



eNewsletter

September 2009

Welcome to the September eNewsletter from Unconscious Potential.

Spring has commenced this month in Australia and the weather has been just wonderful. Spring is a time of change which had me reflecting on the stages we undergo to make permanent changes in our lives.

An important aspect in understanding our behaviour is knowledge of what is called the Stages of Change Model. This model can be useful in understanding the mind/body stages we go through when we do change and provide us with a better insight as to how often do we make resolutions only to let ourselves down ?

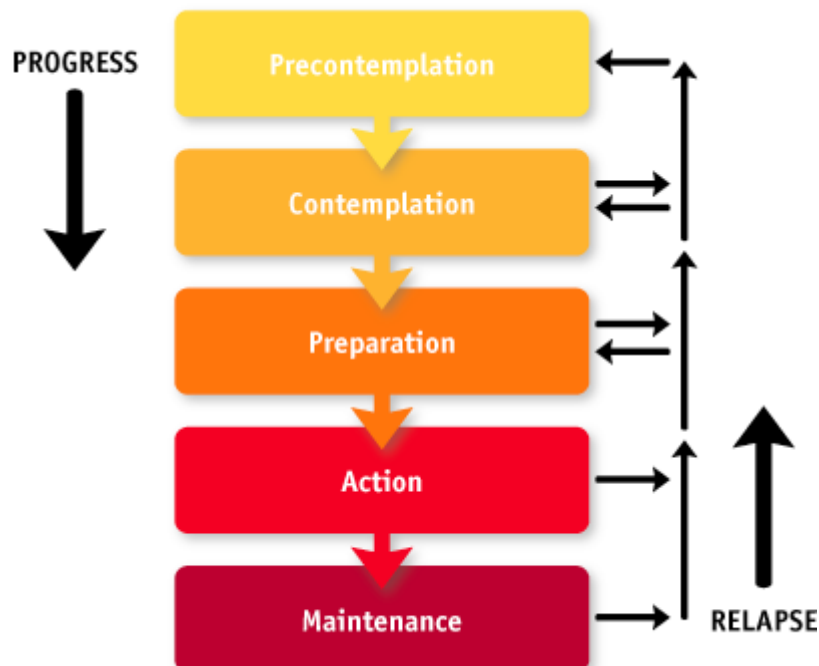
As always, enjoy the read and seek to implement one small change that can make a difference.

Stages of Change

The idea behind the Stages of Change Model is that behavior change does not happen in one step. Rather, people tend to progress through different stages on their way to successful change. Also, each of us progresses through the stages at our own rate. So expecting behavior change by simply telling someone that they should do X or Y can be fruitless (and perhaps counterproductive) because they may not be ready to change.

Each person must decide for himself or herself when a stage is completed and when it is time to move on to the next stage. Moreover, this decision must come from the inside yourself - stable, long term change cannot be externally imposed. In each of the stages, a person has to grapple with a different set of issues and tasks that relate to changing behavior.

The stages of change are shown below





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Looking at each stage in more detail

Precontemplation: - During the precontemplation stage, people are not considering a change. They are not yet ready for change. People in this stage are often described as “in denial” due to claims that their behavior is not a problem. If you are in this stage, you may feel resigned to your current state or believe that you have no control over your behavior. In some cases, people in this stage do not understand that their behavior is damaging or are under-informed about the consequences of their actions.

Helpful Strategies

- Encourage the person to rethink their behaviour
- Encourage self analysis and introspection
- Explain the risks of the current behaviour

Questions to Consider

- Have you ever tried to change this behavior in the past?
- How do you recognize that you have a problem?
- What would have to happen for you to consider your behavior a problem?

Contemplation: - During this stage, people may acknowledge that there is a problem but are not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change. They become more and more aware of the potential benefits of making a change, but the costs tend to outweigh any defined benefits. This conflict creates a strong sense of ambivalence about changing. Because of this uncertainty, the contemplation stage of change can last months or even years. In fact, many people never make it past the contemplation phase. During this stage, you may view change as a process of giving something up rather than a means of gaining emotional, mental, or physical benefits. There is often a level of conflicting emotions in this stage.

Helpful Strategies

- Weigh the Pros and Cons of Changing the Behaviour
- Confirm readiness to change and confirm confidence in your abilities
- Identify barriers you may have to change

Questions to Consider

- Why do you want to change?
- Is there anything preventing you from changing?
- What are some things that could help you make this change?

Preparation: - During this stage, you might begin making small changes to prepare for a larger life change. For example, if losing weight is your goal, you might switch to lower-fat foods. If your goal is to quit smoking, you might switch brands or smoke less each day. You might also take some sort of direct action such as consulting a coach, joining a health club, or reading self-help books.

In this stage, people have made a promise to make a change. Their inspiration for changing is reflected by statements such as: “I’ve got to do something about this. Something has to change. What can I do?” Too often, people skip this stage: they try to move directly from contemplation into action and fall flat because they haven’t adequately researched or accepted what it is going to take to make this major lifestyle change.

If you are in the preparation stage, the support of a coach can improve your chances of successfully making a lasting life change. A coach can support you at this critical stage to be clear of your motivating factors, define clear goals and set up you for success in the next stage of Action.

Action: - During the fourth stage of change, people begin taking direct action in order to accomplish their goals. Oftentimes, resolutions fail because the previous steps have not been given enough thought or time. For example, many people make a New Year’s Resolution to lose weight and immediately start a new exercise regimen, begin eating a healthier diet, and cut back on snacks. These definitive steps are vital to success, but these efforts are often abandoned in a matter of weeks because the previous steps have been overlooked.

If you are currently taking action towards achieving a goal, congratulate and reward yourself for any positive steps you take. Reinforcement and support are extremely important in helping maintain positive steps toward



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change. Take the time to periodically review your motivations, resources, and progress in order to refresh your commitment and belief in your abilities.

Maintenance: - The maintenance phase of the Stages of Change Model involves successfully avoiding former behaviors and keeping up new behaviors. During this stage, people become more assured that they will be able to continue their change.

If you are trying to maintain a new behavior, look for ways to avoid temptation. Try replacing old habits with more positive actions. Reward yourself when you are able to successfully avoid a relapse. If you do lapse, don't be too hard on yourself or give up. Instead, remind yourself that it was just a minor setback. Don't despair, relapses are common and are a part of the process of making a lifelong change.

Relapse: - In any behavior change, relapses are a common occurrence. When you go through a relapse, you might experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and frustration. The key to success is to not let these setbacks undermine your self-confidence. If you lapse back to an old behavior, take a hard look at why it happened. What triggered the relapse? What can you do to avoid these triggers in the future?

While relapses can be difficult, the best solution is to start again with the preparation, action, or maintenance stages of behavior change. You might want to reassess your resources and techniques. Reaffirm your motivation, plan of action, and commitment to your goals. Also, make plans for how you will deal with any future temptations.

Resolutions fail when the proper preparation and actions are not taken. By approaching a goal with an understanding of how to best prepare, act, and maintain a new behavior, you will be more likely to succeed.

In addition, there is one more stage which can be added to the original model

Transcendence

Eventually, if you "maintain maintenance" long enough, you will reach a point where you will be able to work with your emotions and understand your own behavior and view it in a new light. This is the stage of "transcendence," a transcendence to a new life. In this stage, not only is your bad habit no longer an integral part of your life but to return to it would seem atypical, abnormal, even weird to you.

When you reach this point in your process of change, you will know that you have transcended the old bad habits and that you are truly becoming a new "you", who no longer needs the old behaviors to sustain yourself.

The Stages of Change Model (SCM) model is used extensively in coaching and also has a broad application in many areas including lifestyle changes as well as organisational change programs.

References:

Stages of Change - How to Keep a Resolution, Kendra Van Wagner, About.com
<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/>

To Ponder.....

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." (Walt Disney)

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