

SPI Podcast Session #216: Your Habits and the Story Behind Pavlok with Maneesh Sethi

- Pat: This is the Smart Passive Income podcast with Pat Flynn, session number 216. Here we go.
- Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. Now your host, his wife April converted him from a PC to a Mac user when they were dating, Pat Flynn.
- Pat: What's up everybody, Pat Flynn here. Thank you so much for joining me in session 216 of the Smart Passive Income podcast. I have a shocking episode for you. Sorry, I had to put that in there because we are talking with the founder of <u>Pavlok</u>, which is a wearable device that will literally shock you. Provides a little voltage through your wrist there. This is a device that I actually used to help me write my book. Now, I know that might sound crazy and maybe this isn't for everybody but I needed it to break some bad habits that I was forming while I was writing my book. I found that when I was writing for example, I would often, when I'd come to a hard part in the passages I was writing, in the manuscript, I would just go on Facebook or YouTube, or Twitter and do something comfortable because I wanted to avoid what I was supposed to be doing.

I ended up getting involved with Pavlok and actually purchasing one through a Indie Go-Go campaign back in the day. It came in while I was writing and I decided to give it try, and it worked. Maneesh Sethi is going to be talking all about how he founded this, where the idea came from, what it's been like to manufacture and take this from start to where it's at now. He's been featured on a number of television shows, and I've seen it on the news before. I watched a spot on the Steve Harvey Show on television when he was demonstrating this. It's a pretty awesome story and I'm excited to share it with you. I'm not saying that you should absolutely go out and start shocking yourself in order to achieve success, but some of us need that jolt if you will, and some of perhaps need it literally.

Anyway, we're going to talk with Maneesh Sethi, and you might recognize that name, Sethi. We've had his brother Ramit Sethi on the show several times in the past and this is Maneesh's brother. Who, for a period of time, you'll hear it's quite funny, he put on his business card, "I am Ramit Sethi's brother." Now I don't think he needs that because he's created something awesome, so here's Maneesh Sethi, the founder of Pavlok, P-A-V-L-O-K. Here we go.



What's up everybody? I'm so happy to welcome Maneesh Sethi here on the show today. Maneesh, what's up man? Welcome to the show.

Maneesh: Hey Pat. I'm so excited to chat with you, it's been a long time.

- Pat: It has been a long time. You know I first learned about you through Ramit who's your brother, but then I started hearing all this stuff about this really cool project that you had going on called Pavlok. Then I did a little bit more research and it's one of the most interesting things that I've ever seen and followed, and now I use. Some people in the audience know what it is. Anyway, why don't, before we get into Pavlok, just introduce yourself to the audience and who you are what it is you do from there.
- Maneesh: Yeah, sure. My background starts a while ago. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.
- Pat: A Tale of Two Cities
- Maneesh: Of course. My background is I was a ... I'm Ramit Sethi's brother, in fact my first ever business card said, "Maneesh Sethi, Ramit's brother."
- Pat: No way.
- Maneesh: It was just easier. I grew up in California, I had always had these grand plans of doing things. I always had great ideas, but I've never been able to actually get myself to sit down and actually do them. About, I don't know, five or so years ago I was running a blog called <u>Hack the System</u> and in this blog I traveled the world and I would do random stuff in new countries. It was very interesting because my blog would become, I'd get very viral posts but my internal metrics of success were always a failure. It was like my internal metric of success was always, for my entire period of travelling was, did I go to the gym three times and did I get two blog posts on my site. It think I hit that goal maybe twice in five years of trying to run my website. Meanwhile, my website started grossing money and I building passive income.

I helped a lot people build their own blogs. For example I ran bookmarking campaigns for people like Tim Ferriss and Daniel Amen but over time it was very interesting to me that I was having so much trouble getting stuff done so I embarked on this productivity hacks section where I would do experiments trying to make myself become more productive and among those hacks I hired someone to sit down next to me and every



time I got off task, every time I went on Facebook this person would slap me in the face.

- Pat: Like literally slap you in the face?
- Maneesh: Like if you Googled Slapped By Craigslister you'll see my post at the top and it's nuts because I tracked my productivity over many years and the periods of time that she sat down next to me I skyrocketed, from average 38% productivity level, I skyrocketed to 98%. I found it really, really, really fascinating because when I hired her I had her sit down next to me to do tasks that I knew I needed to do. They were not urgent.

They were important tasks that I'd been meaning to do but I never got done and I finished all of them in a period of not even more than five or six hours, things I'd been meaning to do forever, but it was very different because when I had pre-committed to have someone next to me, the slap wasn't the thing, it was the accountability, it was the pre-commitment. I took that and I wrote this post online that went insanely viral and I decided, I was talking to a friend of mine, I was like, "Yo, what if we made a dog collar that could zap me every time I went on Facebook. I could probably save the money." Lo and behold, he's like, "Yo, let's go to Radio Shack."

That's how the idea of Pavlok came about. It was, how can I reproduce accountability forcing me to get off Facebook and put it on my wrist?

- Pat: I love it, I love it. You definitely have a different style than Ramit, that's for sure, who's been on the show before. I don't think he would ever even consider doing that but it's so cool and it makes sense because, we've had people talk about productivity and habits and that sort of stuff on the show before but a lot of them were talking more about the rewards that came on the other end of actually finishing and follow through. Here you're talking about, well what happens if you don't do what you're supposed to do. Do you have any scientific information about all this kind of stuff and how it works?
- Maneesh: It's really, really interesting because I feel like there's a problematic shift towards positive reinforcement in the world. Now, everyone has heard positive reinforcement works better than negative reinforcement. Everyone's heard that never punish, only reward, and that's true, in a context, in a contextual situation, but there's pendulum of habits and if, like in the mid 90's, the type of science that we use at Pavlok, that science disappeared and we pivoted to a completely positive psychology nation where every kid gets a trophy. Never say anything bad and it was too far



of a shift to the point that there's no negative disincentive for anything. Also, so before we realized that what we had built was really effective for breaking bad habits, for the first year of Pavlok we were a forming habits company. That was when we were really delving deep into the power of negative reinforcement.

We discovered that the science of habit is very simple. In order to form a habit you simply need to do an action enough days in a row after a trigger. The keyword is consistency. If you get someone to drink a glass of water every morning after breakfast for about 20 days, it becomes harder for them to not do that action than to do that action. It's like if you leave the house without brushing your teeth you feel like you need to go back and brush your teeth. We found that the secret was the combination of the two, that negative reinforcement, the fear of loss, if I don't brush my teeth, if I don't exercise, I will have to pay a penalty to my friends or I will have to post on Facebook that I failed.

That is incredibly powerful for spurring the initial action but once you get in the beginning habits, the first five to 10 days of getting yourself to brush or getting yourself to go to the gym, in a row, then postive reinforcement plays a bigger part in making the habit stick. That was really interesting before we discovered the difference between forming habits and breaking habits.

- Pat: I love that, I love that. For those of you listening, Pavlok is a wearable device that literally shocks you and I know, I've shared this with a bunch of other people and they freak out a little bit when they hear that. They're like, "Oh, my gosh, it actually shocks you?" Then I'm always reminded of, in eighth grade, actually in seventh grade, when all the eight graders came back from their Washington D.C. trip at school. They would come back with these things that looked like lighters and they'd be like, "Look at this blue flame, it's amazing." Then they'd have me click on it and then it would shock me. Then when I was in eighth grade I did to the seventh graders. Anyway, it feels like that. It doesn't actually hurt you, just more jolts you a little bit.
- Maneesh: Yeah, the word shock is also the thing that we realize is a big problem. It's like oh, if you don't use that word. If you say, "Pavlok shocks you to break bad habits" nobody listens or they get scared, but if you say, "Pavlok releases a mild electric stimulus" or "Pavlok uses biofeedback mechanisms" suddenly it's the word shock that changes people's intuition about the process. Once you feel it, there's like electro-convulsive shock therapy that people often associate with this, that's not what this is. This is more like a rubber band being snapped on your wrist.



- Pat: You get this idea. I didn't even know you actually got a dog collar and just kind of tested this out, but where did you go from there? How did you actually end up producing this and actually turning it into something that has now been featured on television, in magazines and newspapers and all these amazing places? Give us that journey in a short period of time.
- Maneesh: Yeah it's actually a fascinating journey. Today we found out we were in Time Magazine this week.
- Pat: No way Dude, sweet.
- Maneesh: Yeah, in the printed edition there's an article about Fitbit and then "Why I gave up on Fitbit" and the last paragraph is "but I just discovered that Pavlok exists and it can give me a mild shock when I don't hit my daily step goal. This might be the new beginning for Fitbit, for my Fitbit experience." The funniest thing is that in Time Magazine they quoted us as "Pavlok is kind of an S & M Fitbit."
- Pat: Oh my gosh.
- Maneesh: The journey's actually really interesting because I'm not a hardware guy. By no means am I a hardware guy. I had this idea and I made this video, when I made this dog collar experiment with my friend and I was planning on posting this video on my website. My slapping post had gone so viral, I was fairly sure that my dog collar that shocked me when I went on Facebook would also go viral. Then, so we made the video. We were about to post it online and literally while it was uploading, right before YouTube turned to processing, I said to my friend, I was like, "Actually this is really interesting. There is a thousand devices out there that are tracking everything we do but this one's actually changing what I do. Maybe this is more than a blog post. Maybe this is actually something bigger. Maybe this can really help everybody else."

I hit cancel right when it got, it was processing 95% for three minutes so then I hit cancel and for the next, I think it was the next three months, I made it a really big goal to build a prototype. The idea of Pavlok was so different back then but I went out trying to find someone who would help me make a prototype. They were quoting me numbers that were insanely high, in the hundreds of thousands and so I ended up, I remember having a conversation with my brother, and I said to him, "Dude, I really need to figure out, quickly, how to solve and make this product because I've had a lot of good ideas in my life and this might be the best one I've ever had



but I know myself and if I don't solve this problem quickly this will be one of those things that I had, one of those good ideas I had, it passed."

You know what? In March I gave up. I couldn't find anybody. Nobody would help me make it and I gave up. What happened, strangely enough, I heard from somebody that there was this thing called Bolt. I opened up a tab in my browser and I gave up. I was totally moving on. Long story short, I found out that I was, so one day in August 2013, in July 2013, I had all these tabs open and I was like, "All right, today I'm just going to close all my tabs, finish the stuff up." One of those tabs was this incubator in Boston called Bolt. An incubator is like a startup, place that invests money into you and gives you help to build a product.

I ended up writing, really quickly, in 15 minutes, I wrote a post. It was like smilies in my application with my idea. I made a video. I sent the video of the dog collar thing and I gave up. I was like, that's it. I'm just going to submit this and close the tab. Lo and behold, out of 700 people that applied, they called 20 people back. I was one of the people they called back. They had a slot for a B2B company. They had a slot for a B2C company then they had a wild card slot and I was the wild card. The guy with no background in hardware, no experience but with a pretty good idea. They invested some money in my company and they invited me to Boston to spend a year there and it was really the act of being stuck in a room with hardware people for a year that made me take my idea to prototype, my prototype to crowd funding on Indiegogo and then after testing on users and discovering some magical science behind our product that had disappeared, that was when we realized that we were onto something big.

- Pat: What an incredible journey. How's it feel for you personally, to get through something like this and come all the way to where it's at now?
- Maneesh: Do want the honest answer or do you want my normal answer?
- Pat: Give me your normal answer and then give me the honest answer.
- Maneesh: Normal answer is it feels great. It's amazing, right?
- Pat: Hey, what's the honest answer?
- Maneesh: Honest answer is, I looked at the Time Magazine article and I'm like, "Oh man, we should have more paragraphs. I feel like I should have done better." It's like a hedonic treadmill. Five years ago I would have killed to be in Time Magazine and suddenly the better you do the more you need



to feel successful. I think that's it's the consistent imposter syndrome that's been inside of me forever but also a consistent need to achieve that has driven my business forward and it's really hard.

One of the habits I'm trying to form is to be more grateful every morning because I get so pissed when there's a small problem with our shipping line but I never take the time to rejoice about hearing the stories about people who had severe addiction to nail biting or to smoking cigarettes or to hair picking or obsessive eating. I never took the time to rejoice so one of the things I try to do each day now, is to take a deep breath and, we have this really fantastic Facebook group, and just to read the positive success stories and to realize that even if I were to die today I think I've made an impact on the world and I should feel proud about that. That's a nice thing to keep in my mind each morning.

- Pat: That's awesome. I practice gratitude everyday. It's so important to how I run my business and how I treat everybody else around me and I think it's, I mean you're doing great stuff. I've read a lot of the testimonials. I've watched them on YouTube. You guys are doing a great job of utilizing your customers to be able to help share how amazing this tool is. I've used it myself. I've talked about it before on the show I believe or if not on a Periscope at least. I actually showed people on Periscope what it was like and they could see my hand kind of jolt a little bit. They couldn't get a sense for how strong it was. It wasn't very strong but it kind of, maybe I oversold it or whatever but I use it.
- Maneesh: What did you use it for Pat?
- I used to to write Will It Fly? My bestselling book. The way I used it was, Pat: you know it actually came in, I bought two from the Indiegogo campaign and it's one of those things where you buy it and then you kind of forget about it for a while because they're processing it and they're building it and prototyping and all that stuff. I finally got it in in the middle of writing and it came at a perfect time because I was really struggling with my writing. I was very much getting distracted when I was supposed to be writing. Whenever I came to a hard point in the manuscript I would often head on ever to Facebook or go to Twitter or do something that made me feel comfortable because I would often get to a point in the manuscript where I was just struggling or I'd know I'd have to do more research, maybe I'd start on Facebook and just then I'd get lost or go down a YouTube rabbit hole so I started using Pavlok and consciously when I found myself going into those rabbit holes or not doing what I was supposed to be doing, like you instruct, I'd shock myself, or electro, bio whatever,



Maneesh: Zap is the word.

- Pat: Zap myself, yeah there you go. I would zap myself and then over time I started to see that I would catch myself before. I found myself still wanting to do it but then I'd say, "I don't want to zap myself so I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing" and then after a couple weeks I found that it was just natural for me to not even think about cheating anymore and going to Facebook or going Twitter and that's how I was able to really start moving forward and progressing in my manuscript so thank you Maneesh for the tool. I think a lot of people are using it in different ways. What are some of the more interesting things that people are using it for?
- Maneesh: This is a really interesting story because it's like if you look at like the, it's like a circle. Originally we were a forming habits company. Then we discovered that a mild electric zap while you do a bad habit was actually a very studied science called aversive conditioning or classical conditional that if you smoke a cigarette while you zap yourself, your brain will create the association even though you do it to yourself. Your brain creates the association between the zap and stops liking the urge. It's kind of like if you drink too much tequila one night and you get sick you'll never drink tequila again, for the rest of life or for many years.
- Pat: How did you know?
- Maneesh: Everyone's got the tequila one man. In the same way, if you zap yourself while you smoke a cigarette or while you have a recurring negative thought or I use it to get over my ex-girlfriend. Whenever you think about the same thing, adding the zap, even if you do it to yourself, first of all it makes it go away, but also it also, the word you said is the right word. It makes you aware. It makes you notice. What we think is happening in the brain is that when you associate a mild zap it's a shock to your system and it knocks you out of basal ganglia automatic habit mode and makes you become aware, like prefrontal cortex activity mode. It snaps you out of it and trains you, you just become aware which is always the first step in training habits.

When we started seeing, first of all, halfway through our crowd funding campaign, discovered the literature on aversive conditioning. You probably saw the evidence journal in your booklet in your box. We started to see that we could use it for individuals but recently we started to add in all of our smart features and this has brought back the old idea of forming habits and it's also brought in a new mechanism of subconscious learning



which I'm finding fascinating. I'll tell you a couple of our cooler stories that I've heard so far.

One of the biggest ones I've heard is recurring and it's a thing called trichotillomania or intense hair picking. It's one of those habits that no one talks about but 16% of Americans have, where they pick their eyebrows or pluck their hair and it often creates bald spots. Just today I had a call with one of our users, who, she's a female, she's pretty, she's nice and she's sweet but she has a bald spot, or she had a bald spot on her head, so she was always wearing hats and she always felt so uncomfortable going out in the real world because there was a bald spot. We helped and she used it for two days and she stopped picking her hair and that was mind blowing to me that someone could have severe social anxiety for a condition that no one even knows about. There's no solution to this problem and we have it.

I use it on myself for a variety of habits, things like tortilla chips. I used it for quitting-

- Pat: What do you mean tortilla chips? Like not eating tortilla chips?
- Maneesh: I used to eat about a bag of Tostitos a day and now the Tostitos logo makes me ill which is actually, I just felt the feeling right now. We hosted a hack-a-thon last weekend in conjunction with this other company. This company makes an app which uses video input and it can determine facial expressions, like happiness, joy, sadness, frustration. Most times they sell it to companies like movie producers who are trying to figure out when people get bored in the trailer but in the hack-a-thon somebody integrated the two together for autistic children. They built this Google Glass integration that when an autistic person is talking to someone, the Google Glass can identify the personality or the facial expression of the person and then vibrate the person's wrist in a pattern so if they're sad they get a particular pattern. If they're happy they get another one. I found that really cool. Forgetting about the shock and thinking of it more as like a haptic feedback training subconscious learning mechanism. That is really cool.

Pat: That's pretty amazing.

Maneesh: Yeah and recently, everyone's always like, it's funny, I had a conversation this morning. Someone was like, "It's amazing Maneesh that you took a system that was like to help you and you decided to give it to the masses." I'm like, "No, you got that backwards. I'm using the masses to figure out a system to get me to do my stuff."



We just released today this Chrome extension, it's called Pavlok productivity. It started off being a copy of my old slapping assistant. If I go on Facebook it shocks me. If I go on Reddit it starts to vibrate and then zap me but I found that the definition of productivity is something different. It's producing. It's the actual creation of something. If I waste time on Facebook and I stop that I might waste time on Reddit but if I can actually get myself to force myself to do these actions, there's something powerful there.

We created this cool little extension and actually it's pretty cool Pat. You don't need a Pavlok to use it. You won't get the haptic feedback but you get Chrome notifications that pop up. Anyway, you set little to do lists and the amount of Pomodoros you want to do of that to do list each day. Like I want to write for 30 minutes a day, so every hour it starts to bug me. The Chrome extension will bug me, until, and at the beginning it starts to vibrate bug me. Then it starts to beep bug me and then it starts to zap me and until I actually start working on my project and once I start working on it for those 30 minutes, it won't let me leave the tab. I have to do work or else it'll start to vibrate and shock me and I found that to be really cool to get me to get my own work done. If I can figure out how to get me to be productive, I'm pretty sure everybody else will be productive too.

- Pat: Yeah, that's awesome man. That's really cool. Now if somebody wanted to implement similar feedback devices without actually getting zapped, what are some ways that we could do this today?
- Maneesh: Sure, you mean if someone wanted to build a hardware device or someone wanted to just start getting started?
- Pat: With anything that they've, everybody out there's who's listening who knows what they're supposed to do, they just need to get something going to make them do it. What are some other devices besides just being zapped that you've learned work also?
- Maneesh: If you're trying to get someone to do something, I've found that at the beginning, any sort of negative reinforcer is really powerful and so a negative reinforcer could be a bet with a friend, like I will send you my 750 words by then end of the day or I will send you my blog post or else I owe a hundred dollars to George W. Bush public library or whatever it might be. That is extremely powerful to get someone to start doing a habit. We found that reminders, when tied to a bet will help that habit form. With our Chrome extension it'll start popping up automatically but if



you don't have that or you don't want to use it or you don't use Chrome, then simply telling a friend, "Hey I promise to do this action," or else something will happen, or even "I promise to do this action or else I'll post on Facebook that I failed."

Something like that will make you start getting the activity started and the trick is to get yourself to do it, just five to ten days in a row. If you get yourself to, everyday at 10 AM, to sit down and write 30 minutes in front of your computer, the first five to ten days will be insurmountably hard, almost insurmountably hard. It will be very difficult. Your brain is going to want to do anything else, but the next ten days are going to be uncomfortable. The next ten days will be automatic and from then on it's a pure habit. Then it's actually more difficult for you to not write or not blog or not promote your, whatever it might be, than it would be to do it. It's like brushing.

- Pat: Yeah, yeah, awesome. Maneesh may I ask you sort of a selfish question related to this hardware production and this kind of journey you've had because I'm working on figuring out what my next big experiment is going to be and it could potentially be something that requires some hardware. Where would one start if they have some idea that is a physical product and they want to get it built and need a prototype to see what it's like? How does one go about doing this?
- Maneesh: Sure, it is not easy, I will say that. It blows my mind that we pulled this off. If anybody out there is a programmer, the hardware, like ecosystem of today is the same as writing software, web apps in 1995. It can be done. It's never been easier than today but it's really, really hard because you need things like an embedded programmer, software developer, IOS and Rails backend, all that crap, all that crazy stuff, but, the prototyping phase is not always that difficult. Try to think about the core functionality of what you want to do. In my case I was replicating a dog collar, right? So what we did is we ripped apart a dog collar and we bought an Arduino or you can buy a Raspberry Pi and we just wired up to a pre-existing system using an interface that is easy enough to connect. It took us about six hours. Basically what we did was we broke apart the remote control and then we reprogrammed the remote control to say, if I go on Facebook then connect the wires essentially.

The first step you want to do is identify what the core aspects of your product or functionality are and then take a step back and say, what exists that already kind of does that? The next thing you can do is take a look at, you're going to want to definitely try out, hardware is not something that's easy to do alone if you've never had an experience with



programming your software but it's certainly doable. Raspberry Pi and Arduino are two different things you can buy for 30 bucks that are rapid prototyping boards and those are the first step in most cases, of creating some sort of electronics.

I find that there's, it's not like, again, it's really, really hard to go from prototype to production, but it's not impossible and it's actually nice that it's hard. It's like two people can reproduce Snapchat in a garage in 48 hours but Apple couldn't reproduce Pavlok in less than nine months, just because of just how hardware works. There's something beautiful about actually building hardware. It makes you something totally separate from the crowd.

The last thing I'll say is there's a couple places, I mean you can always find design firms if you're willing to invest the money, that will just do all for you, but definitely finding other people who have done anything hardware related is the first step in getting it to happen.

- Pat: Cool, cool. Good advice Maneesh. Hey man, thanks so much for coming on and sharing your story. This is incredible. If people want to check out more from you or learn more about Pavlok, where would they go?
- Maneesh: Actually I've been working really hard. I've been trying to build a system that makes people do stuff and I'm excited because I know you told me before the call, that a lot of your usual readers know what they need to do but always have some trouble doing it and so I want to run an experiment. I created a little special page. I dropped the price of Pavlok super low, just for anybody who wants to check it out. If you go to pavlok.com/patflynn, so P-A-V-L-O-K, it's just like Pavlov, but with a K, .com/patflynn then you'll get access to this cool Chrome extension, this cool to do list thing and the Pavlok and I'm really excited because I think that your users in particular will benefit from it and I'm really excited to try to change our stories from only breaking bad habits to really reinforcing the good habits that will make you succeed.
- Pat: Awesome. Man, thank you so much Maneesh. We appreciate you and all the best of luck.
- Maneesh: Definitely, thank you so much Pat.
- Pat: All right, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Maneesh Sethi. Man, what an incredible story and I continue to use Pavlok, not all the time, I don't keep it on me all the time on my wrist but I do use it when I'm writing and it does still help me and I'm going to be probably using it for



some other habits too. I know it has affected a lot of people's lives in a very positive way and I look forward to seeing how you might have a success story coming out of it too. That link once again, that Maneesh mentioned, which has some special stuff for you, like the Chrome extension, the to do thing that he talked about and also a discount on Pavlok, if you wanted to check it out. There's no affiliate commissions or anything that come off that. You can go to pavlok.com/patflynn. Again that's P-A-V-L-O-K.com/patflynn and you'll get access to that. You can also get access to the links in the show notes and the resources mentioned in this episode at smartpassiveincome.com/session216. Again, that's smartpassiveincome.com/session216.

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Thanks so much. I appreciate you and I look forward to serving you in next week's episode. Until then just keep pushing forward. Keep moving that needle and wishing you all the best. Cheers, take care, love you, bye.

Speaker 3: Thanks for listening to the Smart Passive Income podcast at www.smartpassiveincome.com.

Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:

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