



COPING WITH
**PERSONAL
CHANGE**

➔ **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Why Change is Challenging4

Change is Constant4

Limiting Beliefs5

Keep a Journal.....7

Love Yourself8

Typical Reactions to Change.....8

Changing From Within9

Our Habits and Attitudes Create Us10

Skinner's Experiment.....11

Reprogramming the Brain.....12

Thought Forces.....12

Step Out of Your Comfort Zone.....13

Small Changes Lead to Big Changes14

The Power of Spiritual Motivation15

The Book of Changes.....15

Building the Motivation to Change.....16

The Power of Pictures17

How to Change Beliefs17

Conclusion18

Wanting to change is a courageous and laudable decision. However, like most people, you may find intentional transformation to be at least a little challenging.

This guide gives you several tips to help you make the changes you desire in your life. You can learn from the personal stories within and apply these lessons into your own life. Try out the many strategies, one by one, to effect the changes you want. Soon, you'll find that not only are you used to change, but you're embracing its possibilities and enjoying the results!

The first step to personal change is to identify what you want to change about yourself. Then, take small steps until you reach your goal. The changing itself happens in an instant. But getting to that point can take a long time. How long the process takes is largely dependent on the strength of your motivation.

Motivation is essential to the process of personal transformation. Why do you want to change? If you just want to please someone, long-lasting effects are unlikely. Eventually you're probably going to find yourself sliding back to where you were.

On the other hand, if you genuinely want to change for your own reasons, then the transformation will be quicker, easier, and long-lasting. Everyone – especially you – has the strength and inner resources to cultivate change as long as there's strong motivation.

➔ WHY CHANGE IS CHALLENGING

You're probably aware of your usual sleeping posture, your preference for the right or left side of the bed, or for a particular place at the table. Chances are good that you like to vacation in the same place and eat the same foods.

Wouldn't you be uncomfortable if you had to modify these behaviors? As humans, we seem built to resist change. Once you learn how to do something, you'd rather stick to it because you find comfort in repetition.

*"No man ever steps in the same river twice,
for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."
- Heraclitus*

➔ CHANGE IS CONSTANT

The only thing you can be sure of is change. Most often we're not aware of when we change because this process happened slowly and nearly effortlessly. That's why making small changes don't have to be so difficult.

Think of the millions of cells constantly transforming in your body. The seasons change, fashion changes, hairstyles change. Hasn't yours?

It's common for people to get bored with a certain style and go in for another. That energy can be applied to changing habits, too. It's just a matter of altering your perspective.

"As the great Confucius said, 'The one who would be in constant happiness must frequently change.' Flow. But we keep looking back, don't we? We cling to things in the past and cling to things in the present . . .

Do you want to enjoy a symphony? Don't hold on to a few bars of the music. Don't hold on to a couple of notes. Let them pass, let them flow. The whole enjoyment of a symphony lies in your readiness to allow the notes to pass."

- Anthony de Mello

➔ **LIMITING BELIEFS**

Perhaps your limiting beliefs are hindering your transformation. How often do you tell yourself, "I can't do that?" For example, if you want to quit smoking or start exercising, you've got to *believe* that you can. ***A belief is a self-fulfilling prophecy.***

A belief such as "I'm a bad person" will prevent you from taking personal responsibility for the behavior which prompts you to think of yourself as a bad person. But a person can't be condemned because of his poor behavior. There's much more to any of us than a single act.

Each of us undoubtedly has many good traits. The person who thinks of himself as a bad person could be an animal lover, a generous individual, or someone who can make others laugh.

For example, look at John's story:

John has a challenge with alcohol. Every celebration such as a birthday or Christmas becomes an excuse for him to get drunk. His wife and kids dread these "good times" because John gets aggressive. The alcohol brings out his argumentative side and he looks for openings for arguments.

It's a vicious cycle. The more he argues, the more he drinks in an attempt to drown his sorrows. John blames his outbursts on his wife, insisting that she must not argue with him, especially when he's intoxicated. Secretly, he believes he's a drunk and a bad person who can't change.

John needs to accept himself. But self-acceptance doesn't mean that he should condone his negative behavior and continue doing it. It means that he should recognize that he sometimes engages in unacceptable behavior. ***With self-acceptance, John is more likely to learn from his mistakes.***

Once John admits that he has a problem with alcohol and wants to change, he will need support from his family and friends. Joining Alcoholics Anonymous is a great idea because meeting others who've transformed or are in transformation can be highly motivating.

If you want to change your destructive or socially unacceptable behavior:

- ➔ Take personal responsibility for your actions.
- ➔ Be specific in identifying the behavior - what exactly are you doing wrong?
- ➔ Develop a game plan.

"Only the wisest and the stupidest of men never change."
- Confucius

➔ KEEP A JOURNAL

Writing your thoughts down every day will help you keep track of your thinking process and clarify your insights. You'll be able to see both big and small transformations more clearly. If you've always kept a journal, you'll be able to trace your transformation across the years.

To get an idea of your habitual thought patterns, sit quietly and write down each of your thoughts as it occurs. After you've done this for a few days, you'll be able to tell whether you tend to think negatively or positively. This is an important exercise because ***thoughts control our experiences.***

If you find that your thoughts are hindering your progress, it's time to replace them with ones that allow you to progress. Next, ***make a new list of what you'd like to think and believe instead.*** These thoughts could be related to health and fitness, skills and capabilities, and more.

Now it's time to make the change to your new thoughts. To do this, all you have to do is keep thinking of the outcomes.

For instance, if you, like most people, associate exercise with effort, think instead of the effect exercise will have on your body and mind. You'll feel happier because of the endorphins being released; you'll be healthier, trimmer, and you'll sleep better and be less stressed out.

Think these new and positive thoughts each day. You'll be amazed with the results you will achieve!

➔ LOVE YOURSELF

Self-esteem is central to motivation. If you respect yourself and believe that you're valuable and worthy, you're not likely to have destructive habits. This doesn't mean you won't acknowledge your imperfections. Quite the contrary: you get to acknowledge your imperfections as part of the whole picture of yourself.

Acknowledging is quite different from criticizing and hating yourself. If you have issues with self-esteem, don't hesitate to consult a professional counselor.

“When I experience and accept myself exactly as I am, then I change.”
- **Cherie McCoy**

➔ TYPICAL REACTIONS TO CHANGE

Changes often bring with them a feeling of fear, panic or grief, followed by denial, and finally, acceptance. Such reactions are common in someone who has just lost a loved one or gotten fired from his job.

In the case of a loved one's death, grief is important. If you refrain from grieving, you block your transformation, and with it, your return to normalcy. Coming to terms with your loss is important, and may help prevent long-term depression.

"If you don't get what you want, you suffer; if you get what you don't want, you suffer; even when you get exactly what you want, you still suffer because you can't hold on to it forever.

Your mind is your predicament. It wants to be free of change. Free of pain, free of the obligations of life and death. But change is a law, and no amount of pretending will alter that reality."

- Dan Millman

➔ **CHANGING FROM WITHIN**

Melissa was deeply involved in her spiritual community. Her mentors there pointed out that she had a habit of drawing attention to her helplessness in certain situations. This made the other devotees pity her, instead of being inspired by her.

As a senior devotee, Melissa was expected to set a good example. She was shocked by the revelation of her needy attitude. Melissa had never perceived herself in this manner, but her mentors were right. She did tend to play the role of the lost little girl.

Thinking that this difficulty had come about because of her openness, Melissa decided to stop discussing her personal life with others. However, two weeks later, she made the same mistake again. Although she wasn't complaining about the difficult situation in which she found herself, her aura was so full of that helplessness that others sensed her negative emotions.

Melissa began to observe her thoughts more closely in trying situations.

How was she projecting an aura of helplessness? Why was she feeling

helpless when every circumstance she encountered was meant for her spiritual growth?

Through practice, Melissa trained her brain to think differently. In a few months, she became the strong senior devotee whom others could emulate.

You, too, can bring about this kind of change in your own life. But like Melissa's transformation, ***it must start from within.*** A comment from a friend or mentor may catalyze your growth process, and you may be motivated by your support network, but the actual desire to grow must begin with you.

“Don't be deceived into thinking that by changing the external, the internal will be changed. It works the other way around. The path that needs changing is the one in your mind.”
- Susan Jeffers

➔ **OUR HABITS AND ATTITUDES CREATE US**

Although you make your own habits and believe they're part of your identity, you weren't born with any. Without your habits, you're closer to your true self. For example, you're not born with a drug addiction or a tendency to procrastinate or bite your nails. But when you watch others doing (or enjoying!) these things, it's easy to copy their behavior.

Take smoking, for example. How many of us smoked our first cigarette because we thought it looked cool or because it seemed like the thing to do because our friends were doing it?

“You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself.”

- Jim Rohn

➔ SKINNER’S EXPERIMENT

In the 1940s, the behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner conducted an experiment involving rats and people. He built a maze for each segment and placed chocolate in the middle of the rat maze and \$10 bills in the middle of the human maze.

When the chocolate was removed from the first maze, the rats gave up trying to locate it. In the other maze, though, the people did not cease their quest for the cash even after it was removed.

The mind latches on to such pleasure-seeking behaviors. It sees them as solutions to feelings of discomfort. Thus, habits are born. So you’ll see people smoking in uneasy situations, or stuffing themselves with food whenever they’re depressed.

Because these behaviors make them feel good, they focus on the pleasure. Usually, while smoking or compulsively eating, you don’t spend much time thinking about how bad the activity is for you. Nor did the humans in the maze obsess about the futility of their hunt for the money; they just kept looking.

“Those who are victorious plan effectively and change decisively. They are like a great river that maintains its course but adjusts its flow.”

- Sun Tzu

➔ REPROGRAMMING THE BRAIN

When little Elizabeth fell down and grazed her knee in the school playground, a teacher gave her candy to distract her from the pain. It worked, but Elizabeth liked the candy so much, she would bruise herself on purpose to get more. Her brain associated pain with sweets and this pattern stayed with her as she grew up.

Can she reprogram her brain and change the habit? Sure, she can replace the eating of sweets with another behavior like taking a nap or reading a book whenever she feels any sort of pain.

If she does this often enough, she will create new neurological pathways in her brain which will tell her body how to behave in new ways. ***Her unhealthy old habit will wither away.***

Contrary to what researchers believed in the past, new research indicates that our brains, just like our other organs, are always capable of building new cells. ***We're never too old for change.***

*“There is only one way in which you can “change your luck”
and that is by altering your thoughts.”*

- Eric Butterworth

➔ THOUGHT FORCES

We attract the things on which we focus. So if we want to give up smoking, constantly thinking about cigarettes will prevent us from busting this bad habit.

Instead, we need to think about the person we'll be if we don't smoke: someone who's more energetic and healthier and more mindful of others. After all, we affect those around us with our second-hand smoke.

Take a moment to consider the absurdity of the following attitude: when you want to buy a new home, do you tell the estate agent what you don't want? When you're shopping, do you look at the clothes you don't want to buy?

To effect change in your life, you'll find it very helpful to train your mind to think in a constructive way. ***Before you know it, you'll begin attracting what you do want.*** By default, you'll experience less of what you don't want.

"Thought is cause: experience is effect. If you don't like the effects in your life, you have to change the nature of your thinking."

- Marianne Williamson

➔ **STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE**

Prepare yourself for the big changes by making small changes in your lifestyle. Shun the familiar and do things differently. For example:

- ➔ Instead of watching your favorite TV program, read a book.
- ➔ At the dinner table or in the living room, sit in a different chair.
- ➔ Sleep on the other side of the bed.
- ➔ Buy a different brand of soap.

Just by taking these small actions, you'll begin to prime your mind to receive change positively. Then, when it comes to larger transformations,

you'll feel more confident. You'll already have a sense that change can be enjoyable and fascinating, and this will help motivate you.

➔ **SMALL CHANGES LEAD TO BIG CHANGES**

If you find big changes difficult to make right away, try making small ones that lead toward your goal. You'll eventually get to the big ones. For instance, with cigarettes, you could try cutting down gradually. So for a week you might cut down to 20 and the following week to 15. For losing weight, you might find that losing 1 pound in a week isn't so difficult.

Some may find it easier to make big changes right away. Just decide one day that you want to stop smoking and do it. To help you with the change:

- ➔ Request family members and friends to avoid smoking in your presence.
- ➔ Throw away any remaining cigarettes.
- ➔ Keep the ash tray away. Give your lighter away.
- ➔ Every time you feel like a cigarette, chew some gum instead or eat a carrot stick.
- ➔ Avoid going to bars and other places where people smoke.

Part of retraining your brain does involve the physical world, especially when the change itself is physical, such as quitting smoking. So you may find it useful to take small steps. Also, ***set yourself up for success by preparing your environment for your transformation.***

*“If we don’t change, we don’t grow. If we don’t grow, we are not really living.
Growth demands a temporary surrender of security.”*

- Gail Sheehy

➔ THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL MOTIVATION

You may find spiritual practice extremely helpful when you wish to make personal changes. Find a path you can believe in, a teacher you can trust, and give yourself completely to your spiritual cultivation.

Your perspective will shift. All of your actions will be determined by your purpose and new priorities.

Remember, change doesn’t need to be associated with discomfort.

Although you may experience some in the process of transformation, ultimately it will lead you to true liberation and peace of mind.

“Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.”

- Wayne Dyer

➔ THE BOOK OF CHANGES

The Chinese *I Ching*, the oldest oracle in the world, owes its existence to China’s first emperor Fu Hsi, a great sage. According to this book, the only constant is change.

The oracle helps you live in harmony with changes, so you go with the universal flow. You act when required to act, retreat or refrain from action

when required. Harmony is assured if you follow this path, the way of the “Superior Man.”

*“If you tell me, I will listen. If you show me, I will see.
But if you let me experience, I will learn.”*
- Lao Tzu

➔ **BUILDING THE MOTIVATION TO CHANGE**

For the most effective motivation, make your goal compelling. Also, envision what you no longer want to do as repellant. Think of how your circumstances will turn out if you don’t do something about it right away.

Carter had difficulty making the decision to give up smoking until a girl he was dating told him his mouth smelled like an ash tray and refused to kiss him. Carter felt like she’d slapped him. It woke him up.

He imagined what it would be like to spend the rest of his life without a woman to love him. He pictured himself coming home to an empty house every day and was filled with remorse. It was too much to bear and he decided to give up smoking effective immediately.

The last time he used tobacco, he made himself quite ill by smoking two packs of cigarettes in quick succession. He found his breath and the taste in his mouth repelling. He noticed he did not have an appetite. Did Carter succeed? Of course he did. His date’s bluntness galvanized him into doing something about his habit.

Chances are that most people with unhealthy or socially damaging habits attract such derogatory comments, but usually they don’t take them

seriously. Could this be you? To effect change, all you have to do is ponder the consequences of your behavior like Carter did.

➔ THE POWER OF PICTURES

Einstein said: “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” ***If you can envision it, you can be it.***

You use your imagination all the time, but possibly not consciously and constructively. If someone asks you what you had for dinner last night, a picture of the food you ate will pop up in your mind’s eye. The same thing will happen when you’re asked to describe your friend.

The brain uses visualization to process information about the world. One of your brain’s functions is to make you feel good.

So if you imagine how amazing you’ll feel and the wonderful life you’ll lead as a result of personal change, your brain will latch on to that thought.

Once this happens, you’re well on your way to seeing the changes you want become reality.

*“You want to change your life?
Control the only thing you can control:
the meaning you give something.”
- Tony Robbins*

➔ HOW TO CHANGE BELIEFS

Once you change your beliefs, you can change your circumstances. In other words, your outer world reflects your inner one.

You'll find some powerful exercises in the *Coping with Personal Change Workbook* to help you break old habits and replace them with healthier new ones. Make a commitment to practice these exercises because experience is the only teacher.

To get results, you should practice the exercises several times. This will form new neural pathways in your brain and soon you'll have fresh, life-affirming habits.

Try doing one exercise over and over again for days or weeks before you move on to the next one. Remember to take breaks between practice sessions. Studies have shown that this is the best way to improve performance.

"Thinking is a habit, and like any other habit, it can be changed; it just takes effort and repetition."
- John Eliot, Ph.D.

➔ CONCLUSION

Changes are essential. Either we make them ourselves or we're forced into making them. Ultimately, you get to be the one to decide. Start today to choose new habits, and soon you'll have the life you dream of.

"We first make our habits and then our habits make us."
- John Dryden
