

Pressure Points

Summer 2009

For those who perform under pressure

Volume 4, Issue 1



Changing the Way You Change

This issue is in response to recent conversations with a number of clients from a variety of settings - business, sports, the performing arts - and some simply dealing with the complexities of life. Change is the one constant in life. Far too often we know that we *should* change, but our actions fall short (self included). The model presented here is a tried and true framework for long-lasting change.

Let us know what you think about this issue of *Pressure Points*, topics you would like to have us address and how we can better meet your needs.

- Charlie Brown PhD

Long Lasting Change at Last

Thinking in stages is the key to success

It could be anything: spend more time planning your day rather than being reactive, exercise more often, get to bed earlier, eat more healthily, spend more time with your family and friends. Intellectually, you know that the change would be good; but somehow it never seems to occur. Either it stays in the realm of “good intentions;” or you make a valiant start for a few days, only to fall back into your old habits after a week or so.

Changing a habit, even when you know the change would produce tremendous benefit, can be a daunting task. Researchers have found that change is much easier (and long lasting) if one thinks of it as a developmental process with distinct stages. These stages occur in the same logical sequence. To embrace change, one focuses on moving to the next stage. Since different stages require different skills, the key is matching your efforts to your current stage of development.

At the **pre-contemplation** stage, change isn't even on a person's radar. The goal for a person at this stage is simply to begin considering change. Moving from this stage requires education on the benefits of change.

As a person begins to consider the benefits of change, one advances to the

contemplation stage. As described by researchers Prochaska and DiClemente, “you know where you want to go; but you are not quite ready yet.” It is easy for people to become trapped at this stage. Moving from this stage involves weighing the “costs” of changing the

behavior versus the “benefits” of maintaining the status quo. An essential part of this stage is learning how change might actually occur. What would be realistic small steps? How would the change impact other aspects of your life, and how would you adjust to that impact? The focus

at this stage is still education rather than action.

When a person enters the **preparation** stage, one moves beyond just considering change and is now taking steps to prepare for the change. They may even experiment with change; but it is more of a “test run” rather than actual commitment to change. This is a time for getting the resources together that will be required - checking the bus schedule that allows you to get to the office earlier, getting new running shoes or a gym bag, making certain there is healthy food in the house. Anticipating how to address possible difficulties is essential for moving beyond this stage.

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Stages of Change

- Pre-contemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Relapse

After all aspects of preparation have been considered and a person flirts with the new behaviors a few times, one day the balance of the scales seems to shift. A person decides, "Enough!" and commits to the **action** phase. The time for education and planning is past; at this stage the Nike "Just do it" philosophy rules. While it may not be sexy or esoteric, simple behavioral principles of reinforcement work best at this stage. Charts with checklists and rewards (yes, just like in the fifth grade) work wonders at this stage.

After a person engages in the new activities on a regular basis for about six months, the **maintenance** stage emerges. If the change is to become a lasting part of a person's lifestyle, it is essential to build social support for the new habit and to troubleshoot potential obstacles. Change often includes risks and trade-offs. This is a time for making certain your lifestyle maintains a sense of balance and moderation.

The sixth stage of change is **relapse**. At some point you are going to have that inevitable setback. You have a vacation, a crisis or some event where the pattern is disrupted and suddenly you're not even thinking about your new habit. You are back at the pre-contemplation stage, needing to become mindful of the benefits of change once again and then contemplating how to take action once more. By preparing in advance for a relapse and thinking of it as an expected step in the change process, it is easier to resume your efforts and more rapidly return to the action phase.

This framework is known as the *transtheoretical model of change*, originally developed in facilities treating addictive behaviors. If it can help an addict stop using, it can help you integrate healthy habits for better performance and a more fulfilling life.



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*Vision without action is a daydream;
 Action without vision is a nightmare.*

- Japanese proverb



"What fits your busy schedule better, exercising one hour a day or being dead 24 hours a day?"

Quick Tips for Goal Getting...

- **Think "baby steps"**

Too many people lose motivation because they feel like they are not making progress. The key is to tackle change in small, realistic steps. Think of your ideal as a "10." Now rate your current level on a scale of 1-10. Next think of what a change of **one step** would look like. For example, if you are presently at a "4", what would a "5" look like? How would a "5" be different than a "6"? Be specific! Once you have a clear idea of that one step change, you have your first goal.

- **Trust the process**

Make certain that your goals focus on things that you can control - yourself and how you direct your energy and attention. Such goals address the processes that are the foundations for achieving high standards and successful outcome.

- **Most common mistakes of goal setting**

- Failing to set specific goals.
- Setting too many goals too soon.
- Failing to adjust goals.
- Failing to set process goals.
- Setting goals, but not providing follow-up and evaluation.

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