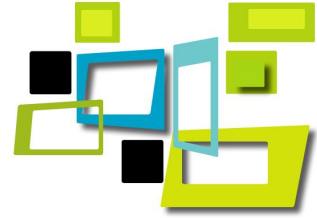




Next Chapter NEW LIFE

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WHY IS IT SO HARD TO MAKE PERSONAL CHANGE?

By Dorothy Tannahill Moran

Sometime in our youth we come to understand the issue and challenge of making personal changes. We carry that understanding with us forever, yet many people never decide to become its master. We avoid change like the plague. We do everything we can to “make it NOT happen”. Don’t you find that interesting? Change is the only constant we have in life yet we dread it and react with panic. We also don’t pass down much wisdom about dealing with it from one generation to the next.

There is a duality that exists in our society about change. On one hand, we are a country that was formed due to a drive for change and as a result, we are a change dependent nation. We count on new everything. We expect new cars, computers, bodies, presidents and attitudes. On the other hand, we ignore it, we avoid it and in doing so, we don’t help each other move through change.

There are multiple factors feeding into this issue. Before I go into them, let me say that change is a process. The change and transition process are well studied and there are very effective things a person can do to maximize the opportunity that change represents.

The main reason change is so hard to do is it usually represents some kind of habitual behavior. Habits help us cut down on the energy and effort it takes to function each day. Some habits are great, like brushing your teeth. Other habits are bad, like over eating. We are clueless about some habits like interpersonal skills. We know we don’t obtain great results with some people, but often we don’t know why. Even our thoughts are habits, such as being defensive or happy. Habits serve a purpose, but aren’t always helpful. Habits also can be a very unconscious drive that we don’t even give much thought to, we just do something a certain way.

Your first step toward change is to be conscious of the NEED to change. Easier said than done. This means you first must recognize an issue, then you need to really “get it” at your emotional and rational core. You must become emotional impacted by the need for change. For several years I packed around some extra pounds and clearly knew I was overweight. At the same time, I was totally fine with it and did nothing. So, on one level I knew I had an issue, but it didn’t make it into my core being what the issue or motivation for change would be. When I finally made the decision, it wasn’t a “lightning bolt” but rather tiny little steps in that direction. I’ve had other changes to make that did strike me and instantly I started making a change. In this regard, you may need patience with yourself.

The rule of thumb about habits is that it takes 21 days of repeated action to start forming a new habit. It doesn't sound like much, until you try doing it. Because the new thing is not a habit, it means you have to consciously make yourself do something. Because it's not a habit means you have to remember to do the new thing at the appropriate time. For most of us, it will mean you have to develop a system of some sort to reinforce this new action until it becomes a habit. A system is simply something you build into your daily routine that will trigger you to do certain things. It can be setting the timer on your watch or writing a sticky note and putting it on the refrigerator.

Another aspect to consider is the payoff you receive. Our actions reflect what works for us even if those actions aren't positive or healthy. Somewhere along your life path, you thought or acted a certain way and got some kind of pay off. One of our most common issues is having negative beliefs (thoughts) about our self. The process might go something like this: You miss a question on a test. You say "I'm so stupid". The payoff is that you don't have to "take credit" for missing the question because YOU'RE STUPID. Of course, you missed it! The payoff is subtle. The payoff here is both a rationalization and lack of responsibility. You may have a habit that you no longer even know what the payoff is. Self examination is usually required as part of the change process.

Lastly, there is often a social aspect to change that will make your change a challenge. Depending on the change, the people around you can make it difficult to make changes. We are all part of social fabric and when one thread attempts to change, the fabric will reinforce the previous behavior. Change of one person in a group usually means the entire group changes to some degree. You are multiplying the change by the number of people in your personal network by the impact of your change.

It's important to point out that change does present opportunities. It's an enticing but much over looked outcome of change. Sometimes, it doesn't always look like there might be an opportunity but eventually most people do recognize the good that came by making change. I have talked with numerous people over the years that were devastated by losing their jobs but in the long run found it was just what they needed to go on to do the next great thing.

If I was going to leave you with one Pearl of Wisdom about making change, it would be to learn from your changes. If you use each change that comes your way as an opportunity to fine tune your process and attitude going forward, you will become masterful. Share your wisdom about change with others. If there is one thing you can do for the next generation it would be to honor change at a personal level the same way we honor new innovations.