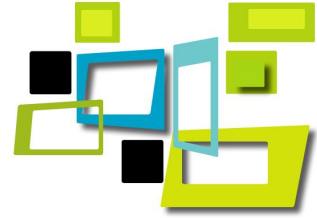




## Next Chapter NEW LIFE

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### CAN A PERSON MAKE REAL CHANGE?

By Dorothy Tannahill Moran

That's a great question. At some point in your life, you have witnessed in yourself and perhaps others, attempts at making changes to their life which simply didn't "take". The range of changes is everything from losing weight to ending a bad relationship or smoking. Whatever the example, we have all had an opportunity to experience what seemed like good attempts but for some reason, the good attempt failed. It can leave one to wonder if, at some point, we become too solidified in various behaviors to really change. Let me set this stage by first saying: yes, we can and do make real changes all the time. I need to add that there is a bit of a process to it, but it's not rocket science so it's all available for us to do.

I usually end with a Pearl of Wisdom but on this topic this needs to be said upfront. If you are considering changing someone else: don't. You only have control over yourself. You will only frustrate yourself and tick off the other person if you make them the focus of YOUR desire to change THEM. You need to work on acceptance, but that's another article.

The process for change starts first with positioning yourself to find the need and desire to make a change. It's like what you hear about addictions, you first must recognize you have a problem before you can start doing anything about it. Along with the recognition of the issue itself, you need to spend time truly analyzing how it impacts your life. You or someone needs to ask the tough questions like: How does this get in the way of accomplishing things you want to do? What would your life be like if this issue didn't exist? How DOES this impact your life? It's not enough to say "I'm over weight and I know I shouldn't be". You need to know at your core why it really is an issue. For this process step to be useful in spurring you on to action, you may need to research the issue by reading or talking to people. This is not a waste of time. Too often people will take a run at changing an issue, before they feel any real need to make the change. When it doesn't work, they walk away wondering why or maybe rationalizing that "I knew it wouldn't work". Once you truly have internalized the need to make a change, it will help drive you forward to the next steps.

The next step is to understand the options for making the change. For a smoker it may be a selection of things like nicotine gum, hypnotherapy, or medications. You need to spend some time educating

yourself on the entire range of possibilities to select from. Not all solutions are useful for all people, so it's helpful to understand what's available and how it might work. Then, narrow down the choices to the ones that you think will work for you.

Let me pause here to make a comment. People that are facing behavioral issues like procrastination or anxiety follow the same process as anyone making any kind of change. I have noticed that people often time feel more resigned to these aspects in them, thinking that because it is something internal, they can't be helped. Let me tell you, it's all internal. It all requires work but the payoff can be worth the effort.

Once you have determined the options that you think will work best for you, it's time to prepare for the change. Preparation is the act of modifying your environment, accumulating the required resources and creating your action plan. In this step, you may find it useful to counsel with key people in your life about the work you plan to undertake and what role you would like them to play. You can not underestimate the issues that arise with key people in your life, when you undertake a change. Mostly, they will resist anything that represents change for them, which includes you making a change. An example of how this might work is if you decide to stop drinking, your drinking friends will continue to offer you drink and may pressure you to resume. It works the same if you are dieting, they will offer you extra food. Recognize that this is not an evil plot to undermine your change efforts. When one person in a "system" (system meaning family or group) changes, the system will continue to work to bring it back to its previous normal behavior. If you know that from the start, you can determine the best way to handle this. For some people, they have to avoid the people that may undermine their efforts. You may be able to simply make your request: "I'm going to be modifying my eating habits in order to make myself healthier, I need your support".

Other preparation steps may be obtaining assistance to help reinforce new behavior, provide support and give guidance. You may need to keep a daily journal of affirmations to help you modify your internal dialogue. Preparation is an important step, much like preparing to go on a trip. You don't just launch out the door. You plan the route, get the car fueled, make reservations and do the research.

You now have motivation, reason and a plan. It's time to take action. This is the action of change. Each day will be a challenge because you are going against the grain of something that has come natural to you. It is said it takes 21 days of repeated action to change a habit. You are changing a habit, so just know that for a while your new behavior will be something that doesn't yet come naturally to you. During this time, if you backslide, just acknowledge what lead up it, make adjustments and continue on. The road will not be straight and smooth and if you know that coming into this step you will be better positioned to make it through this stage successfully. You can't beat yourself up but you need to learn a lesson so you will be even better as you move forward.

Once you have reached your goal you are not done with the change work. You now enter into a maintenance phase. This is an important step because it reinforces the work you have done to make a change. Based on the work you have done in the various stages, you can use that information for your maintenance. If you now know what triggers your old behavior, you either avoid circumstances that the

trigger will occur or you create a self management plan to help you respond appropriately. If you removed tempting foods while losing weight, don't bring them back home now that you hit your goal.

People can and do change every day in many spectacular ways. Change is a process with preparation and planning at its core. It's possible for you to make the changes in your life you want to make. It takes effort but the payoff is well worth it.