

**Changing for Good:
A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively
Forward**

By James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. Diclemente

The key point of the authors is that change is not “one thing”. Rather it is a series of stages through which an individual progresses. Recognition of this continuum of states is critical as individuals **MUST** progress through each state. Jumping immediately to the action stage rarely results in a change in the behavior. The authors describe the six stages of change and highlight nine processes that can be applied to help individuals progress through the stages of change. The framework is easy to understand and easy to implement. Further, empirical evidence is presented that suggests individuals following this schema will achieve higher degrees of success in pursuing behavioral change.

The Six Stages of Change are:

- **Pre-contemplation** – People in this stage usually have no intention of changing their behavior, and typically deny needing to change.
- **Contemplation** – In this stage, people acknowledge they have an issue and begin thinking seriously about changing it.
- **Preparation** – At this point, people are planning to take action in the next month and are making the final adjustments prior to beginning the change in their behavior.
- **Action** – Here people modify their behavior and environment.
- **Maintenance** – People here focus on preserving the new behavior and struggle to avoid relapses in their behavior.
- **Termination** – Now people are without temptation to return to the previous behavior. There is complete confidence that they have changed their behaviors.

The Nine Change Processes:

- **Consciousness-Raising** – This process focuses on raising an individual’s level of awareness and increasing the amount of information available to them. This improves the likelihood that they will make better decisions regarding areas where they may need improvement.
- **Social Liberation** – This process focuses on those things the external environment can give you to help with the change. Examples would include no smoking zones, fat free menus, or a weight loss contest in the workplace. The societal norms are changed via this technique; and, accordingly, the likelihood of a change in behavior increases.
- **Emotional Arousal** – Like consciousness-raising, here the focus is on changing the attitude in your mind. The difference is that in emotional arousal, this is achieved via an “emotional

experience” rather than a “rational thinking” approach as in consciousness-raising. A good analogy would be “feeling” versus “thinking”.

- **Self-Reevaluation** – This process goes back to a focus on the rational side of the brain. Here an individual reflects on their current state, their current feelings, and their current actions. An alternate reality is then envisioned where they are in a different state, taking different actions, and having different feelings. Those familiar with Covey’s work can compare this to his concept of “begin with an end in mind”.
- **Commitment** – One of the most powerful of all the processes. It is rare that an individual simply “becomes” the person they desire to be. Rather, most make a form of confession via commitment. Here they explicitly “tell themselves” that they will become the person they want to be. The technique can be further strengthened by sharing the commitment publicly. This allows the individual to leverage peer pressure for the good.
- **Countering** – This process focuses on replacing the undesirable behavior with an alternative. Examples might include physical exercise in lieu of eating, using an electronic cigarette in place of a normal cigarette, eating in lieu of smoking. The individual makes a conscious decision to acknowledge the undesirable behavior and choose an alternative. In so doing, they (i) become even more aware of the poor behavior and (ii) take an explicit step to avoid the behavior. Over time the new behavior becomes the norm. For this reason, care needs to be taken when considering the alternative behavior.
- **Environmental Control** – This process is closely related to societal liberation. However, in this case the individual takes control of his/her environment. Here they explicitly remove or replace those things that are facilitating/supporting the undesirable behavior. Examples would include throwing away all cigarettes, limiting access to certain internet sites, or pouring out the booze in the alcohol cabinet. The individual takes these actions; and, in so doing literally and figuratively takes control.
- **Reward** – One of the oldest approaches known to mankind! Here the individual establishes some reward that will be received when a certain goal or task is achieved. While simplistic, it can be very effective. Again, we see an emphasis on changing one’s focus – now the focus is on the prize versus the undesirable action.
- **Helping Relationships** – While change must ultimately be accomplished by the individual, there is nothing that “prohibits” the support of others during the process. Helping relations leverages the support of others in the change process. By involving others and asking for their support and help, the likelihood of successful change improves significantly.

The exact process which an individual should use depends on two key things. First, the state of change the individual is experiencing. In general, the processes described first map well to the earlier stages of change and vice versa. However, this is not a “hard and fast” rule. Each of the processes has the potential to be effective during any of the change stages. Second, the process used is entirely

dependent on the individual changing. As they say “different strokes for different folks”. By presenting multiple processes, the authors have provided a solid “tool kit” to support the change process.

In an ideal world, change would be a quick, linear process. Alas, that is not the case. The authors point out that change normally occurs in – and should be thought of as – a “spiral” process. Individuals will experience the “two steps forward, one step back” phenomenon repeatedly during their change journey. That is entirely normal. Relapse can and will be an issue. Again, by raising awareness of the issue, the likelihood of success will be improved.

Ultimately the goal of change is a “termination” of the behavior. This is a state that is quite difficult to achieve as with many poor behaviors, relapse always remains a risk. Many experts will argue that termination is impossible. However, the authors of this work believe that it is possible to terminate a behavior. They suggest four criteria to achieve termination:

- **A new self-image** – The individual has adopted a mental picture of themselves where the behavior is absent.
- **No temptation in any situation** – Through the process and assisted by the new self-image, the temptation to fall back in to the poor behavior has been removed.
- **Solid self-efficacy** – The individual has developed the confidence associated with the new self-image that they can function devoid of the previous poor behavior.
- **A healthier life-style** – The individual has leveraged the change process to other areas of their life and made improvements in their overall health and well-being.

The authors suggest that once an individual has terminated a behavior, it often results in additional changes. This should not be at all surprising. The basic premise of this work is that change is exceptionally difficult and can only be accomplished via a structured process and a high degree of self-discipline. Individuals who successfully change will have effectively used a number of processes and greatly improved their self-efficacy during the journey. Leveraging these new tools to make additional changes/improvements in their lives is a logical next step.

Finally, the authors introduce the concept of “foolish freedom” in an appendix. This is one of the most insightful sections of the book. While they do not give an explicit definition, the concept can best be summarized by the following quote:

- “They demand control over their behavior, even if it means sacrificing their own health”

We each have the freedom to undertake any course of action we would like. However, that does not mean that all choices are necessarily wise. Put a different way, sometimes change is in the best interest of your health and you need to forgo our freedom of choice in favor of freedom of change.

Summary: The key point of the authors is that change is not “one thing”. Rather it is a series of stages through which an individual progresses. Recognition of this continuum of states is critical as individuals **MUST** progress through each state. Jumping immediately to the action stage rarely results in a change in the behavior. The author’s describe the six stages of change and highlight nine processes that can be applied to help individuals progress through the stages of change. The framework is easy to understand and easy to implement. Further, empirical evidence is presented which suggest that individuals following this schema will achieve higher degrees of success in pursuing behavioral change.

Key Take Away: Change is not a thing but a process. Failure to recognize this will result in failure to change.

One Action to Take: Identify one habit that you would like to change. Review the six change states and the nine change processes to “self-diagnose” your current state and the process(es) most likely to yield change for you. Write down the state and process(es) and review it daily for the next thirty days. If you see a desirable change in your behavior, consider purchasing the book and following the process in a more in depth manner.