



Change your Bad Habits For Good
Your Habit Changing Tool Kit

Lisa Metzgar, PhD

Change your Bad Habits For Good

Your Habit Changing Tool Kit

Lisa Metzgar, PhD
BioFunctional Health
www.BioFunctionalHealth.com

All Rights reserved ©2011 BioFunctional Health

Habits

We all have habits that we would like to change. Do you make goals every year to change something in your life and find yourself in the same behavior at the end of the year? We often times feel like a failure that we couldn't accomplish our goals or change a particular habit. We tell ourselves that we aren't worthy and will never reach our goals. How often do you make a commitment to change a habit and the first time you backslide you are wracked with guilt and fall right back into the habit defeated. It isn't your fault! It isn't about strength of character or lack of will power that we often fail at accomplishing our goals or changing a certain behavior. Our brains are wired to resist change.

When we make a goal, we usually go big. We get innovative and think we have to change everything all at once. We do crazy things like go on drastic diets or go to the gym for 2 hours only to feel defeated. Our minds go crazy! All changes, even positive changes, if seen by our minds as big, will elicit fear. There is a biological reason for this. Our brain has a fear response that gets triggered by radical change. Our bodies and minds go into a fight or flight response. This fear prevents change and hinders success. We often even have a fear of success because it represents change. Even a change that can get us out of pain in our lives will cause our brains physiology to trigger fear. Our rational brains know that we need to stop doing a certain behavior such as binging on ice cream when we are trying to lose weight but the part of our brain that is responsible for the fight or flight reaction can shut down rational thoughts when triggered. When we venture off our safe path of routines, this part of the brain gets triggered. Trying to change too much in your life at one time will certainly trigger fear and you won't succeed in your efforts.

Our current lifestyle is maintained by some combination of habit, comfort, fear, or reinforcement. We are hardwired to react to life due to these factors. There is a simple method for circumventing the fear response. Changing habits takes time and patience. You will find yourself backsliding at times. Be kind to yourself. It takes about 6 months to completely rewire our neuro-pathways. The key is small consistent steps. Small steps taken consistently over time lead to big change.

"Vision is...

-to see clearly where you are

-to Hold dear what can be" - Michael Arloski

"It is said that we can't attain enlightenment, let alone feel contentment and joy, without seeing who we are and what we do, without seeing our patterns and our habits. This is called maitri-developing loving-kindness and unconditional friendship with ourselves." - Buddhist Nun Pema Chodron

Tools for Exploration

When we become more conscious, we have a better chance of changing our old habits. Most habits are created from an unconscious place and most times we don't know why we have such a drive to do a behavior or we aren't even aware of the behavior. Spending a little quiet time will help you become more aware of your unconscious self. Try a few of these exercises and see which one resonates with you. Bringing yourself into the present moment helps to bring our attention to what is really going on inside of us. We are so used to being distracted by so many things that we lose touch with ourselves. Try slowing down for a few minutes every day and see what you notice.

Journaling

Commit to writing in a journal at least 3x per week...preferably every day. This will help you to identify your triggers, feelings, and underlying issues you might not be aware of. Don't have a specific topic in mind...just free write whatever comes up.

Solo Time

Spend time by yourself. We are so used to having outside input or diverting our attention away from ourselves. Take a walk by yourself, go to a park, or just sit quietly by yourself.

Reading

Read self growth/self discovery books. You might see something in there that you can identify with.

Life Review

Try writing out a timeline of your life. Write in events that stand out in your mind and notice what emotions they trigger.

Quieting Practices

Yoga, Tai Chi, breathing, meditation...these practices will help you quiet your mind become more aware of your body/mind/spirit connection.

Greatest Strengths Inventory

Most of us tend to focus on the things that we don't like about ourselves. We oftentimes don't look at what are greatest strengths and unique gifts are. Practice seeing the good in yourself and you will be amazed at what you can do! Remember that what you focus on is what manifests in your life.

Sit down for 30 minutes and do this exercise:

You are the star of your own story. In this story, people cheer you on, support you, and look to you for your special unique gifts.

What do you have to offer the world?

How do you make a difference?

What do you find joy in doing?

What do other people see in you and acknowledge in you?

Write down as many strengths and gifts as you can and how they make you feel.

Stay in the present tense and stay positive. The feelings are what you will call upon to keep you motivated and positive in your journey. We are all unique and we all have gifts to offer the world.

You might want to do this in pictures. Make a vision board with pictures of all the beautiful gifts you see in yourself. What does this look like for you. You can make a slide show and put it to music that defines your unique self to elicit that emotion.

Ideal Image

Imagine your life as you see yourself when you shift your habits and reach your goals. Be very specific with details.

What does this look like?

What kind of things do you attract into your life?

How do your relationships change due to this change?

Are you doing anything different?

Write in the present tense everything you see, hear, feel when you attain the goal. If you want to do a vision board or a slide show this also works great for this exercise. Make sure you can focus on this exercise 100%. Turn off the phone, email, and shut the door. You might want to use one of the tools for exploration to prepare you for really getting in touch with your ideal self. Your subconscious mind does not know the difference between what is real and what is imagined. The more specific you make this experience, the more real it will become. What your mind focuses on is what you will create in your life.

Journaling experience:

Take time to sit in a quiet space and journal the answers to these questions. This process will help you get to the core of a habit or behavior you would like to work on.

Is there an area of your life that has been a little bumpy that you would like to smooth out?

What are your triggers? When do you find yourself doing this habit the most?

What would need to change in order to shift these habits?

Who supports you in your life?

What are you willing to do today as one small step to change one of these habits?

How will you stay accountable to your action steps and goals?

Here are a few examples of small steps: drink a glass of water in the morning, add one cup of green tea, eat one small handful of almonds, throw out the first bite of your chocolate bar, march in front of the television during the commercials of your favorite show. (at the end of this program you will see small steps you can pick from to get you started)

As you can see, it doesn't have to be a big change. Habits will shift easier if you take small steps toward your goals.

When you master one small step, then add another step. In no time, you will shift your unhealthy habit to a healthy one!

Journal when you recognize old patterns or habits. Recognition is power. Journaling is a very powerful tool for self exploration. When you commit a feeling to paper it makes it real for you.

How will you reward yourself for being consistent with small steps and reaching your goals? Celebration is required!!

"If you have built castles in the air your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." - Henry David Thoreau

Goal Setting

1. What kind of support do you have for attaining your goals? Surround yourself with like minded people and those who will support your goals.
2. What exactly are you willing to do to attain your goals? Be honest with yourself. If you set lofty goals and you aren't willing to do the work...you will never attain them. It is ok to set small goals and do small steps to attain them than to make excuses for why you can't reach your goals.
3. Be specific with your goals. You must write goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and have a Time frame (SMART goals)
4. Write out a detailed plan of how you will achieve your goals and start with action steps you can do NOW! You must put your plan into action. Small action steps work well...small steps done consistently over time will result in big changes. Just keep moving forward.
5. Write your goals down. Be specific with your goal and your plan. Write in the present tense to own it now.
6. Read your goals every morning when you wake up and every night before you go to bed.
7. Journal how your life looks when you achieve your goals. Write in the present tense and be as specific as you can. How you look, how you feel, things you are able to do, your home life, professional life, how attaining your goals affect every aspect of your life...including your relationships with those around you.
8. Remember that what you focus your mind on is what will manifest in your life. If you see yourself attaining your goals...you WILL reach them!
9. Break your big goals down into small goals. Focus on each small goal and celebrate when you reach that goal then move to the next small goal. A huge goal is great to have but it can trigger our fear response.

SMART Goal Setting:

Specific - The goal must be very specific. For example "I would like to lose 20 lbs." as opposed to "I would like to lose weight"

Measurable - It must be something that you can measure the progress. You can measure weight loss with a scale and tape measure.

Attainable - It has to be a goal that is reachable. For example, if you are 5'8" tall and weigh 135lbs. you probably won't be able to lose 20lbs and still be healthy.

Relevant - It must mean something to you. If it is something that someone else wants you to do then you probably won't be successful.

Time Table - Must have a measure of time. For example: " I will lose 20lbs. in 3 months"

Habit Changing Power Tools

Tool #1 - **Commit to change and have a strong "why"**.

Your reason or your "why" should invoke a strong emotion. There are two strong emotions that will motivate you to change. Fear and Love. You might have a fear of getting sick or you might want to change out of love for a child. Journal your feelings about your "why". The more you get in touch with your feelings the greater the success. Write down your "why" on a notecard and carry it with you. Put your "why" on your computer screen so you see it everyday.

"There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion." - Carl Jung

Tool #2 - **Take the first step and make it so small it seems ridiculously easy.**

Ask yourself this question. "What incredibly small step can I take to reach my goal?" Keep asking yourself this question until you get to something laughably small. When you can laugh at the step, you have found your starting point. Our egos naturally resist change. If your step is too large or too vague then our subconscious mind will reject it and our ego will try to prove that you can't accomplish it. If you can laugh at the step, there is no fear involved and your ego can handle it.

"The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance." - Alan Watts

Tool #3 - **Practice patience. Habits take time to shift**

Habits can take as much as 6 months to completely shift. You have to lay the foundation and slowly change a behavior. Every habit or behavior we have is engrained into our nervous system. Our neuro-pathways are formed over a lifetime. We react to messages, stress, and stimulus in our lives in accordance with these pathways. You must form a new pathway to replace the old pathway and this takes time. It isn't just about will power or strength of character. YOU WILL engage in the old behavior at some point during this process. Just know that this means you are working on the habit and keep doing your small action steps.

"Quality is not an act, it is a habit." - Aristotle

Tool #4 - **Do what you can. You don't have to do it all or do it perfectly.**

Wanting to do everything perfectly or having the perfect time in your life to shift a habit is IMPOSSIBLE! There is never a perfect time to change. If you are waiting, then you will never change. The best time to start is now! Pick one thing that you can change and just do what you can to take a small action step. Just the act of starting will give you a sense of accomplishment.

"Ability is what you're capable of. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it." - Lou Holtz

Tool #5 - **Create rituals and celebrate your success.**

When you create rituals, for example doing something the same time every day, it is easier to establish the new behavior. First thing in the morning is usually the best time to do something new. Try getting out of bed and journaling for 10 minutes to start your day. Or you can do 5 minutes of yoga. If you start your day with a small success it will set your day up on the right step. Waiting to do something until the end of the day (especially exercise) we tend to procrastinate and come up with all kinds of excuses why it didn't get done. Bedtime can also be a good ritual time. We tend to do the same routine when we go to bed. Just make sure if you do wait until the end of the day to do your ritual that you can maintain it.

Make sure when you are doing your action steps consistently that you set aside some time to celebrate. It is an important part of changing a habit. You deserve it! Treat yourself to a nice hot bath, take some time to play, buy yourself something special.

"I have learned, that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours..." - Henry David Thoreau

Tool #6 - Get a support system, a coach, or mentor.

Engage others in helping you reach your goals. We are social beings and we need the support of others in our life. Ask for help, share your goals with others, hire a coach to help you stay accountable. If you don't have a support system at home, find a group that has the same mindset or ask a friend to check in with you.

Simple Steps

"Action without thought is mindlessness, and thought without action is hypocritical." - Ayn Rand

Here are a few simple steps to get you started and to spark your own simple step process:

Health and Wellness Steps:

- Buy a water bottle and fill it up - Just having the reminder will spark you to drink more water.
- Get a pedometer and wear it - just become more aware of your daily steps
- March in front of the television during your favorite shows commercial
- Replace your vegetable cooking oil with olive oil or coconut oil
- Drink one green tea today
- Throw away the first bite of a candy bar
- Add one more vegetable to one of your meals
- Get the medium sized mocha instead of the large one
- Do one push up
- Do 3 deep cleansing breaths when you wake up
- Sit for 30 seconds and imagine your ideal self
- Write down one thing that you like about your body
- Meditate for one minute
- Put your fork down between bites

"To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear." - Buddha

Relationship Steps:

- Tell someone in your family one good thing when you first see them
- Write a nice note to your partner
- Answer the phone with a pleasant tone
- Be on time
- Notice one thing you love about your partner
- Notice one small moment that you appreciate today and tell them
- Put your newspaper or remote down when your family walks into the room
- Spend 10 minutes with your partner doing something you enjoy, take a walk, listen to music, talk about the good things in your day
- Make a gratitude list
- Practice listening

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

Career Steps:

- If you are looking to change careers or start a business: Look at the small moments in your day that you enjoy and write them down. (this will give you a clue as to a career you would enjoy)
- Journal for 5 minutes about your dream job or business
- Write a career goal on a notecard and carry it with you
- Sit down and journal for 15 minutes about what your core values are. Make a list of 10 core values
- Subscribe to a daily inspirational quote to keep you motivated
- Read a business coaching book. "The Success Principles" by Jack Canfield and "Harmonic Wealth" by James Arthur Ray are a couple of my favorites for laying a foundation for success.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." - Howard Thurman

Money Steps:

- Take the change out of your pocket or purse every day and put it in a jar
- Before you spend, ask yourself "Is this going to better my life?"
- Start a small savings account that automatically withdraws from your bank account with a small amount every month
- Cut up one credit card
- Pay \$10 extra dollars a month on your credit card
- Put your bills on automatic pay so you don't pay late fees
- Give yourself an allowance
- Pay only cash for the fun stuff (don't put it on credit)
- Save one dollar a day
- Plan your meals for the week to save on wasted food
- Eat out one less time this week

"Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort." - Franklin D. Roosevelt

Getting Organized Steps:

- Clean out one small drawer
- Clear off one table top
- Get one organizing tool (box, calendar)
- Throw away one thing today
- Just make a list of things that need to be organized, then break this list down into smaller and smaller tasks
- Write down the ways that you waste time, then make a list of ways you can use that time more productively
- Ask for help
- Pick one thing to work on this week and do small steps to work on it everyday until it is done before you start another project.
- Make a check list

As you can see, the steps don't have to be huge steps. If you make the moves small enough, then you will push past the natural resistance.

Gremlin Speak

We all have our inner critic or our gremlins who are very good about pointing out our faults. They poke their little noses in when things are starting to change, even for the better, and tell us that we aren't worthy or strong enough. These gremlins have been with you for a long time. They are the echoes of someone in your life that told you that you weren't good enough. These messages get ingrained in our subconscious and they come out due to fear. Gremlins don't like change, it scares them and they will do anything to keep the status quo...even if the status quo doesn't serve you or causes you pain.

When you can recognize when our gremlins are trying to sabotage you you have power. Try these steps to conquer your gremlin speak. Just recognizing when your gremlins are speaking diminishes their power.

Recognize when your self talk is really your gremlins speaking. Your gremlins have their favorite sayings like:

"You aren't good enough"

"You aren't strong enough"

"You could never do this"

"They aren't going to like you"

Make a list of your gremlins favorite sayings.

There are times when you are particularly vulnerable to your gremlins. Make a list of times when your gremlins like to come out.

Re-phrase your gremlin talk. Write this statement for each of your gremlins favorite phrases:

"This is not true. What's true for me is..."

Make sure you don't start arguing with your gremlin...they will always win. Just make the statement of what is true for you.

The next step is to remove your gremlin. Use imagery to get rid of them. You can tie them up, toss them in a dungeon and throw away the key. Spend 20 minutes visualizing your fantasy for removing your gremlins. Use this image whenever you need to get rid of them.

Don't let your gremlins come with you anywhere. Throw them out of the car, out the window, in the lake.

Journal about times when you were successful and had the feeling of strength and confidence. Reaffirm your abilities and talents.

Focus on the here and now. Your gremlins only exist in the past. They are ghosts of the old messages and they are just coming back to haunt you. If you stay in the present, your gremlins don't exist. The best way to conquer your gremlins is to celebrate small accomplishments every day. Every little victory give us confidence and motivates us to move forward and doesn't give our gremlins something to focus on. Call on the times when you are successful and remember what that feels like.

The Kaizen Way says:

- Ask small questions
- Think small thoughts
- Take small actions
- Solve small problems

The final piece to changing habits and reaching your goals is to make your steps FUN. Find what works for you. We are all different and are motivated by different things. The more you spend on self exploration, the better you will understand what makes you tick, the easier it will be to keep on track. Recognition of your habits, patterns, and what makes you unique is the first step to transformation.

Make a list of everything you would like to change in your life or things you don't like in your life. Now make a list equally as long of things that you are grateful for, your gifts, and the things that work well for you. We tend to just focus on what is wrong in our life or in the world. Take time to notice what is right and you will be amazed at how the shift in your thoughts creates momentum to change the things you want to change. You will start attracting good things into your life if you focus on good things. Remember, our minds and egos will create what we focus our attention on. There is power and energy in all of our thoughts.

"A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes." - Gandhi

"The most valuable skill or talent that you could ever develop is that of directing your thoughts toward what you want - to be adept at quickly evaluating all situations and then quickly coming to the conclusion of what you most want - and then giving your undivided attention to that. There is a tremendous skill in deliberately directing your own thoughts that will yield results that cannot be compared with results that mere action can provide." - Abraham by Esther and Jerry Hicks

Finally, reward yourself when you reach your small goals. You don't have to wait until you reach your big goals. Research shows that if you have small rewards for small accomplishments, you will achieve greater change. We love instant rewards. If you wait until you only make big accomplishments you will get impatient and probably won't create permanent change.

Small rewards when you accomplish your small steps.

- Give yourself a compliment
- Reward yourself with a hot bath
- Take a 10 minute break and enjoy the fresh air
- Buy yourself a book
- Play with your children for 30 minutes
- Do an activity you enjoy, go to the beach, go to the park, the river, roller skating...whatever you love to do
- Buy yourself some flowers

As you can see, it is the simple things that can bring us pleasure. You can certainly plan a big vacation when you reach your big goal but don't wait to celebrate your small accomplishments!

"Whether you believe you can or you believe you can't...you are right" - Henry Ford

"Life is like a river, that flows along infinitely. We do not control where the river goes. We do not control the flow of the river, not its crashing rapids nor its quiet still pools. We don't know where the fork on the left goes, nor the fork on the right.

We are not driftwood. We are not helplessly being pushed down the river by the current, smashing into the rocks, or stuck in circling eddies.

It is like we are in a canoe, with a paddle in our hands. Sitting high in our seat, our eyes wide open, looking ahead we scan for signs of white water. Our ears alert, we listen for the roar of rapids and waterfalls.

We decide whether to take the fork to the left or the one to the right. We decide to run the rapids, or to put ashore and portage around, putting our craft back in the water when it is safe.

Going with the flow of the river we learn to navigate with the current, not against it.

We learn to trust the river, but remember the paddle in our hands. We remember the power of choice we have and know that we did not create the river, but we choose how to live with what it brings us." - Michael Arloski

References

Wellness Coaching for Lasting Lifestyle Change, Michael Arlonski, PhD, PCC, Whole Person Associates, Inc. 2007

Your Journey to a Healthier Life, Micheal Arlonski, PhD, PCC, Whole Person Associates, Inc. 2010

Harmonic Wealth, The Secret of Attracting the Life You Want, James Arthur Ray, Hyperion Books, 2008

Success Principles, How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be, Jack Canfield, HarperCollins Books, 2005

What Matters Most, The Power of Living Your Values, Hyrum W. Smith, Franklin Covey Co. 2002

One Small Step Can Change Your Life, The Kaizen Way, Robert Maurer, PhD, Workman Publishing, 2004

Allowing, A Portrait of Forgiving and Letting Life Love You, Holly Riley, Peace and Peace Out Productions, 2011

Forming better new habits takes time and effort, but breaking established bad habits may be even harder. So be patient with yourself and instead of making dramatic adjustments, try focusing on one habit and the smallest steps you can take to "trick your inner caveman." With food and dieting, for example, small changes like reducing one pack of sugar or switch cream in your coffee to low-fat milk can make a big difference in the long run and may inspire additional small but meaningful changes. Advertisement. Change your environment. Over time, if you do the same behaviors in the same place, your surroundings can become a trigger "sometimes too subtle to notice. If you go on smoke breaks in your office's parking lot, the parking lot itself can become a cue to smoke. Bad habits are difficult to break because they make a person feel good. Dr. Russell Poldrack said that pleasure-based habits are harder to break. The brain releases a chemical dopamine when it experiences an enjoyable behavior. When you decide to replace your bad habit, think of the new activity for a while. If you want some changes for next month, start thinking about those changes now. Expose yourself to the materials involve and educate yourself about the matter. By doing so, you are preparing your subconscious to the transition you are about to launch.