

## CHANGING FOR GOOD

By James Prochaska, PH.D., John Norcross, PH.D., Carol Diclemente, PH.D.

Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me. –**Carol Burnett**

We all have big changes in our lives that are more or less a second chance.

**Harrison Ford** (1942 - ), *quoted by Garry Jenkins in 'Harrison Ford: Imperfect Hero*

Things do not change; we change.

**Henry David Thoreau** (1817 - 1862), *Walden (1970)*

Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better.

**King Whitney Jr.**

Purpose: I have summarized the key points in this wonderful book. In order to gain the greatest good purchase your own copy and read it thoroughly. Do the exercises and self-assessments. Create a journal or notebook and really give it your highest priority.

*Wanda J. Bedinghaus, MD*

Change is unavoidable, part of life. Few changes are under our control. But some things we can intentionally change...our behaviors, thoughts, feelings...habits.

Successful, self-changing individuals follow a powerful and, perhaps most important, controllable and predictable course.

Know what stage you are in for the problem you want to overcome. Even if you are not ready to act, you can set the change process into motion.

The key to successful change is to use the right strategy for the right time.

There are no magic pills, pins or plans.

You can learn new skills, draw upon your inner strength, enhance your self-sufficiency, and avoid becoming dependent on others for solutions; thus building your self-confidence for the future.

Failure is often due to a lack of guidance. You don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Be willing and open to learn. This book can help. Your wellness team at Healing Unleashed™ can also help. We are passionate about your wellness!

### **HOW YOU CHANGE.**

Self-changers.

A change process is any activity that you initiate to help modify your thinking, feeling or behavior. In change, timing is everything.

## **SUMMARY OF NINE PROCESSES OF CHANGE:**

1. Consciousness-raising, awareness. Making what is unconscious conscious.
2. Social liberation: any new alternatives that the external environment can give you to begin or continue your change efforts: No-smoking areas, low fat menu items. You can advocate for yourself and others.
3. Emotional arousal: become aware of your defenses against change. Emotions arousal works at a deep, feeling level. Important in early stages of change. Dramatic release/catharsis..sudden emotional experience related to the problem at hand. Can come from real life tragedies. Drunk driving accident. Easier to generate emotional arousal through film, public education spots., The goal is to increase awareness and depth of feeling and to move individual toward action.
4. Self-reevaluation: thoughtful, emotional reappraisal of your problem...an assessment of the kind of person you might be once you have conquered the problem. Enables you to see how and when your problem behavior conflicts with your personal values. How do you see yourself if you change your behavior? What are pros and cons of overcoming your problem?
5. Commitment: Once you choose to change, you accept responsibility for change. You are the only one who is able to respond, speak, act for yourself. The 1<sup>st</sup> step is private. 2<sup>nd</sup> step is going public...announcing to others your firm decision to change. Even if you fail or fear embarrassment, public commitments are powerful.
6. Countering: Substituting healthy responses for unhealthy ones. Find the one that works for you. Going for a walk outside instead of a walk to the frig.
7. Environmental control: action-oriented. Restructure the environment...removing drugs, alcohol, cookies from your home.
8. Rewards: Punishment is rarely used for successful self-changers. Self-praise. Giving yourself a special present when you reach your goal.
9. Helping relationships: You don't have to go it alone. You can ask for help from family and friends to provide support, caring, understanding and acceptance.

There are many techniques for these 9 processes of change. Having 3 or 4 choices increases success.

## **WHEN YOU CHANGE**

Change unfolds through a series of stages. It is key to know what stage you are in for the problem at hand. If you aren't ready for change, you set yourself up for failure. If you spend too much time "understanding" your problem, you may delay taking action indefinitely. You can't skip stages. Most successful self-changers follow the same road for every problem.

## **THE 6 STAGES OF CHANGE:**

1. Precontemplation: There is no intention of changing, may deny having a problem....can't see it. Resist change. Don't want to be nagged by family, friends, co-workers about the problem. May place the problem outside of their control or responsibility. You may feel hopeless or demoralized. If you systematically take yourself through the stages of change, you can change.

2. Contemplation: Acknowledge the problem and begin to seriously consider changing it. You know the goal, but you may not be quite ready to get there. Many remain stuck in contemplation for long time. Fear of failure. You are ready for next stage when you focus on the solution rather than the problem and when you think more about the future than the past.

3. Preparation: Most are planning to take action within the next month. Important to now make public your intended change. But may not have resolved their ambivalence. May still need convincing. Plan carefully, develop a firm, detailed scheme for action, Make sure you learned the change processes you need to carry you through to maintenance and termination.

4. Action: Now you make the move for which you have been preparing. Requires greatest commitment of time and energy. Changes made in this stage are most visible to others and receive greatest recognition. Support is most needed in precontemplation and contemplation and the crucial stages following action. Action is not the first or last stop in the cycle of change.

5. Maintenance: Work to consolidate the gains you attained during the action and other stages...struggle to prevent relapses or lapses. If you are not strongly committed to maintenance, relapse is inevitable.

6. Termination: The ultimate goal.

Relapses are common and most people go through various stages not in a linear fashion but more in a spiral. Feels like going in circles, but the circles are spiraling upward. As we say in the Wellness Inventory program: "Excuses are valid." Shame shuts you down. Recycle is probably a more accurate and compassionate term than relapses. Recycling gives us opportunities to learn.

#### Making Changes:

Insight/awareness alone does not bring about behavior change.

#### Myths about change:

1. Self-change is simple. When someone says it is easy, it causes us to believe we can't change and causes embarrassment.
2. It just takes willpower. Relying solely on will power set us up for failure. Causing us to give up.
3. I've tried everything...nothing works. Change depends on the method used and the timing of their application.
4. People don't really change. This comes from generalizing.

#### Knowing Your Stage

1. I solved my problem more than 6 months ago.
2. I have taken action on my problem within the past 6 months.
3. I am intending to take action in the next month.

4. I am intending to take action in the next 6 months.

If answer is No to all 4 questions: precontemplative stage

Yes to #4 and no to the rest: contemplation

Yes to #3 & 4, no to the others: precontemplation

Yes to #2 and no to #1, action stage

Yes to #1, maintenance stage.

### **PRECONTEMPLATION**

Denying responsibility for the problem.

Justifying the behavior. Blaming others for your problem.

It feels safe. You can't fail if you don't begin. You can change some other time, but not today. Free from social pressure.

May have tried in the past but failed...demoralized. Admitted defeat and gave up trying.

This is giving up on yourself and give in to the problem.

*Problem or preference (lifestyle choice?):*

Answer these 3 questions truthfully and you will begin to see the distinction between problem behaviors and lifestyle choices:

1. Do you discuss your behavior pattern?

Do you tell people to mind their business or thank them for their concern? If you aren't in precontemplative stage, you usually aren't defensive.

2. Are you well informed about your behavior?

If you avoid learning about the problem, you aren't in precontemplation. Do you turn off the TV when you see something about your behavior? If you acknowledge the behavior is harmful to you, you are on your way to becoming a contemplator.

3. Are you willing to take responsibility for the consequences of your behavior?

Precontemplators are uncomfortable with imagining consequences of the behavior.

Have you any idea what impact suppressed anger has on your heart? If have frequent outbursts of anger, are you comfortable knowing your children are afraid of you? Will the years of drinking seem wise when you have lost much of what you once cared for?

Precontemplators rarely take responsibility for the negative consequences of their actions. Most chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer are partly caused by lifestyle factors.

If you answered "no" to one or more of these questions, you are probably in the precontemplation stage.

What moves us out of precontemplation?

Family, work situations, direct requests from people, the realization that your environment no longer supports your lifestyle. Social pressure to exercise, loose weight, eat healthy, quit smoking.

### The Defenses of Precontemplators

Defenses are used for protection against undesirable feelings and external threats, but in the long run they can damage us. Defenses can prevent you from seeing your problems, and distract us from the difficult task of self-analysis.

1. Making the least of it: Denial and minimization. We deny it just doesn't exist.
2. Good excuses: Rationalization  
We offer plausible explanations for our behavior. Intellectualization is its cousin...using abstract evidence to rob events of personal significance.
3. Turning outward: Projection and displacement. Scapegoating onto someone who is safe and available. Blaming others for our problems.
4. Turning inward: Internalization. Instead of blaming others, we ourselves created the problem. Self-accusation, blame, low self-esteem, and depression.

The 3 change processes...consciousness-raising, helping relationships, and social liberation can help move you toward contemplation.

1. Consciousness-raising. 1<sup>st</sup> step in fostering intentional change...Become conscious of the self-defeating defenses that get in our way. Recognize our resistance to change. Makes information available.

Checking our defenses: are you using the same defense for everything, e.g. "I don't have enough time..too busy... Transforming defenses into coping mechanisms.

Fill in the number that most closely reflects how frequently you have used the method in the past week to combat your problem.

1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Occasionally, 4=Often, 5=Repeatedly

Frequency:

\_\_\_\_\_ I look for information related to my problem behavior.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think about information from articles and books/internet on how to overcome my problem.

\_\_\_\_\_ I read about people who have successfully changed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I recall information people have personally given me about the benefits of changing my behavior.

\_\_\_\_\_ = Score

Precontemplators score less than 10; contemplation score higher than 10. Self-changers may score 12 or more.

2. Helping Relationships. Helps ease up on defenses and contemplate making intentional changes. Our family, close ones are usually aware of our problem

before we are. The simple, nonjudgmental presence of an intimate friend or mate can be enough. Precontemplators defend their right to damage, defeat, or destroy themselves.

Precontemplators are powerless to change w/o assistance. Learn to listen. Helpers gently encourage us into contemplation state so we can open ourselves up to change.

Don't push someone into action.

Don't nag.

Don't give up.

Don't enable.

Using helping relationships: As a precontemplator ask people who care about you to help you as you enter the cycle of change.

- Ask others to identify your defenses. Someone you trust to describe, clearly and directly how you defend yourself and what it is you defend. Encourage this helper to let you know when you are becoming defensive.
  - Become aware of your defenses.
  - Help others to help you. If your helpers are getting too pushy, trying to get you to rush into doing something, tell them you are not ready for action. Criticisms or personal attacks will only serve to make you more defensive.
3. Social liberation. No smoking areas help decrease temptation to smoke. Self-help groups can give support, encourage and help you realize you are not alone.

Once you let your defenses down, and become aware of the facts about your behavior, it is difficult to reverse the process.

### **CONTEMPLATION**

We desire to change but sometimes we are resistant to change. It's easy to stay stuck in contemplation. Sometimes we prefer a familiar self to one that is more real and true to our ultimate nature. We postpone and procrastinate, continually reading, researching about our problems rather than moving into action. We become anxious about change. Being aware of ambivalence can prevent us from falling into one of the many traps that are negative responses to contemplation.

*The search of absolute certainty.*

If we are obsessive, we think we have to explore every aspect of an issue until we achieve an absolute certainty of its origin. We may hope that just thinking about the problem, it will go away. Obsessives may search for years...going from one thing to the next until we find the perfect solution. Eventually, we must make a decision and go forward.

*Waiting for the magic moment.*

We tell ourselves we will change "when the time is right." But, when will you be ready?

### *Wishful thinking.*

We want our cake and eat it too, to go on living as we always have, but with different consequences. Examples: I wish I could eat whatever I want and not gain weight. I wish I could drink as much as I want and not lose control. I wish I could work a 72 hr week and spend lots of time with my children.

*(Exercise: What are your wishful thoughts?)*

It's easier to wish for change than to work toward it. How often have important, desirable changes occurred as a result of your wishing thinking?

### *Premature action.*

Friends/family can push us into change before we are ready...just sets us up for failure.

All of these are negative processes are delay tactics that keep us from moving through the cycle of change. In spite of these traps, a period of contemplation prior to preparing for action is essential for lasting and meaningful change.

There is a certain level of awareness of both problem and solution that must precede action. Without it, and the accompanying commitment that takes place during the preparation stage...maintenance of change proves very difficult.

**AWARENESS PRECEDES ACTION.** Awareness may require no more than a few weeks of honest self-appraisal.

### The 4<sup>th</sup> Process: EMOTIONAL AROUSAL.

Emotional energy is a powerful force. It can give you the impetus and resolve to make the decision to change. Emotions can provide a burst of energy that allows you to stop procrastinating and determine what is really in your best interest. Emotional arousal can move you from contemplation to preparation and action.

1. Go to the movies. Esp. movies about your specific problem/behavior
2. Use your imagination. What will you look like, be like, live like if you continue in the same old patterns and behaviors. Watching other people with similar challenges can help you see what happens to someone in their 70's who is overweight, or the smoker who can't breathe. A very potent experience I had a few years ago when I was going through a very intensive workshop was to see myself at my burial...watching the people in my life come and say what they really thought about me and my negative behaviors. It was extraordinarily emotional. It brought new awareness to what I had been doing to myself. It obviously created a huge desire to change.
3. Write your own obituary, focusing on yourself right now.

### CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

1. Ask the right question  
How many calories does an average 40 yr. Need to consume/day  
How long must you jog to lose one pound?  
How does your body adjust to dieting in order to conserve calories.

2. Define your own goals.  
**SMART** The gift of the Wellness Inventory. **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealist, **T**ime Set  
 Don't let others dictate what is important to you.
3. Collect the right data.  
 Monitoring your problem is critical. Be precise and hone your awareness about your behavior. We tend to underestimate how much we eat, drink, sleep, exercise, etc. Measure. With over consumption problems, measure your intake. With emotional problems (such as anger or rage, panic attacks), measure the frequency, duration and intensity of distress episodes...the frequency changes before the intensity.
4. Functional analysis: learn your ABC's  
 Track the events that immediately precede and follow your problem behavior. Do you drink more when you are angry, lonely? What happens right after an angry outburst...do you drink, smoke, leave? What makes you crave sweets? How does eating it make you feel?  
 Functional analysis can illuminate what is controlling the parts of your life that seem out of control. A = antecedents B = Behavior C = Consequences. Antecedents trigger a problem behavior and consequences reward or strengthen it, no matter how maladaptive it is.  
**EXERCISE:** Take one of your problem behaviors and lists its typical antecedents and consequences. Pay attention to what you tell yourself before engaging in an undesirable habit. Did you tell yourself before you ate the cake, "This will make me feel better." "I worked hard all day...I deserve it." These statements are usually automatic or unconscious, and you aren't aware or conscious. To increase awareness, ask yourself "what am I telling myself that leads to engaging in this problem behavior?"  
**EXERCISE:** Make a list of the statements you make to justify your problem behavior. You may be surprised.

If we overindulge in our problem behavior, i.e. eat too much, we may end up feeling shame, guilt: "I shouldn't have eaten so much. "I shouldn't have smoked that cigarette." "I shouldn't be so anxious." "I shouldn't let one part of me take over the whole of me."

In functional analysis, how far back, how deep do you go? Some successful self-changers go as deep into unconscious events as they can on their own and as far back in time as they believe is relevant to their particular problem. But, most focus on the events preceding and following their problems and stay primarily in the present. It is not necessary to go to such depths to facilitate real change in our lives.

Consciousness-raising is important during contemplation. Seek to develop greater awareness of your problem behavior, gain insight into how your thinking and feeling maintain the problem, and begin to develop a personal conviction of the value of change.



### 5<sup>th</sup> Process: Self-Reevaluation

Taking stock, an emotional and cognitive appraisal of your problem and your self. Shows you that essential values are in fact in conflict with your problem behavior. Once you have raised your consciousness about your behavior, you will question seriously whether you feel good about yourself while continuing with these behaviors. What will you lose by abandoning your problem behavior? What time, energy, pleasures or fantasies must you sacrifice in order to change? Buying devices will not help you make real change.

EXERCISE: What are the questions you have to ask yourself about the behaviors/patterns, habits that you desire to change? What will happen if you make these changes?

### Techniques of Self-reevaluation.

Present evaluation: How unhappy are we with our habit/behavior.

Future: positive reappraisal of our healthier, happier, freer changed selves.

We must carefully balance the two. WE MUST NOT FALL INTO SELF-BLAME WHAT WE CALL "THE SPIRIT OF CONDEMNATION". This will block positive progress. And we must be realistic about the effects change can make.

That's why Self-Love is so vitally important as the foundation of our wellness program.

1. Think before you act, especially, if you have a problem with over consumption: eating, drinking, smoking. But even with angry outbursts, fear and anxiety, you can use this technique. It allows you to pause before the reflex/unconscious behavior sets in. Before eating, ask "Why do I want to eat this? Am I really hungry? Do I have a need that isn't being met? Have I been giving myself enough love?"
2. Create a new image. What is the scenario if you don't change? How will you look, act as you do change.
3. Make a decision. Evaluating the pros and cons of changing.
  - a. Consequences of change to self.
  - b. Consequences of change to others.
  - c. Reactions of self as a result of change.
  - d. Reactions of others as a result of change.

EXERCISE: (pg.140) Decisional balance scale. Take these 4 areas and make a column of pros and cons of changing your problem behavior. This should be as comprehensive as possible. Don't focus only on the negative side of things. Any problem behavior has its positive aspects. If you received no benefit from this, you would have abandoned it long ago. The benefits you receive from these behaviors can be fulfilled with other, alternative, healthier choices.

If the pros seems stronger than the cons, you probably aren't quite ready to move to the preparation stage. The main thing: be gentle with yourself, and give yourself love. The imperative to change has already begun.

### Helping Relationships During Contemplation

*Empathy:* Ability to take one's place emotionally and cognitively; to walk in another's shoes. Important to know that ambivalence need not be paralyzing. It is possible to move forward despite self-doubt. Let others know where you are in the change process. Helpers may be aware you aren't quite ready for change. You are changing in your own way at your own pace. Don't let overzealous helpers push you into premature action. Ask for what you need...that you need understanding and support, not advice. Ask for someone to just listen.

*Warmth:* Non-possessive caring and valuing another without imposing condition. We don't need conditional support. Ask your helpers to express concerns as observations and not confrontations. Warmth should represent a genuine attitude of acceptance and caring. We want to know we are accepted no matter what.

*Solicit input:* Ask helpers to assist you in more information, more awareness and more self-motivation. Ask for their personal experiences of you and your behavior. Family member are often able to report with great accuracy what precedes and follows the problem behavior. Take the risk with your loved ones and ask.

### **PREPARATION – GETTING READY**

Preparation is the cornerstone of effective action. It helps to make a solid commitment behavior change. Commitment is the most important change process during preparation stage. You must finally resolve your ambivalence.

Preparation takes you to the specific steps you take to solve the problem during the action stage. In this stage you will continue to reevaluate both yourself and your problem. Now you will focus on finding the most suitable type of action to overcome.

#### Continuing Self-Reevaluation:

*Focus on the future* of your new self. Make a list of the benefits of the change and keep it with you.

*Turn away from old behavior.* Let go of the past

*Make change a priority.* You will not be ready to move into the action stage until changing your behavior becomes your highest priority.

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Process: Commitment:

A willingness to act and a belief/faith in your ability to change.

RESPONSIBILITY...the ability to respond. Commitment involves using your will in a powerful way.

***Serenity prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.***

Anxiety may come as the time for action draws near because change can feel threatening...but anxiety brings with it avoidance and delay...a temptation to make excuses to wait until tomorrow or some other better time.

Scarlett O'Hara: "I'll think about it tomorrow."

Anxiety can cause some people to hide their action so no one will know if they fail. Anxiety can be countered and conquered. Here are 5 techniques that help you counter anxiety.

1. Take small steps.
2. Set a date. Prevents premature action and prolonged procrastination. Set it as soon as possible while your decision-making momentum is strong. Best to set within the next month. Once set, guard against excuses to delay.
3. Go public. More powerful than private commitments. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to act in the face of fear.
4. Prepare for a major operation. Psychic surgery...put this operation first and everything else second. Change is powerful and real.
5. Create your own plan of action. Get help from other resources, books, support groups for your particular problem, but ultimately the plan must be yours.  
The plan must be specific.

Commitment self-assessment:

1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = repeatedly.

Frequency:

\_\_\_\_\_ I tell myself that if I try hard enough I can change my problem.

\_\_\_\_\_ I make commitments against giving in to my problem behavior.

\_\_\_\_\_ I use willpower to keep from engaging in my problem behavior.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tell myself I can choose to change or not.

\_\_\_\_\_ Score

To be ready to take effective action, your score should be 14 or higher. If score is lower, you have more work to do on the commitment process.

#### Helping Relationships During Preparation:

You need support from others even if you decide not to go public with your decision to change.

Ask your helpers to keep these "do.s and don't's" in mind:

- Don't keep asking how I am doing.
- Don't nag me.
- Offer to help when I look overwhelmed.
- Tell me how proud you are that I am doing this.

In the first few days and weeks it is easy to give up so support from others is vital.

Ask your helpers to be tolerant when you are on edge. You need their understanding.

Some interesting research from the author of this book: **THE PRINCIPLES OF PROGRESS.**

Preparation for change lies in the balance between your perception of the pros and cons of changing. In the precontemplation stage, you are likely to perceive the cons of changing as outweighing the pros. You will need to increase your pros of changing twice as much as you need to decrease the cons. The Processes of Change applied in the early stages have the greatest impact on the pros. The Processes of Change applied in the preparation and action stages have the greatest impact on the cons.

If you bypass the contemplation and preparation stages, your change efforts are highly likely to fail.

Decisional Balance: (Insert assessment)

### **ACTION – TIME TO MOVE**

Once the commitment to change is made, it is time to move; in the action stage the focus is on the processes of control, countering and reward, with a continuing emphasis on helping relationships. The action stage usually lasts for months. Awareness of the pitfalls will greatly increase your chance of success. These approaches can leave you spinning your wheels:

*Taking preparation lightly.* Action without preparation usually lasts only a day or two. The temptation to return to the problem behavior is too strong.

*Cheap change.* You have to be willing to make some sacrifices. Real change takes work. Quitting a habit, changing a behavior can require not only enormous sacrifice of energy, but the pain of others' disapproval, and the anxiety and anger that people who desire to change can temporarily experience.

*The myth of the "magic bullet".* There are no simple solutions to complex behavior problems. There is no single right technique that will make change easy.

*More of the same.* Using more of the same techniques often leads to more of the same misery. No single method is so effective that its use guarantees success. Combining a variety of techniques at the proper time is more likely to bring the desired results.

What Change Processes are especially useful in this stage:

The 7<sup>th</sup> Process: Countering.

Countering = substituting healthy responses for problem behaviors. If you get rid of one problem behavior, there is possible of replacing it with another. There are 5 effective countering techniques:

1. Active diversion. “Keeping busy”, or refocusing energy. Find an activity that precludes a problem behavior. Activities such as playing the piano, walking, reading, calling a friend, engaging in a hobby. Be sure it is enjoyable, healthy and incompatible with your problem.
2. Exercise. Transform the urges into cues for exercise. Exercise is part of a self-change plan. If you are too busy for exercise, you are just too busy.

Benefits of exercise:

- Improves body image, self image, self-esteem.
  - Increased energy, metabolism, and heart function
  - Increased endorphins (self-produced pain killers)
  - Decreased anxiety and depression
  - Decreased body fat and cholesterol
  - Decreased physical and emotional pain.
3. Relaxation. Deep relaxation produces a mildly altered physical and mental state. 10-20 minutes can give you:
    - Increased energy
    - Increased rate of alpha (pleasurable) brain waves
    - Decreased blood pressure and muscle tension
    - Decreased anxiety
    - Improved sleep
    - Improved health
    - Improved concentration

Transcendental meditation, prayer, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation are the best know methods for relaxation and share these:

- A quiet environment
- A comfortable position
- An internal focus
- A “letting go”

4. Counterthinking. Free yourself from rigid thought patterns. Replace troubled thoughts with more positive ones. “What am I telling myself that is getting me so upset?”

Substitute healthier thoughts for some irrational statements like these:

- I must have everyone like me.
- I can’t stand it if someone doesn’t approve of me.
- I can’t control my anxiety
- I can only feel good about myself when I am doing well.

What are some other statements that you have often heard yourself say?  
And what are the countering statements you can make?

When you are absolutely sure about something, you are closed to questioning. If you *must* do a thing, then there are no logical alternatives for you. Thinking in absolutes is like painting yourself into a corner. Pay attention to how often you say, “I need to...I must” in a day. Don’t confuse needs with desires.

5. Assertiveness. Problem behaviors can be expected, supported, and triggered by other people in your life. You may feel helpless in the face of external pressure to maintain your behavior. But, you have a right to be heard anytime you don’t feel respected or heard. Assertiveness can decrease anger and anxiety and increase self-respect.

You have a right to be who you are and to be where you are in your change process. Everyone else has the same rights. Assertiveness is not aggression. *Being assertive is being “for yourself”*. Remember, you are the only one who can make the changes necessary to lead a full and happy life. If you don’t make it clear how you want others to help you in your process, they probably won’t be able to do it.

#### 8<sup>th</sup> Process: Environmental Control.

Not only do you have to change your thinking, you have to change the environment. If you are trying to lose weight, going to a fancy restaurant every day isn’t going to help.

Here are some control techniques:

*Avoidance.* It helps eliminate temptation. Effective self-control prevents a problem from starting.

*Cues.* Avoidance is not a permanent solution. You will come to recognize the cues that trigger your problem behavior. Gradually expose yourself to these cues. This will strengthen your resistance to falling back into the behavior. You can first confront problem cues in your imagination. Imagining your effective responses to problem cues, prepares you to confront them in real life.

*Reminders.* Put little signs around your workplace or home.

“Breathe”...”Relax”...”Stop” (on the pantry or frig door)...”What am I thinking/feeling right now?”

#### 9<sup>th</sup> Process: Reward.

Reward would not be necessary if resisting temptation were its own reward. We need to be reinforced when we substitute carrots for chocolate, jogging for cigarettes, relaxation for anger, and assertiveness for fear.

Three valuable techniques for rewarding positive behavior:

- *Covert Management.* Give yourself private positive reinforcement. “Nice job”...”you’re doing it...”. If after relaxing or asserting yourself, you immediately begin to feel upset for not indulging your behavior, you are effectively punishing yourself for resistance to temptation. This will weaken your resistance and increase your risk of relapse. If you give in to temptation, you should not berate yourself. Excuses are valid. Punishing yourself does not offer suitable alternatives. If delayed punishments worked, then hangovers and stomach aches from overindulgences would be natural cures. Punishment decreases self-esteem and increase emotional distress. These are barriers to change. You need to believe in yourself and be patient and calm. Self-reinforcements such as “you can handle it, or “don’t give up, you can do it” encourage you like a good teacher or coach did in the past. It’s important to feel good about the entire process of change.
- *Contracting.* You can contract with yourself. Written contracts tend to be more powerful than spoken ones, so write out your agreement. “I will put \$10 in my saving accounts for every pound I lose.” When you need reinforcement, draw on your account and reimburse yourself. You could also donate money to a charity that supports children around the world. If the contract is not with someone else or even your company, you have to really be honest with yourself.
- *Shaping up.* Gradually shape your behavior in a new desirable direction. And the key word is “gradually”. You can’t expect immediate results with life-long patterns of behavior. Make small steps forward. Don’t withhold rewards even if you are taking baby-steps. Any movement forward and away from the troublesome problem is reason for congratulations. Lay a solid foundation by doing this process of change. When you slip (and that’s common for all of us), you don’t fall all the way. Well-practiced, well-rewarded earlier steps are good insurance that any slips will be brief lapses rather than complete relapses.

#### Helping Relationships During Action.

Don’t assume your spouse or anyone else will intuit your plans...go public and do it clearly. This is a very active stage of change, and you will need help from those who care about you. Let them know that even if you become anxious, irritable, confused or difficult, you still need and want their support.

Ways your helpers can assist you in the action stage:

- *Exercise together.* Ask them to join you in your countering technique.
- *Buddy up.* Work with someone who is also trying to change.
- *Rearrange your home.* Helpers can play a role in controlling your environment so you can avoid tempting cues.
- *Put it in writing.* Write a contract with specific start date, your goals and the countering techniques and rewards you will be using.

- *Get stroked.* Verbal praise, monetary rewards, extra hugs, small presents, back massages give you a sense of positive feedback.
- *Don't take guilt trips.* Write in your contract that you are asking helpers not to scold, nag, preach and embarrass you if you momentarily lapse.

## **MAINTENANCE – STAYING THERE**

Successful change means change that is sustained over time, not just months, but years, a lifetime. Maintenance is a busy, active period of continuing change, one that requires you learn new coping methods. Two factors are fundamental to successful maintenance: long-term effort and a revised lifestyle.

### A Strategy for Success

The action stage lasts for several months. The first month or two is the most likely time for relapse. Maintenance takes all the work begun in the action stage and builds on it. To truly overcome our problem behaviors, they must be replaced with a healthier lifestyle.

For all of us, former problems, especially addictive one, will hold some attraction long after the habit is broken. You need to acknowledge this vulnerability. Developing new desirable habits helps keep the temptations at bay.

The most common threats to maintenance are social pressures, internal challenges and special situations. It is impossible to remain free of tempting cues forever. And extremely stressful situations like an illness in your family, stress at work, losing your job, and financial downturns can ultimately lead to relapse.

There are three common internal challenges that are closely related to slip, or brief lapses: overconfidence, daily temptation, and self-blame. Awareness and vigilance is the key to successful maintenance. “I can handle just one drink or one cigarette, or that one banana split with extra whip cream”. Stay mindful of this overconfidence because it can cause daily temptation. The severity of self-blame is one of the best predictors of failed maintenance.

### Processes for Maintaining Change

You won't need to use the Processes of Change as much as you did in the earlier stages. You must keep up the commitment. Challenges make it easy to let down your guard. You can become complacent and forget the painful passages in your life. Complacency makes it easier to slip back into the old pattern.

You can maintain your commitment by journaling about the difficulties you had in your early change efforts. Review the list of the negative aspects of your problem behavior. Look at them especially at the first sign of slipping.



Take credit for your accomplishments. This is not the time to fall back into self-condemnation and criticism for having the problem behavior. Be gentle with yourself. Give love to yourself.

*Keep a healthy distance.* Commitment is not enough to maintain change, you must also monitor your environment and stay away from situations where you might be tempted to lapse back into the old habitual behavior. Continue to avoid people, places or things that could compromise your change.

*Create a new lifestyle.* Learn to reduce stress with exercise and relaxation. Create alternative behaviors that do not involve your prior behavior pattern. This is an excellent time to explore and implement a hobby or an activity that will bring you greater joy, inner peace, self-confidence and happiness. Go ahead and learn a new skill or participate in creative art.

*Check your thinking.* This is time for self-observation. What are you telling yourself? What are the negative thoughts about yourself and others that threaten to crowd in on your new life? Be observant of minimizing your previous problem behavior. Denial, distortion and rationalization are the enemies of maintenance. Check your thinking to be sure you are being consistent and honest with yourself. Review your reasons for changing.

#### Guarding against slips

Slips usually come from overwhelming stress or insufficient coping skills. You can recover from them, learn from them and continue toward your goal of permanent change. First, take responsibility (remember: the ability to respond) for the slips and realize that they indicate your vulnerability. Check high-risk situations and develop a plan to deal with them. Don't fall into absolutist thinking that a single lapse is a total relapse.

Your old problem behavior was like a friend. You may feel a sense of loss and go through a mourning time. You may miss your old habits. But, remember, you are in the process of making a new self that does not need your old problems.

#### Helping relationships during maintenance.

It is more important than ever to have an understanding person nearby during this stage, especially when you are experiencing a crisis that could lead to relapse. Organizations like AA and other 12-step programs provide support, encouragement and accountability.

Make a "crisis card" with these instructions and the name of a helper to call, and put it in your wallet.

- Review the problem list.
- Substitute positive thinking for negative statements.
- Remember the benefits of changing.

- Engage in vigorous distraction or exercise.
- Call \_\_\_\_\_.

Practice confronting temptations before they happen. Learn to say “no” and mean it.

Help someone else. Helping others is a key to helping yourself maintain change. Dr. Karl Menninger said, “Love cures people...both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.”

There are no “quick fixes.” Be patient and persistent with yourself. Patience and persistence are the hallmarks of maintenance. Change is a process and takes time. Change is healing. No matter how long it takes to change, consider how many years you may be adding to your life, and how improved the quality of that life will be in the years to come.

### **RECYCLING-LEARNING FROM RELAPSE**

Most people who relapse will go back to the contemplation or preparation state and get read to take action again. Any experience with change actually strengthens you. Relapse is never desirable, but change is often circular and difficult. Relapse is a time for self-reevaluation where you learn from your recent mistakes.

#### Ten important lessons of relapse.

1. *Few changers terminate the first time around.* Rare to overcome a problem the first time. This is an unrealistic expectation. Without professional help or understanding the processes and stages of change that this book provides, most people try to change by trial and error.
2. *Trial and error is inefficient.* It’s frustrating to try to change only to relapse in spite of your best efforts. Learn from your relapses but use guided learning to assist you.
3. *Change costs more than you budgeted.* You may fail to budget enough time, energy or money. It took years for the problem to develop; it will take time to change it. Sheer willpower is not enough. What is needed is a commitment over time to an action plan that uses all that the processes of change have to offer.
4. *Using the wrong processes at the wrong time.* There are 3 major ways in which the basic processes of change are often used incorrectly:
  - a. *Becoming misinformed.* If information on self-change is scarce or incorrect, consciousness-raising techniques may backfire. You need accurate information to avoid misguided strategies.
  - b. *Misusing willpower.* Some problems do not respond to using willpower.
  - c. *Substituting one bad behavior for another.* Example: countering anxiety by drinking alcohol. Or using eating to counter smoking.

5. *Be prepared for complications.* Change seldom involves only one problem. Problems coexist and changing one can exacerbate another. Learning to use the processes of change can help you deal simultaneously with several problem behaviors.
6. *The path to change is rarely a straight one.* Change follows a cyclical pattern. You are progressing up a spiral staircase of change.
7. *A lapse is not a relapse.* One slip does not make a fall. Many give up as soon as they lapse. Guilt and self-condemnation cripple change efforts. Guilt can turn a lapse into a relapse. Take lapses as signs that you must redouble your self-change efforts.
8. *Mini-decision lead to maxi-decisions.* You may make any number of “mini-decision” that ultimately have negative consequences. Like buying cookies for your kids; easing up on your exercise program because you feel good. Mini-decisions lead you away from maintenance and toward full relapse.
9. *Distress precipitates relapse.* This includes anger, anxiety, depression, loneliness and other emotional problems. Emotions are a high-risk factor in relapse because you cannot avoid your emotions, and they weaken you psychologically. Most of us don’t know how to deal with intense feelings. Social pressure is another major cause of relapse. If your social network contains mainly people who share your problem behavior, you may experience intense pressure against changing.
10. *Learning translates into action.* Have you learned from relapse? Here’s a simple self-assessment:
  - Have you identified the major cause of your previous relapse(s)?
  - Do you have specific, action-oriented processes to counter the situations and emotions that induced your relapse?
  - Are you more informed about the cycle of change and how it relates specifically to your problem?
  - Can you tolerate a slip (lapses) without a total fall (relapse)?
  - Are you planning to make change one of your highest priorities for the next three to six months?
  - Have you prepared yourself for the possibility of complications and for more than one change at a time?
  - Can you put your newfound learning into action?

If you honestly answer, “yes” to all of the above, you are well prepared to recycle through the action and maintenance states. If one or more of your answers is “no”, you may not be ready YET for renewed action. Just realize you have more to learn...and be patient, gentle and loving with yourself.

who have changed our lives. in so many good ways. Jason and Jodi. Rebecca and Jonathon. Although psychotherapy can provide an excellent environment for change, there are fewer differences between therapy-changers and self-changers than was once believed, and many more similarities. In fact, it can be argued that all change is self-change, and that therapy is simply professionally coached self-change.