.

[0:35:11.9] LC: What are people getting on average, is there a number?

[0:35:15.9] JC: Yeah, I'm not sure, that's a good question and some of this depends wildly on what cohort you look at. Do you look at Americans versus Europeans versus Australians? Do you look at people who have corporate jobs versus manual labor jobs? It will vary wildly based on the group that you look at. In general, that number of seven hours I think is the threshold that you should shoot for and I would say you probably even a little higher than that seven and a half to eight.

[0:35:38.9] LC: So one of the things I hear all the time is I'm not getting sleep because my lists have lists, which have lists right? I am up doing things, I have to get things done, more emails, my opportunity if you have kids to finally get a minute. Since you work so closely in the world of habits, what would you say to somebody who is in that mindset?

[0:35:59.8] JC: At some point, I think it comes down to a cultural decision and whether you want to buy into the culture that our society is largely created because these things all kind of blend together and what you're hinting at here is that, and this is something I think a lot of society, we operate under this assumption, which is that being busy means that I am important. Because if I'm busy, then I have a lot to do and if I have a lot to do then by extension, my life is important and I must have worth because of that and so we end up tying business to self-worth, which is not true at all but we have fallen into this cycle of believing that busy is the correct answer to give whenever someone asks you how you're doing.

If you're not busy then you must be lazy, you must be checking out of capitalist society, you must not be ambitious, you must not be trying your hardest. I think that that is a myth, I think that's wrong but I also think that it's very hard to fight that, it's very hard to live in a society, as we have in America, where the predominant religion is actually capitalism more than anything else, it's the one thing that everybody agrees upon.We all should have jobs, we all should earn money, we all should work hard, we all should be more productive, society should become more efficient and effective.

Certainly, all those things are great in a particular case or in moderation. But should that be the driving factor in how you determine your self-worth as an individual? Should that be the way that you assess whether or not you're living a valuable life? I don't think that it should. So that often I think is the deeper cause of my lists have lists and I can't get enough sleep, which is that we've chosen to buy into this framework that the rest of society operates on.

I think that it can be good to reset and recalibrate yourself to see the world, not through this lens of measurement and competition and capitalism and to slow down and to not work as hard and that there's actually something very healthy about being lazy every now and then. But I also realize that it's a very hard battle to fight because this is the reality that we all live in.

[0:38:04.7] LC: Yeah, and I think that's exactly right and this question of being lazy because you're taking care of yourself is an interesting problem. So James, I ask everyone who comes on the show so I'm going to hit you up with a couple of questions here, what does it mean to you to have an authentic life?

[0:38:22.2] JC: Yeah, it's a good question. I try to think about how I would measure my own authenticity. It's hard to come up with a quantity for it or some specific quality. Some of the best ways that I've heard to describe, "I just want to do what makes my children proud." That if I were to do something that would not make them feel proud then that would not be living an authentic life.

Another way that I think about it is that if I — each year I publish integrity report where I talk about what are my values? There're three questions, what are my values? How have I lived by those values over the last year? it's kind of a chance to brag a little bit and talk about what went

well? Then the most important section is the third one, which is where did I fail to live by those values?

So hopefully each year, that failure section gets a little bit smaller or the failures become a little more, a little less painful. I still have a lot of them in there, I've done this for three years now but so I think to some degree, authenticity for me is about being able to not be perfect but to at least run that integrity report and admit the time that I failed.

Authenticity is not so much for me at least about nailing my values every single day but at least about admitting what I'm working toward and not trying to uphold this false pretense that I am perfect or that I've managed to live with upstanding integrity or with perfect authenticity and honesty in every moment but rather admitting the faults that I have and trying to move toward that in the long run.

[0:39:51.5] LC: That's awesome, I love it. I would ask you what your path through an authentic life was but you've explained your story and how you've gotten to where you are. So the question I ask people is what are your daily practices and habits to stay authentic and I'm afraid because we could spend about probably three hours on that one with you. But could you tell us at the top a few things that are practices for you to stay in a life that has integrity?

[0:40:15.0] JC: Yeah, for me there's a big connection with physical movement and mental clarity. So lifting weights is a big one, I already mentioned that that's my keystone habit, so it definitely has to have a spot here. The second one I think which is equally important and one of the reasons why I chose to build a business around this, for me it's writing. Writing for me is like thinking.

A lot of the time I don't know what I really think about something until I write about it. So those two processes of testing my body through lifting and testing my mind through writing. I would say that those are probably the two that drive the biggest, from a self-improvement and personal introspection standpoint, drive the biggest change or the biggest results on a daily basis.

[0:40:55.0] LC: James thank you so much for coming on the show, you've brought at least for me I've learned so much, I know the audience has learned but guys if you're hearing anything

you're interested in today, I promise you, check out jamesclear.com because this is just the tip of the iceberg, there's so much information on this website. Is there anything that you have going on, anything brewing that the listeners should be aware that's coming down the stream?

[0:41:20.8] JC: Yeah, so I'm working on my first book right now to be published by Penguin Random House sometime soon, hopefully, next year at some point and if you're listening, I just want to say thanks for listening. I would encourage you, it's very easy to sit down and listen to a podcast or read an article or even read a book. It's much harder to put an idea in practice and I'm under no delusions that everything I said is a perfect fit for you or that everything that I've shared today is useful for your given situation.

But what I would encourage you to do is think about what are the one or two things that do seem like you could put into practice and then focus on actually using those because if you take just one idea from this conversation and actually use it, then it will be time well spent. If you'd like to get a little bit more for me, feel free to check out JamesClear.com.

[0:42:05.6] LC: Thank you very much for coming on today's show.

[0:42:08.1] JC: Awesome, thanks, Laura.

[END]