

EXERCISE CHANGE

BUILD, STRENGTHEN AND MAINTAIN
MOTIVATION TO EXERCISE



LEARN ABOUT THE MYSTERY AND MAGIC OF CHANGE
TAKE ACTION AND TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR
HEALTH AND FITNESS

Matt Williams

A KINDLE
SELF HELP
ADVENTURE

Praise for *Exercise Change*

“This book demonstrates how powerful our minds are and helps you to understand how thoughts affect behaviour and the role this plays in making positive changes. Embracing change opens the door to opportunities and *Exercise Change* provides you with the resources to make things that you thought were impossible happen.”

Monty Betham, *former Professional Boxer, New Zealand Rugby League footballer and the Founder of the Monty Betham Steps for Life Foundation*

“Many people talk about the importance of motivation and the need to change habits in the pursuit of optimal health and well-being yet very few offer real, simple and effective tools and advise for people to actually achieve this. This book not only offers sound and practical advice to help us achieve great things but lights the spark for motivation itself. An excellent resource and guide for anyone wanting to achieve success and for those who have stopped believing in themselves this is a must read, I believe it will change your life”

Lee-Anne Wann, *Health & Fitness Specialist, Vodafone Warriors Team Nutritionist, Radio Live Health Expert, Author & Presenter*

“Motivation is not about will power, it is about understanding and working with what fuels our ‘won’t’ power! In this easy to read book Matt has usefully drawn together current theories on motivation, which can help the ambivalent or repeatedly slipping reader better reach their exercise goals. For example, he allows the reader to understand how brain function is so much more than simply ‘mind over matter’, and how through working with the brain, rather than against it, desired exercise change becomes more likely. This is simply a must read for anyone who has had the best of exercise intentions, but keeps falling short of their targets.”

Anton Ashcroft, *Forensic Psychologist and Chartered Consultant*

“Approaches to exercise and physical change can be many and varied, some less successful than others. What this book succeeds in doing is drawing on experiences and conclusions that actually work, and have been proven to work. Sometimes it is honest, sometimes inspirational, but one thing is for sure, if you can buy into the messages this book portrays you will be successful.”

Andrew Ellis, *Canterbury Wizard and New Zealand Black Cap*

“Motivation is not something we have, it is something we do; it is behaviour, it is acting upon our hopes, desires and reasons for changing. In this book Matt has captured this idea superbly. It takes the reader on a journey of exploring how to get to the starting position, but

more importantly how to establish the habits of change and maintain these over time. All of us know the challenges of motivation; it waxes and wanes and can be easily disturbed and interrupted. Life often gets in the way of our best intentions. Being able to recognise this process and get back up, is the test of true motivation which Matt has captured in this book. “

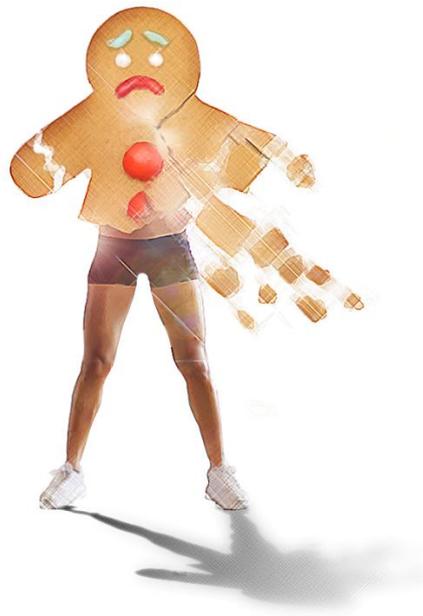
Ken McMaster, Principal Trainer, Hall McMaster & Associates

“This book covers all aspects of how to exercise change by drawing on knowledge from a wide range of elite athletes and exercise enthusiasts, all of whom have experienced success in their chosen pursuits. This information is second to none and is guaranteed to help anyone wanting to exercise change.”

Kagan Orton, Mr Universe Junior (Nabba) 2013 and Mr World Junior (Nabba) 2012

“Read this book – it might just change your life! Exercise Change is a self-help book written in a refreshing and inspirational style. The author presents the information in this book in an intelligent and informed manner and, through the presentation of the unique ‘Exercise Motivation Change Cycle’ model, explains how readers can go about successfully making the positive changes they’ve always wanted to make. As a blend of motivational theory and practice, this book is completely original in outlook and, I guarantee, will not disappoint.”

R. Hyde Parker, Writer, Editor and Translator



EXERCISE CHANGE

Build, Strengthen and Maintain Motivation to Exercise

Learn about the Mystery and Magic of Change - Take Action and Take Control of your
Health and Fitness

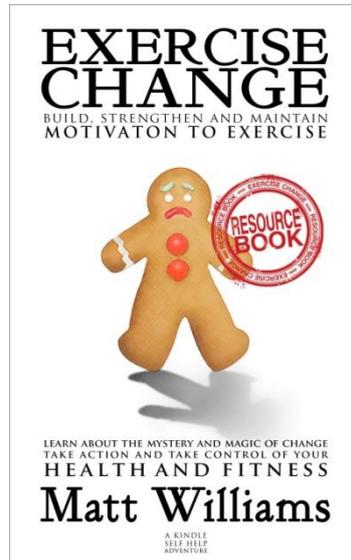
A kindle self-help adventure

By Matt Williams



EXERCISECHANGE
B O O K S

Accompanying Resource Book



With over 100 ADDITIONAL PAGES of material, the accompanying resource book, which includes a large variety of printable activity sheets, exercises and journals, will provide you with everything you will ever need when making an exercise related change.

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Access other Exercise Change resources here [ExerciseChange.co.nz/Resources](https://www.exercisechange.co.nz/Resources)

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About the author

Matt Williams is the author of several books including ‘Exercise Change: Build, Strengthen and Maintain Motivation to Exercise’, and is the creator of [ExerciseChange.co.nz](https://www.ExerciseChange.co.nz)

Matt is a devoted husband, father and fitness fanatic who makes understanding change, and how to make the most of it, a priority. He has used the information in this book to successfully change many aspects of his own life as well as to teach thousands of others to do the same.



Visit the author's website here [ExerciseChange.co.nz](https://www.ExerciseChange.co.nz)

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EXERCISE

- 1) Physical or mental exertion carried out to improve or sustain health and fitness: *exercise improves heart and lung power, and mental alertness*
- 2) Something undertaken or performed in order to practice or train: *exercises aimed at improving self-awareness*
- 3) A putting into action, use or effect: *exercising self-control*

CHANGE

- 1) To transform, convert, modify or make something different from what it is, or from what it would be if left alone: *to change ones physical appearance and mental state*
- 2) To substitute one situation or thing for another: *they made the change to a sugar free diet*
- 3) The passing from one state, form or phase to another: *changing from being unmotivated and unhealthy to motivated and healthy*

INTRODUCTION

“Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.”

- NIDO QUBEIN, MULTI AWARD WINNING MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR

Building, strengthening and maintaining motivation to exercise

“You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”

- MARCUS AURELIUS, ROMAN EMPEROR AND INFLUENTIAL STOIC PHILOSOPHER

If you asked a group of 100 people, all of whom wanted to make exercise-related changes, to explain the term ‘motivation to exercise’, I’m sure most could explain it reasonably well. However, if you asked the same group to actually ‘motivate themselves to exercise’, the outcome would be much different. What you may find is that many of the group wouldn’t even try. Some may manage to motivate themselves for a while and only a small few would manage to maintain their motivation over time.

So why is it then that even though the whole group wanted to exercise, only a minority would manage to start and stick with an exercise programme? Maybe it’s because they didn’t really want to exercise in the first place. Maybe, for some people, exercising is just too hard, or maybe the majority of people just didn’t have the time. Maybe...

For many of us, attributing external factors to our lack of action, or blaming things that are outside of our control can be comforting. Unfortunately not only does this get us nowhere but it also leaves us feeling powerless to change. In reality it is in fact the internal factors or those things that are within our control that are the likely cause of our inaction around exercise. In most cases we aren’t actually aware of this and as a result we continue to unknowingly blame external factors while minimising and justifying our own behaviour. While this may seem like an intricate plot to self-sabotage ourselves out of exercising, this behaviour is very normal and is largely born out of a lack of understanding about change and more specifically how change works for us on an individual level.

While external solutions such as different exercise programmes or a new diet can provide temporary relief for the acute problems many of us face (being overweight, being unhealthy, having low energy etc.), very few of these solutions address the underlying issues that are central to most peoples repeated failed attempts. That is, a lack of knowledge about how to make long lasting changes that are in harmony with our individual needs and circumstances. Once someone has this information, they will find starting and sticking with an exercise routine will become much easier due to an increased ability to build, strengthen and maintain their motivation **OVER TIME**.

It is this focus on how we change as individuals, combined with an in-depth look at motivation to exercise, that separates this book from 99% of other available material on this subject. Rather than repackaging the latest self-help or self-improvement fads, or reusing

tired old exercise mantras, this book will instil in the reader a deep sense of understanding and empowerment when it comes to making exercise related changes.

If you have ever asked yourself why you can't stick with an exercise programme even though you REALLY WANT TO, or why after starting so well you find yourself quitting, then this book is for you!

If you can't understand why you keep making the same mistakes over and over again despite telling yourself that "this time will be different", then this book is for you!

Or, if you really want to take your training or chosen pursuit to the next level but can't quite commit to taking the next steps, then this book is for you!

What makes this book different?

First of all this book is not about how to exercise and will not go into what kind of exercise you could or should be doing. That's up to you to decide. Instead this book has been written with one overarching purpose in mind. That is to provide you with everything you will ever need to build, strengthen and maintain your motivation to exercise, whatever that exercise may be.

It is assumed that up until this point you have either been unable to start and stick with an exercise programme or unable to take things to the next level of whatever it is that you do. In short you either want to sustain an exercise programme or you want to exercise consistently at a higher frequency or intensity.

Assumptions aside, here are some of the reasons this book is different to other similar resources.

It presents complex information in SIMPLE TERMS. Information usually reserved for psychologists and other similar vocations is explained in a way that makes it both UNDERSTANDABLE and USABLE. The translation of often complicated theory into practical application will get you thinking deeply about HOW THE INFORMATION IS RELEVANT TO YOU.

IT'S FLEXIBLE and encourages you to actively think about what's BEST FOR YOU! Instead of stating what needs to occur, it asks you. Based on the information YOU FIND THE MOST RELEVANT TO YOU AND YOUR SITUATION, the hope is you will find 'your way' and form your own customised approach. The information and material can be used sequentially and in full, or can be purposefully selected depending on individual needs. IT'S UP TO YOU.

It provides a huge amount of RESOURCE MATERIAL. With over 100 ADDITIONAL PAGES of resource material, the accompanying resource book (activity sheets, exercises, journals etc.) provides you with everything you will ever need when making an exercise related change. You may choose to use every resource in this book, or you might select only

one or two resources to meet a specific need e.g. to supplement an existing programme. Again, it's up to you.

What can I expect to read about?

It goes without saying that all who read this book will be exposed to the same words, the same content, and the same information. However this does not mean that everyone will have the same experience. Instead readers can expect a highly personal and all together more meaningful experience that will compel them to consider the information from the most important perspective of all... Their own!

With that said what you can expect to read about includes:

An exercise specific exploration of motivation, including an examination of the word itself, a comparison between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and a look various key motivational concepts including how to integrate them into day to day life. The emphasis placed on motivation to exercise not being a one size fits all approach will allow you to consider motivation from the most important view point of all - YOURS!

An in-depth exploration of habits and automatic behaviour. This information provides a fresh look into why these two aspects of change can be your best friend or your worst enemy when it comes to making exercise related changes. Several highly practical methods on how to break bad habits and form new constructive habits are also included.

A re-examination of goals and goal setting in the context of exercise. This includes the provision of a new and highly effective method of setting goals, known as THE 2-3-4 APPROACH. This approach is different in that it pays particular attention to the all-important, but often forgotten about, 'WHYS' of goal setting.

An in-depth introduction and explanation of [the Exercise Motivation Change Cycle or EMCC](#) (an adaption of the Transtheoretical model of change). [The EMCC](#) simply explains the stages EVERYONE goes through when making exercise-related changes and provides copious amounts of information designed to assist you to successfully manage each individual stage. This all equates to any future exercise-related changes being MORE FOCUSED and MORE EFFECTIVE.

Multiple case studies that will help you to make sense of [the EMCC](#) by providing PRACTICAL, RELEVANT examples of real people making real exercise and health-related changes.

A selection of the BEST INFORMATION, STRATEGIES and ADVICE taken from the [Exercise Change Interviews page](#). Hear from athletes and exercise enthusiasts, as well as experts in the field of motivation and change, about how you can increase your motivation to exercise and maintain it over time.

To begin with...

“The most effective way to do it, is to do it.”

- AMELIA EARHART, AVIATION PIONEER AND THE FIRST AVIATRIX TO FLY SOLO ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

All too often, people struggling to achieve their exercise and health-related goals ignore the importance of motivation, look at it in the wrong way, or don't look at it at all. As a result, countless exercise programmes, fitness routines and health-related pursuits never really manage to get off the ground. Or they do get off the ground only to crash and burn immediately after take-off. What these failures usually leave people with, are feelings of frustration, guilt, and a lasting sense of incompetence.

Generation by generation, decade by decade, year after year, we are consistently becoming more overweight and increasingly unhealthy. How is it then, that, despite the plethora of useful information out there, many people are still unable to lose weight, get fitter, look and feel the way they want, or reach the next level of their chosen pursuits? In most cases, IT'S NOT THE QUALITY OR VALIDITY OF WHAT IS BEING DONE, BUT RATHER IT'S THE WAY PEOPLE ARE THINKING ABOUT WHAT IS BEING DONE. According to forensic psychologist [Anton Ashcroft \[1\]\(2013\)](#), it's specifically due to our inability to access our logical brain (frontal lobe) over our emotional brain (limbic system). Although the logical part of our brain knows what we should be doing, all too often it is overcome by the more primal emotional brain.

It might come as a surprise to most people that not being able to stick with an exercise programme has very little to do with the exercise itself. The main culprits are in fact a lack of knowledge about motivation and a lack of insight into the stages we all go through when making a change. More specifically it is a lack of understanding about how to apply motivational strategies to match the various stages of change. These are the real, albeit often hidden reasons, why so many people fail to maximise their potential when it comes to exercising and living a healthy life. There is no doubt that if you can attain this knowledge your chances of building and maintaining your motivation to regularly exercise will be dramatically enhanced.

I've been amazed over the last few years. I've always taken an interest in statistics regarding obesity, diabetes and heart disease, as these things, more than others, provide a reliable measuring stick for the health of a nation. While looking at statistics I would shake my head in disbelief as I read that: over 35% of Americans are considered obese (American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012); heart disease is responsible for one out of every four deaths (Kochanek et al., 2011); and almost 10% of the population has diabetes (American Diabetes Association, 2011).

You see, being from New Zealand, meant that when it came to being healthy, our country could stand tall and look down on all of those other fatter nations. Well, that was quite a few years ago now. Since then, there have been some disturbing changes, both globally and nationally.

Globally, obesity has nearly doubled since 1980. One in ten of the world's population is now obese, and more of the world's population dies as a result of being overweight than they do from being underweight (World Health Organisation, 2013). The forecast isn't great either. The World Health Organisation predicts the global overweight population will increase from 1.6 billion in 2005 to 2.3 billion in 2015.

Internationally, New Zealand now ranks third amongst the fattest developed nations in the world (OECD, 2012). In less than 20 years, clean, green, health conscious New Zealand has gone from 12.7 per cent of the population being obese, to the third fattest country with 27.7 per cent obesity (OECD, 2011). This is just obesity, remember. This isn't taking into account all of the people that are also overweight.

Although you get a sense that people are getting bigger, as is society as a whole, actually hearing these statistics can be surprising. My country, New Zealand, isn't healthy anymore. How can it be that over a quarter of the population is now obese? The credibility that once came with being a New Zealander is gone. We, like many other developed countries in the world, are now facing a widespread health crisis that continues to get worse.

All of this got me thinking. With all the interest surrounding health and well-being, and the huge amounts of money being poured into research for chronic diseases and weight-related issues, why are we getting bigger and unhealthier? In an interview with food scientist [Dr Tim Lindley \[1\]\(2012\)](#) I was again left pondering this conundrum when he stated that "after all of the advances in health-related science, what we are left with is a greater understanding of how an individual can change to increase the quality of their life, the length of their life and increase the wellness they have through to a late age". Then it dawned on me. It's not the information; rather it's our ability or lack of ability, to motivate ourselves to use this information in order to begin a course of action and to follow it through!

Many of us believe that when we decide to do something, that's it - we will just do it! The issue of motivation doesn't usually feature in our decision, and we certainly don't worry about it as we launch straight into whatever it is we decide to do. Often, after the initial decision to start or change something, we experience a motivational honeymoon period where we are excited about the change we are making. Why would we even consider motivation at this point; I mean, we are doing it, aren't we? As multisport legend and nine times Speight's Coast to Coast winner [Steve Gurney \[1\]\(2012\)](#) notes; an interesting way to look at this initial honeymoon period is to consider the 80-20 rule, in that you'll initially get 80% of the results with 20% of the effort. However as time goes on the law of diminishing returns will take effect and results will be harder to come by. It's no wonder then that given the ease of which we initially gain results that we often find ourselves highly motivated when we first start to make changes.

As many of you will know however, myself included, very rarely will this motivation last. Not only does it not last, but it often dies a horrible death not long after we start. At this stage many of us quit, and are left thinking, what happened? It's the point where many people will tell themselves that 'I just can't do it', or 'this is just too hard!' What a shame!

The bad news is that, not only have we quit this thing we felt so strongly about, but we have also strengthened our core beliefs around our own ability to start and maintain a course of action. Essentially, we have reinforced the notion that, when it comes to taking this type of action, we are incompetent. Take the classic example of the 'New Year's resolution'. "I am going to start going to the gym!" How many times have you made this, or another similar promise, to yourself, only to find yourself making it the following year, and the one after that, and so on and so on. As many of you will have discovered, merely drifting into change will not work. You have to consciously think about and plan for whatever it is you want to do differently ([McMaster, \[1\] 2013](#)).

To make matters worse, we rarely relate these failures to our own motivation, often citing situational circumstances, or the exercise routine, or the advice we received as the issue. It's common and quite normal to attribute our successes to ourselves, and our failures to the external environment, but unfortunately it doesn't get us anywhere. For many people it can result in a cyclical pattern of trying new things then stopping a short time later. All the time, though, you are remaining oblivious to the fact that **IT'S NOT WHAT YOU ARE DOING, BUT HOW YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING THAT'S THE PROBLEM.**

So what do we do? We search the internet for the next biggest health-related trend or breakthrough. We spend huge amounts of money on gyms and personal trainers. We buy all kinds of foods we wouldn't usually buy. All in search of that special something that will finally allow us to make the change we have been dreaming about. Throughout this whole process we are continually looking outside of ourselves for an answer. We look and look and look, when the place we should be looking has been right in front of us all along. Well, not in front of us, so much as inside us. **WE HOLD THE KEY, AND WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO TURN ANY EXERCISE PROGRAMME OR PURSUIT INTO A SUCCESS.** If only we understood the cycle of change and how to motivate ourselves to move through this cycle. If only.

Just imagine if you will...

How great it would feel to achieve the things you wanted by tapping into your own motivational potential. Imagine how different your world would be if you could begin an exercise programme or health-related pursuit and actually see it through to the end. What if having the ability to assess your own levels of motivation, and apply the appropriate techniques when needed, was a reality. What would you do if you had this ability?

The answer... you could do anything you wanted!

So why is it that something so important in life, for the most part doesn't even get a look in? Is it because you haven't been looking? This may be partly true, but if you actually search the internet for real programmes or information about exercise motivation, you will find... well... not much. I believe that there are several main reasons for this:

One reason is that motivation is hard to sell. In a world where everyone wants to sell you a magic pill, a piece of equipment or a revolutionary new way of exercising, selling the idea that you can actually do it yourself without any of these things just doesn't make sense! Imagine learning how to motivate yourself so you could begin something, and actually see it through, without having to buy anything along the way. That just wouldn't make business sense to the people who are trying to sell you the latest gadgets or supplements, would it?

A second reason is that motivation, and the processes that occur when we make a change, are not topics that a lot of people in the health and fitness industry know much about. If they do have any knowledge, it tends to be superficial. This is reflected by the amount of 'tips and tricks' you will find online. A lot of these make sense and are valuable pieces of the puzzle. More often than not, though, they are a scattered collection of ideas that give little direction to those wanting truly to understand the stages they go through when making changes.

To really achieve change you need to go beyond tips and tricks and, instead, acquire the knowledge to build, strengthen and maintain the motivation to change. Fortunately this knowledge is the domain of several other vocations outside of the health and fitness industry, specifically in the fields of: psychology, education, health and social services. By borrowing some of these techniques and practices, we can approach our exercise and health challenges in a similar way. Ultimately we can acquire a more balanced understanding of motivation and the cycle of change, including the distinct stages within this cycle. We can then use this knowledge to achieve our exercise-related goals.

Yet another reason that interesting, effective and easily understood information about motivation is not readily available is that motivation is not a black and white concept. Not only is it not black and white when considering humans as a species, but also when considering humans as individuals. Motivation is constantly changing and evolving because you are constantly changing and evolving. You could be motivated today, and then wake up unmotivated tomorrow, or you could be motivated by something this week only to be demotivated, or motivated by something else, the following week. All this adds up to motivation being ambiguous, which makes it challenging to know exactly what you can do to address it. As a result, there are very few structured or packaged resources available to the public. Thus, tips and tricks provide the main source of information for those wanting to learn how to really make a change.

You may now be asking yourself - how can I learn more about motivation and gain an understanding of how I change, when it seems to be such a complex topic? Well the answer to that question lies within the pages of this book. By reading on, you can expect to become an expert on the aforementioned topics by learning about an adapted model of change, [the EMCC](#). You can expect to learn about motivation and how it applies to you, and you can

certainly expect to come away with countless strategies and invaluable pieces of information about how you can start incorporating exercise into your life. Not just temporarily but for **THE LONG TERM!** Along the way you will also learn about habits and automatic behaviours which will most definitely provide you with valuable insights into why you do the things you do, even though you don't always want to do them. And last, but not least, you can expect to be re-exposed to goals and goal setting, where you will learn about a new and effective method of setting goals called the [2-3-4 method](#).

As clichéd as it might sound, you are now beginning a journey of self-discovery and infinite self-improvement. A journey that will help you to understand how you have dealt with change in the past and, more importantly, how you can make changes in the future. This book will give you all the information and resources you need to build, strengthen and maintain your motivation to exercise and to do whatever else it is you want to do.

In the past, you may have never considered motivation and an understanding of change as being important factors of success. After reading this book, however, I guarantee you will never again disregard how powerful this knowledge can be.

Exercising change

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

- BARACK OBAMA, FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Change... Some people welcome it, others... not so much. Regardless of how you perceive change, one thing is certain - it's inevitable. You have made many changes in the past and you will no doubt make many more changes in the months and years to come.

It stands to reason, then, that learning about how to initiate, direct and respond to change more effectively will serve you well in the future.

One exercise that will get you thinking about change, and how people (yourself included) respond to it, is the 'fold your arms' exercise. You can try it right now. Follow the two steps below:

Step 1: Start with your arms by your sides, then cross your arms as you usually would. Once you've done that return your arms to the starting position.

Easy so far, right?

Step 2: Now cross your arms again but this time cross them the opposite way. The top arm now becomes the bottom arm and the bottom arm becomes the top arm.

How did you go?

Chances are you completed step one easily. You probably didn't even think about it. You just did it.

Step two, however, would've been more challenging. You more than likely did complete this task, but only after you gave it some thought. The reason you had to think a little is that folding your arms in this way is something you've probably never done before. Despite the task being relatively easy to complete, you still had to think in order to complete it. Not only did you have to think it through, but when you managed to fold your arms in the opposite way, I bet it still didn't feel right or, at the least, felt a little strange.

So, how does this relate to making exercise-related changes?

The message here is twofold.

Firstly, making a change and doing something different will, in most cases, be more challenging than doing the same thing you've always done. This needs to be understood before attempting to change anything. It will be challenging, perhaps extremely challenging!

Secondly, although making a change can be a challenge, in most cases you will be capable enough to do it... **IF YOU MAKE THE CHOICE TO DO SO!** If changing an aspect of your life is important to you, and you have the confidence that you can do it, **IT IS POSSIBLE!** You just have to give it some thought and trust that, although things will feel unfamiliar at first, you can get there if you persevere.

Beyond exercise motivation

“First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.”

- EPICTETUS, GREEK SAGE AND PHILOSOPHER WHO BELIEVED SUFFERING OCCURS FROM
NEGLECTING WHAT IS WITHIN OUR POWER

Imagine a world where anything and everything was possible. This is the reality for those who are highly motivated. Wouldn't it be nice to establish a goal, put a plan into action and follow it through to completion?

Being able to do this doesn't require a university education, special training or even a super strong will. What it does require, however, is an understanding of change and the processes you go through when making one. In addition to this, understanding motivation, and having some knowledge about how to build and maintain motivation, is a big advantage. This is exactly what you will learn by reading this book.

So is this knowledge limited to the domain of health and well-being? Is it exclusive to exercise and fitness-related pursuits only? Absolutely not! As you will already know, motivation is not just relevant to exercise, fitness, health and well-being. It's relevant to any situation you would like to change. Although this book is written with exercise in mind, you will by no means be limited to using what you've learnt for this purpose alone.

In fact, after reading this book, you will look at any change you make in a new and enlightened way. You will be able to track your position within [the EMCC](#) and have an understanding of exactly what is happening, regardless of which stage you find yourself in. From here, you will be able to apply the same techniques learnt in the context of exercise to any other type of change you're making, or want to make, at the time.

MOTIVATION

“If you try, you might get exactly what you want. If you don’t, you don’t”

- UNKNOWN

Motivation deconstructed

"I've always found that anything worth achieving will always have obstacles in the way and you've got to have that drive and determination to overcome those obstacles on route to whatever it is that you want to accomplish."

- CHUCK NORRIS, RENOWNED MARTIAL ARTS TEACHER AND SIX-TIME UNDEFEATED WORLD PROFESSIONAL KARATE CHAMPION

Let's start with an easy question...

What comes to mind when you think of motivation?

Maybe what comes to mind is seeing yourself or others achieving great things. Maybe you pictured ripped athletes, or yourself at your physical peak. Maybe you thought about intangible things like the positive feelings and emotional states you associate with being motivated. Perhaps you thought about themes like self-control, mental struggle, or life re-evaluation.

Motivation means different things for different people, and therefore, when learning about it, it's important to start with the basics. This way you can get a feeling for WHAT MOTIVATION REPRESENTS IN YOUR WORLD, and not what it means to a specific individual or group. By examining both its etymology and definition you will get a sense of what motivation is all about and how it applies to you.

First though, have you ever tried defining motivation? Try it now. Try and come up with a concise definition of what you think motivation is all about. Tough isn't it? It's a little like asking someone to describe what salt tastes like. You know what it tastes like, you've experienced it many times before, but putting it into words is tough.

We will examine some definitions of motivation very shortly, but first let's get started by taking a closer look at the word itself.

The word **motivation** has been around since 1873 and originated from the word **motivate**. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary the first definition (Psychological use) of the word appeared in 1904, with the meaning "inner or social stimulus for an action" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2012).

Looking at the etymology we can track the word back even further.

Motivate: 1863, "to stimulate toward action," from **Motive**: mid-14th c., "something brought forward," and "that which inwardly moves a person to behave a certain way" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2012).

At its most basic level the word **motivation** can be broken into two parts: **moti** derived from the Latin root *moveo*, meaning ‘to move’ (Wiktionary, 2013), and the suffix **ation**, meaning ‘the act of doing’.

You can see by this basic dissection of the word that, in essence, motivation represents the **ABILITY OR SKILL TO BE ABLE TO TAKE OR MOVE SOMETHING FORWARD**.

Fairly basic so far. Right?

Let’s now look at some common definitions in order to gain a greater understanding of the word.

Dictionary.com (2013) defines motivation as:

- 1) the act or an instance of motivating
- 2) the state or condition of being motivated
- 3) something that motivates e.g. inducement or incentive

Wiktionary.org (2013) describes motivation as:

- 1) willingness of action especially in behaviour
- 2) the action of motivating
- 3) something which motivates
- 4) an incentive or reason for doing something

Merriam Webster (2013) describes motivation as:

‘Factors within a human being or animal that arouse and direct goal-oriented behaviour.’

Although all three of these definitions are more or less saying the same thing, I like the last definition the best as, to me, this is the definition that best summarises what motivation is all about. Let’s look at that one again:

‘FACTORS WITHIN A HUMAN THAT AROUSE AND DIRECT GOAL-ORIENTED BEHAVIOUR’

The words *arouse* and *direct* allude to motivation being a *process*, a *process* of building and maintaining, and not something that we just acquire then forget about. Too often motivation comes down to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question i.e. am I motivated, or not? It’s almost as if it’s part of an initial checklist of items you need before making a change... Motivation? Check!

What this definition implies is that, before you do anything, you first need to *arouse goal-oriented behaviour*. To me, this is saying that if you are going to change something you first need to know specifically what it is that you want to change. Once you know this, you must then build the importance of making this change. By doing so, you will increase your desire and motivation to change it.

After arousing goal-oriented behaviour this definition states you must then *direct it*. I like to think of directing as a two part process, this being a) strengthening, and b) maintaining motivation. I believe this is the most important part of this definition. The word *direct* implies that motivation is not just something that you muster up before embarking on a course of action. It implies that **MOTIVATION IS SOMETHING THAT NEEDS ON-GOING ATTENTION AND MAINTENANCE** in exactly the same way that exercise needs to be maintained. Imagine expecting that, after a week's worth of exercise, you would remain fit and healthy from that point on? The same applies for motivation - you simply can't afford to forget about it!

While the two parts of the definition '**arouse**' and '**direct**' are clear to me, what isn't so clear is what '**factors within a human**' means. What this definition doesn't, and can't possibly, make clear is what these factors are. The reason for this, as already discussed, is that motivation means different things to different people. A factor that motivates one person may not necessarily motivate another and for that reason there is no one universal set of factors that we can focus on.

While it is impossible to identify specific factors that contribute to our collective motivation to change, it is possible to identify other aspects of change that are relevant to us all. Despite our motives being variable, we all systematically proceed through predictable stages when attempting a change. It is these stages that hold particular relevance to **ALL PEOPLE WHO ATTEMPT A CHANGE**, regardless of the change they are making. By understanding these stages, you can better understand the motivational tasks you need to utilise in order to become motivated to make a long term change.

Information about these stages will be examined later on when [the EMCC](#) is introduced and explained in full. For now though we are going to leave the word motivation and move onto looking at the different types of motivation, these being intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

"Mental will is a muscle that needs exercise, just like muscles of the body."

- LYNN JENNINGS, AMERICAN LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER AND ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S BEST EVER FEMALE ATHLETES

When we think of motivation, it is more useful to think of it as a behaviour, or a way, of thinking, as opposed to any one action or method. By thinking about motivation in this way you can treat it like any other behaviour and learn it. In the words of behaviour change expert [Ken McMaster \[2\]\(2013\)](#) "Motivation is something you do, not something you have". This is good news for those of you who have ever said "but I'm just not a motivated person". Well, you may not be now, BUT YOU CAN LEARN TO BE.

Motivation should be taught in schools from a young age. It is so important, in fact, that without it, you would've never gone to school in the first place or got out of bed, gone to work, looked after your children, bathed, shaved or done anything that you would usually do from day to day. Without the motivation to do something, you simply wouldn't do it.

Having said that, I'm sure many of you will be thinking "but I'm not motivated to go to work, but I do". DON'T CONFUSE BEING MOTIVATED TO DO SOMETHING WITH WANTING TO DO SOMETHING. These are two different things. When you go to work, even if you don't want to, you are still doing it because you are motivated. If you're like most people, then you go to work because you need money. You are motivated by the need for money (the reward or secondary gain) and not by the desire to work. This is a form of extrinsic motivation. You see, motivation comes in two varieties: **extrinsic** and **intrinsic**.

Extrinsic motivation occurs when you are motivated by external factors, which can be positive ones, like rewards or bribery, or negative ones, like threats or blackmail. In many cases it is crude, easily understood and effective, especially in the short term.

Extrinsic motivation drives you to do things for tangible rewards or pressures, and not because you enjoy the work, or believe it's a good thing to do. When you do anything there is always a reason or justification for your actions. Being extrinsically rewarded provides this justification, and allows you to feel comfortable doing something you often don't want to do. In short, it focuses people on the reward or outcome, and not the action itself.

Intrinsic motivation is the stronger and longer lasting form of motivation, and occurs when you are motivated by internal factors or influence. Intrinsic motivation drives you to do something because you believe it is a good thing to do, or because you enjoy the act of 'doing it', regardless of the reward or outcome.

Consider the many interests and hobbies that people have. You, yourself, may invest time and money in various activities or pursuits, physical or other, but if you don't, you will no doubt

know someone else who does. Why do we engage in these activities? Is it the money we make from the activity? Is it because someone is forcing us to do it? Do we feel obligated or pressured to do it for others? The answer to these questions, assuming you are intrinsically motivated, is no, it's none of these things. We simply do it because we enjoy doing it and are rewarded by the act itself.

Often the things you are intrinsically motivated to do will be aligned with your own values and beliefs. For example, if you don't value your own health and believe exercise is a waste of time, then chances are you will only ever do it if you are forced or pressured into it. Even then, it's more than likely it won't last. On the other hand, if you value being healthy, both now and in the future, and you believe exercise can contribute to your well-being and longevity, then you have a much better chance of doing it and sticking with it.

Think back to a time now where you have attempted to make an exercise or health-related change. Don't worry about whether you succeeded in making the change or not. Now ask yourself "why did I make that change?" and "what were the reasons or triggers for making it?" What did you come up with? Did you try and make this change because you felt you should, or was it because you wanted to? Chances are, those who wanted to make the change were more successful in the long term, than those who didn't. This is the power of intrinsic motivation.

So I should concentrate on intrinsic motivation and ignore extrinsic?

Well not exactly... Being motivated by external (extrinsic) factors can be effective in the short term, but if we are motivated by internal (intrinsic) factors we will have a better chance of succeeding in the long term.

The message when considering intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not that one works and one doesn't. Both forms of motivation have their strengths. Rather it's that intrinsic motivation over extrinsic is what you need in the long term. Yes, extrinsic motivation is still effective when starting out and at different periods during an attempt at change. Overall, however, it's intrinsic motivation that will be the difference between achieving a short or medium term goal vs. a long term goal or lifestyle change.

Consider the following as an example.

You may be advised by your doctor that losing some weight would be beneficial to your health. As a result you start an exercise routine only to find a month down the track you have stopped as you can't really be bothered. This is an example of extrinsic, or external, motivation. In this case the doctor motivated you to exercise because S/HE, NOT YOU, were concerned about your weight.

Alternatively you may catch your reflection in the mirror and not like what you see. Because of this you may think a lot about how great you would look if you lost 5kgs, and how good this would feel. As a result you may start an exercise routine and stick with it. This is an

example of intrinsic, or internal, motivation. In this case the motivation to change came from inside as opposed to an outside influence.

So what does all of this mean?

Put simply it means that YOU have got to want it! If someone else wants it for you rather than you wanting it for yourself, the chance of succeeding in a specific course of action will be greatly diminished. As [Ken McMaster \[3\]\(2013\)](#) says “When we have things imposed upon us we get grumpy. We need to feel we are in control of our own lives.”

This means that you must do everything you can to BUILD UP THE IMPORTANCE of making a change in a specific area. IF YOU FEEL MAKING A CHANGE IS IMPORTANT, YOU WILL HAVE A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF BEING INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED AND ULTIMATELY SUCCEEDING IN YOUR CHANGE. Again this doesn't mean you can't, or shouldn't, utilise the power of extrinsic motivation. In fact, where possible, tapping into external motivators to kick-start action, or to give you a motivational boost when required, can be invaluable.

Three more points

Having knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation gives you a good place to start when contemplating and attempting change. However, it's not the only thing that can help you to make sense of motivation. Below are three more pieces of the puzzle:

Firstly, motivation is not fixed.

Put another way, your motivation to do something will fluctuate over time.

For example: You may become motivated to start an exercise routine, then become less motivated a week later, only to become motivated again the next day.

What does this mean? It means that you must continually strengthen and/or rebuild motivation in relation to a specific course of action. Often people have the preconceived notion that they will work on motivation in the beginning, and that this will see them through to the end. This is not the case. You must look at motivation in the same way you look at exercise, in that it's something that needs addressing continually and consistently.

Secondly, motivation is about probabilities.

How motivated you are to do something depends on the number and strength of the factors adding to, or taking away from, your motivation to change.

For example: The probability of you building and maintaining motivation to exercise regularly would be low if you didn't really think exercise was important, and you weren't that confident you could do it anyway. Alternatively, if you thought exercise was extremely important and you were confident you could do it, the probability would be high. Other external factors like your environment, peers, time, money and support can also add to, or take away from, the probability of building and maintaining motivation.

What does this mean? It means you must put in place as many things as possible to make becoming motivated more probable. It's really a matter of odds. How many things have you got supporting you, vs. how many things have you got holding you back?

Thirdly **motivation is specific to a course of action.**

Being motivated to do one thing doesn't mean you are motivated to do all things.

For example: You may find yourself motivated to begin an exercise routine but unmotivated to begin an eating plan.

What does this mean? It means you mustn't assume that because you're motivated to pursue one course of action you will also be motivated to pursue another. Each course of action, i.e. exercise and diet, needs a specific motivational plan of action.

So, to summarise, we now know that:

- 1) In the long term intrinsic motivation is stronger than extrinsic
- 2) Motivation is not fixed
- 3) Motivation is about probabilities
- 4) Motivation is specific to a course of action

By keeping these four points in mind, when you attempt to make a change you will be in a much better position to a) make sense of your motivational situation or position, and b) to build strengthen and maintain your motivation to exercise (or make another type of change).

So, now that you know all about motivation and you have a better sense of how it applies to you, it's time to move on and look at how motivation contributes to behaviour. With that said the next chapter will introduce you to the often ambiguous world of habits. The hope is that by examining habits and how they contribute to your everyday (automatic) behaviour you

will continue to make sense of what contributes to your motivation and ability to make changes.

For those of you who would like to know more about motivation and in particular motivational theories, check out the Exercise Change Blog, category: 'Motivational Theories' www.exercisechange.co.nz/blog

HABITS

“Winning is a habit. Unfortunately so is losing.”

- VINCENT LOMBARDI, PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAMER AND ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL
COACHES IN NFL HISTORY

Guess who?

I am your constant companion.

I am your greatest helper or heaviest burden.

I will push you onward or drag you down to failure.

I am completely at your command.

Half the things you do might just as well turn over to me and I will be able to do them quickly and correctly.

I am easily managed - you must merely be firm with me.

Show me exactly how you want something done and after a few lessons, I will do it automatically.

I am the servant of all great people; and alas, of all failures as well.

Those who are great, I have made great.

Those who are failures, I have made failures.

I am not a machine, though I work with all the precision of a machine plus the intelligence of a human.

You may run me for a profit or run me for ruin - it makes no difference to me.

Take me, train me, be firm with me, and I will place the world at your feet.

Be easy with me, and I will destroy you.

Who am I?

Anonymous

I am habit!

The path in the grass

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.”

- ARISTOTLE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FOUNDING FIGURES IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Imagine you are walking a familiar path when you come across a pristine field of tall grass. Now imagine crossing the field and walking through the tall grass creating your own path as you go. It's not easy work. The grass is shoulder height in some places and you have to really work to establish your chosen route.

At some point in the future you again find yourself walking the same familiar path when you come to the same field. This time however the field is marked by your previous tracks.

HOW WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO CROSS THE FIELD?

Would you take the same path as you did last time, the path that's already been travelled? Or would you choose to forge a new path and in doing so take a chance by hoping it will lead to the place you want to go?

Chances are you would take the same path as you previously did. Why? Because it's that much easier! You've already done the hard work by choosing a route and flattening some of the grass. There is also a familiarity in that you've walked down this path before. You know that by taking this route you'll end up at a previously defined point.

Assuming you continued to return to this field and continued to cross it using the same route, what do you think would happen to the path after a week or month or year? What would it look like? Would it be wider? Would the grass be worn down? Maybe there would be no grass in some patches? Either way the path would be established and perhaps well-worn.

After having crossed this field many times using the same path each time, what would now have to happen for you to cross via a new path? One in which you would have to create despite the established path still being right next to you? You might want to do this because you don't like where the old path has been taking you. You might feel it's time to take a different path. Either way, how hard would this be? How hard would it be to ignore the well-established route, the easy road, and start a whole new path? Not knowing if it would even lead you to a better place?

Even if you succeeded in creating a new path, the next time you arrived at the field would you choose to take it again? Considering the well-established and well-worn route was still right there too? At this point the old route would still be much easier to take despite now having the choice of two different paths.

Assuming you did manage to regularly traverse the newly formed path, how long do think it would be before it, too, became as established or more established than the old one? Would it

be difficult to continually ignore the old familiar path while establishing a new one? How long would it be before the old route became overgrown and was no longer visible? Or became overgrown enough that it wasn't an obvious option?

Many of the answers to these questions will of course depend on the circumstances or factors surrounding the individual crossing the field. What is certain though is this:

- In the absence of an existing route most of us will forge ahead creating a path as we go, however...

- When presented with one or more pre-existing routes the chances of us creating a new path diminishes greatly. This is a natural part being human, in that we all, to some extent choose the path of least resistance. I mean, why make it harder than it has to be, right?

The 'path in the grass' metaphor is a good way to understand habits and why they're so difficult to form and even harder to break. The field represents the choice point at which you start or form a new habit e.g. the choice to sit down and have a beer or snack after work, or the choice to get straight into exercise. The path, of course, represents the habit itself e.g. actually exercising regularly after work. The more entrenched the habit, the more accessible and visible the path becomes. This then makes it easier to use (partake in the habitual behaviour), but also makes it more challenging to take an alternate path (form a new habit).

What this metaphor helps us to understand is why even after we have created and walked a new path e.g. following an exercise routine for a month, it's still so easy to return to old ways. The old way, aka the established path, is still there and is still very easy to walk down.

With this in mind let's take a closer look at what a habit actually is and explore how habits can help or hinder our attempts to make changes.

To listen to another metaphor about habit formation visit psychologist [Anton Ashcroft's interview page](#) and listen to the following interview segment: ['To form new habits we need to perform the new behaviour consistently for at least a month + the cornfield analogy as a way to understand how habits are formed and broken.'](#)

Habitual and automatic behaviours

“Every time you are tempted to react in the same old way, ask if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future.”

- DEPAK CHOPRA, PHYSICIAN, ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE PRACTITIONER AND AUTHOR OF 21 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERS

A habit can be described in many ways. These three definitions from Wiktionary.org (2013) define the word habit simply and concisely:

- 1) An action done on a regular basis. *It's become a habit of mine to have a cup of coffee after dinner.*
- 2) An action performed repeatedly and automatically, usually without awareness. *By force of habit, he dressed for work even though it was holiday.*
- 3) An addiction. *He has a 10-cigar habit.*

What you get from these definitions is a clear sense that a habit is AN ACTION UNDERTAKEN REGULARLY AND REPEATEDLY, TO THE POINT WHERE IT BECOMES AUTOMATIC AND IN SOME CASES ADDICTIVE.

The following three definitions from Dictionary.com (2013) define habit in more depth and breadth:

- 1) An acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary. *The habit of looking both ways before crossing the street.*
- 2) Customary practice or use. *Daily bathing is an American habit.*
- 3) A dominant or regular disposition or tendency; prevailing character or quality. *She has a habit of looking at the bright side of things.*

Whereas the previous set of definitions looked at habit exclusively as actions performed regularly, the above three definitions delve deeper by exploring habit as AN ‘ACQUIRED BEHAVIOUR’, ‘CUSTOM’ AND ‘DISPOSITION OR TENDENCY’.

From these definitions you start to appreciate the factors that play a part in the formation of habits, and not just the habit itself. Namely how we learn or acquire the knowledge to act a certain way, the customs or rituals of those around us including our society and environment as a whole, and the characteristics or traits we possess.

What both sets of definitions are stating is that habits are routines of various actions and behaviours repeated regularly. These behaviours often occur on a subconscious level of thinking and are therefore largely automatic and go unnoticed. Furthermore the reasons we undertake these actions and behaviours will be dependent on several factors. These include how we learn, or develop, behaviours in the first place, and the customs and rituals we are exposed to as a result of being part of a society or specific group.

At the basic end of the continuum, habituation is actually an extremely simple form of learning, in that you perform a specific action or behave in a certain way and you get a reward for it. As a result you keep doing it. With a habit, the reward becomes less apparent the more the behaviour is repeated, and results in the reward becoming more subconscious and therefore less visible. This is why we often recognise we have a habit but no longer understand why we continue to do it. Habits at this point have become automatic.

To make sense of this in the context of your own automatic habits, try and recall a time where you have thought to yourself regarding a specific action or behaviour, “why do I do it?”, or “why do I keep doing this to myself?” Have you ever then thought after not being able to come up with an answer “because that’s just what I do?” Automatic habits offer some explanation for this. You are still being rewarded but you just don’t realise it, at least not on a conscious level.

Of course depending on our automatic behaviours our habits can affect us in either a positive or negative way. More than likely however our habitual behaviours will be of little consequence and therefore have outcomes that will seem neither positive nor negative. This is a good thing. The reason being that these inconsequential habits, these behaviours we undertake without thought, are the very things that get us through the day. **WITHOUT HABITUAL BEHAVIOURS GETTING THROUGH THE DAY WOULD BE EXHAUSTING!**

Imagine having to think about everything you did, from the moment you woke up to the time you went to sleep. For example, consider making your morning cup of tea or coffee. Once you learn the sequence of actions involved, the process becomes more or less automatic and happens virtually without controlled thought. Having to think about this process every time would become extraordinarily time consuming, and this is just one behaviour. Imagine having to get dressed, prepare breakfast, bathe, do your hair and brush your teeth as though it was your first time doing it. Not just once but every morning! That’s before even going to work or starting your day proper.

Driving a car is another good example. If you’re a habitual driver consider the journey from home to work or any other regular route. During this trip you are unlikely to be aware of changing the gears, braking to adjust speed in traffic or of the places you pass on the way. You probably spend the entire journey thinking about other things. It’s only when you’re interrupted or distracted during the execution of these routines that you become conscious of what you’re doing.

So again imagine having to think about everything you do. Remember how hard you had to concentrate when you were first learning to drive? Can you recall how tired you were after your first day at a new job or school? Maybe you can remember all too vividly how difficult that first week of a new diet or exercise routine was. This is because the actions and behaviours undertaken to complete these various sequences hadn't yet become habit. Once you form these habits they allow you to maintain your behaviours and actions overtime. As humans we all find ourselves in the position of maintaining certain behaviours, both good and bad. There aren't many people who don't have some kind of daily ritual or consistency of behaviour.

When you put all of these learned automatic behaviours together you get a daily schedule that looks like a sequential series of small-scale routines. These combined form larger routines which, in turn, make whole days seem routine. Think about your average day. Most people begin at more or less the same time each morning. From here, any number of organised activities is undertaken, ranging from work, to domestic duties, to leisure activities. Meals will likely be eaten at similar times and the time you go to bed each night will also be roughly the same. This all equates to most of our lives on a day-to-day basis at least, being fairly orderly and mundane. Unsurprisingly, that's the way most people like it.

As routine oriented as we are, the occasional departures from habitual activities are common. For example, we take holidays, we go to the doctor, we eat out and we attend various social events. Now and again we can also adopt other patterns or routines that are significantly different. This can happen either by choice (for example exercising and eating differently), or by constraint (for example unexpectedly having to care for a sick family member, or recovering from an injury or illness). By and large however, the majority of our behaviours and actions can be described as routine.

As convenient as our habits and routines are when they are positive and helpful, they can also be our undoing if they are negative and destructive. The stronger and more established our habits are the harder they become to alter or change all together. This applies to both positive and negative habits alike. This is why unplanned or unexpected variations of our usual behaviours or actions can be anxiety provoking and quite stressful, even when these variations seem enjoyable or worthwhile. Often we are not even aware of this anxiety as it operates at a subconscious level. It's almost as if we unknowingly gravitate towards, and orbit around our routine behaviours. When we deviate from this orbit, whether in a good way or a bad way, we can always tell something is different. This is why even when we go on holiday or find ourselves with some spare time we often feel a certain level of unease. While some can transition seamlessly from one routine or structure to another, most of us need a bit of time to settle in before we can really start to enjoy something different. As martial artist Hugh Robinson states, regarding exercise, it's not a pleasant feeling you throat rasping, your lungs bursting and your heart pounding. For most people it will take at least three weeks to get past this feeling and get to the point where exercise starts becoming pleasurable ([Robinson, \[1\] 2011](#)).

The key point here is that despite habits being difficult to change we still have the ability to do things differently. This flexibility is important as it allows us to respond to the challenges we face by choice or necessity. This is good news given that many people, myself included, have a few old habits they would like to shake as well as a few new habits they would like to form.

Of course this is the part of the story where we come back to motivation to change. Sure it's possible to break and form new habits and routines, but that doesn't mean it's easy to do. When it comes to the business of change, motivation plays a big part in the process. Without it, all of us would struggle to follow through on any attempt to alter or change our habits. This is especially true when attempting to break well established habits or attempting to form a challenging new habit. In most cases it will again come down to the importance we place on changing. As the CEO of Snap Fitness New Zealand, [Korey Gibson \[1\]\(2012\)](#) told me during a 2012 interview, "we must get to the point where something is so important that we feel we need to do something about it NOW, and NOT LATER".

So assuming you feel change is important and you are motivated to change your behaviour, what are the things that can help you to break and form habits? This, as always, will involve different things for different people. Exploring how habits, motivation and change are linked is a good place to start. In doing so you may come to a few conclusions about if, and how, you can alter your behaviour in order to make a change.

Habits, motivation and change

“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.”

- JIM RYUN, WORLD-CLASS RUNNER AND THE LAST AMERICAN TO HOLD THE WORLD RECORD IN THE MILE

Habits, motivation and change are inextricably linked. Habits impact on how successful we are when making a change and motivation to change plays a key role in forming effective habits. The more we exercise the habits that are moving us closer to change, the easier it becomes to remain motivated to make that change. Needless to say the same applies in reverse, in that the more we exercise the habits that are moving us further away from change, the more difficult it becomes to remain motivated to change.

Behind all of your habits, routines and rituals is your thinking or your cognitive processes. Your thinking obviously plays a key role in the establishment and execution of habits. Just as habits, routines and rituals can be functional or dysfunctional, so can the thinking behind them. It is at this cognitive level that habits, good or bad, gain any momentum in the first place. All of your habits are the product of your cognitive processes which, themselves, have been shaped and influenced by your collective experiences and learning history. You may have heard the term ‘habits of a lifetime?’ This sums up the connection between habits and thinking really well. You have literally spent your whole life contributing to the formation and maintenance of every habit you have. The good news as always is that you don’t have to settle for the status quo. **IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE, OR EVEN BETTER IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO, YOU CAN.**

Below are some ideas to consider when you want to break old habits or when you’re considering forming new ones. Before you read on though, take some time to consider the two questions below so as you can make practical use of the information.

1) What existing habits would you like to modify, change or stop altogether?

2) What new habits would you like to form?

As you read the following ideas consider your answers to the above questions and ask yourself... *How could this idea help me?*

Breaking and forming habits is a twofold process

One point that is often overlooked is that breaking and forming habits is a twofold process. Firstly you must do more of a specific action or behaviour, or do something new altogether.

Secondly you must do less of certain actions and behaviours or stop doing them altogether. The key here is understanding that by doing something new, e.g. starting a new exercise routine, you are in turn forfeiting something old, e.g. the time you spent sitting on the couch watching TV. Not only do you need to think about any new actions and behaviours, but you also need to appreciate that you're losing the ritual of what this new action has replaced. This sounds dramatic but the key point is that **WHEN ATTEMPTING TO BREAK OR FORM NEW HABITS, IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE ADDING, IT'S ALSO ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE TAKING AWAY**. This means any strategy should include details of not only how you will form a new habit e.g. exercising three days a week, but how you will deal with breaking the old habit, e.g. sitting on the couch drinking a beer.

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Make your new habit enjoyable

Consider the following... Imagine you wanted to replace your car, or a specific item of clothing. Now assume you were doing this because you wanted a change, and not because the car wasn't working or the item of clothing no longer fits. Given this was your situation what would you want the new car or the new piece of clothing to look like? How would you want each of these things to function? Chances are you'd want them to look better, and to function better than the items they were replacing right? As you are choosing to do this, why would you intentionally replace these things with lesser equivalents? If you did replace your car with something that was not as aesthetically pleasing, didn't run as well and was more expensive to run, you would be a little disappointed, to say the least. Likewise, if a piece of clothing didn't look as good, wasn't very flattering and didn't fit that well, you wouldn't be satisfied then either. In fact there would be a good chance that, after replacing these items with lesser equivalents, it wouldn't be long before you wanted the old car or item of clothing back.

The same concept can be applied when considering breaking and forming habits. By forming a new habit you will likely be replacing an old habit or at the least you will be interrupting or altering an existing routine. Therefore **THE NEW HABIT YOU'RE TRYING TO FORM WILL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF BEING SUSTAINED IF IT IS ENJOYABLE, SERVES A PURPOSE, OR IS AN IMPROVEMENT ON WHAT IT'S REPLACING**. This is not to say that if new habits aren't these things you can't sustain them, it just means it will be more challenging to do so.

You've got to enjoy what it is your motivating yourself to do ([Lockstone, \[1\] 2012](#)). To ensure new habits are suited to your situation considering things that would be most enjoyable and purposeful to you is important. Trying your best to match something to your preferences will ensure the new habit will have at least some appeal, which will make it easier to sustain. If something is un-enjoyable or doesn't have an obvious purpose, why

would you start doing it? Furthermore, why would you keep doing it? Putting yourself in this situation would be setting yourself up for failure.

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Cold turkey anyone?

Wikipedia (2013) defines the term “cold turkey” as... *‘the actions of a person who abruptly gives up a habit or addiction rather than gradually easing the process through gradual reduction or by using replacement medication.’*

It’s not uncommon that when we decide to make a change, we launch straight into action at a hundred miles an hour. Given you will often be excited about the prospect of change this is not surprising. This is the point where you often enjoy a motivational honeymoon period as the excitement of the prospect of change spurs you on. By doing this you not only throw yourself at full speed into a new behaviour, but you often leave behind or quit another behaviour cold turkey. While I’m a big believer in getting big things done in a short period of time, I’m also a realist in that I am aware that this can be difficult to do. Not just because forming new habits at high speed is difficult, but also because quitting old habits cold turkey can be challenging as well.

For some a cold turkey approach may be the answer but I’m sure, as many people can attest, this approach can prove challenging, especially when it comes to something as engrained as exercise and diet-related habits. Many a change attempt has fallen victim to the cold turkey method of breaking and forming habits. The question to ask yourself is: ‘WHAT HAS WORKED IN THE PAST?’ Better still: ‘WHAT HASN’T WORKED?’ The answer to these questions should inform any future change plan. That is to do more of the things that have worked for you in the past, and do the opposite or at least do less of the things that haven’t worked.

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Starting small, not starting big

Through my own experience and through the many interviews I have conducted on the topic of habits and change, I have come to realise something extremely important. That is that **FORMING THE HABIT OF A SPECIFIC BEHAVIOUR IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF THAT BEHAVIOUR**, at least in the early stages of behaviour change. As 2004 and 2005 New Zealand bike coach of the year [Terry Gyde](#) [\[1\]\(2012\)](#) once told me, “I get new students doing half of what I think they should or could do in order to first build the habit.”

By forming the habit of doing something new, you develop a platform in which to build on any new behaviour. Whereas starting big (the 'all or nothing' mentality) may seem great at the time, you must ask yourself "is this sustainable?" For most the answer will be 'probably not.' For example, how many people do you think have gone from doing no exercise to setting themselves a goal of exercising for an hour 3-4 times per week? Although some, or even many, might manage to do this for the first week or few weeks, inevitably most of these people can't sustain this sudden change in routine. Whereas those who set themselves smaller, more realistic goals might not initially see results, they will have more chance of sustaining this new activity over time. From here they will find themselves in a great position to start upping the ante without it coming as too much of a shock.

The key message here, whether you are trying to do more of something or less of something, is that starting small and aiming to establish consistency of behaviour will likely be the more effective approach to long-term behaviour change. Think tortoise and hare! The following quote sums up this idea nicely:

"Habit is habit, and not to be flung out the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time." - Mark Twain -

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

The 10% rule

If you're not into the 'all or nothing' approach to making a change, or if you're not into stopping certain behaviours cold turkey, starting small could be a more realistic approach.

The 10% rule is a great way to start doing this. What this rule states, according to good friend and martial artist [Pete Robinson \[1\]\(2011\)](#), is that when attempting to alter a behaviour you should aim to change only 10% of that behaviour. When you are confident that the new behaviour has become established, change a further 10% and so on until you reach your goal. What 10% means for you and how small you start will depend on the individual. Regarding exercise, 10% for some might mean going for a 10min walk every Tuesday night, while for others it might mean cycling to work 2 mornings a week. Regarding diet, some might start with 2tsp of sugar in their coffee instead of 3, while others might cut out sugar for a full day every week. Either way the idea is that gradual behaviour change is much more manageable and sustainable than making significant changes all at once.

What gets in the way of this slow and steady approach is our desire for instant gratification. We want it NOW, not later. What ends up happening when you rush is that you end up getting nowhere over time. SMALL AND STEADY, ALTHOUGH LACKING THE IMPACT OF A SUDDEN DRAMATIC CHANGE, IS A FAR MORE REALISTIC APPROACH TO HABIT FORMING. Remember you're in it for the long haul so altering habits slowly is a realistic way to make long term changes.

So before moving on, have a think about this question: “Which one behaviour you would like to alter or change?” Think about it. It could be a behaviour you want to do more or less of. Now consider this question. “What would I have to do to make a 10% change in this specific behaviour?” “What would need to happen?” Now simply make a choice about whether you’re going to follow through on actioning this 10% change and either make it or not. Simple.

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Utilise and build on existing habits

There will no doubt be many things you do on a daily or regular basis. Instead of creating a whole new space from which to start something new, what you could do is piggyback on existing habits. For example, many people shower once or twice per day. While waiting for the shower to warm up, why not use this ‘dead time’ to do as many push ups as you can. Of course push ups could be replaced with any number of different exercises (ideally exercises that don’t require equipment), but the point is you DO SOMETHING on the back of an existing habit or routine. Building on existing habit is a great non-threatening way to get started and ease your way into exercise, especially if you have been out of the game for a while. It is also very practical in that it requires NO ADDITIONAL TIME commitment.

Other common habits or routines you could consider building on, including exercises, might include:

- *Brushing your teeth while completing sets of alternate lunges*
- *Cooking while doing calf raises (single or double leg)*
- *Completing as many burpees as you can while waiting for the jug to boil or while waiting for your tea/coffee to steep*
- *Showering while doing squats*
- *Tricep dips on a chair while sitting around at lunchtime*
- *While driving or waiting in traffic try isometric exercises (tensing muscles without actually moving them)*
- *Talk on the phone while doing leg raises*
- *Crunches while watching TV*
- *Arm rotations when you’re at the computer*

So... what habits and routines could you build on?

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Just do it! The 20 second rule

Behaviour change expert [Ken McMaster \[4\]\(2013\)](#) has an interesting hypothesis about habit forming called the 20 second rule. The rule states that if you act on a thought to do something (e.g. going for a run) within the first 20 seconds of thinking it, your chances of forming a habit around that behaviour will be greatly increased. Wait any longer than 20 seconds and procrastination starts to set in, and before you know it you'll start coming up with a menu of reasons not to do something.

Whatever habit you want to form, your action or non-action within the first 20 seconds will serve to strengthen any future thinking around the habit. This, in turn, will result in the outcome or behaviour being strengthened. So the message here is when you're trying to change something, stick to the plan and be sure to try and do it immediately instead of procrastinating. For example if you've planned to go for a run after work, don't sit down when you get home. Instead walk in the door, put your running gear on straight away, and walk straight back out the door.

It seems Nike may have been on to something with their famous bi-line 'Just do it.' By 'just doing it' and not thinking about why you shouldn't do it, you begin to strengthen the ritual or habit of the new behaviour. This then creates a snowball effect in that, the more you 'just do it', the stronger the habit becomes until it reaches the point where it becomes automatic. At this point you've made the transition from consciously 'doing it', to unconsciously 'doing it' and, in doing so, have integrated the new habit into your day to day routine.

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Don't be so hard on yourself

The path in the grass metaphor helps us to understand why old habits are easy to reengage with. Old established habits take a long time to disappear completely and, in some cases, might never completely vanish. It takes a moderate amount of time for an established path to look unused and less appealing, quite a while for it to become overgrown, a long time for it to become barely visible, and even longer still for it to become invisible, if it ever does. The part of our brain called the basal ganglia is what remembers the events that trigger our habits. Every time the trigger occurs, you are reminded of specific habitual behaviours. That's why an old habit may never become invisible as it can always be revived through the basal ganglia's memories of trigger events. Avoiding these triggers therefore would help to

strengthen any new habits you're trying to form as you wouldn't become side-tracked and tempted to walk down memory lane.

As most of you know, despite swapping one behaviour for another, in some cases for a significant amount of time, it still always seems so easy to return to old behaviours. More than seeming easy it all but compels you to return. It's no wonder when you consider how many times that same familiar path has rewarded you for walking it. It is no surprise then that you will often find yourself gravitating towards old habits and getting back into the behaviours that you had managed to avoid or minimise for so long.

So why is it that when we do 'fall off the wagon' we are so hard on ourselves? What would be more useful would be to normalise the fact that glitches WILL occur. In fact it's very normal to have glitches while attempting a change. A PLAN THAT RUNS 100% SMOOTHLY IS THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE, ESPECIALLY WHEN ATTEMPTING TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT OR DIFFICULT CHANGE.

What often happens when we divert from our plan is that the all or nothing mentality kicks in. This is the type of mentality where nothing less than perfect will do, and it the type of mentality that prevents us from seeing bumps in the road for what they really are. That is, very expected and predictable diversions on the journey to change and certainly not dead ends. This black and white thinking prevents us from continuing on with the changes we were making prior to the glitch. So instead of adopting an "I'm falling off the wagon" mentality when you have this experience, look at the situation as an opportunity and try to implement an "I'm gonna get back on the horse" outlook. In the words of forensic psychologist [Anton Ashcroft \[2\]\(2013\)](#) "Be tolerant but not too tolerant. Really allow yourself to understand why you do what you do and accept it. But, don't then give yourself permission to therefore not do anything."

The key message is to not be so hard on yourself when you deviate from the plan, by actually expecting that it will happen. This way you can be mentally prepared for when it does happen. It's also helpful to think of the 'path in the grass' metaphor again, but this time in the reverse way. That is despite returning to the well-established path you have still managed to establish a new path. Depending on the time you have been walking this new path, it too may take some time to grow over. Thus it will be reasonably visible and therefore easily reengaged with. The only decision you will have to make is: "will I decide to walk it again?"

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

Habits and importance

If you happened to have some regular spare time would you choose to consistently fill in this time doing something you didn't really care about or didn't find very interesting? Probably not right? Now consider the following: After initially caring a lot about something and

finding it very interesting, have you ever later found that you no longer care about it, and no longer find it that interesting? I know a lot of people myself included, who would say “yeah, I can definitely think of one time”.

In the same way so many barely started or half-finished craft projects have been abandoned, so too have countless exercise programmes and health plans. Why is this? There could be any number of reasons as to why we abandon newly formed habits, but in many of these cases importance, or more specifically a lack of importance, would be a contributing factor. You see doing things outside of your usual daily routines requires extra effort. Therefore **YOUR CHOSEN PURSUITS NEED TO BE OF SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE TO YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE. OTHERWISE, WHY WOULD YOU DO THEM?**

The problem arises when you think something is important but in fact it's actually not or, at least, not as important as you initially thought it was. The trouble is we often get sucked into our own or others' hype and don't think things through. We start a change plan so enthusiastically only to find we crash and burn not too long after. The reason being we didn't take the time to really consider if achieving this goal is truly important. When a little while down the track we figure out that it's not that important, we quit.

So the message when considering the purposeful formation of habits is to firstly spend some time thinking about whether or not it is of real importance. From here you can go three ways. Firstly, if it's not that important don't pursue it. Secondly, if it is important go for it. And thirdly, if it's somewhere in the middle and you still want to do it, spend some time building the importance before or as you get started. If the importance is high enough you will stand a good chance of successfully forming a habit. In the words of Junior Mr Universe 2013 and Junior Mr World 2012 [Kagan Orton \[1\]\(2012\)](#), “You have to really want it first. If you really want it and want to take it further you then have to dedicate yourself.”

Take a moment to consider how you could apply this concept to your existing habits or how it could apply to any new habits you would like to form.

The relationship between habits and goals

When making a change, the ability to self-regulate and modify habitual behaviours to achieve goals is crucial. **IT IS THE ABILITY TO MODIFY YOUR BEHAVIOUR OVER TIME THAT MAKES CHANGE POSSIBLE.** The relationship between goals and habits are the motivational equivalent of salt and pepper. Where you find one you will likely find the other. Just as habits are inextricably linked to motivation and change, so too are goals.

As you will know habits can either benefit or harm the goals you set yourself. Often to achieve a goal you must alter or change certain habits altogether. Conversely goals guide habits and play a crucial role in the breaking and forming process. **AT THE MOST BASIC LEVEL, GOALS PROVIDE THE INITIAL INCENTIVES AND OUTCOMES NEEDED FOR REPETITIVE ACTION TO OCCUR.** Because of this relationship the habits you have

presently are in a very real sense a legacy of past goal pursuits. The more successful the pursuit the more likely the habit will be a positive or useful one. Needless to say the reverse applies.

Given the link between habits and goals and the influence they have on each other, it pays to ensure your goals are sound. Again this becomes increasingly necessary the more difficult the habit is that you are trying to form or break. Habits can be difficult to tackle at the best of times so utilising tangible, realistic goals is a must. With that said, let's now explore what a 'tangible' and 'realistic' goal is and look at how you can get one for yourself.

GOALS

“If we are facing in the right direction, all we have to do is keep on walking.”

- ZEN PROVERB

Goals and goal-setting revisited

“In absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.”

- AUTHOR UNKNOWN

A Goal - A desired outcome or result that a person envisions, plans for and commits to in order to achieve.

Setting goals is hardly a new concept. In fact it's been around for years. I don't actually know when the first human ever thought to themselves “I want that so I'm going to do this to get it”, but I'm pretty sure it was a long time ago.

Nowadays, of course, goal-setting has all kinds of names. Actually it has all kinds of everything: systems, structures, methods, approaches, techniques, processes and of course a wide range of acronyms. The most well-known of these being the SMART goal acronym.

So what about goal-setting has changed since the first human consciously made a decision to achieve a goal? Apart from the acronyms that is...

As always this depends on how you look at it. Sure we know a lot more about the psychology of setting and achieving goals. We can put a name to many of the cognitive functions that occur when setting and following through on plans to change. We have many more names and methods for making goal-setting more structured and user friendly. But, at its core goal setting is the same, and will always be the same.

The equation is simple. WE CONSCIOUSLY WANT OR NEED SOMETHING (THE GOAL), WE PLAN HOW TO GET IT AND THEN WE ACT ON THE PLAN.

Goal + Plan = Action

The real difference between goal setting today versus goal setting in history lies in the complexity of it. Firstly, we have many more complex wants and needs these days. Secondly, the plans we make are often more complex and involved, and finally, we act on plans in ever increasingly creative and varied ways. In short, everything is more complex or, at least, that's how we often make it. So is complexity wrong? No, not at all. It might work for you, or it might not. The point is that what is important when setting goals is that **YOU NEED TO DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU!**

Do goals have to be SMART?

“Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives.”

- VIKTOR E. FRANKL, HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR AND AUTHOR OF THE BEST-SELLING BOOK ‘MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING’

The one thing I really notice when interviewing athletes and exercise enthusiasts is the huge variation in thinking around goals. Bear in mind that these are people who have achieved at the very highest level in their chosen sport or pursuit, or are people who are exercising and have been committed to doing so for some time. While some of these people prefer a rigid, more prescribed approach to goals and goal-setting, others prefer to have a general direction in which to head and aren't that big on specifics. What all do have in common however is the IMPORTANCE they place on the goal or the direction they are taking.

THE IMPORTANCE YOU PLACE ON ACHIEVING A GOAL IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST FACTOR IN DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING IT. Therefore it would be more useful to ask yourself: “how can I build the importance of what I want to achieve?” instead of: “what approach to goals setting should I take?” This is an often overlooked point when considering why we achieve some goals and not others. IT IS IRONIC THAT THE REASON MANY PEOPLE FAIL TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS IS BECAUSE THEY NEVER REALLY THOUGHT THE GOAL WAS OVERLY IMPORTANT IN THE FIRST PLACE. Instead of stopping to think at the front end about whether the goals we set are worthwhile pursuits, we often launch into the goal-setting process itself and neglect to consider the validity of what we are setting out to achieve. Certified Yogi in Iyengar Yoga [Gael Warren \[1\]\(2011\)](#), summed this point up nicely in a 2011 interview when she said, “If you're doing something because somebody else suggests it or because it is trendy and that thing doesn't resonate with you then you're doomed for failure. So you really need to find something that you enjoy doing that fits easily into your lifestyle and then you have a chance to succeed in it.”

So once you have established that something is of significant importance, how should you go about setting goals? As previously mentioned, the SMART goal approach, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (or Time Based) is one way of looking at the process of goal setting. In short it requires that you consider each goal you set through the lenses of the five aforementioned criteria. This approach is widely acknowledged as the ‘industry standard’ for those wanting to give themselves the best chance of success when setting and following through on goals.

For a more information and an in-depth analysis on the SMART goal approach, including an exploration of the strengths and limitations of each aspect, check out the Exercise Change Blog, category: ‘SMART Goals’ www.exercisechange.co.nz/blog

Despite having no doubt that the validity of the SMART goal method is strong, measuring every goal against its five criteria is hard work and may be a little too involved for the majority of people. For the most part people appreciate a simple approach to challenges that often appear quite complex to begin with. In addition SMART goals although effective for shorter term goals, seem to become less and less effective the more long term our goals are. It just so happens that when it comes to exercise and health-related goals a lot of us do want to make long term or lifestyle goals. Life after all is a long term prospect.

So the question for those of us who are in it for the long term is, “do goals have to be SMART?” For short term goals, maybe. For longer term goals, probably not. The reason being that for a lot of people, traditional long range goal setting doesn’t work. Why? Because when things change, as happens regularly in life, plans fall apart. Therefore we need to ask ourselves, “How can I approach goal-setting and make plans that will allow me to achieve longer term or lifestyle goals?” Most traditional goal-setting advice points in one way or another to the SMART approach or similar offshoots. This advice will tell you if you’re not ‘SMART’ then your chances of success are slim.

Unfortunately applying the SMART framework to long term goals can become exceedingly complex. This is unfortunate because as most of you will know complexity often leads to confusion, which leads to frustration, which leads to goals being forfeited.

The problem arises when you consider the huge range of ways you could go about pursuing a long-term goal. Then after choosing an approach, what’s then to say that things won’t change along the way? In fact you could almost guarantee that along the way to achieving a long term goal things will change and most likely more than once.

For example consider a SMART goal such as wanting to lose 15kgs within one year. You may plan to do this by going to the local gym three days a week for an hour after work, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Needless to say, there are a huge number of possibilities regarding how you could achieve this goal but, as per the SMART goal mandate, this is the path you have chosen.

Issues arise when considering what would happen if you change your mind along the way and decide for example, to run instead of going to the gym. What if you wanted to get into a team sport or give cross-fit a go instead? Perhaps the days you had originally planned to exercise don’t work out, or your situation changes due to employment, family or illness. The point is that, more often than not, many things change over time. You could, and should, expect that things will change while trying to achieve a long-term goal.

In summary, SMART goals are often too rigid to adapt to these changes and are not flexible enough to handle life’s dynamic nature. This is especially true when considering long-term or lifestyle changes. You can’t expect to say “ok, so I’m going to live like this now” and then just go do it. YOU NEED TO GROW INTO A NEW LIFESTYLE AND ADJUST THE SPECIFICS OF YOUR LONG-TERM GOAL AS YOU GO. Ultra runner [Russell Maylin \[1\]\(2012\)](#) echoed this point during a 2012 interview when he said “people should not start

with a hiss and a roar, rather they should pursue an evenly paced time commitment and a level of excitement that they can maintain right from the beginning.”

So how can we do this?

Choosing a direction alongside or instead of a specific short-term goal offers an alternative to traditional long term goal setting. Consider the same goal of losing 15kgs in a year as discussed above. While this is a worthwhile goal, remember that it's long term, and for many might require a total lifestyle change. While sticking to a prescribed approach like the SMART method may work well for say losing 2-5kgs, 15kgs is a different challenge altogether. During the time it would take to achieve this goal, what are the chances everything would stay the same? What are the chances you would remain motivated to go to the gym three days a week and eat sensibly? Would your situation, routine or thinking around achieving this goal remain the same? More importantly if these things did change, could you adapt? If you're thinking 'maybe' or 'unlikely', then you wouldn't be alone. In fact, if you think back to your most recent, unsuccessful goal attempt, I'm sure you can relate to some of these changes in thinking, situation or circumstance.

So instead of setting a 'SMART' long term goal, why not choose a direction instead, like wanting to lose weight and feel healthier. When you have established a direction, you can then set short-term goals aligned to your situation at the time. You may still have in your mind that losing 15kgs would be ideal, which is great. It's just that you're doing this by setting and achieving multiple short-term goals that are aligned with your chosen direction. It's important to be clear about what you want to achieve and the direction you want to head in but you have to be prepared to change goals depending on results. Constant reassessment and adjustment is the way to do this ([Storey, \[1\] 2012](#)). By choosing a direction instead of a goal you have the freedom to adjust your plan accordingly as the situation requires.

AS LONG AS YOU ARE HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND ARE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR EFFORTS, A DIRECTION WILL STILL GET YOU TO WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IN THE END.

Thinking about a change plan

“Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind.”

- SENECA, ROMAN PHILOSOPHER, STATESMAN AND DRAMATIST

Although in a way I'm promoting having a more flexible approach when setting goals, it is still useful to have some structure around how you plan to achieve something. Putting a structure in place transforms a direction or desire into a workable plan.

Of course structure or not, if you don't have a strong reason 'why', or you don't see change as important in the first place, it won't matter either way. The more work you do at the front end around deciding what's important to you, the fewer changes of direction you are likely to experience. Building the importance of a specific change therefore is in many ways the most useful thing you can do. I mean if something is so important you feel compelled to do it or achieve it, would an inadequate change plan or goal really stop you from getting there? Certainly not. I'm sure you can think of times in the past where you have overcome adversity to achieve something you really wanted. This is why you always need to consider the reasons you are motivated in the first place when considering any goal or direction.

To get things started we'll now move on to looking at a simple 3 step method called the **2-3-4 approach to change**. This approach will help you to establish the 'WHAT'S', 'WHY'S' and 'HOW'S' of making a change and will provide you with all of the relevant questions you'll need to ask yourself in order to be successful. Below you'll find an explanation of the method followed by an example of what looks like in action.

When it comes time for you to complete your change plan, use the '2-3-4 change plan template' in the [resources section](#) at the end of this book.

For additional information and activities that explore key points including: selecting a direction or goal, options for change, settling on a plan, and strengthening commitment, check out the 'S-O-S-S Goals' supplement in the [resources section](#) (under 'other resources') at the end of this book.

2-3-4 approach to change

“When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.”

- CONFUCIUS, INFLUENTIAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHER, TEACHER AND POLITICAL FIGURE

The **2-3-4** method involves 3 simple steps which explore...

- 1) **2 WHATS:** One direction and one goal
- 2) **3 WHYS:** Motives or reasons why you want it
- 3) **4 HOWS:** Plans and actions for how you'll do it

Let's take a closer look at each step:

Step 1 - Identify 2 WHATS

A GOAL TO GET YOU MOVING AND A DIRECTION TO GUIDE YOUR EFFORTS.

So you want to make a change? The first step is to identify exactly what it is you want to change. The reason for choosing two 'WHATs' is that you can have the best of both worlds, that is both a direction to head in and a goal to aim for. The direction will sustain you in the long term and the goal will get things moving in the short term. The idea is that once you achieve your goal, you identify another and so on and so on, all the while heading in your chosen direction.

When identifying your two 'WHATs', start with the direction as this will inform your goal. If you're not sure about the validity of your direction, don't worry too much at this stage. If it really isn't what you want to do you'll know during the second step when you are unable to come up with any meaningful reasons for wanting to do it. If this is the case, simply return to step 1 before again proceeding to step 2.

To get started, consider the following questions:

Your direction (Your FIRST 'WHAT')

- THINK ABOUT YOUR LIFE NOW... HOW WOULD YOU LIKE THINGS TO BE DIFFERENT?

- GIVEN THE THINGS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE DIFFERENT... WHAT DIRECTION HAVE YOU CHOSEN?

Your goal (Your SECOND 'WHAT')

- WHAT COULD BE THE FIRST STEPS TO MAKING THESE THINGS HAPPEN? (Taking into account the things that would specifically help YOU as well as the things that might get in your way).

After considering the options...

- WHAT IS THE GOAL YOU HAVE DECIDED ON?

I will revisit this goal and either alter it, or set a new goal...

- AFTER THIS AMOUNT OF TIME -

- OR WHEN THIS HAPPENS -

Step 2 - Identify 3 WHYS

Identify three reasons why you absolutely and positively have to do what you are aiming to do. These reasons or motives will keep you moving when times are good, and stop you from quitting when times are tough. This is about what's really motivating you.

It's your motivation in conjunction with the goal-setting process that allows you to achieve your goals. The relationship between motivation and goals is hugely important yet is often overlooked by those eager to change. Think of the relationship between motivation and goals as you would a car and fuel. In the same way you need fuel to run a car, you need motivation to achieve your goals and to drive you in the right direction. In both cases having one without the other won't get you from A to B.

The key point is that making a change is not solely about a goal or direction. What is actually more crucial is the importance you place on achieving a goal or arriving at a certain point. If something is highly important you will be more motivated to achieve it. Without this motivation, without the fuel to drive you, a goal is essentially pointless. **YOU SIMPLY WON'T ACHIEVE ANYTHING MEANINGFUL WITHOUT IT BEING IMPORTANT, WITHOUT THERE BEING A MOTIVE, WITHOUT THERE BEING A CLEAR REASON WHY.**

It is ironic that most people spend the majority of their time crafting their goals, while neglecting to address the motivation needed to achieve them. This is not to say goal-setting isn't a worthwhile exercise. It just means that the reasons why you choose to pursue a goal, and not the goal itself, is what will sustain your efforts.

To get started, consider the following questions: `

- WHAT ARE SOME BROAD REASONS THAT WILL DRIVE YOU TO TOWARDS YOUR DIRECTION OR GOAL?

Considering the reasons you listed above...

- WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE BROAD REASONS THAT WILL DRIVE YOU TOWARDS YOUR DIRECTION OR GOAL?

It is useful after establishing your three reasons, to expand on each of them. Doing this allows you to appreciate the importance and flow-on effects that each might have. For each of your three reasons consider the following:

- WHAT ARE FIVE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS THAT COULD, OR WOULD, ARISE AS A DIRECT RESULT OF EACH REASON?

While five additional reasons sounds like a lot, it really isn't. Remember you are trying to come up with as many reasons as possible to make this change. The more compelling reasons you come up with, the more important change will become. You can even expand on each of these reasons if there are additional benefits. See the example for how this looks in practice.

Step 3 - Identify 4 HOWS

Now that you know 'WHAT' you want to do, and 'WHY' you want to do it, the next step is to plan 'HOW' you are going to do it.

To do this you need to think about four action steps that will get you started and help you to achieve your goal. Remember you aren't coming up with big action steps for your direction, but rather smaller steps for your shorter term goals.

To get started consider the following questions:

- WHAT ARE 10 TO 20 ACTIONS YOU COULD TAKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL?
(Remember to include varied ideas even if they seem a little farfetched or out of your comfort zone).

Considering your list of possible actions...

- WHICH OF THESE ACTIONS WOULD BE REALISTIC FOR YOU TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH AT THIS TIME? (Remember to take into account any barriers that may impact on your choice of actions).

Considering the remaining possible actions...

- WHAT ARE THE FOUR ACTIONS YOU ARE GOING TO TAKE?

Achieved your goal?

Remember these steps are meant to assist you in achieving your shorter term goal while heading in your ideal direction. Once you achieve your first or second goal, repeat the process again. The process should look something like this...

- 1) Review step one again to ensure your direction is still valid. Alter if needed.
- 2) Consider another shorter term goal. This could be similar to your previous goal or totally different as long as it's taking you in the right direction. Go through the 'your second WHAT' process again.
- 3) Review step two or go through the process again if needed. As long as you have strong reasons why you want to achieve your goal, proceed to step three.
- 4) Go through the step three process to come up with another four 'HOWS' and continue heading in your chosen direction.

So there it is. The 2-3-4 approach to change. The hope is that, after completing these three steps, you will have a clear understanding of WHAT you want to do, WHY you want to do it, and HOW you will do it.

Have a look at an example of what the approach looks like in action below, or get started yourself with the 2-3-4 change plan.

You will find a '2-3-4 change plan template' in the [resources section](#).

2-3-4 approach to change - an example

To get started consider the following questions.

Your direction (Your FIRST 'WHAT')

- THINK ABOUT YOUR LIFE NOW... HOW WOULD YOU LIKE THINGS TO BE DIFFERENT?

I'd like to feel happier and healthier. I'd like to look at myself and feel ok about it. Be more self-confident. Exercise more, maybe play a sport. I guess eat better? Just to feel positive.

Or, I want to lose weight and get back into pre-children shape. Well something similar. Look more attractive, feel more confident. Maybe have more energy?

- GIVEN THE THINGS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE DIFFERENT... WHAT DIRECTION HAVE YOU CHOSEN?

I want to improve my appearance and confidence through exercise

Or I want to lose weight and look better

Your goal (Your SECOND 'WHAT')

- WHAT COULD BE THE FIRST STEPS TO MAKING THESE THINGS HAPPEN? (Taking into account the things that would specifically help YOU as well as the things that might get in your way).

Contact someone about joining the social tennis club. Try it out and, if I like it, join. Maybe while I'm sorting that I could go for a walk or a short run once a week. Mondays and Saturdays are out and if I did something on Sunday I will have to sort out childcare. And I'd need to get some running shoes, and get my racket re-strung if I choose to play tennis.

After considering the options...

- WHAT IS THE GOAL YOU HAVE DECIDED ON?

To go for a fast 30min walk or a 15min run on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, and to play tennis on Thursdays.

I will revisit this goal and either alter it or set a new goal...

- AFTER THIS AMOUNT OF TIME - *three weeks*

- OR WHEN THIS HAPPENS - *the walk or run gets significantly easier*

Step 2 - Identify 3 WHYS

To get started, consider the following questions: `

- WHAT ARE SOME BROAD REASONS THAT WILL DRIVE YOU TO TOWARDS YOUR DIRECTION OR GOAL?

I want to be healthier, I want to look better, I want to be happier, I want to be a good role model for my kids, I want more energy, and I want to feel in control.

Considering the reasons you listed above...

- WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE BROAD REASONS THAT WILL DRIVE YOU TOWARDS YOUR DIRECTION OR GOAL?

1) I want to be healthier

2) I want to look better

3) I want to be a good role model for my kids

- WHAT ARE FIVE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS THAT COULD OR WOULD ARISE AS A DIRECT RESULT OF EACH REASON?

Reason 1: I want to be healthier

1) I'd have more energy

a) Day to day routine would be easier

b) More sex

c) Play with the kids more

2) I would be less tired in the morning

a) It'd be easier to get kids off to school on time

b) I'd be nicer to my partner

3) I wouldn't have to go to the doctor as much, or take as much medication

a) This would mean having more money too

4) Better relationship with my partner

5) *Be able to exercise more*

Reason 2: I want to look better

1) *I'd feel more attractive*

a) *I'd be happier with myself*

b) *Could buy new clothes*

2) *My confidence would go up*

a) *Feel more comfortable, socially*

3) *I would feel proud that I was setting a good example for my kids*

4) *I would feel like I've finally got to where I want to be*

a) *I'd feel in control*

5) *I could feel confident in a swimsuit and start swimming again*

Reason 3: I want to be a good role model for my kids

1) *My kids would grow up being healthy*

a) *Huge satisfaction for me knowing I'd done my best*

2) *My kids would experience different exercises and sports*

3) *They won't end up fat like me when I was a kid*

a) *They won't get bullied at school*

b) *They will be more confident*

4) *I would feel satisfied that I had given them the best start*

5) *My partner would be happy that I was doing this for the kids*

a) *Better relationship*

b) *He/she might choose to make a health-related change too*

REVIEW THESE REASONS REGULARLY, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH MOTIVATION.

Step 3 - Identify 4 HOWS

To get started consider the following questions:

- WHAT ARE 10 TO 20 ACTIONS YOU COULD TAKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL?
(Remember to include varied ideas even if they seem a little farfetched or out of your comfort zone).

- 1) Have some hits against the practice wall at the tennis club*
- 2) Sort out logistics*
 - a) Go to a sports shop and get all my gear sorted in one go*
 - b) Contact the tennis club to sort out details*
- 3) Contact some other clubs to see if they sound better*
- 4) Review daily the reasons why I want to do this until I get started*
 - a) put a list on the fridge and on my screen saver at work*
- 5) Talk to my partner, my friends and my colleagues about what I'm planning to do so I'm accountable*
- 6) Ask friends if they would like to play tennis with me*
- 7) Contact friends to walk or run with for support*
- 8) Take health supplements if needed*
- 9) Eat healthier foods for more energy in general*
 - a) Eat healthier sustaining food at afternoon tea so I have some energy on the days I exercise*
 - b) Take some vitamins for improved health and energy*
- 10) Organise things with my partner so nothing gets in my way (kids, household jobs etc.)*
- 11) Look for good routes to run or walk*
 - a) Possibly drive to scenic places or other tracks*
- 12) Start doing some stretches at night so I don't pull any muscles*
- 13) Get a personal trainer*

Considering your list of possible actions...

- WHICH OF THESE ACTIONS WOULD BE REALISTIC FOR YOU TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH AT THIS TIME? (Remember to take into account any barriers that may impact on your choice of actions).

- 1) Have some hits against the practice wall at the tennis club*
- 2) Sort out logistics*
 - a) Go to a sports shop and get all my gear sorted in one go*
 - b) Contact the tennis club to sort out details*
- 3) Review daily the reasons why I want to do this until I get started*
 - a) put a list on the fridge and on my screen saver at work*
- 4) Talk to my partner, my friends and my colleagues about what I'm planning to do so I'm accountable*
- 5) Contact friends to walk or run with for support*
- 6) Eat healthier foods for more energy in general*
 - a) Eat healthier sustaining food at afternoon tea so I have some energy on the days I exercise*
 - b) Take some vitamins for improved health and energy*
- 7) Organise things with my partner so nothing gets in my way (kids, household jobs etc.)*
- 8) Look for good routes to run or walk*
 - a) Possibly drive to scenic places or other tracks*
- 9) Start doing some stretches at night so I don't pull any muscles*

Considering the remaining possible actions...

- WHAT ARE THE FOUR ACTIONS YOU ARE GOING TO TAKE?

- 1) Sort out logistics*
 - a) Go to a sports shop and get all my gear sorted in one go*
 - b) Contact the tennis club to sort out details*

2) *Review daily the reasons why I want to do this until I get started*

a) put a list on the fridge and on my screen saver at work

3) *Eat healthier foods for more energy in general*

a) Eat healthier sustaining food at afternoon tea so I have some energy on the days I exercise

b) Take some vitamins for improved health and energy

4) *Organise things with my partner so nothing gets in my way (kids, household jobs etc.)*

My 2-3-4 change plan in review

My 2 WHATS

My direction is: *I want to improve my appearance and confidence through exercise*

My goal is: *To go for a fast 30min walk or a 15min run on Tuesdays or Wednesday and play tennis on Thursday.*

My 3 WHYS

- 1) I want to be healthier*
- 2) I want to look better*
- 3) I want to be a good role model for my kids*

My 4 HOWS

- 1) Sort out logistics*
 - a) Go to a sports shop and get all my gear sorted in one go*
 - b) Contact the tennis club to sort out details*
- 2) Review daily the reasons why I want to do this until I get started*
 - a) put a list on the fridge and on my screen saver at work*
- 3) Eat healthier foods for more energy in general*
 - a) Eat healthier sustaining food at afternoon tea so I have some energy on the days I exercise*
 - b) Take some vitamins for improved health and energy*
- 4) Organise things with my partner so nothing gets in my way (kids, household jobs etc.)*

CHANGE

“If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.”

- LAO TZU, CHINESE PHILOSOPHER BEST KNOWN AS THE AUTHOR OF THE TAO TE CHING AND
CONSIDERED THE FOUNDER OF PHILOSOPHICAL TAOISM

The relevance of understanding change

“We learn wisdom from failure much more than success. We often discover what we will do, by finding out what we will not do.”

- SAMUEL SMILES, SCOTTISH WRITER BEST KNOWN AS THE AUTHOR OF ‘SELF-HELP’

At this point, you are hopefully beginning to see how motivation, habits and goal setting all contribute in some way to how we change, and in many cases to how we don't change. In this chapter the focus will now shift to change itself, and more specifically the stages we all predictably pass through when making a change. The hope is that by learning more about change you will find yourself in a better position to motivate yourself to exercise and live a healthier life in general.

An understanding of change is both relevant and necessary if you want to achieve challenging goals in the short and long term. Below are several points that highlight why understanding how we change is relevant for those wanting to achieve their exercise and health-related goals.

Knowledge is power

Have you ever heard the expression ‘knowledge is power’? This single, simple expression sums up why understanding the process, or cycle of change, is so important. In fact it sums up why it's relevant to anyone wanting to change any behaviour. Understanding and recognising the steps you go through when you change will empower you **TO TAKE THE RIGHT ACTION AT THE RIGHT TIME**. No longer will the way you change be a mystery and no longer will your success rely on a succession of random events. Knowledge of change, and its cyclical nature, will give you control and put the ball back in your court!

Revamping past attempts

The good news is you may already have many effective strategies that can assist in the building and maintenance of motivation, but you might not realise it. Maybe you have discarded these strategies in the past because they didn't help you achieve your goals. This doesn't mean that they aren't effective. It may simply mean that you were using them at the wrong stage of change. Knowledge of the cycle of change will allow you to identify **WHICH STRATEGIES WILL BE EFFECTIVE AT WHICH POINT**. This is not new stuff, this is just applying old skills to a new situation ([Ashcroft, \[3\] 2013](#)). This is good news for all of those people who regularly scour the internet looking for tips to increase their motivation to exercise. Armed with new knowledge about the cycle of change, you will now be able to use these tools at the right place and at the right time.

Predicting problems

An understanding of the cycle of change equals an understanding of where common problems are likely to occur. This ability to predict potential problems and intervene accordingly will provide you with a huge advantage when attempting a difficult change. By understanding where things are likely to get tough and putting strategies in place pre-emptively, you can be ready for any barriers that threaten motivation. Often it's the unexpected hurdles that will throw you off track, or undo much of the good work done up to a point. For many this provides the perfect excuse to quit or downgrade original goals. Don't settle by letting what happens just happen. You shouldn't have to compromise on what you want. **BY BEING ABLE TO PREDICT PROBLEMS, YOU CAN DEVELOP STRATEGIES BEFORE YOU FACE THESE HURDLES.** This means when they do occur, they will seem more like bumps in the road rather than insurmountable barriers. Food scientist Dr Tim Lindley is big on this concept. What's important is to control your environment to remove the cues. If you're used to having bags of potato chips in your pantry try not to have them there. You can't walk in and out and say no to them every minute of the day. It's best if they aren't there at all ([Lindley, \[1\] 2012](#)).

Failure

The cycle of change acknowledges failure as a natural part of a cycle rather than the end of the road. In fact, it predicts **IT WILL BE MORE THAN LIKELY THAT YOU'LL FAIL BEFORE YOU SUCCEED**, often many times over. This is contradictory to how most of us think about and respond to failure. Often when people fail they give up all together and are left thinking: 'I just can't do it', or 'the goal must've been too difficult' or even worse, 'I'm just not a very motivated person'. This is due to a phenomenon called the abstinence violation effect or 'the really stink moment'. What happens is that during momentary lapses we tend to catastrophise things and look at the situation in a black and white way e.g. I've had one piece of chocolate so I may as well have the whole lot ([Ashcroft, \[4\] 2013](#)). Understanding that failure is a normal part of change takes the pressure of having to succeed on the first attempt. Not only that but it allows you to see failures as a positive thing by reframing 'failed attempts' as 'things I now know not to do'. At the very least having tried and not succeeded is surely better than never having tried at all.

Importance

Understanding change and its cyclical nature is relevant to us in one more way. It can help us to really think about the importance we place on making a specific change. Those who possess such knowledge are aware that the initial stages involve a lot of thinking about whether or not moving forward is a good idea. It is at this point that specific strategies and techniques, designed to help you determine the importance of a specific change, can be utilised.

Determining importance means you can safely choose to pursue legitimate and meaningful changes. **SO OFTEN WHEN PEOPLE DECIDE TO CHANGE SOMETHING, THEY DON'T ACTUALLY THINK THAT LONG OR HARD ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT THEY ACTUALLY WANT TO DO IT.** Putting effort into making a change only to find it

wasn't actually that important in the first place can be disheartening to say the least. By understanding how to assess importance, you will be able to accurately answer the question "Do I really want to do this?" The answer to this question will put you in the best position to make an informed decision about whether to move forward or not.

Remember that success is never guaranteed but by understanding the stages of change and being able to intervene accordingly, you will give yourself the best possible chance of success.

The Trans-theoretical what?

“When it becomes more difficult to suffer than to change... you will change.”

- ROBERT ANTHONY, BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGIST, PSYCHOTHERAPIST, MASTER HYPNOTIST AND PERSONAL PERFORMANCE TRAINER

In the late 70s and early 80s, James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, psychologists from the University of Rhode Island, developed what was called the Trans-theoretical Model of Behaviour Change (TTM). The model is also known by the terms: Stages of Change, Cycle of Change and Process of Change.

TTM is based on an analysis of different theories of psychotherapy, hence the name *trans-theoretical*. The model assesses a person's readiness to change or act on a new healthier behaviour. If a decision to change is made, the model then provides strategies, tools and techniques to assist the person through the action and maintenance stages.

Although many models of behaviour change exist today, TTM is arguably the dominant model of health-related behaviour change. It has received unprecedented research attention and is utilised by an ever widening professional and personal population.

While developing the model Prochaska and DiClemente studied thousands of people all of whom were self-changers, meaning they were responsible for their decision to change. The study focussed on their smoking habits and the attempts they made to try and quit.

The following question was the foundation for this investigation:

‘ARE THERE COMMON PHASES OR STAGES THAT OCCUR WHEN PEOPLE MAKE A CHANGE?’

The answer and the outcome of the study in general was yes, there are indeed common stages that occur when people make a change. The model found that behaviour change does not happen automatically and was not the outcome of an isolated effort to change. Prochaska and DiClemente discovered that while people were trying to change, they followed specific patterns and progressed through discrete, but clearly defined, stages or steps. Only after moving through these stages could a person say that they had truly changed.

The model (adapted from DiClemente and Prochaska, 1998) identified six stages. The first stage (the entry point for the cycle of change) is pre-contemplation. Following on from this is: contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and relapse. An image and brief description of each stage is included below:

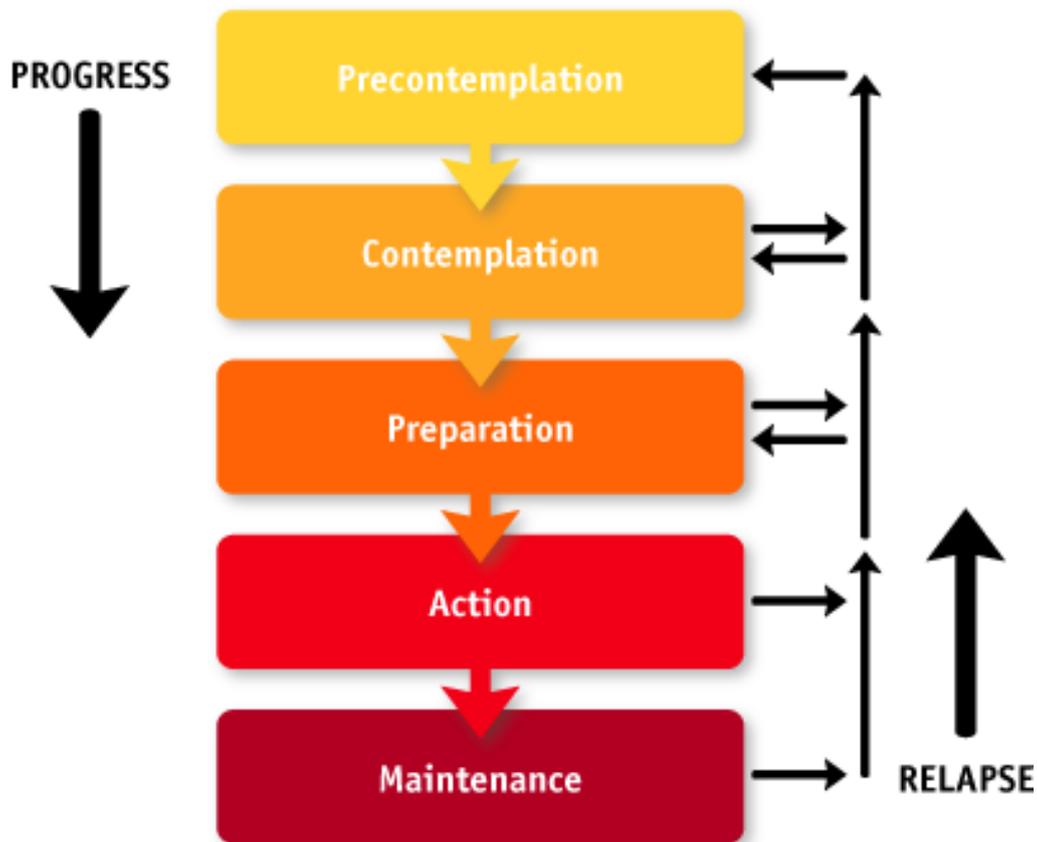


Figure 1 Trans-theoretical model (sourced from AdultMeducation.com)

- 1) **Pre-contemplation** refers to the status quo, or the situation as it exists before a person considers change.
- 2) **Contemplation** refers to the stage where a person is open to change, or is considering changing a behaviour.
- 3) **Preparation** involves making a decision to change and preparing to take action.
- 4) **Action** speaks for itself. It is the stage where a person starts putting into action what they have planned to do in order to change a specific behaviour.
- 5) **Maintenance** is the stage a person will enter after persistently taking action. This is the point where change starts to become integrated into everyday life.
- 6) **Relapse** is a full return to the old behaviour.

The study also found, that although not inevitable, people will likely circulate around this cycle several times before achieving complete or lasting change. This backed up much of what was already known, in that it was normal for people to make several attempts before

succeeding. It also found that at any stage within the cycle a person could move backwards through the stages e.g. slipping from preparation back to contemplation.

From the study findings Prochaska and DiClemente came to understand that people have different needs and must grapple with a different set of issues during each specific stage of change. This meant a person wanting to change would need to employ techniques that match the stage of change they were in. For example, during the contemplation stage a specific set of skills or tools would be used which would be very different to those used within the action stage. From these findings a variety of tools and techniques were developed with the intention of helping people progress through the stages.

Now days there are many versions of the original TTM. Many organisations, both private and public, utilise the original or adapted information. Various additions are often made, depending on the context in which the cycle is being used. Public sectors such as Health, Education and Social Services use the model for anything from addiction work to medication adherence. Privately, it is also used extensively. Some applications include sales, self-help, pursuits related to physical and mental wellbeing, psychology and motivational skills.

Most adaptations follow a similar cyclical process and have anything from five to ten stages. Adapted models, like the original, are designed to assess and understand how people change in the context of a specific course of action. They then assist people to move through the stages of change with the goal being positive behaviour change.

So, with that said, it's time to introduce you to a new and very important adaptation of the cycle of change. This model, [the EMCC](#), has been adapted specifically with exercise motivation in mind. From here on in when a reference is made to the cycle of change it will be this model that is being referred to.

The Exercise Motivation Change Cycle

“Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.”

- STEPHEN HAWKING, THEORETICAL PHYSICIST AND COSMOLOGIST WHO’S BODY OF WORK HAS TRANSFORMED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF COSMOLOGY

[The Exercise Motivation Change Cycle \(EMCC\)](#) is the model of change that will assist you in positively altering your behaviour and habits around exercise. Each stage will be explained fully in a later section but for now a diagram and brief description will get you familiar with the model.

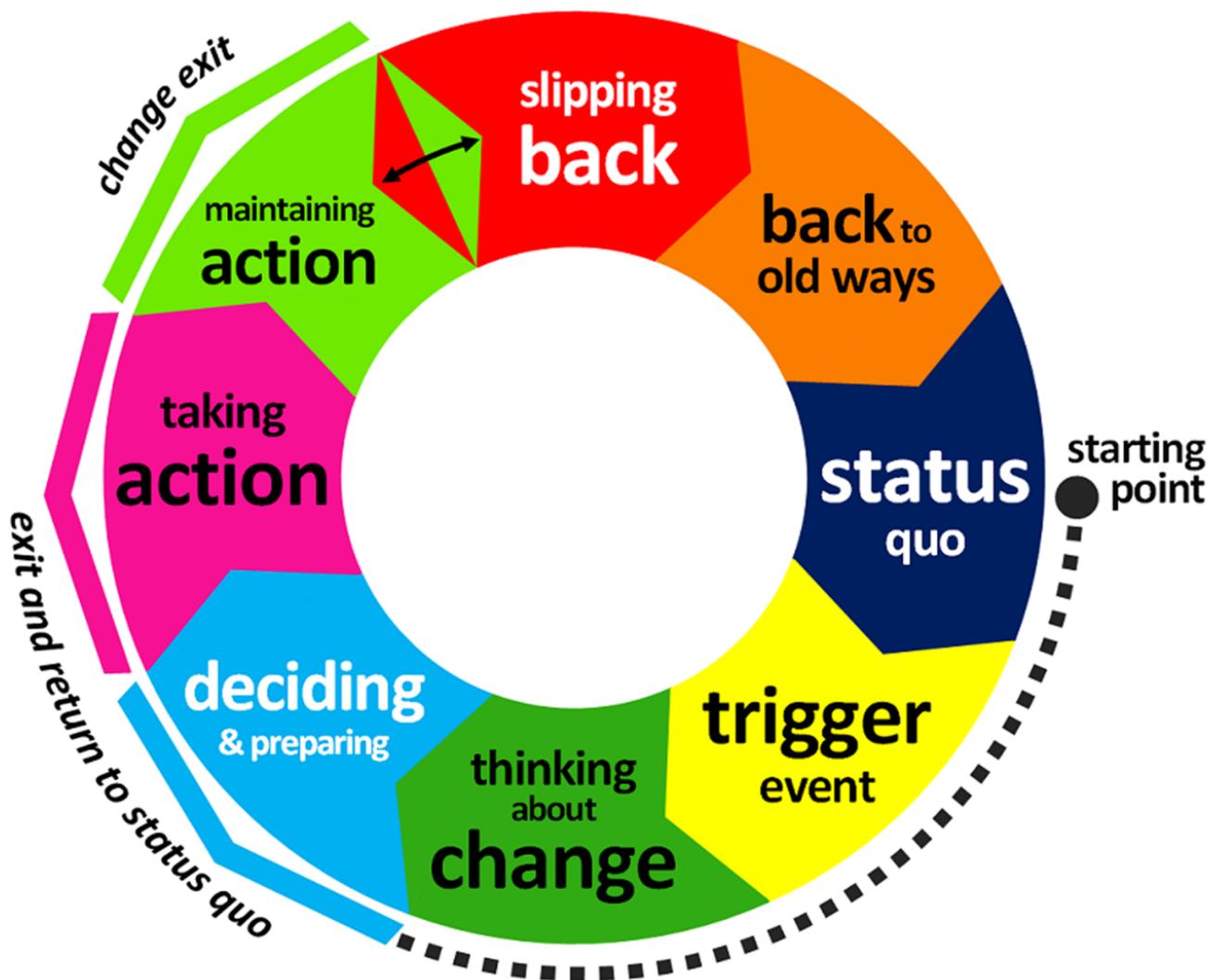


Figure 2 EMMC model

As you can see from the diagram, this adapted change cycle has eight stages and three exit points. A brief explanation follows:

- 1) Status quo.** This stage is occupied by people that haven't yet considered changing a specific behaviour, or are in denial about the need to change.
- 2) Trigger event.** This stage refers to the point in a person's life where something occurs that gets them thinking about change. This point could be triggered by an isolated event or a build-up of negative thoughts or feelings. Either way something happens to trigger the idea that change may be needed.
- 3) Thinking about change.** As the name suggests this stage is all about contemplating change. It is at this point where the pros and cons of changing are considered. This will ultimately lead to a person deciding to make a change or to not make a change.
- 4) Deciding and preparing.** After the pros and cons of changing have been weighed up a person will decide whether or not they want to go ahead with change. If they decide not to, they will exit and return to the status quo stage. If they decide they want to change, they will then enter into the second phase of this stage which involves preparing for action.
- 5) Taking action.** At this point a person has decided to make a change and has made initial preparations to begin taking action. This is the point where, if needed, plans are revised or expanded on before being put into action. It is also the point where many will discover that putting a plan into action is too difficult or is not what they had expected. As a result they may exit and return to status quo.
- 6) Maintaining action.** A person will enter this stage after persistently taking action and establishing a consistent routine regarding a new behaviour. This is the stage where the new behaviour starts to become integrated into everyday life. Once the new behaviour becomes fully integrated it becomes part of a new status quo. It is at this point a person will exit the cycle having successfully changed a behaviour. Alternatively, if the person fails to maintain action they will find themselves slipping back to the way things used to be.
- 7) Slipping back.** This stage represents a person's inability to persistently maintain action. As a result any new behaviour begins to give way to old behaviours and habits. Although the person may still be maintaining action to some degree, it is not as consistent as it needs to be in order to change. At this point there are two options. The first option is to refocus and return fully committed to the maintaining action stage (represented by the double sided arrow between the stages). The second is to continue to let things slip to the point where a return to old behaviours is inevitable.
- 8) Back to old ways.** At this stage, all action and maintenance of a new behaviour has been forfeited. The person will now be doing what they were doing before they attempted to change their behaviour. What differentiates this stage from status quo is a consciousness of having not succeeded. This feeling will eventually dissipate which will bring the person full circle where they will again be occupying the status quo stage.

So there you have it, a brief description of the eight stages of [the EMCC](#). This diagram with its eight stages will provide the perfect structure for what you already know. With this new understanding you'll have an improved chance of making the changes you've always wanted to make.

This is the point where you should be getting excited about your future and the changes you will make. Changes you've always wanted to make but have never been able to. Although you may not know it, this is your crossroad. From here on in you are taking a new exciting path. The path less travelled will be your path to a new and improved you!

Meet Robert, Susan, Amanda and Nick

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

- CHARLES DARWIN, NATURALIST AND GEOLOGIST BEST KNOWN FOR HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

During the explanation of [the EMCC](#) Robert, Susan, Amanda and Nick will help you to make sense of each of the stages. These four case studies will contextualise the material and provide real examples aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice. Although all four case studies are very different, they will all contribute to your understanding of how the change process applies to a broad range of people facing a broad range of challenges.

Take some time now to familiarise yourself with these case studies:

Robert is a 55 year old teacher, husband and father of three. He is unfit and overweight. He hasn't trained in 15 years but he does occasionally play squash. In his 20s Robert was very athletic. In his 30s Robert started a family and his training slowly dropped off.

In the past year Robert has tried to start exercising again after advice from his doctor that he should lose some weight. So far he hasn't managed to stick with anything for longer than 3-4 weeks. He is confused about what he should be doing and how often. Robert knows he should be exercising but doesn't really want to.

Susan is a 45 year old nurse and mother of two. Susan has never really done much exercise and has steadily put on weight since her mid-20s. Susan works part-time and is bringing up two teenage girls. She really wants to lose weight and get in shape but has little time for herself and doesn't like gyms.

In the past Susan has tried several diets but has never experienced any long-term weight loss. She has gone to the gym a handful of times to do both weights and classes, but neither of these appealed to her.

Amanda is a 27 year old mother of two boys, aged 2 ½ years and 4 months. Amanda was always very sporty at school and through her 20s. Prior to having her children she went to the gym at least twice a week and was part of an indoor netball team.

Amanda hasn't exercised since her second son was born. She is low in motivation to exercise as she is exhausted from caring for her two boys all day, and feels she has no time for herself.

To make matters worse she will soon be returning to part-time work. Amanda doesn't see how she will ever have time to get back into exercise and/or start playing netball again.

Nick is a 30 year old retail manager and has been married for two years. Nick has always maintained a reasonable fitness level by playing basketball and occasionally going to the gym. For a long time now Nick has wanted a greater challenge.

On two occasions, five years and three years ago, Nick tried boxing and, although he liked it on both occasions, he quit approximately three months after starting. Two years ago Nick wanted to try bodybuilding but never really got started. Nick doesn't really know what he wants to do.

Exploring the EMCC

“In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”

- THEODORE ROOSEVELT, FIRST SITTING AMERICAN PRESIDENT TO HAVE WON THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

As described earlier in this section [the EMCC](#) has been adapted from Prochaska and DiClemente’s Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change. This adaptation with its eight clearly defined stages has been developed over many years, and is the culmination of substantial personal and professional experience examining both my own and others experiences of change around exercise and health-related pursuits. Thousands of hours in the training room, many interviews with athletes and change experts and countless hours of self-reflection have resulted in this exercise specific model of change that combines the best of modern thinking and theories. The possibilities that will arise once you fully understand this model will be vast and, although I cannot offer a complete guarantee of success, I can assure you that [the EMCC](#) will give you the best possible chance of positively altering your behaviour and habits around exercise.

The power to assess and track your position within the change cycle, and knowing exactly what you should be doing to move yourself through the cycle at any given point, will provide you with an invaluable insight into change. **THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME BEING YOUR OWN POSITIVE CHANGE!**

As we take a closer look at the eight stages in the cycle, we will be using our four case studies to gain a greater understanding of the content. However there is also something else you can do to make greater sense of the material. While you are reading about the eight stages, **I WOULD LIKE YOU TO THINK OF EXERCISE**. Not just exercise in general, but something specific to you that you would like to change regarding your exercise behaviours or habits. This could be something you want to start doing i.e. running for 20 minutes twice a week, or something you would like to stop doing i.e. coming up with excuses for not exercising - ‘I’m too busy’, or ‘I’ll start next week’ and so on.

Remember that [the EMCC](#), like the original model, **ONLY APPLIES TO ONE SPECIFIC COURSE OF ACTION, SO DON’T GENERALISE OR GROUP MULTIPLE BEHAVIOURS INTO ONE - BE SPECIFIC**. Now keep this in mind as you read about the eight stages and consider which stage you might currently find yourself at.

We will start by looking at the entry point and first stage of the cycle, **Status quo**.

Status quo

“Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

- WILL ROGERS, COWBOY, HUMOURIST, SOCIAL COMMENTATOR AND MOTION PICTURE ACTOR

Status quo is defined as ‘The way things are now, the condition or state of affairs that currently exists.’

This stage is occupied by people who haven’t yet considered changing a behaviour or who are in denial about needing to change. It is important to note that at this point there may be no need to change anything you do. You may be happy with everything in your life regarding exercise, fitness and health. If so, this is great! After all we are all trying to reach a status quo that we’re happy with.

On the other hand you may well have an exercise or health-related behaviour that would be beneficial to change. If you fall into this group you will be in one of three positions. Firstly you could be unaware of any issue. Secondly you might be unwilling to acknowledge it, aka in denial. And thirdly you simply might not be ready to change it.

If you fall into the first category and are unaware of any negatively impacting behaviours, you will likely require a stimulus to get you thinking about change. Something needs to happen in your life to trigger this thinking process. Until this happens you will be blissfully unaware of any problems or negative behaviours that need changing.

If you fall into the second group you could be in denial about needing to change. This can be due to the fear of making a change being greater than the fear of staying the same. If you are in denial about an issue, often distorted statements are used as a way to justify the status quo. Statements or thinking such as: ‘well that’s just me’, ‘I’m not hurting anyone’, ‘I’m not that bad compared to others’, or ‘there’s no point in changing and I couldn’t do it anyway’ are all common ways the status quo can be justified. This is a very normal process that occurs with a whole range of issues. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or guilty about not doing something they feel they should be doing. By using distortions and making justifications, we can maintain a level of comfort that allows us to live guilt free.

New Zealand cricketer [Andrew Ellis \[1\]\(2012\)](#) described something similar during a 2012 interview when he said, “there are a lot of people out there who are quite shut off and don’t want to open themselves up to a new way of life because they are inherently stubborn. But... this doesn’t mean that they can’t change, it just means they haven’t found the catalyst that will help them change. Until they open themselves up to changing they are always going to find themselves making excuses or finding roadblocks.”

Those of you who fall into the last group are simply not ready to change a behaviour at this point in time. This speaks for itself. You are aware that there is a problem but don’t intend to

change it now, or in the near future. What differentiates this position from one of denial is the openness or admission that there is a problem behaviour in the first place.

Regardless of whether you are aware of an issue or not, status quo is all about having no intention to change. There is not even any consideration given to changing at this point. It's just not on your radar.

Let's now consider two of our case study examples. Both Robert and Susan are in the status quo stage but are in different positions.

Robert

Robert is in DENIAL about the need to change.

Over the last five years Robert has been getting advice from his doctor that he really should be doing more exercise. He has made several half-hearted attempts to exercise but every time he has started his laziness has got the better of him, and he has quit, often within a month of starting. The problem is that Robert simply doesn't want to exercise.

He justifies his current situation by comparing himself to others his age, especially his two closest friends. Both of these friends are bigger than Robert, and one has serious health issues. Robert often tells himself: 'I'm still in pretty good shape compared with others my age, it could be worse', and 'at least I still play squash now and again, I don't really have the time to fit anything else in'. By thinking this way Robert feels comfortable with his current position and, as a result, has no intention of changing his behaviour.

Question

- What do you think Robert would need to happen in order for him to start thinking about changing?

Susan

Susan is UNAWARE about her need to change.

The idea of losing weight has never been too far from the forefront of Susan's mind. So much in fact that wanting to lose weight has been part of Susan's status quo for the last twenty years. Despite this Susan has accepted that she is a naturally bigger person and to date has always been happy and healthy.

Susan is overweight and would benefit from exercising more but not to the point where she has been advised by medical professionals do so. What Susan doesn't know however, is that

over the past year she has developed Type II diabetes and her health is about to dramatically decline.

Question

- Health issues aside, what might Susan need to happen in order for her to seriously consider losing weight?

What about you...

Considering periods prior to changes you've made...

- Which parts of the status quo stage can you relate to?

- What could you do at this stage to trigger the idea of change?

Trigger event

“Nothing diminishes anxiety faster than action.”

- WALTER ANDERSON, PAINTER, WRITER AND NATURALIST

In this stage something happens that makes an issue visible, usually not in a good way. This stage serves as a launching pad for thinking about change, and kick-starts us into contemplation.

This transition from not thinking to thinking could be triggered by an isolated event, or a build-up of either positive or negative thoughts or feelings. According to legendary martial artist and owner of High Performance Health, [Hugh Robinson \[2\]\(2012\)](#), the two most common triggers are a health crisis of some variety or relationship issues. Either way, something happens to trigger the idea that change may be needed. From here we begin to consider specific behaviours much more thoroughly. Usually this type of occurrence triggers negative feelings and is often driven by a long period of increasing discomfort regarding a specific issue. These feelings will often be accompanied by a sense of increased negative cost regarding the behaviour.

A trigger event that promotes change can be major, e.g. having a heart attack, or becoming physically or emotionally unwell. Alternatively it can be something small, e.g. clothing not fitting, witnessing something inspiring or the way someone looks at you. It may simply occur because you become tired and uncomfortable due to an unhealthy behaviour and its consequences e.g. being out of breath and your clothes smelling bad because you smoke.

Whether the trigger event is a major or minor occurrence, or it is something positive or negative, something happens to jolt you out of the status quo stage and into the thinking about change stage.

Let's now consider three of our case study examples. Susan, Amanda and Nick have all experienced trigger events. Although they have had different experiences the result for each is that they are now considering change.

Susan

Susan's trigger event has arisen after a doctor's visit. For a long time now she has felt tired and run down. After having a series of blood tests Susan's doctor diagnosed her as having Type II diabetes.

This news has come as a huge shock to Susan. She is now seriously considering how she can change her lifestyle in order to overcome her condition.

Question

- *What about this trigger event might make Susan consider changing?*

Nick

Nick's trigger event occurred after he attended a bodybuilding competition to support a friend who had entered. After watching his friend, as well as a number of other muscular well-conditioned men, Nick felt for the first time he really knew what he wanted to do.

Nick left the competition that night in deep thought about how he too could achieve a physique similar to that of a bodybuilder. He doesn't necessarily want to compete, but he wants to transform his body beyond anything he has previously achieved.

Question

- *What about this trigger event has made Nick think this is what he wants to do? Why couldn't he come to this conclusion by himself?*

Amanda

Amanda's trigger event came about following her wedding anniversary dinner. Amanda has only achieved a small weight loss since her son was born four months ago, and has been too busy and too tired to contemplate losing more weight.

As Amanda was getting ready for a special dinner out with her husband (her first evening out in many months) she became distraught as she realised the only clothes that fit were her maternity dresses. She realises that in order to fit the many outfits she has, she needs to lose at least five to six kilos.

The initial excitement that Amanda had about a night out is quickly overshadowed by her not feeling and looking her best. She now feels she needs to seriously think about how to get back into exercise and lose some weight.

Question

- *Why did it take this trigger event to make Amanda to start seriously thinking about change when she already knew she wanted to lose weight?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- Which parts of the trigger event stage can you relate to?

- How could you utilise your trigger event to increase your chance of making a strong decision to change?

Thinking about change

“As you think, so shall you become.”

- BRUCE LEE, LEGENDARY MARTIAL ARTIST, ACTOR, FILMMAKER AND THE FOUNDER OF JEET KUNE DO

At this stage something significant enough has happened that you are now considering the possibility of changing a behaviour. This stage can be looked at as a window of opportunity - one in which you can decide to make a positive change, or choose to stay the same. How long this window lasts will vary depending on the event that triggered the thinking in the first place.

After a trigger event you are usually left thinking: ‘maybe I need to deal with this issue, maybe I don’t?’ You are ambivalent. This stage is all about looking at the options and weighing up the pros and cons of changing in an attempt to resolve ambivalence. The key being to RESOLVE! After all, “Ambivalence is a reasonable place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to live there” ([Miller](#) and [Rollnick](#), 2002).

At this point there is acknowledgment of an issue and there is willingness or even an eagerness to explore the possibility of change. Often it is a struggle to understand an existing behaviour or issue or to visualise what a new behaviour might look like. After initially considering the problem, it is not uncommon for people at this stage to tell themselves: ‘I’m actually okay’ or ‘someday I’m going to change, but maybe now isn’t the time’. Often statements like this are driven more by a sense of hopelessness and fear of failure than by a genuine belief that everything is okay.

How willing you are to explore a new or existing problem will often be linked to the consequences of ignoring it. If the consequences get bad enough it can kick start you into thinking about change. As with motivation, these consequences can be either internal i.e. we create them ourselves, or external i.e. driven by outside influences.

External consequences are often abruptly thrust upon us and can create a powerful initial burst of motivation. Further down the track however the initial desire to change wears off and is replaced by a desire to do the minimum required. This will often result in an issue not being fully explored. Alternately internal consequences can reflect a pattern of uncomfortable feelings around an issue and can kick start and maintain the process of change more effectively.

Regardless of what is driving you to consider change it is now completely and unavoidably on your radar. Considerable time will be spent thinking about the problem as you regularly weigh up if changing now would be the best thing to do. This is the stage where you would ask yourself questions such as: ‘is this really what I want?’, and ‘how important is this to me?’

Let's now consider two of our case study examples. Both Robert and Nick are now thinking about change after experiencing different trigger events.

Robert

Robert has been driven to think about change by an EXTERNAL CONSEQUENCE.

After his regular yearly check-up, Roberts's doctor has again recommended that he exercise more. This time however the doctor is much more insistent, as over the last year Roberts's weight and blood pressure have risen significantly. During the visit Robert noticed the doctor was visibly concerned. This is something which hasn't happened in the past.

Robert leaves the doctor more worried than he has been in the past and tells himself: 'this time something has got to change'. On the way home he is thinking about all of the possible ways he could start to incorporate more exercise into his schedule.

Two weeks later, after the busy end of semester period at work, Robert hasn't started exercising and is starting to question whether or not he really needs to. On the one hand he believes what the doctor had said, and admits to himself that he has put on a little weight. On the other hand he doesn't feel any different and is starting to wonder if the doctor was going a bit overboard to try and scare him into action.

Questions

- *At this point Roberts's chances of changing his behaviours around exercise aren't looking that great? Why is this?*

- *What needs to happen for Robert to increase his chances of changing his behaviours around exercise?*

Nick

Nick has been driven to think about change by an INTERNAL CONSEQUENCE.

A week after attending his friend's bodybuilding competition Nick is still churning over in his mind everything that would need to happen in order for him to transform his body. The problem for Nick is whether or not he really wants to do this. He thinks he does. He knows for certain he wants to do something, but is this it?

Nick is continually trying to visualise how he would look and feel if he made a physical transformation. He keeps coming back to the feeling of excitement he had last week while attending the competition. Nick is beginning to feel almost certain that bodybuilding is what he wants to do.

He is also mindful of the time and financial commitment such an endeavour would demand. What would his wife think? What if they decided to have a baby sooner than planned? Could he fit this in around work and social commitments? There are many unanswered questions. What seemed so clear to him a week ago is getting more and more complicated.

Questions

- *What are the things Nick is doing that will help him with changing?*
- *What needs to happen for Nick to increase his chances of changing his behaviours around exercise?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the thinking about change stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do at this stage to subjectively explore your situation and resolve ambivalence about changing?*
- *What would help you to make a strong decision to change?*

Deciding and preparing

“It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret.”

- JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE, VOTED THE ‘GREATEST FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE 20TH CENTURY’
BY SPORTS ILLUSTRATED FOR WOMEN

This stage represents the first real fork in the road or decision point regarding any changes that may or may not take place. After thinking about change for an amount of time, you will now be at the point where a decision to change, or not, is imminent. It’s at this point where you can choose to go ahead with making a change or decide for whatever reason that now’s not the time.

Deciding not to change will mean a return to the status quo stage where you will remain until another trigger event restarts the process. If however after weighing things up you decide to change, you will enter the second phase of this stage and begin preparing for action.

Regardless of what you choose to do, it’s often a big relief to make a decision, especially if you’ve overcome a high level of ambivalence in the process. Unfortunately this feeling doesn’t always guarantee a good or even a right decision has been made. It’s not uncommon to feel a misguided sense of relief, as if the hard part of the process has been dealt with. Making a decision is positive however more decisions will need to be made and acted on if your change is going to stick.

Making a change is often preceded by an idea that you don’t want things to carry on as they are currently. This will then lead to a decision about exactly what it is you would like to be different i.e. what new and improved situation will replace the existing one? Once a clear picture is formed the next step is to explore goals and consider action steps. This is where the preparation phase of this stage kicks in. It is vital at this stage to remember that the more time you put into preparation the better your chances of maintaining action will be ([Lockstone, \[2\] 2012](#)).

Hopefully during the previous stage there has been enough information gathered to come up with a clear goal or direction, and a plan of action. It is of high importance that any goals set at this point are achievable and highly relevant to what you aim to do. This means prioritising tasks and focussing on shorter term goals that can be easily achieved. Doing this will result in an initial sense of success and will also build the confidence needed to be bolder with your goals next time around.

Preparation is not just exclusively about planning and goal-setting. It can also include actually taking some small steps in the direction of your anticipated change. A kind of behavioural warm up for what’s to come. It may also include the creation or consideration of some kind of a support system. Something that will assist you to stick with the plan once it begins. Being accountable to others as well as yourself can be an additional motivator when

trying to make a change. Making plans without anyone else knowing means you only have yourself to answer to. As I'm sure you would have experienced in the past, this doesn't always work out.

Preparation is usually pre-emptive of action taking place within a month of plans being made. Both the strength of the decision to change and the quality of the preparation involved will play a big part in determining how effective the action stage will be.

Ultimately what this stage represents is a decisive choice to move forward or to not move forward with change. The situation for those that choose not to change will remain the same. Those who do decide to move forward are making a commitment to be different in some way. How strong this commitment is will vary but on some level a commitment has been made as have the necessary preparations to take action.

Let's now consider three of our case study examples. Although Robert, Amanda and Nick were driven to think about change by different things, they are now all in the deciding and preparing stage.

Robert

Following a hectic couple of weeks at work, Robert had a bit of downtime before school began again. He used this time to think about his future. Robert acknowledged that he had a pattern of beginning something then quitting. This didn't sit well with him as he has always thought of himself as a doer and not a quitter.

This time he said to himself: 'I'm going to do it. I'm going to start exercising and I'm going to stick with it!' Robert had decided to take action.

That day it was Tuesday. Robert told himself that come Monday he would start exercising. He planned to do 45-60 minutes of exercise two mornings a week before work. In addition to this he would also play squash at least once a week.

Questions

- *What are the chances of Robert successfully taking action, based on the strength of his decision and preparation? Why do you think this?*

- *What could Robert do to increase his chances of successfully taking action?*

Nick

Nick has now been thinking seriously about body building for almost two weeks now. During this time he has renewed his membership at the local gym and has had a workout with

his friend Luke to see how it felt getting back into it. Nick had told Luke how impressed he was with his physique and that he was considering getting into weightlifting. As a result Luke had given Nick some old magazines and a tub of protein powder to get him started.

Nick had also discussed the possibility with his wife, who had been supportive of the idea. She told Nick that she wanted him to be happy and healthy and if that cost a little extra time and money, then so be it. She also said that all they did now at night was to watch TV, so why not do something constructive? She said she might even start going to the gym if he did.

Nick had now heard all he needed to fully commit to the idea. He felt excited at the possibility of transforming his body and couldn't wait to get started. He told his wife that night: 'I'm going to go for it!'

Nick spent the next two nights eagerly planning his workouts and nutritional plan. He wrote down everything. When he would work out, what he would be doing, who he would be doing it with, what he would eat, what he would need to buy etc. On the weekend he brought everything he needed and made some final preparations. Nick felt, for once, that he had made the right decision. He was excited. He was prepared. Nick was ready for action.

Questions

- *What are the chances of Nick successfully taking action, based on the strength of his decision and preparation? Why do you think this?*
- *What are the specific aspects of Nick's decision and preparation that put him in a good position for taking action?*
- *Is there anything Nick could do in addition to what he has already done to increase his chances of successfully making a change?*

Amanda

Since going out for dinner with her husband, Amanda has felt loathsome and depressed about her post baby body. She had flicked through some old photo albums earlier in the week and missed the way she used to look. While she is aware that her body will never be quite the same post children, at the very least she feels she should still be able to get back into her old clothes.

Frustrated by her perceived lack of time, Amanda dedicates an evening to plotting out her weekly schedule and is surprised to discover she has three to four windows of time during the week, mostly at night and on the weekend. Although there was more time than she anticipated Amanda still only commits to exercising two times midweek in the evenings. She saves the weekend for backup in case the demands of motherhood interfere with her midweek sessions.

Amanda knows she has a tendency to quit easily if she is self-reliant, so she joins up with her indoor netball team again. Knowing they will depend on her to play will be a great motivator to show up. She also re-joins the gym as she hates exercising outdoors, especially if it's cold and wet. A woman from her baby coffee group has also expressed an interest in getting back in shape, so they have committed to attending one pump class per week. Amanda has also arranged that either her mother or husband will look after the kids while she goes out, so that she is not distracted and can fully commit to what she has planned.

Amanda is really looking forward to achieving her five to six kilo weight loss goal. The prospect of having some time for herself is also a huge motivating factor for her.

Questions

- *What are the chances of Amanda successfully taking action, based on the strength of his decision and preparation? Why do you think this?*
- *What are the specific aspects of Amanda's decision and preparation that put her in a good position for taking action?*
- *Is there anything Amanda could do in addition to what she has already done to increase her chances of successfully making a change?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the deciding and preparing stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do, or what information could you draw on at this stage, to make a strong decision to change?*
- *What would help you to prepare for making a change and give you the best possible chance of succeeding?*

Taking action

“You miss 100 per cent of the shots you never take.”

- WAYNE GRETZKY, THE GREATEST HOCKEY PLAYER EVER, NICKNAMED “THE GREAT ONE”

At this stage you've committed to making a change and made initial preparations to begin taking action. You have talked the talk and now it's time to walk the walk. If needed plans are revised or expanded on before being put into action. It is important to note that the taking action stage is characterised by actual behaviour modification and change. No amount of talking, planning or organising can be a substitute for actually doing something.

For many this will be an exciting time. This excitement will often provide an initial surge of motivation which will assist with taking the first steps. For others though, this will be the point where you discover that putting a plan into action is too difficult or not what you had expected. As a result some people may exit and return to status quo.

An exit at this point may happen for a number of reasons:

Firstly, it may simply be a matter of losing motivation to change. What you thought was a great idea in the beginning may now seem not that great or maybe even pointless. What you thought was of high importance initially has now become unimportant or less important than the next thing you're thinking about changing. If you find yourself in this situation, it's likely that you haven't spent enough time attending to one or more of the earlier stages. As forensic psychologist [Anton Ashcroft \[5\]\(2013\)](#) says, people are usually pretty good at the initial phase of the action stage, but find the continued action more difficult. It is easy to become complacent and think you are fixed. As a result you may experience 'drift' which can ultimately lead to any new habits degrading.

Secondly, you may find that the sacrifices you have to make in order to implement your plan are too great. Considering sacrifices versus actually making sacrifices are after all two very different things. For some, living a healthier existence may mean distancing yourself from certain friends or social groups and in some cases even family members. It may also mean dramatically altering established habits, routines and lifestyle choices that hinder change. For some, these sacrifices will simply be too much. If you find yourself in this situation it's probable you weren't entirely aware of how any sacrifices or changes might trigger feelings of loss. Loss in this sense refers to losing your previous lifestyle or at the least certain things within it. As the significance of the changes you are making becomes apparent, emotionally it can be a time of highs and lows and things can often seem overwhelming. This is often the point where self-sabotaging behaviour can creep in causing you to abandon action in favour of going back to the old, not so good, but much more comfortable status quo.

Thirdly, an exit might be the result of inadequate or unrealistic goals and plans. If either of these things have not been well thought out or are too ambitious, the chances of following

through will be low. If you are to succeed with change it is vital that goals are realistic for you and your needs at the time. Unrealistic goals have a lot to answer for when considering a person's ability to change. Not only do they negatively affect any current change attempts but they also taint future attempts. The reason being that failure often reinforces beliefs that changing is too hard. The more a person fails, the more they will believe they can't succeed and so the unhelpful cycle continues. Establishing goals and plans that are manageable, appropriate, and effective therefore is key, if exiting and returning to status quo is to be avoided. Little is better in the beginning. Taking the slow and steady approach will help any new behaviour become habitual and part of your routine ([Warren, \[2\] 2011](#)).

Assuming you can overcome these and any other obstacles you might face, the first real steps towards changing will begin. New behaviours will begin to emerge and will hopefully become consistent enough to replace old behaviours. The longer you maintain the changes the easier it will become to stick with them, and the more likely it will be that you'll progress to the next stage in the cycle - that stage being to maintain action.

Usually before progressing to the maintaining action stage, you would have been consistently taking action for approximately six weeks to six months. This time will fluctuate depending on how much of a commitment is made to changing. This will largely depend on the motivation you have previously built, as well as your ability to formulate realistic goals and consistently follow through with action.

Let's now consider two of our case study examples. Robert and Susan have made a decision to start exercising regularly and have both made different preparations before beginning. They are now both in the taking action stage.

Robert

On Sunday evening, a day before he was due to start exercising, Robert considered what exercise he would do tomorrow morning. He had promised himself that this time he would stick with it. But what would he be sticking to? He had decided to exercise two mornings a week but hadn't thought about what he would do. Robert decided he would go for a walk as that would be an easy way to start things off.

The next morning Robert got up half an hour earlier, got his running shoes on and was about to head out the door when his wife called out. She reminded Robert that she needed a ride to work today as she was dropping the car off to the mechanic. Robert hadn't really told his wife about what he was intending to do. He could hardly blame her for not knowing he had planned on going for a walk that morning. Dropping his wife off meant that Robert now only had 20 minutes to exercise. He told himself this was not enough time to really get a sweat up. He put his shoes away, and had breakfast with the intention of walking the following morning.

That evening after work, Robert called his friend John to line up a game of squash for later in the week. John told Robert he was leaving on business the following day and wouldn't be back until next week. However he told Robert that if he wanted to play he was free tonight. Robert had had a busy day so he declined, thinking to himself he would go down later in the week and play with one of the locals. Besides, the game was on later and Jim, Robert's neighbour, always came round to watch it while having a couple of beers.

The next morning Robert's alarm went off half an hour earlier. Robert had drunk a few more beers than planned the night before, so he hit the snooze button. Robert didn't end up exercising that day. The next morning Robert got up half an hour earlier got his running shoes on and finally made it out the door. After ten minutes it began to rain. Robert was already tired and said to himself that twenty minutes' total was not bad. He turned back.

The next evening Robert headed down to the squash courts expecting to find someone to play with. There was nobody free for a game. Robert went home thinking to himself at least he had tried. The next morning, Robert didn't get up earlier to exercise. He thought, as it was now Friday, it would be impossible to make up the two mornings and one evening of exercise he had planned to do. He would start over the following week.

The next week came and went and Robert managed to do one morning's exercise. The following week he didn't do any. Robert told himself that at the moment things are just too busy. He told himself that if things got worse or if he started to feel really bad, he would definitely commit more seriously to exercising, but for now things were ok. At this point Robert exited the taking action stage and returned to status quo.

Questions

- *What are the things Robert didn't do in the previous stage that contributed to him ultimately returning to status quo?*
- *What could Robert have done after his first unsuccessful week to regroup and get back on track with making the changes he originally wanted to make?*
- *In what ways has Robert affected any future attempts at changing his behaviour?*

Susan

After Susan's diagnosis she only spent a short time in the thinking about change stage. During this time she thought intensely about her health and the behaviours that had contributed to her current position. She thought about her children and how her ill health may affect them in the future. She thought about her career and how she needed to be strong and be a good role model for those she worked with. She also thought about the things she had always wanted to do for herself that she had never managed to do.

As a result Susan made a strong decision to make a change. After her decision she meticulously considered where she had gone wrong in the past. She thought about how she

could do things differently this time. She set herself a series of small achievable goals and made a detailed plan of how she would achieve them. She also let everyone close to her know about her intentions to change, as well as the reason she was doing it. Susan felt prepared, motivated and confident she could do it.

Susan finished making her preparations for taking action early Tuesday evening. Because this was something she wanted to do for herself and others, she thought ‘why wait until Monday?’ She looked at the weekly routine she had created. On Tuesdays she had planned to walk for an hour. It was still light outside and the weather was fine. She put her shoes on and left feeling like she had really taken charge of the situation. A little over an hour later she arrived back home, tired but feeling empowered.

The next day Susan again completed her planned routine and felt great for it afterwards. Her children even pointed out that she seemed different somehow, in a good way, and had told Susan they were proud of her. Susan finished her weekly routine the following Friday night and even managed a small walk in the weekend, even though she hadn’t planned it.

After reflecting on the week’s exercise, Susan realised for the first time that she had never really exercised because she wanted to. It was always because of outside pressures and because she felt she should. For the first time she realised she had the right motivation to keep going. This insight added to her confidence and she felt great. She also told herself that this was just the beginning and things were bound to get challenging sooner or later. At this point Susan again considered where she had gone wrong in the past. She went over the strategies she had planned to put in place for when these same situations would inevitably occur again.

The following three weeks went according to plan. By now Susan could notice a change in her fitness and energy levels. The following week, however, she had several challenges arise: a sick child; overtime at work; and a family member unexpectedly coming to stay. Susan didn’t have a great exercise week that week, although she did manage to employ several of the strategies she had planned to use when such events occurred. As a result she remained empowered and didn’t become disheartened by missing some sessions.

The next week, when things were back to normal, Susan went over her goals and plans again and reminded herself of the reasons she was doing this in the first place. She managed a full week of exercise and even did extra in the weekend.

Questions

- *What were the things that Susan thought about that helped her to take action?*
- *What did Susan put in place that will help her to stay motivated and have the best possible chance of making a change long term?*
- *What were some of the small things Susan did to empower herself and gain additional confidence to take action?*

- *What was good about the way Susan dealt with challenges when and after they arose?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the taking action stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do or what information could you draw on at this stage to ensure you will start and continue taking action?*
- *What could you do to pre-emptively prepare for any barriers or roadblocks that might occur while taking action?*

Maintaining action

“Some men give up their designs when they have almost reached the goal; while others, on the contrary, obtain a victory by exerting, at the last moment, more vigorous efforts than before.”

- POLYBIUS, INFLUENTIAL GREEK HISTORIAN

You will arrive at maintaining action after persistently and consistently taking action for approximately six weeks to six months. At this point you will have consolidated skills, routines will have been established and new habits will have been formed. It is also likely that by now you've used some strategies to deal with barriers and high risk situations. Consistent efforts to change are beginning to pay off. This is the stage where new behaviours start to become integrated into everyday life. You have tasted success to some degree and can now see that making a long term change is possible. At this point you may be thinking things like: 'this is really happening, I'm doing it', or 'I didn't think I would get this far but here I am'.

Despite having tasted success to some degree, it's very normal that the novelty and excitement of making a change may now be diminishing. Perhaps you might feel as if it's gone altogether? As a result it's common that your energy and enthusiasm for continuing with new behaviours may be levelling out, or even declining. Understanding that this is normal and predictable is the first step in pushing through this often difficult sticking point.

If you are to make a permanent or long lasting change you will need to spend approximately three to six months in the maintaining action stage. After this time you will exit the cycle having successfully made a change. At this point new behaviours will have become fully integrated into everyday life and will now part of a new, more positive status quo.

If however you're unable to consistently maintain action, you'll find yourself slipping back to the way things used to be. Maintaining action is the stage where your initial high levels of motivation are likely to fade. In this position you may often find yourself questioning why you're changing in the first place. Flip flopping between maintaining action and the slipping back stage therefore is not uncommon and again is actually expected. This is represented on [the EMCC](#) by the double-sided arrow between the two stages. If you do enter the slipping back stage and don't reassess the reasons for wanting to change in the first place you will not return to maintaining action. Instead you will keep progressing through the cycle until you arrive at the back to old ways stage. From here the cycle of change would begin again.

At the heart of the maintaining action stage there needs to be a commitment to on-going change. After choosing to be different and making shorter term changes, what is now being asked of you is a commitment to long term change. It is important to make the distinction between long term commitment and long term goals. Although a long term commitment is

required, this doesn't mean that when developing a plan for maintenance that goals should be long-term. To maintain momentum through this stage you still need to experience the regular rewards that shorter term goals provide. Completing these smaller tasks will ultimately lead to the long term goal of changing a behaviour. Goals with too long a proximity, or expectations that are too high, will result in you becoming overwhelmed. This will inevitably lead to old behaviours and habits re-emerging.

By making an on-going commitment you will also begin to tackle change at a deeper level. Changing your behaviour is one thing, but changing values and beliefs is what really needs to happen for long term change to stick. If you act a certain way but believe something else, it's only a matter of time before your behaviours will realign themselves with your beliefs. The hope is that by regularly experiencing the rewards that come from behaving differently, your values and beliefs will also change. This however is easier said than done, and will depend largely on how realistic your original goals were. As nine times winner of the gruelling Speight's Coast to Coast multisport event [Steve Gurney \[2\]\(2012\)](#) states, "you have to choose to do things that are closely aligned to what really matters to you in life." If this has not been the case, you might find maintaining action tough.

It is natural that you align and surround yourself with others who have the same values and beliefs. Because of this when you alter who you are and what you believe it may be that your relationships need to be reviewed. This may result in the people in your life being polarised into two groups. Those who support your change and those who don't. Letting go of allegiances and friendships can be one of the hardest things about making major life changes. The question to ask at this point is: 'is this relationship holding me back from achieving the things I want to achieve?' If the answer is yes, then ask: 'what is more important to me, my goals and dreams, or this relationship?' This might sound harsh but it's reality.

Yet another aspect of maintaining action is expanding on the work already done around managing high risk situations. There will have already been many situations that have threatened your progress to change. Without a doubt there will be many more. During the taking action stage, management of these situations will have already started. During the maintaining action stage the task is to now extend on and fine tune these strategies. This will increase your confidence and ability to deal with any future situations that will inevitably occur, e.g. varying routines, sickness, injury, change of job or living arrangements etc. Continued use of these strategies will also help to strengthen your newly formed values and beliefs which will ultimately support long term change.

As you can see the maintaining action stage is much more than just getting on with things. It is the stage where motivation is put to the test and is also the point where you will choose to either fully commit or start to question whether change is still needed. Ultimately if change is to be achieved a deeper commitment to change is required. This will inevitably lead to an alteration of values and beliefs which will result in a successful change and an exit from the cycle.

Let's now consider two of our case study examples. Susan and Nick have been taking action for approximately 6 weeks to 3 months and are now both in the maintaining action stage.

Susan

After months of consistent effort, Susan feels as if she's a new person. She has lost weight, her skin is clearer and she feels great. The doctor has informed her that her glucose tolerance and kidney function test results are now almost in the normal range. The symptoms Susan initially experienced such as fatigue, thirst, and a reduced sense of wellbeing have all improved. Overall her efforts have resulted in a reduction of her diabetes symptoms.

Over recent months Susan's values and beliefs around exercise and health in general have also started to change. Through making changes and experiencing the benefits of exercise and a healthy diet, many of her old ideas are now changing. Susan feels she understands why she never succeeded in the past, and now knows she has the knowledge needed to change permanently.

Along the way Susan has also had numerous opportunities to manage difficult situations and use strategies accordingly. She feels highly confident that, no matter what happens, she will continue on her current path to change.

Although Susan feels committed to a new lifestyle, she also feels a little lost, as all her initial goals have now been met. After receiving the good news about her diabetes, Susan is not sure where to go next. She still intends to keep up her exercise routine but hasn't really thought about what her new goals will be now that her diabetes is under control.

Susan has had an intense few months of exercise and because of that has sacrificed many things she once used to do. One friend in particular, Beth, had initially put pressure on Susan to maintain their weekly get together. Susan and Beth usually went out for a few drinks, dinner and a movie once a week, and got together for a catch up over coffee and cake during the weekend. Since beginning her new exercise and diet regime, Susan hasn't really seen Beth much and she misses her company. Beth had initially been insistent that they maintain their weekly dates but after she saw Susan was serious about changing she eased off.

It just so happened that the weekend after Susan received her good news, Beth gave her a ring on the off chance that Susan wanted to grab a coffee. This hadn't been Susan's routine for months now but she felt she deserved a treat. Susan had such a good time she made plans to meet with Beth later in the week for dinner and a movie, just like they used to do.

Questions

- To date, what are the things Susan has put in place that will help her during the maintaining action stage?

- What are the things that could threaten Susan's progress towards long term change?

- *What could Susan do at this point to refocus and get back to effectively maintaining action?*

Nick

After making a strong decision to change, Nick made preparations and plans to take action. During the first month of action Nick was buzzing with excitement and was highly motivated. After this motivational honeymoon period started to decline however, Nick found it increasingly difficult to stick to his routine. Near the end of the second month he almost came to a point where he was ready to quit.

Thankfully due to the preparation Nick had done he was able to re-establish what was important to him. He reminded himself of how unsatisfied he was previously. He reinvigorated the feelings of excitement he had during previous stages and he revisited the goals he had put in place. He also reflected on how far he had come and what he had already achieved in two months. This was enough to keep Nick on track. Since the end of his second month Nick hadn't faltered on his journey. He has been focussed and driven. He still has the support of his wife and his friend Luke.

A few more months down the track, Nick is now facing some new challenges. Until now, Nick has managed to make considerable changes to his body and is looking and feeling pretty good about his new physique. Lately however a nagging thought has been occupying his thoughts: 'what's next for me?' Nick had always said to himself he doesn't want to compete. The problem is that Nick can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. How does he know when he has achieved his goals, if there is no measuring stick?

This uncertainty regarding how far he should take his new endeavour is becoming distracting and demotivating for Nick. He has recently felt distracted at the gym and has even missed a couple of sessions. Nick feels he needs to establish new goals, but is stuck as to which direction he now wants to go. To make matters worse, Luke, who has been a constant support throughout this process, will be moving away at the end of the month. Nick is happy for Luke but he is worried about the impact this will have on his on-going motivation.

Questions

- *To date, what are the things Nick has put in place that will help him during the maintaining action stage?*

- *What are the things that could threaten Nick's progress towards long term change?*

- *What could Nick do at this point to refocus and get back to effectively maintaining action?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the maintaining action stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do at this stage to ensure you stay on track?*

Slipping back

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AMERICAN CLERGYMAN, ACTIVIST, AND NATIONAL ICON

The slipping back stage typifies an inability to persistently maintain action. Although maintenance may still be occurring to some degree, it's not as consistent as it needs to be to make a change. During this stage, whether consciously or not, you will essentially be moving away from your original commitments. Old ways of thinking and unproductive or harmful behaviours will begin to creep in. As a result any new changes that have begun to form will begin to give way to old behaviours and habits.

This stage represents a tipping point from which you can choose to return to the maintaining action stage or progress to the back to old ways stage. This back and forth between maintaining action and slipping back is represented by the double-sided arrow between the two stages. When you find yourself in this stage, you are faced with two options. The first being to refocus and return, fully committed to the maintaining action stage. The second option is to continue to let things slip. If this happens a return to old behaviours is inevitable.

Usually a lapse will start off as discrete changes in thinking or behaviour. If left unchecked and allowed to develop, these small alterations can eventually override any positive changes made so far. Any newly-formed values, beliefs and attitudes may also be overridden. Even small lapses in thinking or behaviour if left unchallenged, can spiral out of control and result in a full blown relapse.

Whether you challenge these lapses will largely depend on how aware of slipping you are. Awareness regarding slippage will vary depending on the person. Some people may be very aware they're slipping back and will be conscious of the choices they're making. Others may have limited or no consciousness of what's happening, meaning any choices being made will be largely subconscious. Whether aware or not, in almost all cases slipping will occur due to dwindling commitment and motivation.

Commitment to change, as with motivation, is not fixed and can be expected to fluctuate. It is normal that during the maintaining action stage commitment may be lower than it had been during previous stages. This can happen for any number of reasons but often things like boredom or missing the way things used to be are common culprits. Boredom can often be the result of a lack of direction which can contribute to a sense of hopelessness. It's at this point when you can begin to contemplate the positive aspects of life before attempting change. The more these positive aspects are thought about, the more likely it is that you will start to doubt whether or not change is a good idea. Previously unthought-of downsides of

changing may start to emerge. If these are left unchallenged a return to the way things used to be is almost guaranteed.

Major or unexpected events can also challenge commitment. As food scientist [Tim Lindley \[2\]\(2012\)](#) says, “Will power is great until your life turns into crap.” Things that have the potential to dominate thinking such as deaths or illness, employment, holidays, relationships or environment can all be to the detriment of your commitment to change. Any major event, good or bad, can temporarily unbalance life and upset routines. In addition to major events, changes in day to day living can also effect commitment. Even things as simple as diet and exercise, according to Junior German Taekwondo Champion [Johan Hausen \[1\]\(2012\)](#), can hugely affect motivation and play a massive role in derailing any attempt to change.

When something does affect your commitment to change, it often results in unhelpful thinking and behaviours. It’s common to deny, justify and minimise these behaviours in order to feel more comfortable with what is happening. Skewed comparisons between life now and life before attempting change may also occur. Everyone has heard the expression ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’. At this stage you may be actively trying to convince yourself of this as a way to justify getting back to the way things used to be.

It is important to note that slipping back or lapsing during the maintaining action stage is very common. Someone who manages to change their behaviour on their first attempt is the exception, not the rule. Often slipping back can be a highly reinforcing experience. A return to old behaviours can be wake up call as to why you were trying to change in the first place. Slipping back can force a review of plans, goals, and the things you value. If after you review these things and return to maintaining action, it is likely that you’ll have a renewed sense of purpose and will experience a boost in motivation.

Ultimately the slipping back stage represents a very normal part of the change process and should not be viewed in a negative way. For many of you slipping back will conjure up feelings of failure, frustration or inadequacy. It’s crucial that these feelings aren’t allowed to take hold as they will severely damage your mind set when it comes to changing in the future. Change is almost always a cyclical process, therefore slipping should be viewed as normal. Understanding this will not only enable you to pursue change again in the future, but will also give you an idea of things to look out for. This means that when you are ready to attempt change again, you’ll be doing so with a greater knowledge of what works and what doesn’t.

Let’s now consider two of our case study examples. After managing to maintain action for some time both Susan and Nick now find themselves in the slipping back stage. While they both have different levels of awareness about what’s happening, they are both exhibiting the same types of thinking and behaviours.

Susan

For some time now Susan has been unconsciously thinking and behaving in a way that has been jeopardising the progress she's made to date. Without realising it Susan is now in the slipping back stage and is at risk of going back to her old ways. Susan is aware that she is doing some things differently, but isn't aware that these things are negatively impacting on her ability to change long-term.

Susan began slipping after receiving improved test results about her diabetes. At this point she felt as though she had achieved what she set out to achieve. She still intends to maintain her new diet and exercise routine but now feels she can relax a little.

Around the time Susan got her results she also started to re-engage in various detrimental activities. By feeling as though she had achieved her main goal, Susan's focus began to shift. Her thoughts were no longer consumed with anxieties about her diabetes and the plans she had made to combat the problem. This left a void which Susan then filled by thinking about the things she used to do. The process was exacerbated by reconnecting with friends that were not entirely supportive of the changes Susan had made. Before she knew it she was right back into her weekly dates with her friend Beth and had reignited old habits around diet and exercise. What this essentially means for Susan is more time engaging in unhealthy behaviours and less time spent exercising and eating healthily.

Part of the reason Susan is unaware of the growing discrepancy between how she wants to behave and how she is behaving, is that she is using justifications without realising. Thoughts such as: "I deserve to live a little now", and "I can now afford to ease up" are keeping her comfortable with her changing situation. To make matters worse, Susan is again beginning to experience familiar symptoms but is minimising these by telling herself that her diabetes is pretty much cured.

Questions

- What has contributed to Susan being in her current position and what could she have done pre-emptively to avoid this situation?

- What are the things that Susan is doing that if left unchecked will mean a progression to the back to old ways stage?

- If Susan is to return to maintaining action what would need to happen?

Nick

After managing to maintain his actions for several months, Nick is now seriously questioning why he is even doing this anymore. He was already beginning to think twice about what he was doing but since his friend and gym buddy Luke left, these feelings have accelerated and are starting to consume his thinking. He is starting to miss more and more workouts and is becoming increasingly bored with what he's doing. As Nick is no longer sure about where

he's going, more persistent thoughts and feelings of hopelessness are starting to creep in. Nick finds himself regularly asking: "what's the point?"

Nick is very aware of this slippage and is aware of what will happen if he doesn't do something about it. He keeps meaning to revisit his goals and plans as a way to re-motivate himself however for whatever reasons he just can't seem to get around to it. To some extent Nick is in denial about his original goals of changing and is minimising the importance he once felt. He knows that by revisiting his original intentions he will feel uncomfortable. He doesn't like to think of himself as a quitter. As a result, he is basically letting his goals die a slow death rather than confronting the reasons that are contributing to his current situation.

Nick is already rehearsing mental scripts designed to justify quitting. He says to himself: "it's too expensive and it takes too much time. Imagine what I could buy or what else I could do if I wasn't going anymore". He also justifies his situation by thinking "yeah I didn't get to exactly where I wanted to be, but I'm still in great shape and I'm looking pretty damn good". As well as perceiving his current situation as negative, Nick is also exacerbating the situation by remembering his old life in an overly positive way. He remembers, incorrectly, how awesome it was hanging out with his wife watching movies and sipping a beer. He remembers, incorrectly, how great it was having the freedom to do what he wanted in the evenings and not having to worry about what he eats. And most of all he remembers, incorrectly, how much better life was before he started this whole gym thing.

Nick is in trouble and it's going to take something special to get him back on track.

Questions

- *What has contributed to Nick being in his current position, and what could he have done pre-emptively to avoid this situation?*
- *What are the things that Nick is doing that if left unchecked will mean a progression to the back to old ways stage?*
- *If Nick is to return to maintaining action what would need to happen?*

What about you...

Considering changes you've made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the slipping back stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do at this stage to make returning to maintaining action more likely?*

Back to old ways

“A life spent making mistakes is not only more honourable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.”

- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, IRISH PLAYWRIGHT AND THE ONLY PERSON IN HISTORY TO HAVE BEEN AWARDED BOTH A NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE AND AN OSCAR

This is the stage where old behaviours, habits and thinking have made a full comeback. You will now be back to doing what you were doing before you first attempted to change. By progressing to the back to old ways stage you have made a conscious decision to revert to old behaviours and thinking. Any efforts to maintain new behaviours have been postponed or forfeited altogether. Awareness and understanding around this decision, as with slipping back, will vary depending on the person. Some people might deny or minimise their choice, while others may take a position of acceptance, disappointment or anger.

What differentiates this stage from status quo is a consciousness of having not succeeded. This feeling will eventually dissipate which will bring you back full circle. From here you will again await another trigger event which will start the process all over again.

Despite the fact you've reverted back to old ways, you might still have long-term intentions of changing. However while you're occupying this stage you will more than likely be actively justifying your behaviour. No one likes to feel they have failed or they are no good or unable to change. Justifications provide a way to feel better about the current situation and allow you to avoid contemplating failure or making another attempt at changing.

It's common at this stage that old behaviours can surpass original levels of intensity or frequency. Consider the common example of a person who regularly eats high fat or high sugar food then decides to quit or cut back on their consumption. After having changed their behaviour for some time they may then find themselves reverting back to old ways. In many cases they will quickly return to, and surpass, previous patterns of consumption. This makes sense when considering that during the slipping back stage a lot of time is spent thinking about how great life was before making a change. When a person has thought so much about how good the old behaviours will be, they become excited about the prospect of returning. As a result you can often overdo things before understanding what's happening.

Time spent thinking about 'how great life was before' is also why the initial phase of this stage can be so euphoric and comforting. To use our example again, imagine how comforting and familiar that first binge would be after being so controlled for so long. It's not only the food aspect that feels good. It may be that old eating habits involved a social or environmental element. While eating piles of high fat, high sugar foods you may also be surrounded by old friends in a comfortable and familiar environment. It may be some time before there is a come down from these initial feelings of euphoria. It is almost guaranteed

however that at some point more negative feelings, e.g.: hopelessness, failure, despair, frustration and even anger may surface and become the predominant feelings.

As with the slipping back stage, it's important to understand that going back to old ways is very normal when attempting to change. Those of you that find yourself occupying this stage shouldn't feel discouraged. RELAPSE IS NOT FAILURE, BUT RATHER IT'S A NATURAL STEP IN THE CHANGE PROCESS. Sometimes it takes a person several trips around the change cycle before they realise the pattern they are in and therefore what needs to happen to make a change. Some people will never realise and keep going around and around.

The good news is that by circulating around the change cycle you will more than likely have learnt several valuable lessons. Although it won't feel like it at the time, you will be in a better position than you were prior to attempting change. The next time you want to alter a behaviour you will be much more in tune with yourself and the processes required to make change stick. As New Zealand's Body for Life winner [Jared Wilson \[1\]\(2012\)](#) puts it, "You really need knowledge to make long term changes. You need to know what certain types of exercises and foods work best for you. Having this knowledge is like having the key to changing your physique and your life."

Let's now consider our case study example. After slipping back and dabbling in old behaviours and thinking, Nick was unable to re-motivate himself and get back to maintaining action. He now finds himself in the back to old ways stage.

Nick

Nick never did revisit his goals, nor did he find other ways to re-motivate himself and get back on track. He is now living the same life he did a few months ago.

It wasn't that hard for Nick to stop going to the gym or to stop eating his healthy diet. When he made the decision 'now wasn't the best time to continue with change', Nick simply stopped. He had spent so much time convincing himself that life would be better if he quit, that it made quitting surprisingly easy.

The first night when Nick would have otherwise gone to the gym, he hired a movie and a computer game and stayed up late watching TV, playing games and eating snack food. Although Nick felt tired the next day he did the same thing that night as well, and had a similar night on two more occasions that week. For the first week Nick felt free, like he had all the time in the world to do whatever he wanted. He felt excited about the possibilities of doing something else and felt vindicated in his decision to quit.

Two weeks later Nick had a very different mind-set. He could already notice his body changing and his energy levels dropping. This hadn't been helped by the large quantities of junk food he'd been eating since stopping his change plan. Nick thought about the time that

had passed since he made a decision to quit. He thought to himself: “Did I quit just to stay up late, watch crap on TV and eat junk food?” Nick didn’t need to answer this question as he already knew the answer. He suddenly felt ashamed, disappointed and angry at himself. To make himself feel better he prepared a big bowl of ice cream, turned on the TV and tried to forget about it.

A couple more weeks down the track Nick is starting to see the situation for what it really is. He now feels as if he tricked himself into reengaging with the life he didn’t want to be living. He also now knows that the life he was trying to talk himself out of was actually much more fulfilling than his life now. Nick still feels some level of disappointment, especially as he has put on several kilos, but he also feels for the first time he gets this whole change thing. He isn’t necessarily ready to start going back to the gym just yet, but he feels confident that when he does things will be different. Nick is about to enter into a new more informed status quo. When his next trigger event occurs he will be better prepared and more certain of what he really wants to achieve.

Questions

- *What has contributed to Nick arriving at this stage, and what could he do pre-emptively next time around to avoid this situation?*
- *What are the things that Nick is doing that are typical of the back to old ways stage? Why have these things happened?*
- *What has Nick learnt about himself by going through this process? How might this help him during his next change attempt?*

What about you...

Considering changes you’ve made in the past or present...

- *Which parts of the back to old ways stage can you relate to?*
- *What could you do at this stage that would help you the next time you decided to change?*

The EMCC – A summary

“It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.”

- SIR EDMUND HILLARY, NEW ZEALAND MOUNTAINEER AND THE FIRST PERSON TO REACH THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT EVEREST. NAMED ONE OF THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

From Status Quo to Back to Old Ways and everything in between, you now have an in-depth understanding of the eight stages of [the EMCC](#).

At this stage it's worth pointing out that, although there are many complexities involved in changing behaviour, the process of change doesn't have to be complex. REMEMBER THAT YOU ALREADY HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE A CHANGE. YOU'VE DONE IT MANY TIMES BEFORE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO IT IN THE FUTURE. What [the EMCC](#) will assist you with is identifying the areas of YOUR change process that you find most challenging. This will provide a buffer for what you already know and have already been implementing for years, as well as empowering you to “adjust accordingly and be fluid and flexible with your efforts” ([McMaster, \[5\] 2013](#)).

Think of it like having a team of experts on your side. Up to this point, you have been doing fine without them, but imagine how much better you could be doing if you had the right experts intervening at the right time.

Through understanding [the EMCC](#) you will also come to understand what it takes to build, strengthen and maintain motivation to exercise. This knowledge will then lend itself to other areas of your life that you wish to change too. In fact, once you learn about what works for you, you won't have to learn it again. Rather you will simply apply the same management strategies and techniques to different changes.

With that said, you might now be thinking “well, how do I manage each stage?” Good question! However, before we get into that, the first logical step is to establish which stage you are currently occupying. If you are to put strategies and techniques in place, you will need to make an accurate assessment of this before doing anything else. From here you can focus on managing the stage that is most relevant to you and your current situation.

ASSESSING YOUR EMCC STAGE

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

- ALBERT EINSTEIN, THEORETICAL PHYSICIST AND DEVELOPER OF THE GENERAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY, ONE OF THE TWO PILLARS OF MODERN PHYSICS

So where do I fit in?

“Know thyself means this, that you get acquainted with what you know, and what you can do.”

- MENANDER, GREEK DRAMATIST AND POPULAR WRITER OF ANTIQUITY

[The EMCC](#) clearly identifies the stages that you pass through, as you attempt to change a specific behaviour. To effectively manage the stage MOST RELEVANT TO YOU, you will need to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) **What stage am I actually in regarding the change I want to make?**
- 2) **Is this the right stage for me at this time?**

What stage am I actually in regarding the change I want to make?

You can get an accurate idea of the stage you're currently occupying by completing the **EMCC Stage Assessment Questionnaire**.

If this stage is right for you at this time you would then go to the management section of the corresponding stage and continue to work your way around the cycle.

Is this the right stage for me at this time?

By working through the **Importance, Confidence and Readiness** section you can gauge if the stage you're in is RIGHT FOR YOU AT THIS TIME. If not then it's recommended that you return to the first stage of [the EMCC](#) (Status quo) and begin the process again, or at least consider some of the key points and strategies before continuing.

Combined, this assessment material will help you establish whether or not you really want to change, if you are ready to do so, and what you then need to do to make it happen.

Getting started

“People often say that this or that person has not yet found himself. But the self is not something one finds, it is something one creates.”

- THOMAS SZASZ, PSYCHIATRIST AND ACADEMIC

The first thing you need to do is consider one of the following questions:

If you haven't started making changes yet ask yourself:

- What do I want to change or do?

If you have started making changes ask yourself:

- What is it that I want to continue doing and/or start doing?

Example answers:

- I want to start exercising

- I want to change my exercise routine to something more challenging

- I want to train to run a half marathon

- I want to exercise more intensely

- I want to exercise consistently and regularly

Now use your answer to complete the assessment below.

Remember if you want to change more than one thing, then you will need to complete an independent assessment for each change.

If you're still unsure about the changes you would like to make, the [Goals chapter](#) will be useful.

Got a non-exercise-related change in mind?

[The EMCC](#) and the assessment material also applies to other non-exercise-related changes you might want to make.

Just ask yourself the same questions:

If you haven't started making changes yet, ask yourself:

- What do I want to change or do?

If you have started making changes, ask yourself:

- What is it that I want to continue doing and/or start doing?

Example answers:

- I want to start eating a healthier diet

- I want to change the way I look

- I want to decrease the stress in my life

- I want to consume less sugar

- I want more energy

If you're still unsure about the changes you would like to make, the [Goals chapter](#) will be useful.

The EMCC Stage Assessment Questionnaire

“The authentic self is the soul made visible.”

- SARAH BAN BREATHNACH, AUTHOR, PHILANTHROPIST AND PRESIDENT AND CEO OF SIMPLE ABUNDANCE, INC.

(x) = Change you want to make (*what you want to achieve/your goal*)

Which ONE statement do you agree with the most?

- 1) I have no intention to change my behaviour regarding (x)
- 2) Something has happened within the last two weeks that has got me thinking about changing my behaviour regarding (x)
- 3) I'm thinking about changing my behaviour regarding (x)
- 4) I intend to change my behaviour regarding (x) and/or I am putting plans in place to change my behaviour regarding (x)
- 5) I have begun to change my behaviour regarding (x)
- 6) I've already changed my behaviour regarding (x) for 6 weeks to 3 months or more
- 7) I've already changed my behaviour regarding (x) for 3-6 months or more, but now I'm slipping
- 8) I managed to change my behaviour regarding (x) for 6 months or more, but I'm not doing it anymore

Results

1 = Status quo

2 = Trigger event

3 = Thinking about change

4 = Deciding and preparing

5 = Taking action

6 = Maintaining action

7 = Slipping back

8 = Back to old ways

My stage =

Importance, Confidence and Readiness

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

- HELEN KELLER, AUTHOR, POLITICAL ACTIVIST, LECTURER AND THE FIRST DEAF AND BLIND PERSON TO EARN A BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE

The importance you place on changing and your confidence in your ability to change will influence your readiness to change.

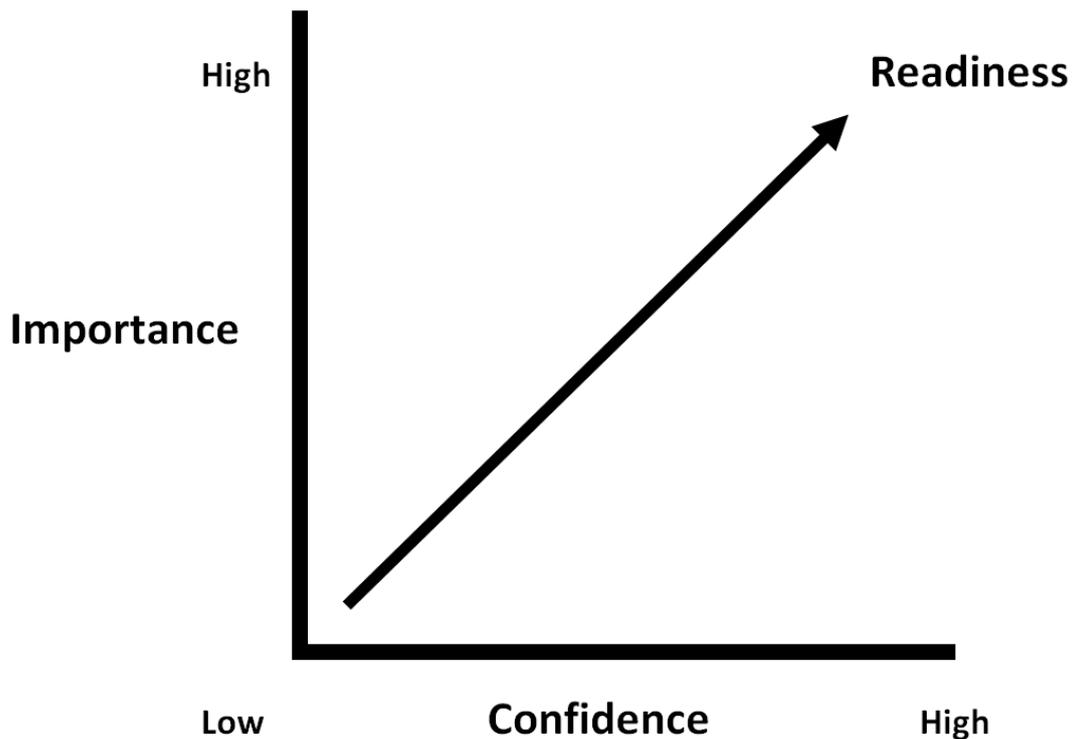


Figure 3 Importance, Confidence and Readiness model

It is critically important that regardless of whether you've started making a change or not, you feel it's of high importance to change. If not, it's likely that you'll never successfully change, at least not in the long term. Likewise when considering confidence to change. If you're not confident, it's only a matter of time before you'll return to an unchanged status quo due to an inability to follow through on any plans made.

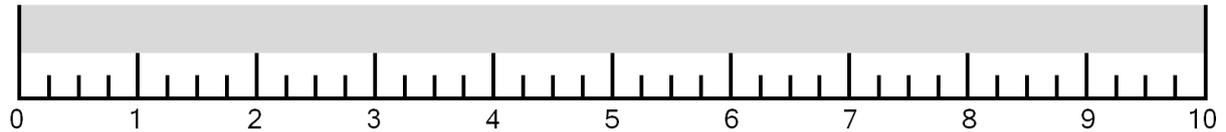
The following questions will provide an assessment of how important you feel change is, and how confident and ready you are to change.

Assessing Importance, Confidence and Readiness

(**x**) = Change you want to make (*what you want to achieve/your goal*)

Considering the change you want to make...

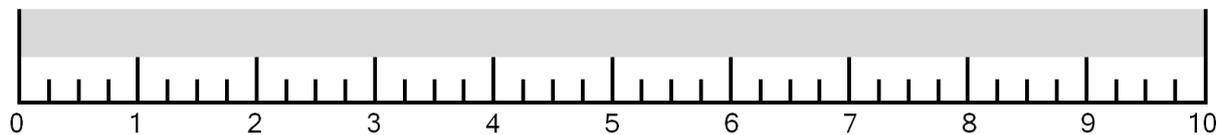
1) How **important** is it for you to make this change? (*circle*)



0 = not important at all

10 = extremely important

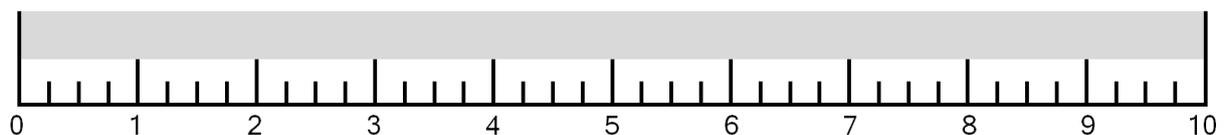
2) How **confident** are you that you could make this change if you chose to do so?



0 = not confident at all

10 = extremely confident

3) How **ready** are you to make this change if you chose to do so?



0 = not ready at all

10 = ready right now

Results

If you scored a **7 or above** for each scaling question then you're probably be in a good position to start or continue with change.

From here you should proceed to the stage you are currently occupying (as per [the EMCC](#) stage assessment) and begin working through the management strategies.

If for whatever reason you scored **below 7** in all or any of the scaling questions, consider doing one of the following two things:

1) Regardless of which stage within [the EMCC](#) you are occupying, go back to the first stage (stage quo) and begin your change again! At the very least use some of the strategies and techniques to build importance and confidence as you proceed. This may sound like overkill, especially if you have begun to take some steps towards change. However if it's long term change you are trying to achieve, you need a solid foundation from which to base all attempts. Without this foundation you are more than likely setting yourself up for disappointment down the line.

2) Keep working within your current stage of [the EMCC](#) while simultaneously building importance, confidence and readiness. Utilise the **Importance, confidence & readiness** resources in the [Resources section](#) to help with this. If after utilising these resources you still feel importance, confidence or readiness is lacking, then it is highly recommended you try the first option and return to status quo.

MANAGING THE EMCC STAGES

“For some of us, it’s time to own up, step up and do what success requires. It’s that complex and that simple. We’ve read enough. Thought enough. Talked enough. Planned enough. Avoided enough. Hoped enough. Intended enough. Waited enough. Now it’s time to do enough. Or, we could wait another decade.”

- CRAIG HARPER, ONE OF AUSTRALIA’S LEADING PRESENTERS, EDUCATORS, COACHES AND COMMENTATORS IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH, FITNESS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Managing stages

“Given a choice between changing and proving that it is not necessary, most people get busy with the proof.”

- JOHN GALBRAITH, ECONOMIST, PUBLIC OFFICIAL AND DIPLOMAT

What is power to you? Thinking about how you would like things to be different and making it a reality is surely one definition of power.

By reading up to this point you already have a huge advantage over most people. For instance, you now know that if you want to change because you feel pressured or forced into it, you will have less chance of making that change. You know that the reason many people don't succeed with long-term change is because they only think about the benefits of change, without thinking about the sacrifices they'll have to make. Having familiarised yourself with [the EMCC](#) you know that change is not a linear process but rather cyclical. As a result what most people would deem a failure you now consider a learning experience.

This new understanding will serve you well when you next find yourself wanting to make a change. Having an understanding of the eight stages is great but, to go a step further, you need to learn about how to manipulate each stage, so the odds of making a change are stacked in your favour. The next logical step therefore is to learn how to effectively manage each stage.

As you are aware, behaviour change is a process involving a series of steps or stages, as identified in [the EMCC](#). How you manage these stages as you move through the cycle will play a major role in determining if you're successful in your endeavours to change. By learning about how to manage each stage, you will give yourself the best chance of achieving your exercise-related goals.

Make no mistake though! This will still require a huge amount of work on your part. Understanding change and knowing how to manage each stage is one thing, but applying the strategies effectively will require persistence and dedication. **IT WILL ULTIMATELY COME DOWN TO HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE YOU PLACE ON CHANGING.**

How much do you want it?

Within this section you'll find a wide variety of material on how to manage each stage. How much of this material you use is up to you. No one has the knowledge you have when it comes to changing YOU. There is no point in recreating the wheel. If you do something well then keep doing it. If however there are aspects you can improve on and add to, the information in this section will be useful.

A good way to look at this information is as a supplement to what you already know. If there are aspects of past change attempts that you have struggled with, using the material to understand why you had this experience and what you can do to get around it next time will be valuable. If you feel the key tasks at each stage have been met, then move on. Don't dwell on a specific stage just because you haven't worked through ALL the material.

The nature of change is that it's variable. Just because you spent a long time thinking about change last time, it doesn't mean you need to this time. **TREAT EACH CHANGE ATTEMPT AS UNIQUE AND BE FLUID WITH YOUR MANAGEMENT.** Be aware of your sticking points and apply strategies as needed.

Success can never be guaranteed, but by applying the right strategies at the right time and by giving yourself some motivational nudges when needed, you will be in the best position to make genuine lifelong changes.

How to use this section

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it."

- PABLO PICASSO, ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Each stage will be examined in the following way:

Information sections

- **Stage management summary**
- **Aims** (*What you should aim to achieve when managing each stage*)
- **Think** (*Insights into managing each stage*)

Activity sections

- **Ask** (*Questions aimed at eliciting change talk*)
- **Do** (*Resources: Various activities, exercises and tools*)

Final thoughts before proceeding...

- DON'T READ THIS WHOLE SECTION ALL AT ONCE! There is a lot of information in the managing stages section which is not designed to be read all at once. Only the sections most relevant to your current stage of change should be utilised.

- Remember to use the assessment material to establish which stage to start on. IF YOU ARE UNSURE START AT THE BEGINNING (Status quo) and work your way through the stages.

- Pick and choose the questions, activities or information that BEST SUIT YOU

- Make sure you REALLY CONSIDER THE MANY QUESTIONS within this section. The right question asked at the right time is a powerful tool. The trick when asking yourself questions is, firstly, to ask the right ones and, secondly, to answer honestly. It's always a positive thing to have a question on your mind or to be curious about something. That's how we grow. So why wouldn't you question yourself and learn all there is to learn? It sounds better than the alternative. What do you think?

- Where possible, RECORD YOUR THINKING, GOALS, and PROGRESS. The journals, diaries and worksheets in the [resources section](#) will help with this.

- Depending on your motivation and commitment to change, you could choose to get moving and start taking action straight away, or be pragmatic and explore all options before moving forwards. IT'S UP TO YOU!

Managing the status quo stage

“If you wait, all that happens is that you get older.”

- MARIO ANDRETTI, CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE THE GREATEST DRIVER OF ALL TIME

***Status quo is the stage where you would start your change management if you are unsure about what to change, or if you would like to make a fresh start with changes you're already making.**

By definition status quo refers to the situation as it currently exists. Managing this stage therefore may seem a little redundant to some. After all, people in this stage either don't want to change, are unaware of a need to change or are in denial about needing to change.

The strategies for the status quo stage are focussed around exploring the possibilities of change and whether or not you even want to change. Analysing your current situation and assessing whether or not you're happy with it is a good place to start. If you are unhappy, what you will try to do is generate ideas and thinking that will trigger the change process.

The status quo stage differs from other stages in that doing less is often more beneficial. Remember that at this stage there isn't actually a lot to work on as what needs to change hasn't as yet been examined. Because of this using selected motivational strategies rather than a flood of strategies and tools is recommended. The aim is not to change immediately but rather to explore the possibility of change. You're trying to create doubt and maybe even concern regarding your current situation. Is everything ok? Or is there a want or a need to do things differently? Are you happy with your current situation? Or are there things you want to do to improve it? Essentially you need to ask yourself particular types of questions aimed at eliciting thinking around change ([Gibson, \[2\] 2012](#)).

Aims - Status quo stage

- Explore your current situation and consider: what you're happy with, what you're not happy with and what could benefit from change.
- Create a trigger event. By nature the behaviours, habits and thinking that occur within your status quo will not be visible to you because they're part of your everyday routine. Take a closer look by questioning current behaviours and thinking. The more you think about these things, the more chance you'll have of creating your own trigger event or light-bulb moment.

- Build interest in change by exploring your hopes and dreams for the future. Considering what it is you want in life will reignite previous goals and passions and provide insight into new avenues of change.

- Develop discrepancy between your current situation and the situation you want to be in. Establish what it is you want to achieve in life (hopes and dreams), then think about how your current situation is and/or isn't helping you to get there.

Think - *Status quo* stage

Remembering it's always your choice

You should never do something you don't really want to do. Extrinsic motivation may be effective in the short term but unless YOU want it, it's unlikely you'll experience long term success.

Raising awareness of any possibly negative issues or behaviours

Do this by thinking about change regularly. Consider any issues thoroughly in an unbiased and factual way. There will be time to discount or expand on ideas later.

Reflecting on your own thinking

Put another way, think about your thinking processes and consider why you think the way you do. Question whether or not you are being subjective and factual with the information you are gathering. You need to see things for what they are during this stage.

Exploring issues separately

If, or when, considering multiple issues, be sure to think about each issue individually. Grouping issues together is a great way to become overwhelmed and confused about what you really want to change. Consider the possible impacts of changing or altering one specific issue at a time.

Issues, to problems, to crises

Think about what would need to happen in your life for your identified issues to become a problem. If they are already problematic, what would need to happen for them to become a bigger problem. Ask yourself how you would know something was becoming a problem?

Keeping things to yourself in the beginning

Throughout the management of this stage, try to avoid too much input or negativity from others. Listening to others can confuse the issue. This is not to say that input from others isn't valuable. Just that at this stage it's best to consider things yourself. Negativity in any form can lead to a skewed view of what's actually going on. Remember... **FACTUAL!**

Ask - Status quo stage

Within the status quo stage there are a range of questions you can ask yourself.

The following questions are divided into three sets, with each following a different theme.

The three sets are as follows:

- 1) Hopes and dreams/values and beliefs**
- 2) My current situation**
- 3) How is my behaviour affecting my life?**

Question set 1: Hopes and dreams/values and beliefs

The purpose of these questions is twofold.

- 1) Firstly, to trigger thinking around change by exploring your ideal future and the things that are important to you.
- 2) Secondly, to develop and explore discrepancy between your current position and your desired position i.e. I'm saying that being healthy is important, yet I'm not looking after myself by exercising or eating a balanced diet?

- *What are the things that are important to you?*

- *What are your hopes and dreams for the future?*

- *If there was one thing you could change what would it be?*
- *Where do you see yourself in 6 months/1 year/2 years/5 years/10 years from now?*
- *What would you say are important values to you? e.g. I value good health.*
- *What beliefs do you hold regarding exercise, health, fitness and well-being? E.g. my belief around exercise is that I should be doing it regularly.*

Question set 2: My current situation

These questions are designed to trigger thinking around change by exploring how content you are with your current situation. They are also intended to increase your perception of any potential problems with your current behaviour.

- *If you had to think of 1-2 things you wanted to do differently (behaviours or habits you wanted to change), what would they be?*
- *What would have to happen for you to really start thinking about moving ahead with the things you wanted to do differently?*
- *If you had to think of 1-2 problems (behaviours or habits that currently cause you concern), what would they be?*
- *What would have to happen for you to acknowledge that a current behaviour was becoming a problem?*
- *What signs would let you know that you were ready to make a change?*

Considering any behaviours you would like to change, or any potential problems or issues:

- *What have you done to try and change this/these behaviour(s) in the past?*
- *What are the current benefits (if any) of this/these behaviour(s) for you? What do you enjoy about it/them? E.g. the benefits of my sedentary behaviour/lifestyle is that I have lots of time to watch TV and blob out, which I enjoy after a long day at work.*
- *What do you like less about this behaviour? E.g. this behaviour has meant that I haven't kept fit and have put on weight in the past year.*

Note - If there is nothing you DON'T LIKE about a behaviour then ask yourself:

- *Are you really ready to change this behaviour? Or you even want to change it?*

To summarise behaviours you've considered (ask the same question for each behaviour):

- On one hand you like this behaviour because... and, on the other hand you don't like it because...

Question set 3: How is my behaviour affecting my life?

These questions are designed to get you considering all the ways your current behaviours, issues or problems could or are affecting your life. They also aim to get you thinking about how the absence of a specific behaviour could, or is, affecting your life.

- What affect(s) is your current behaviour/issue/problem having on your physical health, mental health, family, relationships etc.? E.g. because I'm not as fit as I used to be I'm not playing with my children as much. Also I can tell my partner doesn't find me as attractive as he/she used to.

- How is your current behaviour impacting on the things that are important to you? E.g. not exercising anymore is impacting on being healthy, which is important to me.

- If you change this behaviour how would that impact on your hopes and dreams or plans for the future? E.g. I would be back on track to reach my goal of competing in a marathon.

Considering where you are now (your current situation) then considering where you want to be (your ideal situation in the future)...

- What are your chances of reaching your ideal situation if things don't change?

Do - Status quo stage

Explore the good and not so good aspects of your life now (your status quo). Consider all of the different areas of your life and think about how well, or not, each area is working for you. There's no need to label things bad or negative at this point. In time you may be ready to take a stance on various behaviours, but for now keep emotions out of it and look at things in an unbiased way.

[RESOURCE: My current situation](#)

Explore your hopes and dreams for the future. This could include revisiting old hopes and dreams and/or considering new ones. Ask yourself the miracle question. That is, *'if you could magically change anything in your life, what would it be?'* If you are lacking inspiration a good place to start is considering what is most important in your life and/or your values and beliefs. You could also think about what you like doing the most.

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

[RESOURCE: My values and beliefs](#)

Establish how important issues actually are by using scaling questions. E.g. *on a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being extremely important and 1 being not important at all; how important is it for you to drink four to five times per week? Or, how important is it for you to exercise three to four times per week?* Really try to think about it and make sure you allocate a number.

[RESOURCE: Importance, confidence & readiness: resources 1 - 3](#)

Don't feel you have to create specific goals at this stage. Getting specific about exactly what you want to achieve can come later. Thinking about more general or broad aims for the future while in this stage is more useful. Looking forward is a great technique you can use for this purpose. Ask yourself, what would you like to be different in your world in 1 month, 6 months, 1 year or several years from now?

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

Managing the trigger event stage

“The hand that dips into the bottom of the pot will eat the biggest snail.”

- WOLE SOYINKA, NIGERIAN WRITER, PLAYWRIGHT AND POET. FIRST PERSON IN AFRICA TO BE AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

You can look at yourself in the mirror every day and think to yourself I wish things were different but it often takes something extra like an event to trigger change ([Hausen, \[2\] 2012](#)). Whether you've recently felt that change is in the air or it's suddenly hit you out of nowhere, it's now on your radar. Something significant enough has happened to begin the process of thinking about change. You are in the trigger event stage.

For many people this stage is reasonably short and for others it can be very brief. Trigger events will often launch you straight into the thinking about change stage, if not straight away then soon after. For some however this stage can last for a while and become somewhat of a crisis. This will all depend on the type of trigger event you've experienced and whether it was positive or negative, as well as on your ability to manage it.

If you've experienced a negative, unpleasant or uncomfortable trigger event, it would suggest you're unhappy with the status quo and you want to change something in order to feel better. An unfavourable medical diagnosis or something small like clothes not fitting anymore are two examples of this. Management for those in this situation will involve anything from dealing with an uncomfortable or unpleasant situation all the way through to dealing with a crisis. When in this situation it's important you don't rush anything. It's not uncommon to commit quickly to a plan of action only to find that when the crisis diminishes so does your commitment. Again it's important to take things slowly, manage the crisis or rough patch appropriately and when the smoke clears look at things subjectively.

If you've experienced a positive or inspiring trigger event, it suggests that you're happy with the status quo but something has happened that has made you want to improve on what you already have. At the least it's caught your interest enough for you to consider changing. Seeing a friend that's lost a lot of weight or watching an inspiring athlete are two examples that come to mind. When in this situation your management strategy will be very different. Without diminishing initial enthusiasm you essentially need to question the validity of the trigger event. Is it a good enough reason to consider change in the first place? Remember the information on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation? Are you considering change because YOU WANT TO or because YOU FEEL FORCED OR PRESSURED? These are good questions to ask prior to fully moving into the thinking about change stage.

Aims - Trigger event stage

- Don't be in a hurry. Gather information about what's actually happened. Try and keep things factual. High emotions at this stage can often lead to a skewed view of events.

In the case of a negative or unpleasant trigger event:

- Regulate your emotions. It is important to get through this potentially tough time before making any decisions. After the initial period of high emotion has died down consider the event again and assess if it's still something that makes you want to change.

In the case of a positive or inspiring trigger event:

- Spend some time reflecting on exactly what it was about the event that got you interested then question the validity of the proposed change. Is it a good enough reason to change? If what triggered you to consider change in the first place is still exciting, you're in a good position to begin really thinking about what would be involved in change.

Think - Trigger event stage

Spending too much time here

The trigger event stage is somewhat of a transitional stage between status quo and thinking about change. Therefore you should only spend the minimal amount of time needed before progressing.

Taking the time to understand what's happened

Taking time to fully consider your trigger event is the only way to see things for what they are. Only by taking the time to reflect on your trigger event will you be able to look at it subjectively. Once you understand why this event triggered you into thinking about change, you can start to examine if the changes you think you want to make are valid.

Keeping yourself safe

Keeping yourself safe may sound over dramatic but depending on the trigger event, issues of safety, especially emotional safety, may be highly relevant. Take an unfavourable medical diagnosis for example. This could for some, be highly traumatising. As you will know from the section on motivation, as humans we are constantly trying to achieve a state of homeostasis. We don't like being uncomfortable or feeling bad and as a result we will often make irrational or impetuous decisions in an attempt to feel better. This is why not rushing is so important.

Intrinsic or extrinsic?

When determining the nature of your motivation to change (intrinsic or extrinsic), remember that extrinsic motivation can still be a powerful motivator. In fact in the short-term it can be very effective, but ideally you'll be intrinsically motivated to change. Intrinsic motivation will be the stronger and longer lasting of the two and will provide the best chance of long-term change.

Ask - Trigger event stage

The following questions are divided into three sets, with the first being general questions to ask at this stage. The second for those who've experienced a positive trigger event and the third set for a negative trigger event.

The three sets are as follows:

- 1) General questions**
- 2) Questions to ask, based on a positive trigger event**
- 3) Questions to ask, based on a negative trigger event**

Question set 1: General questions

- What has triggered you into thinking about change? Was this trigger something negative, unpleasant or uncomfortable, or was it something positive or inspiring?

Now that you've established what your trigger event was and how it made you feel...

- *Are you considering this change because you want to or because you feel forced or pressured? (Are you intrinsically or extrinsically motivated?)*

- *On a scale of 1 – 10 how good a reason do you think this is to consider change in the first place?*

Question set 2: Questions to ask, based on a positive trigger event

- *How did you feel when your trigger event occurred and do you think that this feeling could sustain you through change?*

- *Do you think that your trigger event is a valid enough reason to start seriously considering change and why?*

- *What do you feel needs to happen/change as a result of this trigger event? E.g. I want to start eating well and doing weights to gain muscle.*

Question set 3: Questions to ask, based on a negative trigger event

- *Do you need support as a result of your trigger event and, if yes, who could/can support you during this time?*

- *What do you feel needs to happen/change as a result of this trigger event? E.g. I need to lose weight and begin exercising.*

- *How could you link the things that need to happen to the things that are important in your life? E.g. I need to lose weight. This is important for me to do because I want to be a good role model for my children.*

Do - Trigger event stage

Compare your current situation to past situations to help put things in perspective and provide insight into how you might react. This will assist you manage your situation more effectively, assuming you have past trigger events to draw on.

If you have established that your trigger event has been **POSITIVE:**

Build on initial inspiration and motivation to maintain momentum. Understanding why you've been inspired or motivated is helpful information. Link these reasons to your hopes and dreams and/or your values and beliefs in order to strengthen motivation and commitment to change.

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

[RESOURCE: My values and beliefs](#)

If you have established that your trigger event has been **NEGATIVE:**

Managing emotions should be a priority after experiencing something negative or traumatising. The urgency you place on emotional management should be relative to where on the continuum your trigger event sits. For example, if it's been something deeply traumatising then the focus will be high and the more relevant your support people will become. If on the other hand you have experienced something a little troubling then any strategy will be minimal.

[RESOURCE: My supporters](#)

Managing the thinking about change stage

"I can accept failure, but I can't accept not trying."

- MICHAEL JORDAN, THE GREATEST BASKETBALL PLAYER OF ALL TIME

Should I do it? Or shouldn't I? Ambivalence is common at this stage.

Something's happened to make you think about change. You think it could be a good idea but could you do it? It's the classic weighing up of pros and cons. What would be good about changing? What wouldn't be so good? How much thought you put into considering change will likely have a direct impact on how successful you are in making it.

The most common mistake at this stage is letting initial thinking, whether excitement or worry, dictate decision making. This often leads to a rushed and uninformed decision being made. A decision in which few options have been considered and little information has been gathered. Needless to say all of the things you don't consider have the potential to wreak havoc, when and if you find yourself in the taking action stage. Building up an impetus or momentum that will push you towards your final goal therefore is important ([Maylin, \[2\] 2012](#)). In any case it's important to consciously work your way through this stage otherwise you risk your thinking occurring automatically. You want to be in control of the decisions you make, so putting a decent amount of thought into this stage is well worth it.

Coming to an informed decision is the best way to be effective and efficient with your efforts. It ensures you don't make decisions you can't back up and means you don't reinforce a cycle of failed attempts. We've all been there, think big, be ambitious and reach for the stars! Often you get so excited about the end result you don't think, in practical terms, about what pursuing this idea would mean or what you'd have to sacrifice. This usually means when the first road block occurs you drop out.

Alternatively, you may consider something to be too difficult or too challenging to pursue. This kind of thinking, if left unchallenged, can result in a decision not to change. In reality what you consider too difficult or challenging may be something you can easily overcome. If you don't think it through, however, you risk initial thinking taking over and determining the decision you make.

So it's important that when you realise you're thinking about changing you give it some conscious thought. THERE'S NEVER REALLY A SITUATION WHERE YOU SHOULD RUSH THIS PROCESS. It doesn't matter what you decide to do, as long as you've thought it through. Get all the information, consider what would need to happen and then make an informed decision.

IF THERE IS EVER A TIME TO REALLY THINK ABOUT MAKING A CHANGE, THIS IS IT!

Aims - Thinking about change stage

- Examine and explore your ambivalence about changing. Look at things from both sides and get the full picture so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to go ahead with change.
- Explore the reasons or causes for why the situation exists. This could include re-examining your trigger event, considering the timing of wanting to change or thinking about what in your life has led to this moment.
- After exploring ambivalence, attempt to resolve it. Resolving in this case meaning to come to point where you can make a decision to change or to stay the same.
- Build the importance of your proposed change(s) by linking it to other important things in your life like your hopes and dreams and your values and beliefs.
- Start thinking about possible solutions to overcome the situation. This will help to inform your decision to change or not. What are the new things you could try and what past strategies could you re-employ?

Think - Thinking about change stage

Not rushing the process!

Stay focused on looking at the possibilities before committing to a decision. You don't have to rush anything. Remember really thinking about and gathering all the information you can at the front end will mean a smoother ride if you choose to progress. Even if you are pretty sure you will make a decision to change, try to hold back on taking too much action at this point. If you're anxious or feel pressure to change, you could launch into action not having fully considered all the options or outcomes in the first place.

Exploring ambivalence before attempting to resolve it

Exploring and resolving ambivalence sounds simple enough but it's surprising how many people neglect the exploring portion of this task when making a potentially major change. Often people become so excited and driven by the potential outcomes of change that they neglect to consider what must be sacrificed, or what it would actually take to make a change.

DO NOT FALL INTO THIS TRAP. You must explore all aspects of change before making a decision and planning accordingly.

Getting all of the information

This doesn't mean getting some of the information, it means gathering AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN and thinking as much as possible about what making a change would involve. It also involves exploring what it would mean to you if you were able to make this change and what it would mean if you were to stay the same. If you are serious about making a change, you owe it to yourself to give it some real thought. It's harder than you think but if you really want it you will do it.

Thinking first, deciding second

Only after you have fully explored both sides of making a change should you try and resolve your ambivalence by coming to a decision. DON'T FALL INTO THE TRAP OF RUSHING THIS PROCESS! Think about all of the hasty decisions you've made in the past. How did they work out for you? Remember that one definition of stupidity is doing the same thing over and over whilst expecting a different result.

Dealing with each challenge separately

Be conscious of whether you are thinking about one challenge (change/issue/problem etc.) or more than one challenge. Grouping challenges together is a good way to become overwhelmed and/or disheartened and can often result in paralysis by analysis aka doing nothing. This is not to say that you couldn't deal with multiple challenges, it just means that separating and dealing with each challenge individually will make things more manageable. Get specific about what you want to do, then identify if this can be dealt with one or multiple change attempts.

Telling yourself you can ALWAYS change if you really want to!

Really thinking about making changes can often be a daunting and anxiety inducing process. This is especially true for those who have tried and failed to make similar changes multiple times in the past. Regardless of how bad you might feel, or how hopeless the situation may seem. Remember that YOU CAN ALWAYS MAKE CHANGES if you really want to. Prove this to yourself by thinking about all of the things you have managed to change in the past, no matter how small these things might be.

Ask - Thinking about change stage

Asking many different types of questions at this stage is a great way to consider change. Questions enable you to contemplate then revisit specific issues as often as you want until a decision is reached. This is exactly what is required of you when you find yourself in the thinking about change stage.

The questions in the thinking about change stage are extensive. This is a reflection of how important it is to consider this stage thoroughly.

The following questions are divided into six sets:

- 1. Why now? Why at all?**
- 2. Why not now? Why not at all?**
- 3. The negatives of your status quo**
- 4. Looking back and looking forward**
- 5. What's stopping you?**
- 6. What could help you change?**

Question set 1: Why now? Why at all?

These are the first and most obvious questions you should be asking yourself. Sometimes the things that make you THINK you want to change are questionable. Clearly defining and examining your reasons to change is a great place to start. Remember **IT IS ALWAYS BEST IF YOU REALLY WANT IT YOURSELF** and not because you feel forced or pressured into doing it.

- *Why do you even want to change now?*

- *What would be the benefits of changing?*

Ask these follow up questions:

- *How would you describe your reasons to change? E.g. are they intrinsic (I really want to do this for myself) or extrinsic (I'm doing this because I want others to like me).*

- *What about these reasons do you feel will sustain your efforts to change?*

- *Are you reacting to something that's happened recently and, if yes, are these reasons intrinsic or extrinsic?*

Question set 2: Why not now? Why not at all?

The following questions are important but often overlooked. You may have heard of the expression ‘every action has an equal and opposite reaction’? This is the way you must think about change. When you change you’re not only gaining (potentially) a new behaviour, habit or way of thinking, you’re also losing something too. What you have to sacrifice to make a change could be anything from a social group to a food group but, inevitably, to gain something you must sacrifice something.

This concept of give and take is unfortunately rarely thought about. As a result you will often find you’re totally unprepared when down the track you find yourself missing your former lifestyle or certain things within it. By asking yourself the following questions, you can be better prepared for the inevitable feelings loss that change can bring.

- *What are your reasons (if any) for not changing?*
- *What do you like about your current situation/behaviour(s)? What would it be like to give these things up in order to make a change? What could you do to minimise the impact or offset not doing these things?*
- *If you did make a change what would you miss and how do you think you would cope with not having these things in your life?*

Question set 3: The negatives of your status quo

These questions will help you to explore any negative impacts that are occurring as a result of your current situation. By naming issues and exploring their impacts you can start to explore where you are now in comparison to where you want to be. This isn’t a superficial process e.g. telling yourself ‘yeah I don’t feel that great about my life at the moment’, but rather it’s about digging deep and looking at all of the issues that are affecting you. The more you can get these things out there, the bigger the gap will be between where you want to be and where you actually are. For a lot of people this alone provides enough motivation to make a strong decision to change.

- *What concerns you, or others you know, about your current situation/lifestyle/behaviour(s)?*
- *What concerns you the most about your current situation/lifestyle/behaviour(s) in the long term?*
- *What could happen if you continue to live this way? E.g. not exercising, eating a poor diet etc.*
- *Suppose you continue as you have been without changing. What do you imagine are the worst things that might happen to you?*

- Imagine you woke up in 1/2/5/10 years' time and you hadn't made any of the changes you currently want to make. How would you feel?

Just because these questions might be hard to answer, it doesn't mean you should avoid them. Remember the more discomfort you can create, the more likely you are to do something about your current situation.

Question set 4: Looking back and looking forward

These questions utilise the Motivational Interviewing techniques of looking back and looking forward.

Looking back (examining the past)

These questions will help you to explore effective strategies and successes you've experienced in the past. They will also help to form a clear picture of the types of things that have previously prevented you from changing. These factors would then be carefully considered when planning for and attempting another change.

- Remember a time when things were going well for you. What has changed since then? What specifically do you think has contributed to these changes? Why do you think these things happened?

- What were things like before you started to... (behaviour you would like to change)? What were you like back then?

- How did you start... (behaviour you would like to change)? What attracted you to this behaviour?

- What is the difference between the you of 1/2/5/10 years ago and the you of today? How would you explain the difference?

- What's a previous situation(s) where you've tried or managed to stop... (behaviour you would like to change) for any amount of time? What specifically did you do to manage this? What helped you to do this?

Looking forward (gazing into the future)

These questions will help you to define how life would be different if you followed through with making a change. They're also useful when considering what life will be like if things stay the same. Considering possible long-term effects of current behaviour can be a huge motivator to change. The visual images conjured up through asking these types of questions

will be your motivational fuel, both when you're first taking action and when you're maintaining it.

- *If you do decide to make a change how would you like things to be different in the future?*
- *Regarding the change you're thinking about making. How would you like things to turn out for you 1/2/5/10 years from now?*
- *Suppose you don't make any changes and just continue as you have been. What do you think your life would be like 1/2/5/10 years from now?*
- *Given what has happened so far regarding the behaviour you would like to change, what do you expect might be happening 1/2/5/10 years from now if you don't make any changes?*

The miracle question

- *If you were 100% successful in making the changes you want to make, what would be different?*
- *If you could wake up tomorrow to your ideal life, what would it look like?*

Question set 5: What's stopping you?

How many times have you thought to yourself: "It's too hard", or "I don't have the time?" These are common and valid reasons for not attempting or maintaining change. But are they valid for you? If you're honest with yourself you could actually come to the conclusion that "It's not too hard and I do have the time, it's just that I'm anxious or lazy or fearful etc." Establishing your genuine barriers to change means you can identify what actually needs work.

Often superficial statements like 'I don't have enough time' are really just an excuse disguised as a reason. By being honest and exposing excuses for that they are, you can create a level of discomfort. How comfortable would you be if you had established that making a change is truly important to you, then after considering these questions you then established the reason you aren't changing is because you're lazy. Would that sit well with you? If not, what are you going to do about it?

- *What are all of the things that are stopping you from doing the things you would like to do?*
- *What specifically would keep you from changing at this time?*

Considering your answers to the above questions...

- *So you want to change... (changes you want to make) and these are the things standing in your way. How does that sit with you? Do you feel these things are genuine reasons or barriers to you changing?*

- *How would you feel if you didn't make a change knowing that the only things standing in your way were...?*

Question set 6: What could help you change?

These questions will help you to establish what could assist a potential change attempt. If you're well supported and have a good knowledge of what it would take to change, your decision will be easier. If not then your decision will be more difficult.

- *What might help you to make this change?*

- *In what ways have you approached change in the past that might help you this time around?*

- *What things (people, information and services) have helped in the past?*

- *What about your current situation puts you in a good position to attempt change now?*

Considering your answers to the above questions...

- *How could you amplify or enhance these factors to make them even more helpful?*

Do - Thinking about change stage

Explore the pros (benefits) and cons (costs) of changing. Think about all the reasons there are to change and all of the reasons there are to stay the same, but don't stop there. Dig deeper and explore how these things would affect you and the people around you. Visualising a changed future can be a huge motivator to change, as can visualising an unchanged future.

[RESOURCE: Pros and cons grid](#)

Think about the current and future you. Take an honest look at the person you are now by examining all of your existing qualities and features, both good and not so good. Get started by asking questions such as: "What are the things I like/dislike about my life?" After you have done this consider how happy, or not, you are with the 'current you'. Then, think about

the person you want to be in the future including all of the qualities and features you would like to possess. Really visualise this and be as specific as you can. Get started by asking questions such as: “If I could, what things about myself or my life would I change and/or enhance?” Once you have done this think about how good it would feel to transition from the ‘current you’ to the ‘future you’.

[RESOURCE: Current and future me](#)

Think about the main obstacles that are preventing you from achieving what you want to achieve right now. Now imagine, if your life depended on it, what would you do to get around these obstacles?

[RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare](#)

Explore the purpose and motives behind what you are currently doing. Ask yourself, are my current behaviours or habits serving a purpose? What is this purpose? And are these things that I really need to be doing?

[RESOURCE: My current situation](#)

Talk to various but carefully selected people about what they think would be good options for change. This should only be done after considerable time has been spent considering change yourself. Input from others at the early stages of thinking about change can be detrimental.

[RESOURCE: My supporters](#)

Think about what others would think if you managed to change. For example, what would your partner, children or friends think about you being healthier or fitter? If you were to make this change how might your relationships improve or benefit?

Start taking baby steps towards action if you feel confident you can do so. If you do decide to take some steps towards action, ensure you do something small that has a high chance of succeeding. This will help to build up confidence and better prepare you for taking more substantial action. It will also ensure you experience success early on, which is vital. Think about one or two small things you could do right now.

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Managing the deciding and preparing stage

“Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try.”

- UNKNOWN

You've raised awareness of a potential change and managed the excitement or anxiety of your trigger event. From here you've weighed up the pros and cons of changing and really thought about what would be involved. You're now ready to make a decision and make the necessary preparations to take action.

The deciding and preparing stage is the first stage that has an exit point. This represents the first real fork in the road on your journey to change. Whether you consciously make a decision or not, you will eventually end up progressing onto taking action or exiting and returning to status quo.

If you exit due to a decision not to change you will remain at status quo until another trigger event again kick starts you into action. After returning your awareness around changing will initially remain, however this will eventually diminish, assuming you don't continue to think about it.

Although your change attempt may not have gotten out of the gates this time around, there is still an upside to exiting at this point. If you decide at a later date to attempt the same change, a lot of the thinking will have already been done. This means your progress through the cycle up to the deciding and preparing stage at least, will be faster and more efficient.

Assuming you do make a decision to change, you will now need to consider preparations for action. How much preparation you do will most likely be influenced by how much you want to achieve your goal, meaning the more you want it the more you will be willing to prepare ([Orton, \[2\] 2012](#)). Any preparations made now will directly influence how effective you are when taking action later. INVESTING TIME AND EFFORT INTO THIS PROCESS THEREFORE IS WELL WORTH IT and will pay off during the stages that follow.

Aims - Deciding and preparing stage

Decision

- Continue to explore ambivalence in an attempt to strengthen your resolve about changing. Remember someone who is 100% convinced they should change is the exception not the rule.

- Determine what the best course of action would be for YOU to take. Draw from the work done in the thinking about change stage.

- Make a decision! Do you want to proceed or not? Now is the time to decide one way or the other. Either you want to go ahead with change in which case preparation will now become the focus. Or you're not ready, in which case you'll exit and return to status quo.

Preparation

- Establish a direction and set yourself a goal that will take you towards that direction. What's realistic but still challenging for YOU is the most important part of this process.

- Create a plan of action for the short term, drawing on everything you've thought about up to this point. Be specific when making plans and ensure they're in line with your goals.

- Review your goals and plans and ensure they're realistic for YOU before setting a date to start your action plan.

Think - *Deciding and preparing stage*

Talking to walking

This stage represents a transition point from which you move from talking the talk to walking the walk. Although work on motivation should be on-going, the focus for this stage is to strategize actions that need to be taken.

Your window of opportunity

The deciding and preparing stage represents a window of opportunity where, off the back of motivation generated, you can begin to put together a plan of action. It's important to realise this window won't be open forever.

Making a strong choice to change

Making a strong, definitive choice is a great start but this doesn't mean that any old strategy will do. Any change strategy put in place needs to be well matched. This means strategies that are realistic and effective for YOU.

Motivation being high now but fluctuating in the future

It can be a huge sense of relief to find yourself at this point in the change cycle. After all the thinking, decision making and preparation, the feelings you'll have prior to action can be exciting. Motivation at this point usually isn't an issue but this doesn't mean it won't be in the future or even in the near future.

Being aware and preparing for the reality of action

There is a huge difference between making a decision to change, and taking action to change. The reality of walking the walk needs to be considered and planned for so that there are as few surprises as possible. Remember a decision without action has minimal impact.

Framing things in a positive way

Your self-talk will play an important role during the decision process and can really set the tone of an upcoming change attempt. For example, instead of thinking about the things you may have to sacrifice, consider all of things you will be gaining, or reframe what you don't want to do into what you want to do.

Not rushing the process

Not rushing into action is easier said than done, especially if you've really considered your situation during the thinking about change stage. There will often be a tension between wanting to rush into action and taking your time to prepare appropriately. Remember the more time spent at this point, the more successful you will be during the taking action stage.

Making an effort to be non-biased

Only work with information that is honest, non-emotive and factual. This is not to say that you shouldn't acknowledge the many feelings and emotions you may be experiencing at this point, but be very aware of how these may be impacting on the choices you make. Spend time reflecting on the process every night before going to sleep as a way to become more self-aware.

Making yourself accountable to others

Firstly, make sure these people are supportive others. Be very conscious of who you involve in your decisions and preparations to change. Involvement with those that don't or won't support your decision will make it more difficult to change. Once you've established who is

or will be supportive, inform them of your intention to change. Consider what you will tell them and when you will tell them. By doing this you will essentially be mobilising your own army of motivators. They may not know exactly how to motivate you but what they will do is keep change on the forefront of your mind. Making yourself accountable to others makes putting off or cancelling plans to change that much more difficult.

Negative feelings being natural

Be aware that sometimes making a change, especially when it's a major one, can produce feelings of loss and hopelessness. This often happens if you become overwhelmed with what needs to be done. These feelings are normal and make sense when you consider what you may be sacrificing to make a change. If these feelings dominate over more positive feelings however, they can ignite self-sabotaging type behaviours.

Ask - Deciding and preparing stage

Depending on whether you do or don't decide to change, the questions you need to ask yourself at this stage will vary.

The following questions are divided into three sets and will cater for whatever situation you're in.

The three sets are as follows:

1) Making a decision and where to go from here

2) Choose ONE of the following three sets, depending on the decision you've made

- a) You don't want to proceed with change at this point at time
- b) You're still unsure about proceeding with change at this point in time
- c) You want to proceed with change

3) Preparation

Question set 1: Making a decision and where to go from here

Making a strong initial decision to change is an extremely important aspect of the change process. Without this commitment and investment in change, motivation will likely diminish soon after taking action.

After considering all of the information gathered in the previous stages ask yourself the following questions. Remember, if you are to go ahead with change, it's important to be assertive. There is a big difference between a strong 'yes' and a limp 'I guess so'.

- Is making this change really what I want to do? and/or

- Do I want to go ahead with making this attempt to change?

Regardless of how you answered these questions, you will fall in to one of the following three categories, which are...

a) You don't want to proceed with change at this point at time

b) You're still unsure about proceeding with change at this point in time

c) You want to proceed with change

Establish which of the three categories you fit into (a, b or c), then go to the appropriate category and proceed with the questions.

Question set 2a: You don't want to proceed with change at this point in time

So, this time around, change wasn't meant to be. That's OK. Remember the work (thinking) you've done up to this point will serve you well when you decide the time is right.

At this point you could forget all about change and return to status quo. Or you could keep the possibility of change in mind and try asking the same questions (question set 1) in a day, a week or a month to see if anything has changed.

If you do decide to exit, some useful questions to bow out with are included below. These questions will also give you some direction the next time you decide to make the same or a similar change.

- What were the main 2-3 reasons why you have decided not to change at this point in time?

- What would need to happen for you to overcome these reasons the next time you decide to make a change?

- Having gone through this process, what do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses around changing?

- Next time you decide to change how can you amplify your strengths and minimise your weaknesses?

Question set 2b: You're still unsure about proceeding with change at this point in time

Firstly take a breath and relax. Whatever you do, don't pressure yourself into making a decision one way or the other. Remember there's no rush, especially if this is an important change. Feeling unsure about change could be the result of missing some important steps or questions in previous stages, or it could mean that you're simply not ready at this point in time.

The following is a list of questions you could ask yourself in order to strengthen your commitment to change.

- What are the main 1-2 reasons that are standing in the way of making a strong decision to change?

Think about the reasons you want to make a change and think about the reasons you listed above...

- If these reasons were what ultimately meant you didn't change, how would that sit with you? (be honest)

- What would need to happen for you to overcome these reasons assuming you decide to make a change?

- Assuming you decide not to make a change at this point in time, how do you think you will feel about this decision in a week, month or year?

- What are the things holding you back now that will still be there in a month or year?

- Assuming you still want to change in the future, how do you intend to get past these same reasons when the possibility of change emerges again?

Question set 2c: You want to proceed with change

So you really want to change and you've made a strong decision to do so. So that you are 100% sure of your commitment, ask yourself the following questions.

- How would you clearly define exactly what it is that you want to be different?

- On a scale of 1 - 10 how much do you really want to do this? (1 – not at all, 10 – it means everything to me!)

- On a scale of 1 – 10 where would you rate the importance you place on changing? (1 – not very important, 10 – very important)

- On a scale of 1 – 10 how confident are you that you can successfully make this change? (1 – not very confident, 10 – very confident)

The answers to these questions will give you some insight into how successful you may, or may not be, during the taking action and maintaining action stages. If your importance and confidence levels are low or even medium (defined as below 7), despite the fact you have decided to make a change, it's recommended you spend more time building these things up before proceeding to the taking action stage. To do this revisit the thinking about change stage and go over the 'Ask' and 'Do' sections.

Question set 3: Preparation

Considering your definition of what it is you want to change...

- What are all of the things you need to consider while preparing for change?

- What are the goals you want to put in place regarding this change? If you had to reduce your goals to two or three key goals what would they be? (be specific)

- What are your options for taking action? or how could you go about achieving your goals? (think of multiple options)

- What are the potential barriers, traps or situations that could derail your attempts to change? How could you prepare for these barriers so when they occur you can deal with them in a constructive way?

- Who would support your decision to change and who, out of these people, could help during the next stage (taking action)?

Considering past change attempts, whether successful or not...

- What skills, and/or experiences can you draw on?

- What's worked for you in the past and how can you recreate or even improve on these things?

- What are the things that haven't worked and how can you avoid or modify these things this time around?

Do - Deciding and preparing stage

The following resources/activities are split into **Decision** and **Preparation** sections. There are many things to consider when preparing to take action. Don't be like most people and gloss over your preparation to change. **SOUND PREPARATION MEANS MORE EFFECTIVE ACTION!**

Decision section

Recap on the previous stage and decide on exactly what it is that you want to change. Being clear on exactly what it is you want to achieve will make the preparation section of this stage much clearer. Revisiting your hopes and dreams is a great warm up for setting goals. The focus for goal setting at this stage is short term goals but having your long-term direction in mind is useful. The images of your best future are what you should always keep in mind when setting shorter term goals. Doing this keeps things purposeful and will provide you with the motivation you need to keep going when facing the inevitable question 'why am I even doing this in the first place?'

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

Come to a decision about changing and continue to strengthen your decision. If you decide not to change then your journey ends here. If you decide to go ahead with change you will now need to prepare for action. Part of this preparation will involve strengthening your decision to change through resolving any underlying ambivalence you still have. Remember it's likely that even if you have decided to go for it, you will still be ambivalent about certain aspects of changing. This is normal. Being aware of these aspects and continuing to work on them is critical if you want change to stick.

[RESOURCE: Exploring and resolving ambivalence](#)

Preparation section

Always focus on your best future by thinking constantly about your hopes and dreams. This is a much more effective way to look at things rather than seeing change as a series of tasks and sacrifices.

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

Continue to rate importance and confidence to identify which areas might still need addressing prior to taking action. Remember if something isn't important to you, why would you bother changing it? Moreover if you're not confident you can change, how likely is it that you will be able to make a change?

[RESOURCE: Importance, confidence & readiness: resources 1 - 3](#)

Compile a list of all of the things you'll need to consider now that you've decided to take action. Think broadly and deeply about anything and everything of relevance. Remember it is much better to choose from a menu of options instead of one or two ideas.

[RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare](#)

[RESOURCE: Preparation checklist](#)

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Consider times in the past where you have successfully changed. When have you overcome adversity or pushed through barriers in order to achieve a goal or a specific outcome? Doing this will provide a great starting point for thinking about the kinds of things that might work for you this time around. In addition to this, reflecting on past success is a great way to strengthen beliefs in your ability to change.

[RESOURCE: My past successes](#)

Identify who will support your decision to change. Despite the fact that there are often high levels of optimism and motivation at this stage, support people can still play a major role in the process. If not now then later when things are likely to get more challenging. It is also worth considering those who may be unsupportive in either an open or discrete way. If you do suspect certain people may be unsupportive, it is best to hold back telling them until you have begun putting plans into action.

[RESOURCE: My supporters](#)

Identify the roadblocks, barriers and traps you will face during the taking action stage. To do this, think about all of the things that have derailed you and thrown you off the path in the past. What are the temptations and distractions that could emerge without warning? What are the small things that occur day to day that if left unchecked could threaten change? Think hard about the types of barriers that could challenge you and think equally hard about what you can do to manage these things.

RESOURCE: Pre-empting problems

Set realistic, prioritised goals for the short term based on your long term direction. Experiencing early success is hugely important during the taking action stage, therefore achieving short term goals quickly needs to be the focus. You need an early sense of achievement in order to strengthen motivation to change. It's also important not to set too many goals as it will simply confuse and overcomplicate things.

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Link your goal(s) to the reasons you want to change. Without making these links your goals have no context and become meaningless. In the same way a car needs petrol to get from point A to B you need motivation to reach your goals. Fortunately by this point you will have spent a lot of time questioning your motivation to change. From here it is a simple matter of keeping these 'whys' in mind and constantly making the links between them and your goal(s). A common mistake that's often made is forgetting to make these links and spending the majority of time on goal creation. It is vital to constantly identify with the 'whys'. This is what will sustain you through the tougher times and allow you to overcome adversity, challenges, and setbacks. Don't allow yourself to get the point where you are questioning why you are doing this. Establish your 'whys' and carry these with you through to the completion of your journey.

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Create a realistic plan of action to achieve your goals. Make sure you are specific when creating an action plan and ensure it's in line with the short term goal(s) you've set yourself.

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Review goals and plans and set a date to start. It's vital to ensure your goals and plans are realistic for YOU. This essentially means that they have a good chance of being met. If there are any doubts about the validity or level of difficulty at this point, it's recommended that you revise goals and plans so as they are more realistic. Remember don't set yourself up for failure! Once you're happy set a date to commence your plan of action. All that is left to do now is to get started.

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Managing the taking action stage

“Action expresses priorities.”

- MAHATMA GANDHI, CONSIDERED THE FATHER OF THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

You've thought about the possibility of changing, and decided you're going to go for it. Goals have been set, preparations have been made, and an action plan completed. You're in the taking action stage which means it's time to start walking the walk. It's important to reiterate that this stage is all about actual behaviour modification and change. No amount of talking, planning or organising can substitute actually taking action towards change.

After all the thinking, decision making and planning, actually taking the first steps will be exciting. The excitement you feel will provide an initial surge of motivation which will kick start you into action. This is the time often referred to as the motivational honeymoon period. Often at this point you'll feel invincible, like nothing can stand in the way of you and change. Of course depending on the time and effort you've put into thinking and preparation this feeling may be warranted. However if you've launched into action without due consideration or preparation this stage will often end abruptly and leave you feeling anything from confusion, to disappointment, to guilt. Remember if you want to succeed you have to identify any weaknesses, whether mental or physical, and factor these in so as to get yourself into a situation where you can achieve your goal ([Storey, \[2\] 2012](#)).

The taking action stage can also be looked at in terms of phases. These being phase 1, the often volatile initial part of taking action and phase 2, the more settled latter part. How long each of these phases last will depend on factors like the importance you place on changing and how confident you are you can do it, as well as the effectiveness of any preparations you've made. What distinguishes the first phase from the second is more of a feeling than a single factor or point. This feeling will likely be one of increased confidence due to having followed through on actions for some time. Either way it's important to be in touch with these two phases as they will inform which strategies you will employ and when.

The taking action stage is the second stage within [the EMCC](#) that has an exit point. The exit point in the deciding and preparing stage was described as a fork in the road and represented a clear choice whether to pursue change or not. The exit point in the taking action stage could be best described as a pothole in the road, in that we often don't anticipate it or see it coming. An exit here represents an inability to progress to the maintaining action stage, and means a return to status quo.

Exiting at this point can happen for a number of reasons, but would most likely occur due to one or all of the following three reasons. These reasons are:

- inappropriate matching of interventions or change strategies

- inappropriate or overambitious goals and plans, and
- not being aware or prepared for the sacrifices you need to make

Whatever the reason, an exit at this stage will be a big disappointment, especially as there's likely been a huge amount of excitement and investment put into the possibility of change. The good news is that following the management strategies in the previous stages will drastically reduce your chances of an exit. This is why it can't be stressed enough that work done at the front end will pay off in the long term.

Of course exiting at this point isn't a total loss. It can actually be looked at as a warm up for the next time you decide to make a change. Remember change is an on-going process and is not a matter of pass or fail. All the work, the thinking and the planning done up to this point will not be wasted. In fact it will mean that the next time you decide to make a change, you will be able to progress through the cycle a lot quicker. It goes without saying though that you'll need to assess what went wrong last time and adjust accordingly. Assuming you want to prevent another early exit that is. **THE KEY POINT HERE IS THAT AN EXIT IS NOT A BAD THING, BUT RATHER IT'S A LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND A NATURAL PART OF THE CHANGE PROCESS.**

Assuming you have put in the time during the previous stages and remain motivated, the first real steps towards changing will begin. By experiencing small successes, you will begin to feel increasingly confident. You will start to really believe you can achieve your goals. This is the reason short term realistic goals are so important. Confidence means everything when you're doing something new or challenging. The more confident you feel, the easier goals will become and the quicker you will develop new behaviours and habits. When you get to this point you really start to see a snowball effect. Things don't feel so hard anymore. **THE AIM IS TO GET TO A TIPPING POINT WHERE EXITING WOULD NOW BE MORE DIFFICULT THAN CONTINUING.** This is the point you must strive to reach.

Modifying and continuing to set new goals and plans is also part of what needs to happen during this stage. After you have had some initial success and have gotten over the hump of establishing new routines, it's time to review, modify and create additional goals. This process will essentially be a duplicate of what you did during the deciding and preparing stage.

Consistency is another key message at this stage. Shaping a new behaviour will be dependent on how consistently you take action. According to food scientist [Dr Tim Lindley \[3\]\(2012\)](#), progressing step by step at a pace that doesn't make your body push the panic buttons is the key to consistent progress. This incremental approach will play a big part in the habits you form. **BUILDING A BASE OR PLATFORM OF CONSISTENCY IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE AT THIS STAGE.** Remember there is no substitute for actually doing it. If you're consistent over time, it will be almost impossible not to change and create a new normal!

Aims - Taking action stage

Taking action - Phase 1

- Continue to strengthen your decision to change by regularly revisiting the reasons you wanted to change in the first place.
- Review and prioritise your goals and plans and ensure they are realistic for YOU at the time.
- Predict what your first barrier(s) will be and when they will likely occur. Consider how best to deal with these, and put pre-emptive strategies in place to deal with them when they arise.
- Let your support people (if applicable) know that you are now in the taking action stage, e.g. "I'm starting my plan". Ensure that any plans made regarding how these people will support you are clear and known to everyone.
- Keep track of both your physical and mental progress. An effective way to do this is to keep a diary, journal, log or progress chart.
- Conduct on-going assessments of what is working and what isn't. Be positive about the changes you are making and honest about the things you are finding difficult.

Taking action - Phase 2

Continue to do all of the things you have been doing during the initial phase of this stage as well as...

- Create new goals and plans of action that go beyond the immediate short term, only after you feel you're confident enough to do so. Apply the same level of thoughtfulness and approaches you used when creating your original goals.
- Review new goals and plans and ensure they are realistic for YOU at the time before setting a date to start

If exiting the taking action stage

- Consider all of the reasons why you've exited at this stage, bearing in mind all of the things you did, or didn't do, prior to taking action. Consider what you could do to work through or around these reasons if you were to make another attempt at change.

Think - *Taking action stage*

Keeping the big picture in mind

During the stages that involve actually taking action, it's always important to regularly revisit the reasons you wanted to change in the first place. Although you need to be working on small achievable goals during this stage, keeping in mind the big picture (long term direction and reasons for changing) is vital. This will give your continued action a purpose and keep you motivated to change.

Being confident and positive

Confidence and positivity are essential at this stage. At all times you should attempt to think about and frame things in a positive way. Doing this early on is especially important as it will get you off to a great start and also help to extend your initial motivational surge. Have confidence that if things are a struggle they will get better in time, **IF YOU CONTINUE TO BE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR EFFORTS**. Getting over the initial hump will be one of the biggest obstacles on your journey to change.

Being realistic that motivation will fluctuate

This is especially important during the initial phase of this stage, as the way you feel initially will not last forever. Your initial motivation to change will fade but this is very normal and is to be expected. Being aware this will happen is the first step in the process of managing this inevitable situation. The second step is to pre-empt the kinds of strategies that will assist you at this point. The aim of any strategy should be to firstly minimise the motivational decrease and secondly to rebuild any lost motivation before continuing to strengthen it.

Doing everything you can to experience early success

It's essential that you're experiencing early success by achieving shorter term goals. If you're not achieving you'll need to think hard about whether this is due to your goals or due to a lack of action. If goals need modifying adjust them accordingly. If you aren't taking the required action you will most likely need to revisit why changing is important in the first place.

Building the habit

Habits at this stage are everything! BUILDING THE HABIT OF ACTUALLY DOING SOMETHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU'RE DOING, within reasons of course. While goals and plans are important they mean nothing if you're not achieving them. To be in the position of knowing if things need changing you first need to consistently and routinely take action.

Prioritising what's important

Prioritising tasks is something that needs to be done consistently if you're to remain on track. It is hugely important to concentrate on your original goals and see them through to completion. Often other ideas and goals will pop up while you're still attempting to meet original goals. This is normal for those experiencing success. Doing inspires doing! Something switches when you feel you can control your actions by setting goals and achieving them. However good ideas or not, STOPPING YOUR CURRENT ACTION TO PURSUE A DIFFERENT PATH OF ACTION IS A CLASSIC AND HUGELY COMMON MISTAKE.

Small and steady as a useful strategy

Feeling overwhelmed is a common feeling during this stage, especially once initial high motivation passes. If you don't manage this feeling there is a risk of exiting. Prioritising and committing to small steps is often a useful strategy and will keep you on track. It doesn't matter how small of a goal you set yourself or how fast you achieve it. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT YOU KEEP MOVING FORWARD NO MATTER WHAT THE SPEED.

Keeping your goals and plans highly visible

Writing your goals down and displaying them in highly visible places is a great strategy to keep goals visible. This will serve as a constant reminder of what you are trying to achieve. This amount of consistent effort will only be needed until you manage to form new habits. At this point actions will become a little more natural and will seem less forced and calculated.

Reviewing goals, plans and progress

Ensuring you review your goals, plans and progress can't be emphasised enough at this stage. It's the taking action stage over any other where most people exit. A lack of forethought and preparation in previous stages will often be the primary cause of this but another big contributor is a lack of awareness. Rarely can people set goals, make a plan and progress though from start to finish without anything going wrong. This is not to say people can't

adapt to changes in circumstance or environment or deal with problems that arise along the way. But if you are unaware of these problems and issues then how can you remedy them? In short you can't, which is why regular reviews need to be conducted. Only then can you manage issues before they become unmanageable.

Reviewing goals also takes on more relevance as you start to set slightly larger goals. Remember that the nature of short term goals is that they are easily achievable, partly due to their simplicity but mostly due to the short time it takes to achieve them. When you get into larger goals you need to be 100% confident that they're realistic. In short the longer and more complex the goal the more chances there are of something going wrong. This in turn means it becomes increasingly important to review the goals you set yourself and the plans you make to achieve them. To emphasise this point consider the following quote, "Not considering or reflecting on progress is like hitting a golf ball in the dark - it could be in the cup but it could also be in the car park or maybe even still at your feet." - Unknown

Being honest and non-bias

Honesty is always important when conducting reviews about any aspect of progress. Being honest and non-bias about the things you're finding difficult will put you in the best position to deal with them. Not being honest can result in justifications and minimisations about a lack of progress which can quite easily lead to an exit. Remember you're trying to form good habits at this stage. The habits you build will be reflective of what you do, plain and simple. If you continually justify, minimise and deny, not only will you likely end up exiting but you'll also build destructive habits that will affect future change attempts. On the flip side if you build habits around honestly analysing slip ups and putting strategies in place you're more likely to succeed both this time and next.

Using support people where possible

The temperamental nature of this stage means that doing all you can to get off to the best possible start is important. Where possible you should employ the help of your support people in order to stick with the plan of action.

Being aware of the transition from the first phase to the second phase

This is vital, as the transition point is where you will need to start putting new goals in place. These new goals will be what sustain your progress for the remainder of the stage. When this transition occurs will depend on when, and how consistently, shorter terms goals are being met. In general 1-2 months is a rough marker of when this transition would usually occur.

Celebrating success whenever possible

This is especially important if you're doing something that you've never done before or if you're breaking through new barriers. Finding value in your achievements and acknowledging the work you have done will encourage on-going efforts to achieve more.

Not stressing if you exit

Exiting for many will be the reality at this stage. It's vital to understand this is normal. Instead of getting down about it, learn from it. You will probably not feel like doing this at the time but if you do the next time you attempt a change you'll be much more in tune with the things that do and don't work.

Ask - Taking action stage

There are a range of useful questions you can ask yourself when in the taking action stage. The following questions are divided into four sets, and cater for the different positions you might find yourself within this stage.

The four sets are as follows:

1) Monitoring motivation

2) Maintaining motivation

3) At risk of exiting. Struggling with resolve, confidence, consistency

4) After exiting

Question set 1: Monitoring motivation

Monitoring motivation can't be emphasised enough. Letting fading motivation creep up unnoticed is one of the main reasons so many people fail to change. Regularly ask yourself the following questions to monitor your motivation to change.

- On a scale of 1-10 how motivated are you to follow through on your plan of action?

- On a scale of 1-10 how important is it that you follow through with the goals and plans you've set yourself?

- On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you that you can follow through on the goals and plans you've set yourself?

- On as few words as possible how would you sum up how you feel about the way things are progressing to date?

If your score is below 7, you urgently need to fix the situation. Likewise if you're feeling negative or even mediocre about how things are going. Question set 2, and the activities in the 'Do' section are helpful.

Question set 2: Maintaining motivation

Regularly ask yourself these questions to maintain your motivation to change. **THIS IS IMPORTANT EVEN WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL.**

- Why is making this change important to you?*
- What will be different if you successfully make this change? be specific*
- What opportunities will arise if you make this change? be specific*
- How would your important people feel or benefit if you succeed with this change?*

Considering the goals you set and the plans you've put in place to achieve these goals...

- Yes or no - are you taking the required action to ensure you meet your goals?*
- Yes or no - are you acting on these goals according to priority?*

If you answered yes then well done! Celebrate your success before reflecting on what's kept you going and how can you do more of it?

If you answered no then ask yourself why not? What is it that's getting in your way? You've hopefully pre-empted any potential barriers and already have counter strategies planned. Now is the time to employ these strategies. Don't wait until you exit or are at high risk of exiting. **DO IT NOW!**

Question set 3: At risk of exiting due to problems with resolve, confidence and consistency.

Consider these questions if you feel as though you can't sustain action and feel at risk of exiting:

- *What kinds of things are occurring that are demotivating for you? What could you do to deal with these things immediately? (draw on previously thought about ideas and strategies)*
- *On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your chances of continuing and proceeding to the maintaining action stage? What would it take to get this number higher? What are the barriers that if removed would mean this number would be higher?*

Considering your previous thinking around how to deal with barriers, traps and difficult situations, as well as how to deal with a lack of motivation...

- *Which of your previously prepared strategies or ideas could you use given your current situation?*
- *Who out of your support people could support you at this time?*
- *If you had to reduce your existing goals so that one or two remained which goals would be left? If you had to modify these one or two remaining goals to make them more manageable how would you do that?*

Considering past change attempts, whether successful or not...

- *What skills and/or experiences from the past can you draw on at this time and how could these be applied to your current situation?*

Considering what lead you to this point...

- *What were the reasons you first considered change?*
- *What were the initial feelings and thoughts you had about making a change? Are these reasons and feelings still valid now and do they still hold the same importance? How would you explain the difference now compared to then?*
- *What would it take to recapture the same feelings you initially had about changing?*

Question set 4: After exiting

CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU HAVE EXITED FROM TAKING ACTION. MAKE SURE YOU MAKE AN EFFORT TO DO THIS!

There will often be negativity associated with an exit. This is normal. Remember this is a natural part of change. Instead of trying to forget about it which you will want to do, learn from it. Ask yourself the following questions:

- *What were the things that didn't go so well during your change attempt?*
- *What were the main barriers that prevented you following through with your plan of action?*
- *If you had to summarise the reasons why you didn't make a change this time around and come up with 2 or 3 key reasons, what would they be?*
- *If you were to attempt change again, how might you get around these barriers or reasons?*
- *What were the positives that came out of your attempt at change?*
- *If you had to summarise the best aspects of your change attempt what would be the top 2 or 3?*
- *What were the positive feelings you experienced while taking action and what specific action(s) made you feel this way?*

Make a note of the above answers as these things will inform the plans you make the next time you attempt a change.

Do - Taking action stage

Focus on your vision for the future and the opportunities that will arise once you achieve your goals. Remember this is a much more positive way to look at things rather than seeing difficult tasks and sacrifices. You must keep reminding yourself about why it is you're doing this by reengaging with the reasons you wanted to change in the first place. **YOU SHOULD DO THIS DURING THE ENTIRE TAKING ACTION STAGE REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THINGS ARE GOING WELL OR NOT.** It's especially important if you're in the initial phase of action or if you're finding things tough. Revisit your hopes and dreams constantly!

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Affirm! Affirm! Affirm! Positivity and confidence are hugely important during this stage and will play a huge role in you sticking to your plan of action. By acknowledging successes

you will increase your confidence which will positively affect your chances of making a long term change.

[RESOURCE: Exercise & Motivation log](#)

Track both your mental and physical progress by keeping a log. A log provides factual information for current and future reference. This information can be used to keep your goals visible, monitor and modify goals, create new goals and establish new habits. It can also be used to monitor on-going motivation to change. A log is also a great way to keep motivated by considering what you've already achieved.

[RESOURCE: Exercise & Motivation log](#)

Set realistic, prioritised goals for the short term based on your longer term direction or goal. Again there is no need to set too many goals. 1 to 3 goals is ideal.

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Keep your goals highly visible during this stage. The more visible your goals the better as it will get you constantly thinking about what needs to be done. Dedicating a physical space to display your goals is a good way to keep them visible. Classic spots like the refrigerator, coffee table and bedroom ceiling are great.

[RESOURCE: Future board](#)

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Regularly revisit your goals to adapt and prioritise them if necessary. If you find yourself struggling or feeling as if you are not achieving as much this will be an important strategy to get yourself back on track. Often you will gravitate towards doing the less important, often easier goals in favour of the priority goal. This is natural but it can be disastrous to change attempts. It's easy to justify not working towards meeting the priority goal when you are working on something else. It is no surprise that by doing this, in time your original attempts to change will fade away.

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Have relapse prevention strategies ready. It is important that if you do find yourself struggling, you have your relapse prevention strategies ready. Being familiar with these strategies and having an awareness of when they need to be used is a must. Regularly

reviewing these strategies keeps them fresh in your mind and puts you in a position to act fast if you need to. As your action plans unfold, you may also find you need to develop new strategies to deal with any distractions and barriers you didn't foresee.

RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare

Be aware and learn from high risk situations. Learning from any behaviours or thinking that lead to or encourage high risk situations is vital for future success. Being aware of the triggers to specific behaviours and thinking is extremely valuable information. The more aware you are about destructive behaviours and thoughts, the sooner and more effectively you can deal with them. Think about it, if you knew there would be a negative outcome from taking a specific action would you still make the wrong choice? It's often the seemingly inconsequential actions or thinking that derails change attempts. You will always be faced with barriers and distractions so you need to get used to pre-empting and dealing with them if you want to achieve your goals.

RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare

Think about what exiting at this point would feel like. Actually picturing an unchanged future where everything is the same (a future in which you have tried to change but haven't succeeded) can re-invigorate your change attempt. You are doing this for a reason after all, whether it's to get away from certain behaviours or habits or to gain new and improved behaviours or habits. It's common to have several 'the grass is greener moments' when making difficult changes. Remember however, that it was your current situation that you wanted to change in the beginning. Reengaging with your current situation and thinking about why you wanted to change it is a great way to refocus. It's important to note however that while this strategy will work for some people, others may not respond well to the feeling of guilt.

RESOURCE: My current situation

Managing the maintaining action stage

“As long as we persevere and endure, we can get anything we want.”

- MIKE TYSON, THE YOUNGEST BOXER TO WIN AND SIMULTANEOUSLY HOLD THE WBC, WBA AND IBF HEAVYWEIGHT TITLES

If you're ready to manage the maintaining action, stage you've been actively and consistently taking action towards change for at least 3 - 6 months. During this time you've formed new habits and minimised or broken others. You've successfully navigated your way through the volatile first phase of taking action and in the process you've likely gained some experience of managing high risk situations. During the second phase you've no doubt experienced motivational fluctuations which you've dealt with. You have had ups and downs, feelings of euphoria and doubt and now after everything you have arrived at the maintaining action stage.

At this point you've started to integrate new behaviours into everyday life and are seeing and feeling the positive effects. The first order of business then is to congratulate yourself and reflect on perhaps one of the toughest periods of change you've been through for some time. But, and this is a big but. IT'S NOT OVER YET! In fact thinking you've made a successful change at this point and feeling you no longer have to put the effort in to maintain it, is the biggest mistake you can make. There is still a way to go if you want your change to stick. This means continuing to consistently take steps towards your goals. Failure to do this will inevitably result in slippage which if left unattended will mean a return to old ways.

As the name suggests maintaining action is just that, maintaining what you're already doing. While this may sound straight forward it has its own specific set of challenges and requires more than just going through the same motions. What it calls for is a deeper commitment to change. A desire to not just achieve a series of goals but to live a different life. Making this type of deeper commitment and training your mind to be strong and disciplined will lead to higher rewards, which in turn will create a snowball effect where you will see benefits in other areas of your life ([Wilson, \[1\] 2012](#)).

While transitioning to a deeper level of commitment is the ideal, for many it will feel anticlimactic as the buzz of achieving many smaller goals fades. Repetition and a methodical plod towards longer term goals just isn't as exciting for most people. It's challenging to keep going when your interest and enthusiasm to change declines. Often things can become overwhelming as the enormity of the change you're making sets in.

Thinking such as: 'I've already done so much so maybe I'll take a break', 'this is just too big' and 'at least it's more than I've done in the past' are common. It's vital to understand that this type of thinking is valid and normal although, if left unchecked, it will inevitably result in your motivation to change declining. This in turn can lead to slippage which can then go on

to derail your change attempt. On the other hand it is not uncommon to slip then realise you don't want to go back to old ways. As a result flip flopping between maintaining action and re-engaging with old behaviours will likely occur several times before you make your mind up one way or another. To go back to old ways? Or to dig it in and make your change stick?

The maintaining action stage is the third stage within [the EMCC](#) that has an exit point. Unlike the previous two exits however this is the one exit you should be striving to take. This is the 'change exit', which means if you manage to take it, you have officially changed your behaviour. As a result you will now be living a new and improved life. A new life that you have envisioned, set goals for, planned for and followed through on. Exiting here means all of the hardship you've gone through up to this point has now become officially worth it.

While the maintaining action stage throws up its own specific set of challenges, it is worth considering you've already completed the toughest part of your journey. What's important now is that you continue to maintain what you've achieved so far and ultimately exit having successfully made a change.

Aims - Maintaining action stage

At all times during the maintaining action stage

- Continue to regularly revisit the reasons you are thinking about changing in the first place. Often at this stage motivation can wane, so staying in touch with why you wanted to change in the first place is vital.
- Continue to experience success by setting realistic goals. This is important as longer term goals can become daunting. Achieving smaller goals while heading in the right direction ensures you maintain momentum.
- Continue to regularly review and prioritise your goals, plans and routines to ensure they are realistic and have a good chance of being met. Strive to achieve a balance that's right for you and your situation.
- Continue to conduct on-going assessments of what is working and what isn't by keeping track of both your physical and mental progress. As always honesty is the key here.
- Fine-tune strategies to prevent slippage. If something isn't working as well as it could be, adjust accordingly.

If you feel you are slipping during the maintaining action stage

Continue to address all of the stage tasks and aims with a particular focus on:

- Regularly reengage with the reasons you wanted to take action and change in the first place. Revisit your hopes and dreams constantly!
- Take the time to visualise a positive future and think about the feelings you will have after achieving your goals and making this change.
- Where possible, reframe negatives into positives e.g. turn difficult tasks and sacrifices into challenges that will reap amazing rewards.

Think - Maintaining action stage

Not forgetting why you're doing this!

You've already done a lot of thinking about the reasons you want to make this change. Now is not the time to forget the big picture! No additional work is required here, just regular reviews of the work that's already been done.

Revision and honesty being the key

As always honesty is important when you're reviewing any aspect of progress. Remember, exaggerating or bending the truth around what you are and aren't doing can lead to distortions in thinking. What starts off as a small justification, could lead to something more sinister. Remember slip ups are ok but if you're not being honest you'll have no awareness of what needs attention.

Expecting motivation will decline

Being realistic about motivation waning during this stage is important. Your initial motivation to change will almost certainly fade but this is very normal and is to be expected. Being aware that this will happen is the first step in the process of managing this situation. The second step is to pre-empt the kinds of strategies that will assist you at this point. The aim of any strategy should be, firstly, to minimise the motivational decrease and, secondly, to rebuild any motivation that has been lost.

Goals and plans still needing to be realistic

This is not the time to start slackening off with your goals and plans. There is a tendency at this stage to relax and falsely assume that you have already made a permanent change. This is

not surprising when you consider that you've been taking action for quite some time. Do not fall into this trap. Goals and plans still need to be given considerable attention. Doing this will ensure you remain consistent with your efforts. It will also mean you continue to experience success as goals are set and achieved. Ultimately by continuing to make realistic goals and plans you will edge closer to making a long-term change.

Not getting bored

Not getting bored will be a significant challenge at this stage. Boredom leads to complacency which, in turn, can cause you to go in search of more exciting options. Often the first thing people do when in this position is to draw on previous 'exciting' experiences. Ironically these experiences are likely to be the very things you were trying to initially get away from. As always being aware is the first step. If you're getting bored then change something rather than struggling through. It is unrealistic to think you will be able to continue with something you find bring. Variety is the spice of life after all.

Your values and beliefs

In order to fully commit to long term or lifelong change, you need to truly value and believe in what you're doing. This represents the transition from a want or need to exercise to it becoming part of you, i.e. it's just what you do. If you don't make this transition then, in time, old behaviours will return and become dominant. Changing values and beliefs around exercise can be compared to pulling weeds. If you pull weeds out and leave the roots in the soil they will grow back. If you exercise for an amount of time but don't value or believe it's the best thing for you to be doing then eventually, like weeds, your old behaviours will again become dominant.

Acknowledging what you've left behind by changing

By getting to this stage you have most likely made sacrifices. Remember change is not only about the new things you're adding, it's also about what you're taking away. This stage provides a great opportunity to reflect on what you are no longer doing or doing less of, and whether or not this is ok with you. If things feel ok, great! If not, you will need to consider how to manage this situation so that resentment doesn't build and threaten progress.

Ask - Maintaining action stage

The questions you must ask yourself in the maintaining action stage are similar to those in the taking action stage. The major difference is that if you fail to maintain action when in taking action you will likely exit and return to status quo. If you fail to maintain action in this stage you still have the option of refocusing and maintaining your position, that is, if you are motivated to do so.

The following questions are divided into four sets, and cater for the different positions you might find yourself when in this stage.

The four sets are as follows:

1) Reflect on progress

2) Monitoring motivation

3) Maintaining motivation

4) At risk of exiting due to problems with resolve, confidence and consistency

Question set 1: Reflect on progress

A good place to start if you've come this far is to reflect on progress. Often it is easy to forget the positive and focus on the negatives of change. E.g. the time it takes to exercise or the things you're missing out on to do it. While the negative, or not so good aspects of change, need to be acknowledged, it's the positive aspects that are of most value. Exploring the positives and emphasising them where possible can provide a motivational boost to those of you lacking the will to continue.

Ask yourself the following questions to reflect accurately on your current position:

Regarding the changes you've already made...

- What are the positives or the good things that you're experiencing as a result of making changes to date?

- What are the not so good things that you're experiencing as a result of making changes to date?

Regarding the positives or the good things...

- How would it feel if these things became a regular part of your life? E.g. to the point where they were automatic and you consistently did them without struggle. What would be the benefits of being in this position?

Regarding the not so good things...

- If you held up these not so good things in one hand and the positive things in another, would the not so good outweigh the positives? Or would the positive aspects make up for what wasn't so good?

- What would need to happen, or what could you do, in order to minimise the negative impact of these not so good aspects?

Question set 2: Monitoring motivation

Monitoring motivation, especially at this stage when you are so close to success, can't be emphasised enough. It's typical that at this stage you will take your foot off the gas as you feel you've all but made it. This is the main reason that most people fail to progress.

Regularly ask yourself the following questions to monitor your motivation so you can intervene when and if required:

- On a scale of 1-10 how motivated are you to continue to follow through on your plan of action?

- On a scale of 1-10 how important is it that you continue to follow through with the goals and plans you've set yourself?

- On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you that you can continue to follow through on the goals and plans you've set yourself?

- In as few words as possible how would you sum up how you feel about the way things are progressing to date?

If your score is below 7, you urgently need to fix the situation or you risk slipping back. This also applies to those of you feeling anything even remotely negative regarding continuing with change. Question set 3 and the activities in the 'Do' section will help with this.

Question set 3: Maintaining motivation

Regularly ask yourself these questions to maintain your motivation to change. This is most important at this stage even if things are going well. Remember that this is the last push before you can say you have truly changed.

- Why is making this change important to you?

- What will be different if you successfully make this change? What is already different from having made it this far? be specific

- *What opportunities will arise if you make this change? What opportunities have already come about from having made it this far? be specific*

- *How would your important people feel or benefit if you succeed with this change? How have they felt about the changes you have made to date?*

- *What are the most recent goals have you set and what plan(s) have you put in place to achieve these goals? Are you taking the required action to ensure you meet your goals? Are you acting on these goals according to priority?*

If you answered yes, great! What's kept you going so far and how can you do more of it to reach your ultimate goal?

If you answered no then ask yourself: what is it that's preventing you from taking the appropriate action? This is the time to employ any and every strategy you have prepared for such an occasion. Use what you can to get yourself back on track to make your final push towards change. **DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU HAVE SLIPPED AND ARE AT RISK OF GOING BACK TO OLD WAYS. DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO NOW!**

Question set 4: At risk of slipping. Struggling with resolve, confidence or consistency

Consider these questions if you have started to slip or have been slipping for some time. **THIS IS IMPORTANT.** Remember that if you keep slipping you will end up doing anything but making the changes you want to make. This is not where you want to be. Keep reminding yourself you are so close to making a long lasting change. Now is the time for a big final push!

There will often be an all or nothing mind-set associated with slipping. People often feel that if they make one mistake they should give up altogether. This couldn't be farther from the truth. When you consider the percentage of time spent 'on track' with time spent 'slipping', you will usually find slip ups are a drop in the bucket when compared with the positive aspects of change. Instead of looking at slippage as the end, learn from it.

Ask yourself the following questions if you feel as though you can't sustain your current course of action and feel at risk of slipping:

- *What kinds of things are occurring that are demotivating for you? What could you do to deal with these things immediately? (Draw on previously used or prepared strategies)*

- *On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your chances of continuing and exiting maintaining action having successfully made a change?*

- *What would it take to get this number higher?*

- *What have you already tried that has worked?*

- What are the barriers that if removed would mean this number would be higher?

Considering your previous experience around dealing with barriers, traps and difficult situations, as well as how to deal with a lack of motivation...

- Which of your previously used or prepared strategies or ideas could you apply to your current situation?

- Who out of your support people could support you at this time?

- If you had to reduce your existing goals so that one or two remained which goals would be left?

- If you had to modify these one or two remaining goals to make them more manageable how would you do that?

- What skills and/or experiences from the past can you draw on at this time and how could these be applied to your current situation?

Considering what led you to this point...

- What were the reasons you first considered change?

- What were the initial feelings and thoughts you had about making a change?

- Are these reasons and feelings still valid now and do they still hold the same importance?

- How would you explain the difference now compared to then?

- What would it take to recapture the same feelings you initially had about changing?

Do - Maintaining action stage

Explore the values and beliefs you've had to develop to get to this point. Remember if you are to make a long term change your values and beliefs will need to change. If this doesn't happen YOU WILL eventually drift back to doing the same things you've always done. Think of trying to change your behaviour like you would think of pulling weeds. Unless you pull them out at the root level they will eventually grow back.

[RESOURCE: My values and beliefs](#)

Continue to focus on your vision for the future and how great it will feel when you succeed in making a change. Although it will feel like you don't have to do this anymore, **NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO TAKE IT EASY!** You need to constantly revisit your hopes and dreams and reengage with the reasons you wanted to change in the first place. This needs to be happening **REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THINGS ARE GOING WELL OR NOT.** It's especially important if you're experiencing a loss of motivation or momentum.

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Continue to be set realistic, prioritised goals for the short term based on your longer term direction or goal. Don't set too many goals especially if you're finding things tough. A single goal will still keep you moving forward and will eventually get you to where you want to be. You've made it this far. There is no need to rush, especially now that you're so close to the change exit.

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Continue to track both your mental and physical progress by logging your motivation to change. This will not only allow you to monitor motivation, but will also keep your goals visible and help to stay focussed on what still needs to be done.

[RESOURCE: Exercise & Motivation log](#)

Continue to regularly revisit your goals and if necessary adapt and prioritise accordingly. Remember that by feeling as if you've already made a change you may start to drift of your pre-determined course. Diverting from prioritised goals, even at this point, is dangerous. The saying 'finish what you started' couldn't be more relevant at this point. Stick to what you planned to do, make your change and then pursue other goals!

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

Continue to keep your goals highly visible during your final big push towards change. You should have dedicated a physical space to display your goals during the previous stage. If not do this now! The more visible your goals, the more you will think about what needs to be done.

[RESOURCE: Future Board](#)

Have your relapse prevention strategies ready to go. If at any point you feel yourself slipping, don't wait! Put these plans into action and get yourself back on track. It's always useful to be familiar with what typically derails your change attempts. It's also useful to know how you can effectively deal with these situations when they arise. Becoming confident with relapse prevention strategies can be looked at as change insurance. If you are confident and well versed in dealing with difficult situations you will be in a great position when barriers present themselves in the future.

[RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare](#)

Managing the slipping back stage

“Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.”

- ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, ACTOR, POLITICIAN, BUSINESSMAN AND SEVEN-TIME MR OLYMPIA

After maintaining action for some time, you've come to a point where things are starting to slip. For any number of reasons you've started to revert back to the types of behaviours and thinking that made you consider change in the first place. You are now in the slipping back stage.

This stage is about an inability to continue with the consistent action you have been taking to date and represents a move away from your original commitment to change. The distinction between this stage and the next stage (back to old ways), is that to some extent you are still maintaining new behaviours and new ways of thinking. The positive aspect of being in this position is that it is still possible to recover and return to maintaining action. If you can shake off the resurgence of old behaviours and thinking, **YOU CAN STILL GET BACK ON TRACK.**

The possible negative and most obvious outcome of occupying this stage is, that left unaddressed, slippage is likely to continue until you reach the point of no return. At this point you would progress to the back to old ways stage. The outcome of this is that any new behaviours and thinking would become eclipsed by old behaviours. Any future change attempts would therefore require you to start from the beginning of the change cycle where you would again progress through the stages.

It's important to understand that **SLIPPING BACK AND DABBING IN OLD BEHAVIOURS IS VERY NORMAL.** As contradictory as it sounds, returning to the very place you were trying to get away from in the first place is a natural part of attempting change. The bigger the change, the more natural this becomes. I will repeat... it is normal, natural, expected and entirely predictable. Of course this doesn't mean that you should invite slippage or give in to it. On the contrary it's preferable that you visit this stage only briefly or not at all, and avoid having to go through the cycle again. According to world class cycle coach [Terry Gyde \[2\]\(2012\)](#), finding a balance between the things you enjoy and your goals is the key to doing this.

So why after going so well for so long do we start to slip? One major reason is that you've most likely sacrificed a lot in order to get to his point. How much you've sacrificed will depend on how ambitious your change was, but it's safe to say all changes require sacrifice to some extent. It's important to remember that the things you sacrificed were enjoyable to you. You didn't do them for the sake of it. There was a purpose or benefit. In the initial stages of

change the new things you were doing served as a buffer to the things you were no longer doing. This was great as it allowed you to make inroads into changing but inevitably this doesn't last forever. It's usually around the maintaining action stage that new behaviours become less appealing and old behaviours make a comeback. Not just any old comeback but an almighty resurgence, a grand reappearance, a comeback on steroids!

Why does this happen? Well consider this. If you're a coffee drinker, a chocolate eater or a drinker (alcohol), you will no doubt get pleasure from these things every time you consume them. Now think about how this pleasure would be amplified if you consumed these things after not having them for a week, a month or even several months. The perceived benefits would be much greater than if you had been consuming them on a daily basis. When you reengage with the things you were originally trying to get away from, it can be confusing because they feel so good or better, in fact, than they originally did. Remember this is all happening in conjunction with a decreased motivation and desire to continue with new behaviours. It's no wonder then that things can spiral out of control and you end up unable to reel in these resurgent behaviours before they take hold.

The entry into the slipping back stage is also made easier by the fact that you will often perceive maintaining action as boring. As boredom sets in, the mind very easily drifts back to the things that used to stimulate and satisfy. The things that were exciting. Without necessarily knowing it, you start to populate a mental pros and cons list of why your current situation isn't the best position to be in. If you're unaware of this process it becomes very easy to start distorting and minimising the reasons you wanted to change in the first place. As a result when you do slip and engage in old behaviours it feels very right and very familiar. This serves to further confuse the process.

Ultimately the slipping back stage will be the beginning of the end for many of you. However if you are self-aware and understand what is happening **IT IS VERY LIKELY YOU CAN AND WILL MAKE A COMEBACK**. Of course that will all depend on whether or not you still want to change? Do you?

Aims - Slipping back stage

- Normalize the fact that you're slipping and be transparent and factual with what is actually happening. From here consider strategies to return to maintaining action.
- Affirm the work and progress achieved so far and acknowledge your efforts. Remember one or even several lapses doesn't mean you must give up.
- Spend a dedicated amount of time revisiting the reasons you are thinking about changing in the first place. Refocus on what is important to you by revisiting your hopes and dreams.

- Identify the triggers, risks and barriers that are resulting in you slipping, then utilise the appropriate relapse prevention strategies
- Reprioritise and modify goals so that they have the highest possible chance of being met. Remember that achieving smaller goals while heading in the right direction ensures you maintain momentum.
- Continue to utilise your support people. Be honest about slipping and let your support people know that you need their help now more than ever.
- Visualise two opposing futures. Firstly, a positive future where you have made the changes you want to make and, secondly, an unchanged future where you go back to old ways.

Think - *Slipping back stage*

Normalising slippage

Remember it is the exception someone wouldn't slip up at least a few times during a change attempt. Expect to experience disappointment and other negative feelings at some point. This doesn't mean you should invite slippage, but just that you should expect that at times things won't go as smoothly as you would like them to go. You will still have an opportunity to pull things back and, if not, you will have other chances to make a change. Be kind to yourself and allow yourself to be human but at the same time give yourself assurance that there is value in the change you're making. Constantly remind yourself that change is important to you and be realistic that change is a dance that will likely follow a two steps forward, one step back pattern ([Ashcroft, 2013](#)).

Recognising and responding to slippage

Recognising slippage and responding appropriately can be a positive and affirming experience. Becoming aware of problems then fixing them will reinforce your confidence and ability around handling adversity. This means the next time you are slipping or come across a problem you will be more likely to successfully manage it. The key is awareness followed by a willingness to do something about it.

Making a stand

Make a stand on whether you want to continue to change or not. Which direction do you want your life to take? The road to a changed you, or the road back to the way things were? Don't

over complicate this. You either want to continue or not! If you want to continue then get back on track by dealing with the issues that have led you to slip.

Not blaming or shaming

When you find yourself slipping negative emotional responses like blaming, shaming, and self-loathing can often serve to re-enforce black and white thinking (it's all on, or all off) which can result in all or nothing behaviour. This isn't what you want. Instead be factual with what is happening and gather all of the information. Often when you do this you realise that your perceived slippage isn't actually that bad and is actually a drop in the bucket when compared to all of the good work done to this point.

Not forgetting why you're doing this

If there was ever a time to reengage with your big picture, it's now! It's because people lose sight of initial goals and hopes that they start to slip. Without something being important and highly desirable, would you do it? Of course you wouldn't. That's why **YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO FORGET ABOUT YOUR REASONS WHY**. Keep goals highly visible, refocus and reengage with your visions of a changed you!

Goals and plans needing an urgent overhaul

It is vital at this stage to get yourself back on track and start experiencing success again. The last thing you need is to feel like it is all too much and to become overwhelmed with the task ahead. Modifying goals so that they are shorter and easily achievable is one way to avoid feeling this way. By modifying goals or breaking them up into smaller more achievable chunks, you will have a far greater chance of getting back on track. **REMEMBER AS LONG AS YOU'RE HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE YOU REACH YOUR DESTINATION**. Getting there fast isn't the objective. Instead just getting there at all is what you should be striving to do.

Acting on boredom now!

Boredom has probably been a contributor to you arriving at this stage. To combat this boredom you've likely started reengaging with old behaviours and habits. If this is left unchecked you **WILL** progress to the back to old ways stage, where any chance of clinging to your existing change will have been lost. It's understandable and predictable that you're bored, given what you've sacrificed to get where you are now. In all reality, you probably need or deserve some excitement. Ideally you would've pre-empted this slump and have some ideas already generated and ready to go. If not however now is the time to think hard

about what would fill the void. As long as it doesn't take away from your plans to change take all of the excitement you can handle. You deserve it.

Ask - *Slipping back stage*

Asking the hard questions is what's required in the slipping back stage. If you simply ignore the fact that you're slipping, things won't get any better and you WILL end up at the back to old ways stage.

The following questions are divided into three sets:

1) Establish what's happening

2) Resetting

3) Dealing with slippage and getting back on track

Question set 1: Establishing what's happening

Before things snowball into a full blown relapse, a good place to start when you find yourself slipping is to gather all of the information and establish exactly what is going on. It's important that this is done in as non-bias a way as possible. Be honest and keep it factual.

- *How long have you spent attempting this change to date?*
- *How long have you have been slipping back?*
- *What's different now compared with when you were highly motivated to change?*

Regarding both the unhelpful and helpful behaviours that are currently occurring...

- *What are you doing (or thinking) that is hindering your change attempt? What is/are the reason(s) these things are happening?*
- *What are you doing (or thinking) that is still helping your change attempt? What is/are the reason(s) these things are happening?*
- *What proportion of the time are you doing unhelpful things compared to helpful things? Overall I am doing (more or less) helpful things than I am unhelpful things.*

Question set 2: Resetting

After gathering facts about what's happening, you will hopefully have a better perspective on the 'real situation'. At this point, you should be ready to make a call, one way or another about continuing with change. Remember it's still your choice. The idea of gathering factual information is so you can make an informed decision.

The following questions are designed to get you back on track:

Considering what led you to this point...

- *What were the reasons you first considered change and why was changing important to you?*
- *Considering these reasons now, do you feel they are still valid and do they still hold the same importance?*
- *How would you explain the difference then (if there is one) compared to now?*

Considering both the good things and the not so good things that have occurred as a result of your change to date...

- *What are the positives or the good things that you're experiencing as a result of making changes to date?*
- *What are the not so good things that you're experiencing as a result of making changes to date?*
- *If you held up these not so good things in one hand and the positive things in another would the not so good outweigh the positives or would the positive aspects make up for what wasn't so good?*

In summary...

- *How would you feel if you didn't make a change knowing that the things standing in your way were (not so good things)?*
- *Imagine you woke up in 1/2/5/10 years' time and you hadn't made any of the changes you had wanted to make because of the reasons you had just considered. How would this make you feel?*

Given the current situation and what you've just considered...

- *Do you still feel changing is important?*

- *Do you still feel confident you can change?*
- *Do you still want to change?*

Question set 3: Dealing with slippage and getting back on track

Consider these questions as a way to inhibit slippage and return to maintaining action. **THIS IS IMPORTANT** as, if you keep slipping, you will end up in the back to old ways stage. Remember you are so close to making a long lasting change. Now is the time to reset, get things back on track and give it one big final push!

Considering the things that are occurring that are demotivating for you:

- *What would need to happen or what could you do in order to minimise the negative impact of these not so good aspects?*
- *Which of your previously used or prepared strategies, ideas, skills or experiences could you apply to your current situation?*
- *Who out of your support people could support you at this time?*

Considering the goals you have in place...

- *If you had to reduce your existing goals so that only the most important goal remained which goal would it be?*
- *If you had to modify this one remaining goal to make it more manageable and achievable how would you do that?*

Do - Slipping back stage

Focus on your vision for the future and the opportunities that will arise instead of seeing difficult tasks and sacrifices. This is especially important during the slipping back stage, where negativity about change can start to eclipse the positives. Reengage with the reasons you want to take action and change in the first place. Keep reminding yourself about why you're doing this, by revisiting your hopes and dreams constantly. This will be one of the best chances you have of reinvigorating your motivation to change!

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Affirm! Affirm! Affirm! Positivity and confidence are especially important during this stage and will stave off thoughts of quitting, or of easing off a little. If you return to maintaining action you will need a renewed sense of importance and confidence to continue on with change. Returning fully committed means you must have the mind-set that you CAN and WILL make this change. Only then will you be able to get back on track and stick to your plan of action. There is no better way to do this, than to take account of what you have actually achieved and acknowledge how far you have come so far.

RESOURCE: Exercise & Motivation log

Modify and prioritised existing goals so that the task ahead seems less daunting. This may include stripping back all essential tasks so that only a bare minimum is required, or it may mean breaking existing goals into small, more realistic and achievable chunks. This will all help to get you moving again, and will contribute to a renewed sense of achievement. In time when you feel your motivation has been renewed, you can again modify your goals and make them more long term and more challenging.

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Keep your goals highly visible during this stage. The more visible your goals, the better, as it will get you constantly thinking about what needs to be done. This is of particular importance at the slipping back stage where often you will be trying actively to avoid thinking about your goals and what needs to be done to achieve them. Remember, purposefully not thinking about and avoiding goals is as good as saying “I quit”. Be honest and face up to what’s happening. Dedicate multiple spaces to displaying your goals and make sure you can’t go through your day without seeing them multiple times.

RESOURCE: Future Board

RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources

Utilise every relapse prevention strategy you have prepared. It’s highly important that you have every available strategy ready and good to go. Using these strategies, even at the slightest hint of slippage, is the best way to lift your levels of motivation back to where they need to be. Don’t wait until things get so bad you find yourself saying: “what’s the point” or even worse “I’ll do it tomorrow”. Use them now and get back on track!

RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare

Understand and learn from what has caused you to slip. Learning from any behaviours or thinking that leads to or encourages any kind of slippage is vital for future success. Being aware of the triggers to specific behaviours and thinking is extremely valuable information. The more aware you are about destructive behaviours and thoughts the sooner and more effectively you can deal with them next time they emerge. You will always be faced with barriers and distractions so you need to get used to pre-empting and dealing with them if you want to achieve your goals.

[RESOURCE: Be aware and prepare](#)

Think about what quitting would feel like. Considering an unchanged future, the future you were probably trying to get away from or at least change, can recharge your change attempt. Remember you are doing this for a reason whether it's to get away from certain behaviours or habits, or to gain new and improved behaviours or habits. Reengaging with your current situation, and thinking about why you wanted to change it, is a great way to refocus. Remember you are probably closer to changing than you think. Just because you are slipping this doesn't mean all is lost. You can still do this!

[RESOURCE: My current situation](#)

Managing the back to old ways stage

“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.”

- HENRY FORD, INDUSTRIALIST AND FOUNDER OF THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY

After experiencing a trigger event that got you considering change, going through the contemplation process, making a decision, goal setting, planning, putting plans into action and sticking with these plans for some time, you have now slipped and ultimately returned to a place very similar to where your change attempt started. You are now in the back to old ways stage.

Arriving at this stage means you have almost come full circle in that you'll now be doing the same things you were doing back at the status quo stage. However although your behaviour will be very similar there are some major points of difference between this stage and the status quo stage.

The most important distinction is, that despite being in a similar position as you were pre-change, you now know a lot more, not only specifically about health and exercise-related changes, but about change in general. It doesn't matter that you didn't make a change this time around. Remember again that this is very normal. What is important is the knowledge and insight you have acquired by going through the process. The more time you put into working through each stage the more knowledge you will have acquired.

There is an irony when discussing the management of this stage, in that many see it more as a failure or the end of the road as opposed to an opportunity to manage and positively affect future changes. This, again, is very natural especially when you consider the hope, excitement and effort you put in. To arrive back at the start having, on the surface at least, not achieved anything can be devastating. However, if you can work through this period and take time to reflect on the process it will give you a huge advantage the next time you decided to make a similar change. Therefore the word reflection rather than management would be a more accurate way to describe how you should deal with this stage. By putting time into reflecting on what worked and what didn't, you will be better informed, more self-aware and ultimately in a better position to deal with future changes.

As New Zealand cricketer and Canterbury Wizard [Andrew Ellis \[2\]\(2012\)](#) suggests: be open, don't let your ego get in the way and reflect on what worked and what didn't work. This approach will help you to integrate change into your lifestyle rather than seeing it as a monster that's constantly hanging over your head. As a result you will be that much closer to maintaining change over a lifetime.

Aims - Back to old ways stage

- Acknowledge the positive aspects of your change attempt, and reflect on how far you managed to come instead of focussing on perceived failure.
- Consider and reflect on all of the reasons why you've gone back to old ways, taking in mind all of the things you did or didn't do prior to this stage.
- Identify the main reasons why you couldn't maintain action and consider what you could do to get past these reasons if you were to make another attempt at change.

Think - Back to old ways stage

Normalising it

Making several attempts to be different before actually making a real change is normal. In fact a cycle of trying and not succeeding is actually to be expected and is much more likely than trying and succeeding first time round. While there is no doubt that you will be experiencing disappointment and other negative feelings due to arriving at this stage, it is hugely important that you try to look at your experience in a positive way. Doing this, means you will be in a better position really to learn from your change attempt and make it work for you next time around.

Reflecting on the positive instead of the negative

Focussing on the positives that have come from your attempt at change, as opposed to the negatives, serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it will make you feel better about the situation by countering the negative feelings you'll be having at this stage. Secondly, it will help to minimise typical destructive statements like: "what's the point, I'll never change", "I'm useless", and "I may as well just do what I was doing before". Thirdly it will maximise your chances of retaining at least some of the new behaviours you've worked so hard to change. And, finally, it will put you in a better position mentally to attempt changing again in the future.

Not blaming or justifying

When you find yourself slipping, negative emotional responses like blaming, minimising and justifying can often serve to re-enforce negativity. This isn't what you want. Instead try to be factual and non-emotive about what has happened and try and see your current position for

what it is, as normal and ok. Having a realistic view of what has happened will make it easier to make changes in the future when you choose to do so again. The more you own it, the more you will be able to see it for what it is.

Considering the main reasons you didn't make a change

Knowing what prevented you from changing is hugely valuable information. If you have a good understanding of why you initially slipped and ultimately went back to old ways, you will be in a great position to pre-empt similar situations during your next change attempt.

Salvaging what you can

Having got to this point means you will have experienced a significant amount of success along the way. Strategies to deal with tough situations, methods to monitor and maintain motivation, techniques to set goals and make plans will all be things you've done and likely done well.

Instead of packing it all in and forgetting about it (which is what you will feel like doing), try to salvage what you can with a mind to your next attempt to change. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO FALL ALL THE WAY INTO OLD HABITS.** If there are certain things you feel comfortable maintaining or holding onto, **DO IT!** Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Yes, you may have relapsed, but that doesn't mean you haven't done some great work up to this point. Look at your current position as a glitch on your journey around the change cycle instead of an all-out failure.

Still having a choice

Remember, despite not having changed this time, you still have choices about being different. Regardless of how hopeless or negative you may feel, you can still choose to change your life.

It's inevitable that there will be a time when you want to change again, and that's why it's important that you don't look at this attempt as a failure. Rather it should be looked at as an experience that will contribute significantly to future changes.

Ask - Back to old ways stage

Given the negativity associated with a return to the old behaviours, asking yourself questions at this stage will likely be the last thing you'll feel like doing. Therefore the questions below are purposely kept to a minimum. It can't be stressed enough, however, that reflecting on what did and didn't work at this stage is vital for future change attempts. The more you come to terms with exactly what has happened the better off you will be.

The following questions are divided into two small sets:

1) The good

2) The not so good

Question set 1: The good

- *What were the positives that came out of your attempt at change?*
- *If you had to summarise the best aspects of your change attempt what would be the top 2 or 3?*
- *What were the positive feelings you experienced while making changes and what specifically made you feel this way?*
- *If you were to attempt change again, how might you plan to do more of these things and amplify the positives?*

Question set 2: The not so good

- *What were the things that didn't go so well during your change attempt?*
- *What were the feelings and thoughts that really hindered your attempt to change, and what specifically made you feel this way?*
- *What were the main barriers that prevented you following through with your plan of action?*
- *If you had to summarise the reasons why you didn't make a change and come up with 2 or 3 key reasons, what would they be?*
- *If you were to attempt change again, how might you get around these barriers or reasons?*

Make a note of the above answers as they will inform the plans you make the next time you attempt a change.

Do - Back to old ways stage

Salvage what you can from your change attempt. Reflect all of the things you have thought about, planned for, and acted on, and consider which of these things you still feel comfortable doing and carrying on with. Remember you don't have to go back totally to the way things were. By maintaining even the smallest changes, you can establish a new and improved status quo.

[RESOURCE: 2-3-4 approach to change resources](#)

[RESOURCE: Exercise & Motivation log](#)

Reflect on, and learn from what caused you to relapse. Learning from any behaviours or thinking that led to or encouraged relapse is vital for future success. Being aware of specific behaviours and thinking is extremely valuable information. The more aware you are of the reasons you relapsed, the more effectively you will be able to deal with these reasons next time. You are in the perfect position now to reflect, so that next time you make a change you can pre-empt and anticipate problems more effectively.

[RESOURCE: Pre-empting problems](#)

Don't forget about your vision for the future as it is likely that you will want to do something about it again in the not too distant future. Take time to reassess where you would like to be, by regularly revisiting your hopes and dreams. The more you think about these things, the more you will feel compelled to achieve them.

[RESOURCE: My hopes and dreams](#)

Managing the EMCC stages - A summary

"Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results."

- NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

"When you're finished changing, you're finished."

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, SCIENTIST, PUBLISHER AND STATESMAN

There is a huge amount of information within the managing stages section of this book. For some, the prospect of working through this material will generate feelings of motivation and excitement, while others could be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed by it all. Indeed, working through the questions and activities will require a lot of effort on your part. However, and this is an important 'however', if you want to change something, especially if you've tried multiple times in the past to change it, **YOU WILL NEED TO PUT IN A MAMMOTH EFFORT!** It won't be easy and it won't just happen by itself.

Think about it... how many times have you been inspired or motivated to change after hearing, reading or seeing something, only to launch into action before quitting shortly after? Sound familiar? In most cases, this will have happened as a result of not investing enough time into the contemplation and preparation stages of change. You need to take the time to think about and prepare for change. This is especially true when the change you're attempting to make is a challenging one, or if you've tried many times before to make a change but without success. **IF YOU WANT THINGS TO BE DIFFERENT, IT'S AN ABSOLUTE MUST THAT YOU DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY!**

Take your time and do it right. To change, you need to take the path less travelled, and do things that you wouldn't usually do. If this weren't the case, you would have already made all the changes that you had wanted to make. Don't do the same thing you've done in the past, if you want a different result. Really give it a good go this time around by taking all the necessary steps and by doing everything you can to make change stick!

If, and more likely when, things feel tough and you feel uncertain, that's when you know you're on the right path. When you do the same thing, you feel comfortable. **CHANGE ISN'T ABOUT DOING WHAT'S COMFORTABLE.** Doing what's comfortable has led you to where you are now. If you want to be different, you need to think and act in a different way and, yes, this will require effort, and it will feel uncomfortable.

Is it really worth it then, you might ask? Well the answer to this question is entirely up to you. A good place to start might be to ask another question...

Are you happy with your life?

Regardless of how you answered, it's important to remember YOU are the only one that can do anything about changing YOUR life. YOU make the calls and YOU put in the work.

Whatever you decide to do from this point on you can be assured you now have all the knowledge, information and resources you need to make a change, IF... you decide to do so...

So what is it to be? Will you stay with the status quo and live the same life you've been living up to this point? Or, will you go forth and EXERCISE CHANGE?

RESOURCES

“When every physical and mental resource is focused, one's power to solve a problem multiplies tremendously.”

- NORMAN VINCENT PEALE, AUTHOR AND A PROGENITOR OF 'POSITIVE THINKING'

Resources section

“Don't wait for extraordinary opportunities. Seize common occasions and make them great. Weak men wait for opportunities; strong men make them.”

- ORISON SWETT MARDEN, SPIRITUAL AUTHOR IN THE NEW THOUGHT MOVEMENT

Accompanying Resource Book (*All resources in one document*)

[- PDF Resource Book](#)

Menu of resources

- [1\) 2-3-4 approach to change – info sheet](#)
- [2\) 2-3-4 change plan template](#)
- [3\) 2-3-4 change plan template – an example](#)
- [4\) Be aware and prepare](#)
- [5\) Current and future me](#)
- [6\) Exercise & Motivation log - MALE](#)
- [7\) Exercise & Motivation log - FEMALE](#)
- [8\) Exploring and resolving ambivalence](#)
- [9\) Future board](#)
- [10\) Importance, confidence & readiness 1](#)
- [11\) Importance, confidence & readiness 2](#)
- [12\) Importance, confidence & readiness 3](#)
- [13\) My current situation](#)
- [14\) My hopes and dreams](#)
- [15\) My past successes](#)
- [16\) My supporters](#)
- [17\) My values and beliefs](#)

[18\) Values and beliefs list](#)

[19\) Preparation checklist](#)

[20\) Pros and cons grid](#)

[21\) Pros and cons grid – A4 TEMPLATE](#)

[22\) Pros and cons grid – A3 TEMPLATE](#)

Other resources

[- EMCC stage assessments](#)

[- Exercise log \(MALE\)](#)

[- Exercise log \(FEMALE\)](#)

[- Food diary](#)

[- S-O-S-S Goals supplement](#)

[- The ‘What if...’ game \(Use with ‘Be aware and prepare’\)](#)

[- The Exercise Motivation Change Cycle \(EMCC\)](#)

[- Logs and diaries assembly instructions](#)

Exercise MP3’s

[- 30 FREE Exercise MP3’s](#)

[- 20 FREE PREMIUM Exercise MP3’s](#)

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