

# Are You *Really* Ready For Change?

As clinical psychologist, Shari Lewchanin explains<sup>1</sup>, “*just because a client comes to my office with a fistful of money and asks me to help them stop smoking - it doesn't mean that they are really ready to give up cigarettes!*” This statement tells us that good intentions are one thing; and putting a commitment to task is another. It also suggests that a commitment doesn't end once conceived. Quite the contrary.

A commitment to change is only the beginning of a long journey of events – all of which are *intended* to fulfill a goal. Yet, as we see with the clinical psychologist's patient, goals cannot be achieved without an action plan and follow through.

## There's Never Enough Time...

Throughout the last 22 years, I've come to realize that one's intentions and eagerness, *while important and necessary* – are not *necessarily sufficient* to reach their goals and achieve what they see as “practice success”. With this awareness, it has become our goal to uncover that which impedes change, in an effort to build a stronger means to achieving results for our clients.

Likewise, as we evaluated the results of our coaching and consulting, we discovered that what we proposed was oftentimes hindered due to an overwhelming feeling of insufficient time. Even when the client or team members had the very best intentions, they felt they didn't have the necessary time to even consider implementation, let alone start something new. Sure it all sounded good in theory, but when the consultant left, they were inundated with their primary tasks – and the thought of adding on something new to that list – *was out of the question*.

This heightened our awareness to our clients' “*change curve*”, which highlighted the need to transform our services into a “coach/consultant”, rather than just consultant. It is believed that coaching, an “*ongoing relationship that focuses on clients taking action*”, may be more likely to produce long-term results than just consulting, which is defined as simply “*giving advice*”.

Don't get me wrong. Consultants are a valuable commodity. We provide expert advice. We identify a problem and then resolve it for you. How easy is that! Coaches, on the other hand, ask questions and give feedback so that the client can take ownership of their issues and discover their own solutions. The coach doesn't go away after a problem has been solved. They keep nudging the client to follow through with their intended actions.

## But it Doesn't Feel Right!

The time factor isn't the only culprit that sabotages change. Other factors, like physical or physiological discomfort can also come into play. Team members can experience an uncomfortable feeling when behaving in new ways that appeared to be very foreign to them. The unfamiliarity with new verbal skills or organizational routines can end up impeding their commitment. Often times the embarrassment yields an unwillingness to push through to a level of comfort through repetition and refinement.

When this is the case, an individual will typically fall back into old habits while taking on counterproductive assumptions. With this mindset, it then becomes easier to justify why change should not be implemented, which can put an end to *what they believe to be* a negative outcome anyway. The only problem is that nothing ever changes, therefore outcomes never change - and complaining continues to perpetuate the cycle of dissatisfaction.

## Six Degrees of Change

In an effort to propel our clients beyond the seminar “high” or consultation “aha” experience, we studied the findings of Kathleen Miller, PH.D and Shari Lewchanin, PYS.D who discovered that there were 6 distinct stages of change that need to take place to ensure permanent results.

We adopted this framework to represent a progressive model for our clients. We began with the **1**st degree of change, which involved **pre-contemplation**. At this initial stage, our clients have no awareness of a particular problem. We found that when there is limited awareness, the client is more prone to resist or minimize the perception of need. Therefore it is our responsibility to increase their awareness in order to proceed through the cycle of change.

If we have succeeded in helping to increase their awareness for the need to change, then we enter the second degree of change. The **2**nd degree of change involves **contemplation**. Contemplation is where our clients now gain an increased awareness of the problem, yet levels of ambivalence and resistance to change still exist. At this stage it becomes our responsibility to present solutions designed to decrease the level of ambivalence and resistance.

If we have succeeded in helping to dissolve those issues, then we enter into the third degree of change. The **3**rd degree is a stage that truly prepares our clients for change. It involves **goal setting** that supports behavior modification. Without these goals, there would be no plan to follow. A master plan ensures our clients will not stray off course – which is vitally essential in obtaining long-term results.

After a plan has been established, we enter the **4**th degree of change. The fourth degree involves **putting the plan into action**. This is the “doing” part of the change process. You would think this is the easiest of all stages, yet it is often the most sabotaged. Much of this is

due to the mindset that there isn't enough time to "do" any more than they are already doing. Did you know that we all have the same 24 hours in a day. It is simply the way we chose to spend our time. Perhaps what is called for here is simply a process of prioritizing.

There is also a fair amount of discomfort associated with the learning of new habits. Combine *discomfort* with the overwhelming feeling of not enough *time* – and you have a greater appreciation as to why so many people drop the ball at this level of change.

The key here is to realistically account for the learning curve and to acknowledge that change will be uncomfortable, at least initially. If we listen to what change enthusiasts tell us – *that it takes at least 21 days to change a habit*, we can quickly understand that our perfectionist personalities create unreasonable expectations. Because of this trait, we invite our clients to give themselves permission to fail, providing they agree to "fail forward". Which simply means each mistake becomes a lesson which allows us to get back on our feet and begin anew. *Giving up is not an option!*

Once they are back in the game, constantly aware of their behavior, they need to create a set of tactics to keep them on track. Often times this is the sole intent of follow up coaching sessions. When they reach this level of consciousness, they have entered the fifth degree of change. The **5<sup>th</sup>** degree is referred to as "**maintenance insurance.**" It is the stage that ensures that new actions are consistent. Likewise, a strategy should be in place to prevent a relapse. If however, a relapse does occur, they simply re-enter the game and continue on to the sixth degree of change.

The **6<sup>th</sup>** degree is the pinnacle that allows behavior to become routine and permanent. When we initially reach this stage, we are almost too tempted to breathe a sigh of relief – a sigh that can take us ten steps backward. At no time however should the client or the client's coach take this level for granted. Just because new behavior may appear to be in process, there is always potential to relapse. Therefore, all new habits require focused commitment and a strong will to achieve long term success. The true test is in making new behavior permanent for the long haul.

As Stewart B. Johnson once said, "Our business goal in life is not to get ahead of others, but rather to get ahead of ourselves." In essence, changing behavior is all about getting ahead of ourselves.

## Blending

If we base the importance of change on the process of "getting ready" and we wish to insure long term sustainability, then it would be prudent to seek help from an individual that has acquired a blend of coaching skills and consulting skills. This will reinforce the need for an on-going relationship and ensure that you take an active part in creating your own vision, goals and desires.

Both coaches and consultants can act as an outside professional resource or “change agent” for the client – but both must have expertise in the business in which they are coaching, and be highly skilled in listening, observing, interviewing and intervention facilitation.

Blending is a process, according to KRW international, that helps the client “*align their hearts, heads and souls in all aspects of their influence and decision making while honoring the interconnectedness of the world*”. What is most important to remember is that good intentions cannot change the world into a better place – without action. Hence, affirmation without action can only be a delusion.

When we discover what is not working in our lives, it is far easier to verbalize what we intend to do about it, than it is to actually do that which we intended. Needless to say, the process of affirming and doing (while critically important) is not sufficient enough to ensure that new behaviors will become routine.

## Progress Always Involves Risk

Frederick Wilcox once said, “*You can’t steal 2<sup>nd</sup> base, while keeping your foot on 1<sup>st</sup>!*” Change always involves risk. Do you have the courage to take those risks? Are you willing to stretch outside your comfort zone and cross that imaginary abyss called “*fear of change*”?

If so, be mindful to surround yourself with individuals that share your vision; and avoid the “nay-sayers.” It may also behoove you to first determine your tolerance for the “*pain of change*” as it will become the measurement for success.

Likewise, support *group thinking* and demonstrate your willingness to hear out any objections. This will ensure that your attitudes and beliefs will be more realistic and beneficial to all concerned. ☞

## BIO

Risa Simon, a certified management consultant and has earned the mark of CMC from the Institute of Management Consultants USA which represents evidence of the highest standards of consulting and adherence to the ethical canons of the profession. Risa is also the founder and president of Simon Says Solutions, located in Scottsdale Arizona. Her firm specializes in consulting and coaching services, clinical efficiency and motivational seminars; and educational resource books and videotapes. Risa continues to be a featured speaker for several major dental associations nationwide. This article is an excerpt from portions of Risa’s seminar entitled: “*Go The Distance- Make A Difference!*” For more information call 480 575 9353; or email [risa@simonsaysolutions.com](mailto:risa@simonsaysolutions.com) or visit [www.simonsaysolutions.com](http://www.simonsaysolutions.com)

## References:

1. Miller, Kathleen D & Lewchanin, Shari, “Getting Ready to Get Ready for Change” Consulting to Management Volume 12, Number 3 September 2001. pg 42-44.
2. Bennett, John L & Martin, Debrah J. “The Next Professional Wave”, Consulting to Management Volume 12, Number 3 September 2001. pg 6-8.