

Changes That Stick:

How to Create Lasting Changes



by Maria Gajewski



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Preface

Congratulations, and thank you for downloading *Changes That Stick: How to Create Lasting Changes!*

This eBook will show you how to use proven techniques to change your life for the better – and keep it that way!

Inside you'll find practical suggestions, and down to earth explanations, showing you how to:

- Break out of old, destructive patterns.
- Establish new habits.
- Maintain changes over the long term.

Each section consists of a few pages of explanation of one of the stages of change, followed by exercises designed to help you progress from one stage to the next.

How Should You Use This Book?

While I hope that this eBook is an interesting read in its own right, reading it won't help you unless you put the knowledge and exercises into practice. The best way to do that is to identify one *small** area that you want to change in your life. Why a small change? Because you'll have the greatest chance of being successful, and you'll create a foundation for future changes. Like anything else, once you've mastered the process of change, you will be able to do it quicker and easier in the future.

**(Note: Cutting back on coffee is a small change. Getting a divorce, moving to a new state, and training for a marathon all at the same time is not. It is important to know the difference!)*



Go through each of the first four sections as quickly as possible, while still giving the exercises enough time to be effective, until you reach the Action stage. You don't need to do all of the exercises. Just pick the one that appeals to you the most and work with it. If it isn't helping, move on to your second choice, or create an exercise of your own.

Because people take at least 21 days of consistent action to create a new habit, you'll need to work on this stage for 3 weeks or more. When your new change is a habit, you've successfully entered the Maintenance stage and you can begin working with those exercises for as long as needed, or until you're ready to create another change.

If you follow this plan, you will have a successful change in a month, or possibly less.

What is Never the Same River Twice?

Never the Same River Twice is a place to explore all of the ways that the world is changing around us and how we can learn to work *with* change rather than against it. The site began in May 2007 and has grown to include hundreds of articles on topics such as personal change, change management, and self improvement.



I hope you'll stop by the blog if:

You want to learn how to be happier and more successful in the face of change.

You are driven to keep improving yourself and/or your organization.

You're really cool and fun!!



The best way to keep up with the blog is to subscribe in an [RSS](#) reader or by [email](#). To receive exclusive content that only goes to my subscribers, sign up for the [Lasting Changes Newsletter](#) (if you downloaded this eBook directly from the web, you are probably already subscribed).

Who is Maria Gajewski?



Hi! I'm Maria. I have spent most of my professional life working with nonprofit and government organizations and helping them find ways to do their work better. I'm currently working as a researcher at a mid-sized university in the Upper Midwest. I also teach occasionally, including teaching a workshop on change management.

I've been in my current position for nearly 4 years, and I've learned a lot about organizations and the people who work within them during that time. Here are just a few of the key lessons I've taken from my professional experience:

1. **The most valuable help you can give someone is helping them ask the right question.** Nearly everyone I talk to comes into a project thinking that they know what they need. They are almost universally wrong. This happens because people start coming up with answers before they've thought about their question(s). I would estimate that 90% of the success or failure of a project is directly related to the questions that were asked at the beginning of that project.



2. **Most people suck at being objective about their own situations.** That's why they hire me and my colleagues! Seriously, most people lack the ability to remove themselves from their present situation and study an issue objectively. They need an outside perspective to help them see what is really going on.
3. **Change is often much more threatening than continuing to live in your own mess.** Many organizations are filled with redundancy, ineffectiveness and tunnel vision. They are missing opportunities to grow their businesses - which in the case of nonprofits usually involves helping more people who really need help - simply because they continue to do things "the way we've always done them." So often just a small change of direction can make an organization twice as effective, but if there are too many unknowns it will never happen. The unknown is just too frightening.

Probably the most important lesson I've learned from all of this experience is that *all of these statements that are true about organizations are true for individual people!* The lessons that I've learned from helping organizations change are carried forward in this eBook. I hope they help you as much as they've already helped others.



Section 1. Introduction

Are you frustrated by trying to make changes in your life or your organization? Do you get fired up to make a change only to regress to your old behavior within weeks, if not days? Are you searching for the secret of making lasting changes that make real improvements?

You definitely aren't alone.

The struggle to create lasting changes is a chronic problem for people everywhere. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control estimates that [66% of adults in the country are overweight](#) despite a multi-billion dollar weight loss industry. In the corporate world, it is estimated that [65 to 85% of corporate mergers ultimately fail](#), resulting in staggering costs of failure. With statistics like these, you could get the impression that it is impossible to make any real changes.

The good news is that scientists have begun to seriously study how human beings change and how to make those changes more sticky. One of the leading theories of change right now is called the **Transtheoretical Model of Change**. Don't be intimidated by such a technical sounding name. In pages that follow, I'm going to translate the Transtheoretical Model into plain language and show you how the model can be applied to everyday life to create **real change**. (If you're the academic type, you might want to read [this journal article](#) that outlines the theory.)



The 5 Stages of Change



Changes that stick go through five distinct phases, which will all be covered in detail. For now, I'll introduce each stage, which will paint a picture of a successful change.

1. **Precontemplation.** In this stage, you aren't even considering the idea of changing. There are two possible reasons that people are in the precontemplation mode: 1) They are happy with the current situation, or 2) They don't believe they are capable of changing the current situation.
2. **Contemplation.** At this point, people are intending to change in the near future. They may realize that they are unhappy with the current situation, but they may still have some ambivalence about their ability to change it.
3. **Preparation.** A person in preparation mode plans to implement a change very soon and is taking some steps necessary to make that change. Planning, finding support networks, consulting with outside experts and other proactive behaviors mark this stage.
4. **Action.** This is the stage that we usually think of as Change with a big "C." To an outside observer, this is when real change begins, because the three previous changes are often invisible. In the action stage, the people desiring change get down to the hard work of implementing their plan.



5. **Maintenance.** For many changes, relapse is a real possibility, so the maintenance stage is crucial. This is where a change becomes a habit. The maintenance stage can last from a few months of active habit reinforcement all the way until the end of a person's life - or until the next level of change begins.

Each stage of change has its own unique opportunities and challenges that make the difference between a successful change and just another failed attempt at improvement. In the next sections we'll go through all of the changes in detail and build on each stage to *create lasting changes*.



Section 2: From Unconscious to Conscious



Do you know anyone who has a problem such as being a heavy smoker or very overweight, but feels just fine about their current situation? How about someone who has tried to change many times without success and has completely given up? These people, who are not taking steps to improve their lives, are in the **precontemplation stage of change**.

Precontemplation is the opposite of what most of us think of as change, but it is a stage we all have to pass through on our way to the active stages of *contemplation, preparation, and action*. This stage is the most difficult to pass through, as we can see from the number of unhappy people around us every day. There are two criteria for successfully completing this stage and moving on to contemplation:

1. Unhappiness with the current situation
2. Belief that change is possible

So how do you move out of the precontemplation stage of change and get started on making lasting changes? The most effective way is to...



Use Emotion to Change

Human beings are emotional creatures. As I've written previously becoming very emotional is a great way to [change quickly](#). Unfortunately, in the precontemplation stage, the person in question doesn't have any emotion about their current situation. In the absence of any internal emotion, the motivation to change has to **come from the outside**. Some outside influence has to act as the trigger that motivates them to begin the change process. Here are a few possible ways that a person can start to become emotional about a change.

- **Compare to Others.** In our daily lives we are constantly comparing one thing to another. We compare our physical attractiveness to other people, we compare our profitability to other companies. We compare our dinner order to the next table. If we start seeing our situation as much worse than the situations that others are in, we become motivated to change. This is one reason that self improvement gurus often suggest spending time with people that are already at the level you want to be. Seeing their success will motivate you to change your own life to match.
- **Education and Positive Media.** Remember the old "This is your brain on drugs," commercials? They featured a person cracking and frying an egg to simulate the effects that drug abuse has on the human brain. This and other public education materials are designed to elicit strong emotion in people and help them realize that they need to change their behavior (or never begin a behavior in the first place). Unfortunately, there is quite a bit of evidence to suggest that people know that smoking, taking drugs, and eating a steady diet of Twinkies is bad for them and they do it anyway, so education isn't the most effective way to create change.
- **Intervention.** When a situation gets really out of hand, such as with serious drug addiction or a company on the verge of bankruptcy, outside forces can try to intervene to motivate immediate change. Family members might gather and tell the drug addict how his or her behavior is causing everyone pain. A takeover offer might wake corporate managers out of their



complacency and inspire them to begin a massive change management initiative. The goal of any intervention is simply to motivate the first step toward change.

The precontemplation stage is often the most difficult stage to break out of on the journey to create lasting changes. For negative situations, strong emotions are often the best way to inspire change, or at least the next step toward change. Unfortunately, human beings seem to be more powerfully motivated by negative emotions than by positive emotions. The good news is that as soon as a person sees the need to change they have advanced to the **contemplation stage** of change. *In the next section we'll talk about that stage and how it can help you make lasting changes in your life.*



Precontemplation Exercises

There are many areas of your life that are going really well right now. Those areas don't need to change. However, there are probably areas that could use some improvement. You may be aware of some of these areas, but there are probably others that you don't know about, or are trying to avoid.

The exercises in this section are designed to help you identify the parts of your life that are most in need of change.

Exercise 1: Journaling

Even if you don't keep a journal, take 30 minutes to sit alone in a quiet room and write out the current state of your life. Don't censor yourself. Just write the first things that come out. If you get stuck, try answering one or more of the following questions.

- Are there any areas of your life you might like to change?
- Is there something you know you need to deal with that you've been avoiding?
- When you think about some areas of your life, do you get a bad feeling in your stomach, shoulders, neck, or head?

Decide on one concrete thing that you can work on in the next 21 to 30 days.

Exercise 2: Compare Yourself to Your Heroes

Everyone seems to think that it's bad to compare yourself to other people. In most cases, they're correct. Comparing your car to your neighbor's car doesn't help you achieve anything but more debt.



However, there is a self improvement technique called modeling that has been successful for many people. In modeling, you select someone who is exceptionally good at something you want to be good at and mimic the actions that got them there. For example, if you wanted to be a great cyclist, you would copy Lance Armstrong's training program.

Think about someone that you really admire. What do they do that helped them become good at what they do? What are you doing differently? Decide on one behavior you can change to move you closer to their performance and work on that.

Exercise 3: Ask a Trusted Advisor

Have your friends, families or co-workers been trying to tell you about an area of your life that needs to change? Most of us receive unsolicited advice all the time and we generally ignore it. For this exercise, try asking the 2 or 3 people that you trust the most to suggest ways that you could improve your working or your personal life.

Be prepared to hear some things that you may not want to hear. Try to stay open to all feedback. Take notes if you have to, so that you don't block out anything that you find uncomfortable. After your conversation, take some time to let the suggestions process in your brain. Then review your notes and select one thing that you can work on changing immediately.



Section 3: Contemplation and Procrastination



Analysis paralysis is one of the most dangerous points on the path to creating lasting change. This is the place where all possible options seem equally valid and you have a hard time deciding what to do in the present moment. The dangers of getting caught in this loop are at their greatest during the **Contemplation** stage of change. The Contemplation stage of change is the point at which an individual or organization intends to change within a relatively short time horizon, such as within the next six months. In this post you'll learn why this stage is important and how you can move through it quickly to begin the more active stages of change.

In the precontemplation stage of change, a person either a) doesn't think their situation is bad, or b) doesn't think they are capable of changing it. The cost of change and the negatives of change outweigh the positive benefits of that change. When a person has used emotion or an outside stimulus to move into the contemplation stage of change, they are able to see the **pros and cons of change** as more equal. They may even see change as more positive, but not know how they are going to get there.

For most individuals and organizations, the reaction to the contemplation stage of change is to engage in **ambivalent thinking** and doing a lot of *planning to plan*. If you've ever worked in an organization that is weighing the pros and cons of a merger, you know



exactly what this is like. There are studies after studies, which produce conflicting results and create so much data that it is impossible to decide on a course of action.

Individuals can do the same thing. Let's say I was thinking about changing my diet to be 100% vegan. I've passed through the precontemplation stage by learning about all of the health benefits I might gain by changing my diet, but I'm concerned that the change will limit my social life and require a lot more work to make sure that I'm getting all of the nutrition I need. If I were stuck in the contemplation stage of this change, I might buy 20 books and subscribe to 50 blogs about veganism. I may read a dozen or more conflicting medical studies about the benefits and dangers of the diet. I might research dietary supplements, raw food, superfoods and more.

In short, I could spend months or years doing everything but moving forward in making a change!

Helpful Procrastination

The contemplation stage can be very helpful and educational when used correctly. It can genuinely help you investigate a change, and it can also show you when a change isn't right for you. There are certain situations where we might feel that we "should" make a change, but we don't really want to. If you react to the idea of a change by procrastinating and doing endless "research," this can be a good indication that you don't desire a change.

The above example is one such situation. I've thought about becoming a vegan for many years for a variety of health, ethical and environmental reasons. However, after going through literally years of just the type of procrastination I described, I realized that I



don't really want to be 100% vegan. My endless procrastination was just my heart telling me what my head was too stupid to figure out. Instead of completely changing my diet, I've cut back on my lacto-ovo consumption considerably and found high quality, ethical sources of cheese and eggs. I've also accepted responsibility for the fact that my current diet means that my ecological footprint is a bit larger than a vegan's and that I may still be contributing to the suffering of some animals, although that is greatly reduced. It isn't a perfect solution, but it works for me, for now.

Unhelpful Procrastination

Procrastination becomes unhelpful and even dangerous when it comes not from a lack of desire to change, but a feeling of inability to change. This is the type of thinking that people fall into when a change seems so large and permanent that they just can't imagine themselves completing it successfully. Many long time smokers and other types of addicts fall victim to this type of thinking. I'm sure we've all met someone with a serious health condition who just keeps smoking away, and might even joke about how their addiction is going to kill them.

In companies, hearing phrases like "This is the way we've always done things," or "We have a rich tradition of...X" are good indicators of endless procrastination on change. When this type of thinking becomes really ingrained, there is usually a recognition of the need for change, an intention to change, and maybe even the beginning of a plan to change, but no mindset for change. *It's as if a person is standing at the bottom of Mt. Everest, looking up and thinking, "I can't climb this thing!"*



The root of all of this resistance is **fear**. Fear of the unknown. Fear of failure. Fear of success. Fear is an incredible motivator, but it can also be the world's best demotivator. If your procrastination is stemming from fear or lack of belief in your ability to change, you'll need some tools to overcome it.

How to Break Through Procrastination

When procrastination stems from a genuine lack of desire to change, the person or organization usually regresses to the precontemplation stage. If a change is absolutely needed, the strategies outlined in that section can help advance the process back to contemplation. When procrastination comes from a lack of belief in the ability to change, there are many ways of turning Mt. Everest into a molehill.

- **Break the change into small pieces.** Even if you need to completely restructure a Fortune 500 company, there are ways to break the process down into smaller pieces. Use a technique like [mindmapping](#) to start with a large change and break it down into its smallest components. For example, "restructuring" might mean upgrading your Human Resources software, implementing remote work arrangements, or selling off a division. Choose the most critical piece of this project and begin to work on it. The rest of the changes can come later.
- **It doesn't have to be forever.** We tend to think that we have to make a permanent change right from the beginning. Even though this series is titled Changes That Stick, I don't think it's realistic that every change we make will be permanent. Start by trying to change for a [weekend](#) or a month. Or think about ways to change gradually. Can you cut back on junk food a little bit at a time, replacing an unhealthy snack with some fruit or nuts? Can you give up your after lunch cigarette right now and work on the rest later? Choose a small task that can give you a quick victory.



- **Work with your support system.** If you think a change is going to be especially difficult, be sure to involve as many support people as needed. Ask your friends to help you watch your diet, or be available for late night phone calls. Call in the consultants and coaches when you need them. If you are feeling weak and unable to change, you need the support of anyone you think can help.
- **Act before you can think.** If you are really prone to analysis paralysis, it may be best to just skip over Contemplation as quickly as possible. The second you think, "I should change my diet," throw away all your junk food, go to the store, and buy 3 pounds of salad mix. If you see that you need new relationship management software, put an action oriented person on the task and let it go. Defend against your worst instincts by outrunning your own thoughts.

The contemplation stage is a necessary, but perilous step on the path to lasting change. The key to this stage is to stay in it just long enough to create the momentum needed to move on to the next stage, **preparation**, but not a second longer!



Contemplation Exercises

If you have selected one small behavior or habit to change from the Precontemplation Exercises, congratulations! You're officially in the contemplation stage of change. If you haven't, go back to those exercises and work with them until you've decided what you want to move forward with.

The contemplation stage of change is a dangerous time, because it is an easy place to begin procrastinating and finding ways to delay the action stage of change. Because of that, the point of these exercises is to move you through contemplation into preparation as quickly as possible.

Exercise 1: Do a Trial Run

The quickest way to get started with a change is to just start. Unless you are changing in a way that is complicated or requires a lot of research (and I suggest that you don't – work on something simple for now) you probably know what you need to do and how to do it.

Just for today, change your actions in a way that will help you get closer to what you want. If you want to exercise regularly, go for a walk. If you want to cut back on caffeine, only drink half your normal amount of coffee.

Use this experiment to gather data on what is working, what is easy, and what you will need to refine to be successful.



Exercise 2: Watch a Motivational Film

In the precontemplation exercises, I suggested that you model someone that you admire. This exercise is an extension of that. Find a film or an online video that inspires you to act. If you want to become a great runner, try watching some old clips of the [Boston Marathon](#). If you want to stop procrastinating, Randy Pausch's [Last Lecture](#) is about as motivational as it gets.

As you watch your chosen film, look for actions and behaviors that you can model as a way to find shortcuts to success.

Exercise 3: Question Your Motivation

If you've tried exercise 1 or 2 and are feeling uninspired to continue, ask yourself why. A lot of times we select changes that we think we "should" want, but they aren't really things that inspire us. Maybe you are in that situation. Not everyone cares about being thin, or advancing their career. There's nothing wrong with that. Just be honest with yourself and make a change that you really want.

On the other hand, you might really want to achieve your goal, but it seems too big. Think about ways that you can break down the change to really small steps.

Try journaling again, and ask yourself questions such as:

- Why do I want this change? Is it really my desire, or something that I feel I "should" want?
- What is the most important thing for me to change in my life? What is one concrete thing I can change quickly to get started on the right path?



Section 4: Preparation and Planning to Act



All lasting change starts with a plan. That plan can be a single thought (“I want to lose 20 pounds.”) or it can be a 500 page document. No matter how extensive, the act of creating a plan means that you’ve officially graduated to the preparation stage of change.

Preparation is an important stage in the change process, but it is also fraught with danger. If you’ve ever been part of an organization that engages in endless planning with little or no action to show for it, you’ve seen the dangers of preparation first hand. It is very easy for the preparation to *become* the activity. This is a false gain because planning doesn’t actually change anything. Ideally, planning and preparation should take the very minimum time required to get to action, and not one second more. This post will teach you some strategies to continue advancing to the action stage.

Intention and Preparation

The preparation stage of change is officially the point at which a person intends to take action toward a change in the very near future, or a maximum of one month. By the time this stage happens, the benefits of changing clearly outweigh the drawbacks. The person

also has a strong belief in their ability to change successfully. Most of the objections of the precontemplation and contemplation stages are gone. A mindset shift has occurred that makes change more attractive than the present situation.

At this stage, it is time to make decisions about what actions to take to create the desired change. For individuals this can be a very simple process, such as joining a health club. In a large organization, creating an action plan can take months or years, especially when the change is large scale. For example, the American military engages in strategic planning to determine where to put limited resources for the most efficiency. The process of deciding where to build new bases and which old bases to close can take years because of the complexity of the data and number of people that must be consulted. Fortunately, most changes are much more simple to plan!

Analysis paralysis can continue to be a factor in this stage. There are usually many possible ways to create change, and often one method is just as valid as another. It is possible to lose weight through either a high protein or a low fat diet. Often the data available to inform a change is misleading, hard to obtain, or just plain contradictory (Atkins diet versus raw veganism anyone?). It is critical to remain focused on the desired change more than the path to getting there or procrastination can again take over.

Just Enough Planning - Not a Bite More

So how do you move through preparation and into action in a way that honors the need to plan, but also overrides the tendency to over think? In brief: *Don't try to build the perfect plan.* Good enough is good enough to get you started.



Since plans rarely work out the way they were written, it is not helpful to aim for perfection in any planning process. You can always test and tweak your plan as you go along, so the key is to just get started. Create the very roughest outline of a plan - draw it on the back of an old envelope if it helps - and then start acting on it. When you find flaws in the plan, simply adjust and keep moving. (We'll discuss this more in the Maintenance stage of change, and you can also read my post [How to Create a Theory of Change](#) for more information on plan adjustment and reflection.)

Here are a few tips that will help you create a plan that is *just good enough*:

- **Ready, Fire, Aim.** In traditional planning, the temptation is to Ready, Aim, Aim, Aim... and never actually Fire! In this method, you act first and adjust later. Use the information you learned in the first acting phase to refine your approach. So what if your first attempt fails? The key here is to learn and keep trying.
- **Think short term.** It is easy to fall into thinking that a change has to be forever. It doesn't, especially if thinking about permanency makes you feel like you're sure to fail. Commit to acting on your plan for a week, a month, or a year - whatever feels manageable to you. After the end of your timeline evaluate your results and commit to more time if you want.
- **Run an experiment.** If you're trying to lose weight, try going one week without eating desert and the next week try walking for 30 minutes each day. See which approach is more sustainable and/or gets better results for you. Continue tweaking your plan each week to achieve better results.

Staying flexible and being willing to *change your plan*, will help you power through the preparation stage of change. Realize that a plan isn't a life commitment, that it is sure to have weaknesses, and will need adjustment over time. When you do this, planning can become a game rather than a matter of life or death, or failure or success. Minimizing planning time will get you through the Preparation stage and into the excitement of **Action!**



Preparation Exercises

Just as in the previous stage, the goal of preparation is to get ready as quickly as possible to move into the action stage and begin the heavy lifting portion of change.

Exercise 1: Do a Trial Run

You may recognize this one, but if you haven't done it already, I encourage you to try it.

The quickest way to get started with a change is to just start. Unless you are changing in a way that is complicated or requires a lot of research you probably know what you need to do and how to do it.

Just for today, change your actions in a way that will help you get closer to what you want. If you want to exercise regularly, go for a walk. If you want to cut back on caffeine, only drink half your normal amount of coffee.

Use this experiment to gather data on what is working, what is easy, and what you will need to refine to be successful.

Exercise 2: 8 Hours of Information Overload

If you're like me, you love doing research. In fact, you may love it more than you like actually doing stuff! Since I think research and planning is valuable, I'm giving you permission to indulge yourself for one day – but not a minute more!!



Go to the library, veg out on the internet, read books, magazines, watch videos. Cram as much information into your brain as possible, until you make yourself sick, or blind, or both!! (I'm probably mentally ill because this sounds really fun to me!)

Then you have to stop. Yep. No more blogs, newsletters, Youtube channels, or magazines. If you've studied a subject for 8 hours you have more than enough information to get started on a change.

Pick the solution that sounds most likely to you and start to act on it.



Section 5: Action!



You spent some time in *contemplation*. You've *prepared* your plan. Everything is in place for your change. All you have to do is ... Act! Pretty simple, isn't it? If I wanted to be flippant I could end this section right now.

But, wait. What's that you say? **Action is the hardest part of change?** Right you are.

Human beings are really good at procrastinating. It's such an issue that there is an entire industry churning out motivational material, affirmations, lifehacks and even ways to outsource all of the things that you're going to procrastinate anyway! Yet we still continue to avoid taking actions that we truly think will be helpful to us.

As one example, in the time I've been working on this section, I've managed to check my email (several times), make a big pot of soup, get some laundry done, and watch some bad television. As you can see, I'm not immune to the procrastination bug even though I'm well aware of the psychology that causes it.



By the time you have reached the action stage of change, you are **convinced that you need to make a change** and you have **confidence in your ability** to do so. You've made the needed preparations. Now it's time to enact your plans. So why are you frozen? And how can you break through that feeling and accomplish real change?

Action. Change with a Big “C”

The action stage of change is where activity becomes visible. In the previous stages, most of the work taking place is in the mind of the individual, or is in the form of preliminary planning. The action stage is where all of the observable, measurable results start to take place.

This stage begins at the first concrete action - the first workout, nicotine patch, or policy rewrite - and continues until the desired change is accomplished. For ongoing changes such as lifestyle alterations, action continues until the new behavior becomes a habit or a standard operating procedure. At that point you move into the maintenance stage which lasts anywhere from months to years until the rest of your life, depending on the circumstances.

Because this stage is so visible, action is what we tend to think about when we think of the word change. For most of us change = doing something. So why do we resist taking action with so much energy? There are a few common reasons. Each of these could be a book by itself, but I will try to explain them concisely so that we can all get busy on our changes!

- **Fear of Failure. Fear of Success.** Completing a change has consequences. Generally, the larger the change, the greater the consequences. Some of these consequences are positive (you get healthier) and some are negative (men start staring at your



newly thin body). In either event, you may have a fear of failing and not getting the positives. You could also have a fear of succeeding and having to deal with the negatives. Your internal dialogue about these fears can keep you from taking action.

- **This Stuff Seems Hard.** Some of the steps you have to take to change effectively may seem very difficult. To loose a significant amount of weight you may have to change your diet completely, and keep it that way for a long time. To really change a company you may have to fire people who don't fit into your new vision. These unpleasant realities are legitimate parts of a change process. Your motivation to change has to be strong enough to push you past these.
- **Moving a Body at Rest.** Human behavior has a lot in common with a freight train. It's hard to get started and even harder to turn, but once it gets going, it gets easier and easier to keep it moving. However, the initial step of getting the train going can be really daunting.

Three Ways to (Temporarily) Overcome Procrastination

Let's be honest. I cannot stop you from procrastinating. Entire industries of self-help books cannot stop you from procrastinating. You will **always procrastinate** to one degree or another. However, there are lots of ways to temporarily get past your blocks and start acting.

1. **Use Your Momentum.** By passing through the contemplation and preparation stages with energy and focus, you have gained some momentum that will help you power through some of the blocks and objections you may have to parts of the change. You've already done some of the hard work of getting the freight train rolling. By moving quickly (are you sensing a theme by now) to implement the initial steps of your change you keep your momentum going.
2. **Take Mircrosteps.** There are many changes that require hard work, but they usually don't require all the hard work to be done at once. Strategize ways that you can break up the change into very small steps. Then get started one salad, one cigarette, one



step at a time. I've used this technique myself on long runs. If I'm getting tired, I'll concentrate on just reaching the next telephone pole, then the next, then the next. Do this enough and you will make lots of progress.

3. **Keep Your Motivation High.** Constantly remind yourself of why you decided to make a change. What are the consequences of not completing the change? What pain will you have to go through? How great will it feel when you have accomplished your goal? Change can be a long road. By keeping yourself focused on your motivation you can keep going until you start to see the benefits of the change.

What's Next?

Most of us think of change as being done at the action stage. We make our plan, we act on it, end of story. This isn't actually the case. Think about it this way. Would you buy a car and then never get the oil changed? (If you said yes, this series probably isn't for you) Like cars, most changes require some ongoing **Maintenance**. That's what we'll cover in the next part.



Action Exercises

Action is the hardest part of creating a lasting change. It takes a minimum of 21 days for a new behavior to become a habit in your daily life, so you will need to stick with your planned change for at least 3 weeks. Because of that, the exercises in this section focus on keeping your motivation up.

You've probably seen these exercises before. I didn't invent them, and they're pretty well known. The reason I include them is because **they work!** If you've never tried any of them, give them a little time. You may be surprised at how effective they are.

Exercise 1: XXX's in a Row

When you're trying to start a new habit, it's important to be consistent. This exercise is designed to help you take daily action for at least 21 days during the action stage of your change.

Get a paper calendar and put it on your wall. Every day when you act on your new change, put an X through the day. The idea is to have an unbroken chain of XXX's that go on for at least 21 days, or even better, a month. Once you get a few XXX's going, you won't want to break the chain.

Exercise 2: Just 10 Minutes

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do to make your change, give yourself a short time limit to work on it every day. 10 minutes is often enough, but go for 30 minutes or an hour if you'd like. Just don't burn yourself out,



and use a timer so that you're not tempted to go longer. As you get better at your new actions, you can increase the time you work on them for faster results.

Exercise 3: Create a Picture

What does success look like to you? Being as concrete as possible, create a picture of success. Some people call this a vision board, but all it is is a graphical representation of where you want to be in your life in the next week, month, or year.

Make a fun art project out of it. Remember collage making? Get a piece of poster board and print out photos that resonate with you, or cut them out of magazines. Put the picture in a place where you'll see it daily. The closet door where you hang your clothes is a good spot because you have to go there every morning.

Whenever your motivation is low, take a look at your picture and imagine what it will feel like when you've made a change.



Section 6: Maintaining the Change



Congratulations! You have done all of the hard work of creating lasting change. You've successfully *planned and prepared* and you've *taken action* and stuck with it long enough for the change to become a part of daily life. Now you've progressed to the final stage of change - **maintenance**.

The maintenance stage begins at the point where the change becomes a habit and continues until you are ready to make a change to something that will replace your new status quo. For example, you could change from an omnivore to a vegetarian and remain in maintenance with that until you decide to become a vegan or an omnivore again.

During maintenance you will focus your efforts on reinforcing your new status quo and resisting temptations that can lead to relapse.

When Does Maintenance Begin?

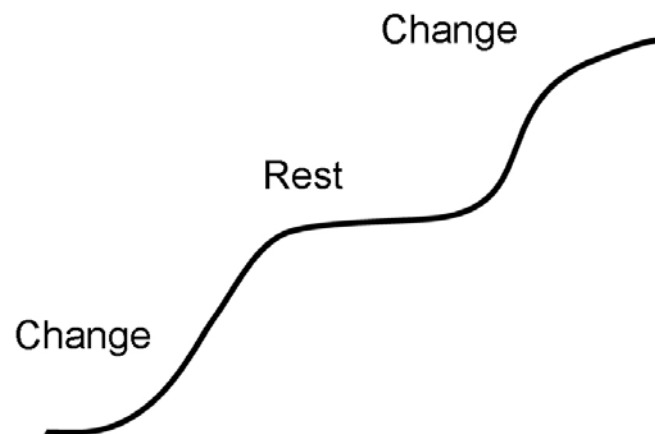
Research suggests that it takes a minimum of 21 days of consistently applied effort to form a new habit and reach the maintenance stage. If you haven't reached a minimum of 21 days of practicing a new behavior without any relapses, you're not in maintenance yet. Reread the section on [action](#) and keep applying those principles until you've formed new habits.



How Long Does Maintenance Last?

The maintenance stage of change lasts from the end of the action stage of change until relapse, or until you decide to create another change. In terms of a timeline, this could be one day or it could be for the rest of your life. For example, someone who has quit smoking could relapse and become re-addicted with just one cigarette, or he or she could remain a nonsmoker for a lifetime. Relapse happens quite often, especially when trying to change ingrained habits and addictions. The good news is that people rarely relapse all the way to the precontemplation stage where they give up entirely on making a change. Usually, people relapse to either the contemplation (I've got to quit smoking again) or preparation (I'll start my diet again on Monday) stage.

Maintenance can also end when you decide to make another change that builds upon or compliments the change you've already made. For example, you could now be a vegetarian and decide that you want to give up dairy products or processed foods. This is a large enough change that you may have to start the stages of change all over again. Fortunately your current diet (vegetarian) is so habitual that you don't really have to expend any effort maintaining it, so you can concentrate on the new changes.



Ideally, if you seek continuous improvement either in your daily life or in your organization, the change cycle will look something like the diagram to the left. You will go through a process of change, which can be difficult and generally takes a lot of energy. Then you will remain in maintenance for a period of time long enough to create some rest and allow you to recharge your batteries. Then, when you are feeling a little too comfortable you will identify the next area that you wish to change.



In this sense, the change process is never “finished.” Some people find this upsetting or burdensome, but I see it as a way to keep learning and making life more exciting. Imagine if you only had to change each area of your life once. It would be like buying a house, remodeling it to your liking and then living there for the rest of your life without doing any updates. Some people choose to do this, but most of us like a new coat of paint or a few new pieces of furniture from time to time. The good news is that you get to decide the pace of change in your own life. There’s no need to keep up with the Joneses here!

How to Maintain a Change

In a lot of ways, the maintenance stage of change is the most difficult part. It can seem like a long and difficult task to keep up a new habit or an organizational change over the long haul. While it may be true that the action stage and the early part of maintenance require a lot of vigilance and energy, any change gets easier to maintain over time. I have been a vegetarian for over 10 years now and I usually don’t even think about eating meat. Very rarely I’ll still get a craving for bacon (that may never go away!) or some other odd dish, but 99.9% of the time it’s just not part of my life anymore. Any major change will become like that after a while.

Until you get to a place where the change that you’ve made is just your new reality, there are some ways that you can reinforce the change and keep your energy up.

- **Review Progress.** Do a regular review of the progress you and your colleagues have made. Have a weekly meeting, keep charts and other visual reminders of progress. Keep a daily journal documenting your challenges and successes. Be honest with yourself and identify areas that still need work. See how you’ve changed over time and enjoy the progress that you have made.
- **Reward Good Behavior.** Humans generally pursue pleasure and avoid pain. One of the reasons that change is often hard is because it causes some short term pain. Make sure to give yourself a pleasurable reward at frequent time intervals if you stick to a change. Be careful not to reward yourself with something related to your old, bad behavior! Don’t reward a successful



week of dieting with a slice of chocolate cake. Instead, identify something that you really enjoy that has no relation to the change. Reward good dietary behavior with a manicure or the book you've been wanting.

- **Burn Your Bridges.** Reinforce your new change by taking steps to make it difficult to relapse to your old state. Get rid of your “fat” clothes. Make sure everyone has removed your organization’s old bookkeeping software from their computers. Stop talking to friends that you used drugs with. We all dig ruts in our daily lives that keep us locked into old behavior. Do everything you can to fill in the rut you want to escape and then throw away your shovel!

Maintenance is the point at which your change transforms into your life. It is a long process, but in many ways it is the most important stage. Be sure to treat it as a part of the stages of change and make sure that you enjoy all of the gains that you've made along the way. Move at a pace that is helpful to you without being overwhelming. Above all else, feel good that you have taken steps that most people don't consciously take!



Maintenance Exercises

The maintenance stage can be a long grind, lasting anywhere from a few weeks up to the rest of your life! If you've completed the action stage successfully, your new change should have become a daily habit at this point, but habits still take some energy and commitment to maintain.

The exercises for this stage are designed to keep you motivated while you keep refining and progressing in the change.

Exercise 1: Check in Weekly

Every change will need some review and refinement over time. One time each week, set aside 10-30 minutes to think about how your new change is going. This is a great time to journal, and think about ways that you can refine your plans and actions to help you be successful over the long term. Some good questions to ask yourself include:

- Have I been successful over the past week? What actions have worked for me? What has hindered my progress?
- Do I need to adjust the length of time, or the number of times a week I work on my change?
- Who can I ask for help to make my change even more successful?

Exercise 2: Make it Automatic

Find ways to make your new behavior as automatic as possible. In general, the less you have to think about doing something, the more successful you'll be at it, so it is always helpful to automate processes that support your change.



For example, if you want to exercise every morning, lay out your exercise clothes, or pack your gym bag before you go to bed. If you are working on getting out of debt, use automatic bill payments to keep your finances on track.

It usually helps to perform a task at the same time each day. I like to do important tasks early in the morning so that I don't have to think about them for the rest of the day. If you're a night owl, you may find late night sessions more helpful.

Brainstorm a few steps you can take to make your change as automated as possible, and keep refining those processes as you go along. See Exercise 1 for a good time to do this.

Exercise 3: Create Support Structures

Having the support of friends, family, and other people and resources always increases your chance of maintaining a change over the long term. As an example, people with gambling addictions can add their name to a list that effectively bans them from casinos. You probably don't need to go to such extremes, but seek out people who can help you keep focused on your change over the long term.

The best help will come from people closest to you, so try to get the support of your family, closest friends, and trusted coworkers. If you need more help, find a support group or at least a group of likeminded people who will hold you accountable. Online forums can help if you can't find a local group to turn to. If you need intense help and are willing to invest some money in your efforts, [contact me](#) for coaching.



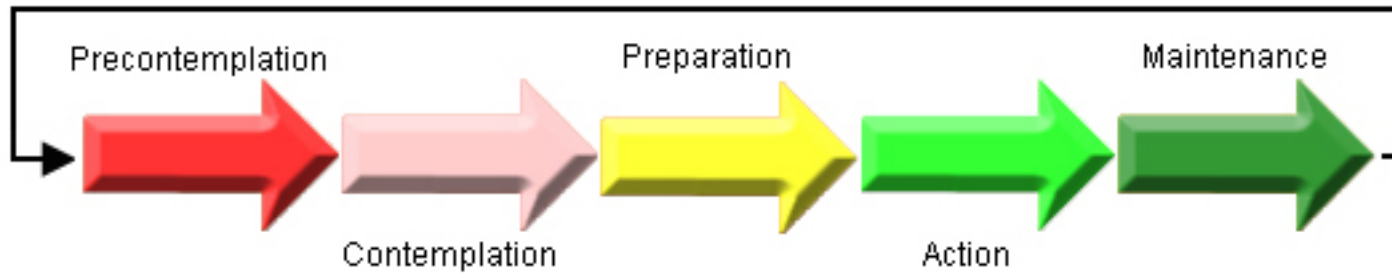
Exercise 4: What if I Relapse?

Chances are that at some point you will backslide in your change efforts. You'll get an injury and have to stop exercising for a few weeks. Stress will get the better of you and you'll stop meditating and start drinking gallons of coffee.

The good news is that you've already made progress, so you won't be going back to zero. The cliché, two steps forward, one step back usually holds true in a change. You've gone at least one step forward, so celebrate that. To start making progress again, try going back to either the preparation stage if you think your plan of attack needs some refinement, or jump straight into action again and start moving forward. Just keep moving forward and keep asking for help until you get to where you want to be.



Conclusion



You've reached the end of this little eBook, but I hope that it is only the beginning of many successful changes in your life! The greatest thing about change is that you learn from each experience and get better at it as you go along.

If you have followed along with the explanations and the exercises, you are well on your way to making one small habit or behavior change that will build a foundation for as many changes as you would like to make.

If you've just read through the book and haven't done any of the exercises yet, do yourself a favor and begin those *today*. The only way to make change is to take action as quickly as possible. As I've written many times already, it will take a minimum of 21 days to establish a new habit, so if you get started today, you can see real progress in just 3 weeks.



If you are ever stuck, or have questions about the best ways to make changes in your life, I'm happy to help. You can contact me by email, through the [Never the Same River Twice](#) blog or through my social media profiles.

- maria@neverthesamerivertwice.com
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Everything Flows,

Maria Gajewski

