

A C T I V E P A U S E ®

SERGE PRENGEL

Six Stages Of Change

The Six Step Process identified by
James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente
in *Changing For Good*

Introduction

A Six-Step Process

This e-book is based on the work of James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente.

Based on their extensive research on the psychology of making changes, they identified six stages of change and wrote about them in the book *Changing For Good*.

This e-book is a summary of these steps, *in my own words* (the original names of the stages are also indicated, so you can more easily compare the summary with the book). It is meant to give you a framework to put in perspective your efforts to make changes in your life. Hopefully, it will give you a sense of where you are in this process, what is appropriate for you to expect at this stage, and what you need to do to move further along.

Please remember: Any shortcomings of this e-book have probably more to do with the adaptation than with the original work of James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente that inspired it.

Stage 1

You're Not Really Ready To Change

Original name: "Precontemplation"

At this stage, you're not really ready for a change:

- You're simply not aware of the need
- Or you're denying the need. You react defensively when somebody brings up the subject ("I'm doing enough exercise as it is; besides, the benefits of exercise are overrated").
- Or you feel overwhelmed by what it would take to make a change; so you feel change is not a realistic option.
- Or you think you want to change, but in fact, it's only a "should" that you don't really believe in, deep down.

What it takes to move you from this stage:

It will probably take a rude awakening to jolt you out of your complacency or fear of change.

Stage 2

You're Getting Serious

Original name: "Contemplation"

You're no longer sidestepping the issue. You've become conscious of the problem. You're aware that what you do (or don't do) has consequences.

You have the intention to do something about it, not right now, but, say, within the next 6 months.

This is a sort of incubation stage, a transition towards doing something. You internally become more open to the possibility of change.

What it takes to move you from this stage:

Paying more attention to the consequences of not making the change will motivate you to start doing something about it.

Stage 3

You Have a Plan

Original name: "Preparation"

At this point, you're getting ready to do something within the next few weeks, a month tops.

As you're getting closer to actually doing something, you're paying more attention to the specifics. It's not just "exercising", it's what kind of exercise, where, how often...

You're also more aware of the "cost" of making this change: it entails some sacrifices, a loss of something (even if it's just losing some free, unscheduled time). As you become more aware of this loss, there's an internal negotiation going on, about what you're willing to let go of and what you're not.

A plan shapes up, taking into consideration your goals as well as the realities of your life.

What it takes to move you from this stage:

Understanding that your plan need not be perfect, and setting a date to actually start acting on it.

Stage 4

You Take Action

Original name: "Take Action"

Now, you're actually doing what you said you would.

As you're doing it, you're probably assailed by all kinds of negative thoughts, fears, doubts. They are part of the process: a normal resistance to change. What do you expect? If it was easy, you'd have done it before. The more you're aware of this, the more you can go on despite the resistance.

The more specific your plan, the easier it is to follow. This is a good time to adjust your plan to be more specific (e.g. "exercising on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at lunch", as opposed to "3 times a week").

What it takes to make this stage work:

- You treat your goals as a priority, so you don't get sidetracked by all the excuses that will inevitably come your way.
- You plan for some rewards to yourself as you go along. You're not celebrating the big success prematurely, you're just acknowledging success in each little step.

Stage 5

You Keep Working At It

Original name: "Maintenance"

You've been at it for a while -- several months, half a year, more... You feel good about what you've done. The temptation is to believe these new habits are so ingrained that you no longer have to pay attention to what you do.

This is when a relapse happens. You had stopped smoking, or stopped drinking, and you think you can handle having a cigarette or a drink in a social situation. You were eating healthy, and you think a donut in times of stress is OK once in a while... You get my drift...

An important part of making lasting changes is not taking these changes for granted. Keep working at it.

What it takes to make this stage work:

- Changes are more likely to last when your whole lifestyle supports them (e.g. spending time with people who smoke or drink a lot is not going to make it easy for you to stop)
- Being aware that the temptation to relapse is normal will help you better deal with relapses.
- When you do have a relapse, remember that it's not an "all or nothing" proposition: you have not failed, you have just had one relapse; keep working at it.

Stage 6

You've Done It

Original name: "Termination"

Your new habits have now become second nature. You no longer feel tempted to go back to your old ways, under any circumstances. Congratulations, you've done it!

Is this a realistic goal?

Maybe, in some cases. In many cases, however, the power of habits is such that you may always be fighting against temptation. It's human nature.

Success does not necessarily mean having a personality transplant. What counts is that you are able to maintain your good habits, and that you're feeling good about your ability to do so.

What it takes to make this stage work:

Don't obsess about getting "there". Just keep working at it: Change is a creative process.

About:

The original ideas on which this is based:

The substance of this e-book originates from the work of James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente, as developed in their book: *Changing For Good* (Collins, 1995).

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