

The Four Major Obstacles to Lasting Change

The biggest obstacles to change are fear, lack of motivation, lack of knowledge and lack of vision. People will not change if they fear failure, if they don't have a reason to, if they don't know how to or if they don't know where change will take them. If you want to inspire change in others, you have to make their future rewards stronger than their current fears. If changes are to be lasting and successful, it is essential to have the necessary reinforcement and tools at your disposal to assist you in the transformation process. First of all, we know that one must have the desire before change can take place. Therefore, dangling bait in front of somebody's nose is useless if it's not something they find desirable. What do they want, and do they want it *enough*? The desire has to be there.

Second, their desire must be coupled with enthusiasm. They can't say to themselves, "That would be nice." They really have to feel like, "All right, let's do this!" Not like, "Yeah, I want that, but..." For lasting change to manifest in them, there is no room for half-heartedness or apathetic feelings on the part of your prospects. They must embrace change as their vehicle and *step on the gas*!

Third, your prospects must be open to suggestions, input and new ideas. Nothing is going to change if they keep doing the same things they've been doing all along, right? So, they've got to be open to new possibilities, new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things. People can't *act* differently if they don't *think* differently, and they can't *think* differently if they aren't open to new information.

Fourth, your prospects must have a positive outlook on change as a growing process that will not take place overnight. Nothing sucks the energy out of someone faster than the realization of unrealistic goals or false hopes. At the very first encounter of struggle, such individuals shrink away in defeat. The challenges seem too daunting, or they slide into a negative, complacent attitude, thinking, "See, I knew it wouldn't work..." Then they're just back to where they started, or worse.

Since it is one of the leading obstacles to positive, lasting change, let's first talk about fear. First of all, what is this debilitating but alarmingly common emotion? It is anxiety or tension that is caused by danger, apprehension, harm, pain or destruction. Fear stems from sources that can be real or imagined. The danger of unchecked fear is that it becomes a vicious cycle: You shy away from things because you're afraid of them, which in turn deprives you of crucial experience, which in turn feeds your lack of knowledge, which is one of the very things that makes you afraid in the first place. Whatever the root of the fear is, there is one thing that is always constant: Fear is an emotion, and like any emotion, it can be redirected. Consider the fact that psychiatrists find only two fears in a newborn baby: fear of falling and fear of loud noises. In other words, all other fears are learned, which means they can also be *unlearned*. Sounds too easy, doesn't it? Let's take a look at the four main steps in overcoming fear.

- 1. Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of what is triggering your fears.** Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Knowledge is the antidote to fear." This statement is so true. We always hear the saying "the fear of the unknown." I'm sure you can think of several examples, both historically and in modern times, of people who responded irrationally to situations and to people they didn't understand. Has this type of response ever proven to be a *good* thing? I can't personally think of a time when it has. Knowledge is never going to hurt you. What you don't know, however, *will* hurt you. In this particular case, knowledge is only going to better equip you to grab your fears by the horns. So, how does one acquire this knowledge? If you don't already know, deep down, what you fear, you've got to pinpoint *exactly* what you're afraid of. Isolate the fear-inducing thing, person or situation—whatever it is—in writing. Write it down!
- 2. Ask yourself: What is the worst thing that could happen?** Take a serious look at your fear in the face. Is the worst-case scenario a life-and-death situation? Could it even really be considered devastating? And even if it could, will it be more devastating to live an unfulfilled life than to take the chance? You gain strength, courage and confidence with every experience in which you confront

your fears, no matter how painful. In retrospect, you are always able to say to yourself, “I lived through this. I made it. I can handle whatever else may come along.” Eleanor Roosevelt once very wisely said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

- 3. Allow yourself to feel capable of overcoming your fears.** Try to visualize your success, to feel what success would feel like. Success has to be real in your mind before you can make it real in true life. We always hear the saying that “seeing is believing.” Well, actually, in a case like this, *believing first* will mean seeing down the road. You can’t achieve what your mind doesn’t believe. Martin Luther King said it best: “Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.” When you can see positive transformation, when it becomes a part of you, it will happen. Every time you feel capable and you mentally see yourself making the changes you want to make, a little chunk of internal doubt will erode away.
- 4. Take decisive action right away.** Once you’ve pinpointed exactly what your fear is, you’ve mentally confronted the worst-case scenario and you’ve let yourself work through the emotions of what your success is going to feel like, then you must take immediate and decisive action to diminish and ultimately overcome your fear. Hesitation only allows fear to fester and enlarge. Do something about it, before that fear continues to grow! Taking action will empower you. Doing nothing will just perpetuate your feelings of helplessness.

Now let’s talk about the second most common obstacle to positive, lasting change: lack of motivation. We all have those days when we just don’t feel like doing what we need to do. We intend to, but then it still doesn’t happen. Well, not only do we have “those days,” but we could probably point to such a scenario *every single* day! Procrastination is just part of the human condition—“Oh, I’ll get to it...later....” How do we muster the motivation to get things done and to stay on track, even during those inevitable times when we just don’t feel like it?

Basically, there are only two things that motivate us in life: inspiration and desperation. We either move toward that which inspires us, or we move away from something that fills us with despair or discomfort. The majority of the world's population uses desperation as a motivator. Desperation is like a cattle prod forcing you to move forward and take action. I can motivate anyone in the world with desperation. The problem is that motivation that is spurred by desperation doesn't last. Think of that person you know who is always lying on the couch. If you douse the couch with gasoline and light a match, you'll see instant motivation. But once the fire is out, you will see her/him turn back into a lazy person.

If you want motivation to last, you have to rely on inspiration. The positive results that spring from using inspiration as a motivator are obvious. Inspired people tend to be proactive, passionate and driven. They are happier and enjoy greater life fulfillment than those who are desperation-driven. If you just check the help-wanted section of your newspaper, these types of inspired people are always in demand. To be most effective, inspiration needs to be internalized. Motivation becomes long-term when the intended goal taps into one's inner drive and emotion. The key to finding success lies in being emotionally motivated with a purpose.

The third obstacle to positive, lasting change is lack of knowledge. Sometimes, people are immobilized from moving ahead simply because they don't know what to do or where to begin. To bring change about in your life, you need the necessary knowledge to make that change successful. Consider what you can read, whom you can talk to, what seminar or workshop you can attend. Who could be your coach? Discover all the resources that are available to you. Remember, there is no challenge so unique that humanity has never seen or heard of it before. There are always going to be others who have been through what you're experiencing and who will know exactly what you're up against. It is much better to get as much information as you can from those individuals who have gone before you than to try to figure everything out on your own.

Think of acquiring knowledge in terms of your own personal development program. Did you know that there is a direct relationship between your personal development program and your income? In the sales industry, we've found the more CDs listened to, the more books read and the more seminars attended, the higher the salesperson's income. Brian Tracy tells people that their income will double every year if they just read thirty minutes a day. Lastly, consider that fact that most homes worth over a quarter of a million dollars have a library. I'm not saying that a huge income is your major goal—maybe it is, maybe it isn't—but the point is, increased knowledge impacts your output, in whatever form it takes on

The bottom line is, the more you learn, the more you earn. Anything you could possibly ever wonder about has most likely already been written about, so invest in the books, the CDs, the seminars and the professional advice that are going to give you the knowledge you need to get ahead. As your knowledge increases, you will experience a parallel increase in motivation and desire. Researchers at Harvard University found that those who are learning and growing every day are more optimistic about life. They are more enthusiastic about where they're going and what they're going to accomplish. Conversely, those who aren't learning and growing every day become negative, pessimistic and doubtful about themselves and their future.

The last major obstacle to positive, lasting change is lack of vision. As we discussed earlier, being able to visualize your success first is crucial to it actually playing out in real life. If your mind can't conceive it, you sure won't achieve it! Since belief dictates behavior, you've got to believe first. And it is much easier to believe in something if you can visualize it. So, take the time to vividly imagine and play out in your mind exactly what your successes are. Let your mind create all the details—it's got to be as real and authentic in your mind as possible. Taste it, touch it, feel it, eat it, drink it, sleep it, breathe it. Some may find such visualization a frivolous expenditure of time, but I cannot stress its importance strongly enough: This activity is VERY worthwhile! When I find people who have not tapped into this success skill, I know they are broke. Again, beliefs and attitudes shape your future!

Vision is a powerful tool in helping you see the big picture. Once you begin to have a grasp on where today fits into the future, suddenly everything you do today matters. Vision gives us energy, passion and a reason for living, growing and working hard.

Knowing exactly where you want to go is the surest way to end aimless “going through the motions.” Stephen Covey said, “To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.”

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