

Getting Past Obstacles to Personal Change

You're considering taking steps toward a personal change. Maybe you have decided to spend more time with friends or family, learn a language, start a side hustle, or improve your health. What keeps you from moving ahead? Time pressures? Taking care of children or older family members? Financial considerations? Fear of change? Uncertainty about how to get started?

You can get past barriers like these by identifying what they are and treating them as important steps on your route to personal change. With a plan, it is possible to get past whatever stands between you and your goal.

Review your goals and know your motivation

Be sure your main goals and action steps are precisely stated so that you have a clear direction. Begin by asking yourself why you want to achieve the goal or goals you've set for yourself.

- What excites you about your goal? Make sure your goal is not a “should” and that it aligns with your personal values and sense of purpose.
- How would reaching your goal change your life? Be specific and think beyond “feeling better.”

Recognize your strengths

A good first step toward reaching your goals is to recognize the strengths you have. For example, was there a time in the past when you did something similar? What helped you that time? Which of your personal characteristics will benefit you now? Are you persistent, determined, creative, organized, or open to new experiences? Who in your life do you have supporting you in this goal?

Identify your barriers to personal change

Another step in achieving your goals is to write down the obstacles that are getting in your way. Once you have them written down, prioritize your obstacles, listing the toughest challenges at the top of the list. Say you want to take a class and money is a concern, but free time is in even shorter supply — you would list “free time” before “finances.” Your list might look like this:

1. Not enough free time.
2. It would stretch my budget.
3. Afraid I will fail or won't advance in my career even if I go back to school.
4. Don't even know where to begin.

There is great value in writing down what is holding you back. The process will help make these obstacles clear in your mind and will allow you to figure out ways to get past them.

Make a plan to overcome your obstacles

First, identify what skills and resources you need to achieve your goals. Then, looking at your list of barriers start to identify ways to overcome each one and create an action plan.

Brainstorm all of the possible ways to overcome the obstacles you have listed. Document each idea you come up with, even the ones that seem far-fetched. If a busy schedule is preventing you from making changes, for example, your brainstorming list might look something like this:

- Keep a daily log of my schedule for one week.
- Identify time wasters and find ways to eliminate them.
- Cut out an hour a week of TV and use this time to work on my goals.
- Ask my family for help with household tasks.
- Talk with my supervisor about changing my work schedule if I am eligible for flexible work arrangements.

Use your brainstorming list to form a plan to overcome your obstacles. Prioritize your ideas, identifying the ones that you know you can work on right away. Then, put your plan in writing. Include a brief description of the obstacle, the actions you will take to get past it, and your timeline. Write down quick reminders or enter them into your phone. Try a goal-setting app that gives you a place to gather and organize your ideas.

Set deadlines for yourself. You're more likely to act on the plan if you give yourself a timeframe in which to complete it. Keep deadlines realistic. If you have decided to save enough money to join a gym, for example, you can tighten personal spending right away, but you may get discouraged if you expect to save up your entire yearly membership fee in a month. Think of the little things that can make a difference in your savings such as making coffee at home, instead of picking it up at a coffee shop on the way to work.

Tackle the obstacles in an organized manner. You may feel overwhelmed if you try to overcome all of your barriers at once. Go slowly and start with one or two at a time. Break down the task of overcoming each barrier into the smallest possible steps and give each barrier your full attention until you've succeeded in overcoming it. Then move on to the next barrier on your list.

Use technology to help you stay on track. You can find a free or low-cost app that will let you monitor and record your progress toward almost any goal. If you'd like to improve your health, consider investing in a wearable device that will help keep track of food intake and exercise activity during the day.

Take a break. If it's stalled or you're feeling pressured, give yourself a breather. Take time out to review your main goal and your motivation as well as your approach. You may realize that this is not the right goal for you and discover a clearer path to what you really want. Making a change is really a series of small transitions, and it takes time. Be patient with yourself.

Prioritize your time. To overcome barriers and reach your goal, you may have to make room in your schedule by saying no to some things in your life.

Reframe. Try finding the opportunities within your challenges, converting each obstacle on your list into a positive statement. Say to yourself, "I can make free time by watching less TV." Just telling yourself that you can find the time will help you think positively. If you don't believe you can change, your expectations will be self-defeating.

Remember that you can always try again. Just because you gave in and splurged by having a meal out today doesn't mean you can't start saving again later today by eating dinner at home. Taking charge of your life means inevitable challenges, so best to tell yourself, "OK, I did that, but now let's get back on track."

Celebrate. Reward yourself every step of the way. Celebrate each success. Recognizing your small successes will build your confidence and motivation.

Seek support

It will be easier to stick to your plan with others cheering you on. Knowing that someone is championing your progress will help to motivate you as well.

Find someone who can help you recognize what is within your power to change and what isn't. If you don't know anyone who could help you or if you would prefer to work with a professional who can support you through the process of making changes, consider hiring a life or career coach. Coaches help with accountability and overcoming obstacles, as well as helping you recognize what is realistic and attainable. The [International Coach Federation](#) has information on coaching.

Find someone who will hold you accountable for working toward your goals, and check in with them on a regular basis. If you know you will have to report on your progress each week, you will be motivated to do the work necessary to have something to report. Ask one or more close friends, family members, or co-workers to help you stay on track. Make sure they are people you trust and who will encourage you without nagging. Let them know what kinds of support will help you move ahead and what to do when you fall behind. Or join an online community that will give you a place to talk about your progress and get encouragement from people with similar goals.

Find a partner who is also trying to make a personal change. Pair up with someone and agree to help each other along the way toward your goals.

Hold yourself accountable. Schedule activities and reminders in your calendar to help with accountability. Check to see that you are on task, and measure your progress along the way by crossing off each item as it is completed. Even the smallest steps can help motivate you to stay on track toward your goal.

Share your successes and disappointments with people you trust. There will be successes and disappointments along the way. Know in advance whom to call for comfort and encouragement after a setback. Celebrate advances and positive changes you are making with people you love.

Ask others for ideas. Someone you know may be able to relate to your experiences or may know of someone else who can help. If caring for your family is draining you of the time and energy to eat right and exercise, talk with others who are in similar situations to see how they fit healthy habits into their schedules.

Remember to ask for help. At times, the work required to remove barriers to personal change may seem overwhelming. Your organization's assistance program may be able to help you find resources and support.

With a well-thought-out plan and the help of supportive people, you will be able to get past the obstacles to making a personal change.



 English

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