

To Change or Not to Change? Jude laClaire, Ph.D.

Change is a process, not an event.

James Prochaska, Ph.D.

It is that time of year when cleaning out the closet, filing those papers, eating more healthily exercising 30 minutes a day, or starting the day with gratitude becomes a reality. Or does it? It may remain in the 'intention' stage for much longer than you think. Dr. James Prochaska, co-author of **Changing For Good**, tells us that up to 80% of people wanting to change are not ready to go into action. Uh oh, does that spell trouble for your New Year's Resolutions?

He and his colleagues have studied change for over 30 years and have developed a model of outlining stages of change. I think understanding them could help you assess where you can begin.

Usually we know where we are by results. I believe it would be safe to say that if nothing is happening, you aren't ready. If you think you might be ready to start a new behavior in the near future, about six months, you are in *Stage 1: Precontemplation (not ready.)* Here you may be preparing, learning about the pros and cons, checking out the effects of the change. Prochaska tells us that precontemplators usually underestimate the pros of changing and overestimate the cons. You need encouragement to become more aware of the benefits of this change. Hopefully this will not take all of 2011.

Readiness is key to success. *Stage 2: Contemplation (getting ready)* is the time when the person intends to start the new behavior within the next six months. At this state pros and cons are about equal. Ambivalence can stop you in this stage. You need help reducing the cons of changing your behavior.

When taking action is within 30 days, the person is at *Stage 3: Preparation (ready)*. This is the time for small steps that help you believe you can make the healthy behavior part of your life. You might start telling people, ask for help, make a plan think about how you would feel if you changed the behavior. As you seek and get support your confidence will grow and you will prepare for fully for the task at hand.

Now you are ready for *Stage 4: Action!* You have taken the steps you need to implement the change in your life. You are going to the gym each day, cooking better meals, writing in your gratitude log everyday or doing whatever behavior you chose regularly. Here strategy, rewards, staying with people who encourage you are very necessary.

Finally, once a change is made *Stage 5: Maintenance*, is necessary to develop the new habit. Avoiding stressful and tempting situations, being with other people who support you in your new habit and engaging in alternative activities to cope with stress will guarantee success in making change that becomes part of you.

In teaching the Neurobehavioral Program designed by Dr. John Leonard, I have found that people can work through the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages more quickly by uncovering any resistance that may be stopping them. These may be unconscious beliefs, doubts or fears that hinder us in making positive changes. The practice they get by going through the training, listening to the CD everyday, practicing the behaviors and getting assistance from counseling enhances the five step process, making it easier, more effective and powerful.

If you are struggling with those resolutions, check out Dr. Prochaska's book. He also has a great website: www.prochange.com that offers online, offline and manuals for working through the

stages of change. For a more personal approach with additional tools for quick and powerful change, try any of the Neurobehavioral Programs.

Happy New Year's resolutions and your journey of change. *Don't fear change, embrace it.*
(Anthony J.D'Angelo)

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