

***Changing For Good* for Lawyers**

Or

I wish all we needed to change was to read a website, article, or book and we could change our behavior. Unfortunately it just does not work that way for humans so let's see what it does take.

The book ***Changing For Good*** was written by three “publish or perish” university research psychologists named Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, after their experimental work had been published many times in professional psychology journals.

What “publish or perish” means to a university researcher is this: If you don’t publish your works in peer reviewed professional psychological journals, you won’t get to keep your position; and you won’t get approved for tenure and become a full professor who gets lucrative consulting jobs as well. Thus your work has to be of the highest quality. An editorial board of your peers will scrutinize it before it becomes published. Only the best works are published. Even then, the best published science gets “attacked” by the sophisticated readers.

Thus this research is ironclad. Only later did they publish their “layperson” version of their groundbreaking research. That is the book I am recommending you read.

How Change Happens In Us

If you read this book you will learn all about the **six stages**, or better said, **spiral**, of how change happens in human behavior. Why? Because what you are doing in your work life is just as habitual, addictive, and sometimes even as self-destructive as any other behavior in your personal life. OK, so maybe “self-destructive” is a little over the top, so let’s go with “limiting your potential for positive outcomes.”

The secrets to changing habits for good are in that book. Let me briefly outline for you the 6 stages of change from the book.

The six stages are:

Precontemplation – this is when the person really does not see a problem at all. Some people would call it being in denial. Other people may see that a person has a problem, but the person himself does not. By the way, it is possible to help people in this stage.

Contemplation – at this point people know they have a problem and are beginning to *think* seriously about how to solve the issue or issues they are facing.

Preparation – at this stage the person is *planning* to take some action, usually within the next few days or weeks. The distinction in this stage is the word “planning” here, whereas the contemplation stage is only “thinking.” Unfortunately, the “thinking” can go on for days, weeks, months or even years and thus a lot more pain or at least missed opportunity occurs. This stage of thinking about doing something is of limited value or in its worst form leads to “analysis paralysis.” Nevertheless, it is a necessary stage to get to where the rubber meets the road, which is next up.

Action – this is the stage in which people become ready to change their behavior and their environment to address the issue. Common wisdom says this is when progress is being made to solve the issue. Actually progress is being made all along each stage.

Maintenance – this is the stage when the person has to work to consolidate their gains made during the earlier stages. Maintenance is a critical time since lapsing into past behavior is very much an issue. In fact this stage is so critical it can last from weeks or months to a lifetime, depending on the person and the behavior being changed.

Termination – this is the stage where the old behavior no longer has a grip on the person at all. There is no temptation, or threat or “lapses” to old behavior. The new behavior has become **natural, normal and a habit** with no ongoing effort to keep the new behavior in place. Now, of course for some people and some behaviors (like smoking, drinking, drugs, food, etc.) there is no reaching this stage. They have to stay in maintenance or at least some lower level of maintenance for a lifetime.

Change is a Spiraling Event

There is one last thing you do have to understand about the stages of change. I just presented these stages as though they are a linear progression, when in fact they are **not** linear for most people, or so the research shows. The stages **are a spiral** for most people.

People often slip up somewhere along the line and “lapse” or “backslide” and then need to go back to at least the contemplation stage and go at it again into the action stage. This is NOT necessarily a bad thing when it happens, although it would be nice if it did not happen.

According to the research, successful self-changers go through the stages from three to four times before they achieve success. The authors of ***Changing for Good*** refer to those who “relapse” as “recyclers.” I like that.

This is just one reason why having the “right knowledge” is not enough for behavior change to occur. **Commitment, motivation, and accountability over time** with the “**right knowledge**” are necessary for change. So says the best scientific research of our time.

Now that you have some understanding of the stages, let’s look into “processes.”

Changing for Good – Stages versus Processes

Knowing the stages is good; however, according to the authors of ***Changing for Good***, one has to apply **one of nine processes** of change at the right point of each stage.

Some processes are **more important** in certain stages than others, and some are **essential** for a successful outcome in some stages. Processes are distinct from techniques. There are nine major processes of change but probably hundreds of techniques of change used inside the 9 major processes. Each process involves a broad strategy or systematic series of actions directed toward some end, while techniques are methods used to achieve something or the application of methods or procedures or actions.

The nine major processes detailed in *Changing For Good* are:

Consciousness Raising – which is about getting information on yourself and the issue you are wanting to change. (This is why I recommend you do a “practice assessment” with me before making any decisions about selecting any possible solutions.)

Social Liberation – which is about increasing social support or the culture for behaviors that need changing... like no smoking zones, which have helped decrease smoking, or no TV advertising for cigarettes for instance.

Emotional Arousal – which is about experiencing and expressing your feelings around the issue(s) being addressed.

Self-Reevaluation – which is about making an assessment of your feelings and thoughts around the issue being addressed.

Commitment – which is about making a conscious choice to make a change with a belief that you can indeed change. (Here is the “commitment, motivation and accountability” piece that I often talk about as necessary for change in business.)

Countering – which is about finding alternative behaviors that can replace our self-defeating behaviors. For example, a person who stops smoking might take up gum chewing to counter the urge to smoke; using relaxation approaches; exercising; becoming assertive where you were once non-assertive; and changing irrational thoughts and beliefs.

Environmental Control – which is about restructuring your environment to maximize the possibility for success in changing the targeted behavior.

Reward – which is about rewarding yourself or being rewarded by others for success or partial success along the road to the desired outcome.

Helping Relationships – which is about arranging for other people around you to support you in being successful. (Here is the “commitment, motivation and accountability” piece again.)

Take Action!

The book has way, way more to communicate in its 289 pages. It is NOT a complex or jargon laden book. It is an easy read, chock full of practical advice.

There are neat “self tests” as well that you can take for every stage and see how you match up. What stage are you in, on whatever issue you are interested in changing? They help you watch out for the common pitfalls as well. I use this information a lot when coaching people and I recommend it to all my clients. Get into action and buy ***Changing For Good*** now with no further contemplation, OK!

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