

Making a Change

Keys to Success

Anne-Michelle Marsden, MS., Atlantic County Family & Community Health Sciences Educator &
Sylvia Ridlen, Ph.D., Extension Specialist in Human Development

Personal change is hard. It doesn't happen just because we want it to. The authors of *Changing for Good* found that only one in five people who decide to make a change succeed the first time.

This may your first attempt at a certain change, or you may be trying again after a change did not last. In either case, you would like to succeed *this time*. Think about these five activities that will help you make a change:

- establish goals and action plans
- reduce or manage stress
- dedicate an appropriate amount of time and energy to making the change
- maintain persistence in reaching goals
- use personal resources – self-reliance, creativity, and self-confidence

Goals and Action Plans

Goals and action plans help you see the change you want to make and how to go about it. Take the time to revisit them regularly to determine if you are on track or if corrections need to be made. Order the Rutgers Cooperative Extension fact sheet, **Making A Change: Priorities, Goal Setting, and Action** (FS-983). This publication offers instruction on developing goals and action plans.

Your Stress Level

Stress is a part of life. Lots of stress can make it harder to change while addressing stress will help you to stay focused on the change you desire. It's a good idea to pick a time when stress levels are lower than usual to begin making life changes. However, that's not always possible. If you must make changes during a high-stress period, or if your stress level continues to rise while you are working on making a change, you'll need to take some action.

There are many ways people address the distress in their lives. Some find exercise and meditation helpful. Others find talking to a counselor beneficial. Ask yourself: "What are the best methods I can use to deal with the stress in my life?" Then regularly use these methods.

Time and Energy

Making change takes time and energy. As author Susan Wilson says, "There is no magic to learning to manage time. It is a simple matter of identifying how your time is currently used, identifying the habits that need to be changed, and applying the strategies to change those habits."

An important step in reducing barriers to a goal is to evaluate your use of time and energy.



1. Consider the current demands in your life. Think about your ongoing activities and amount of time, and physical and emotional energy they demand.
2. Consider the time and energy required to make the change.
3. Compare these two assessments and ask yourself: "Am I willing and able to make the required adjustments necessary to be successful in making a change?"
4. Remember, some changes may require permanent reallocation of both time and energy, not just a temporary adjustment.
5. Successful change may mean better management of your daily schedule. Examine how your time is managed. This activity will help you see where better time management is needed if you are to make the change. Ask yourself: "How can I reduce the amount of time I waste? Can I eliminate an activity or reduce the time I spend on it?"
6. Finally, take a positive attitude toward the hours available each day! If you value the change you have chosen to make, then using whatever time is necessary to support that change can be a very positive experience.

Persistence

Making change can be tough. Develop a plan that helps you stay on track during the tough times.

Create ways to celebrate what you have accomplished. This is a powerful tool in reaching a goal.

For example: if you are changing the way you spend and save money, ask yourself if there are milestones along the way to your

goal. How can you celebrate those milestones?

Substitute positive thoughts and behaviors for those that are not helping make the change.

For example: if you are changing the way you relate to your life partner to include more positive discussions, ask yourself what actions or reactions you could substitute for those that are not positive.

Develop a support network.

For example: if you are changing the amount of physical activity in your daily living, think of people who will enjoy sharing the activity and/or hear about your successes.

Personal Resources

How you feel, think, and act can help or hurt the change process.

Consider these questions:

Do I really think that I can succeed in reaching my goal?

Self-confidence helps people set goals and take action. If you really doubt you can change, then change is harder.

Do I blame others for personal failures?

You may need to find balance between the needs of others and your action plan activities, but making personal change is *your* responsibility.

Do I avoid taking steps that would help me change?

Sometimes people avoid taking action because they are afraid of change. Taking

risks can be scary but rewarding. Change involves taking calculated risks.

Do I limit myself to one way of making changes or do I think of several ways I could go about making changes?

Making change requires creative thinking, planning, and actions. Think about the resources available to you and how you can use them to support your goals.

Succeeding involves honestly evaluating your self-confidence, accepting responsibility for yourself, taking risks, and using creativity and problem solving skills. Everybody has some of these abilities. Strengthening the weakest of your personal resources makes change easier.

This also will help you manage other life situations.

References

Olen, Dale R. 1993. *Meeting Life Head On*. Milwaukee: JODA Communications, Inc., p. 25-37.

Prochaska, James O., John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DeClemente. 1994. "Introduction: A Scientific Revolution" in *Changing for Good*. New York: Avon Books, Inc.

Spencer, Sabina A. and John D. Adams. 1990. "Ten Steps for Living With Change" in *Life Changes*. San Luis Obispo: Impact Publishers, p. 169-171.

Wilson, Susan B. 1994. *Goal Setting*. New York: American Management Association, p. 13, 91.



© 2004 by Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension, NJAES, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Desktop publishing by Rutgers-Cook College Resource Center

Published: October 2001

**RUTGERS COOPERATIVE RESEARCH & EXTENSION
N.J. AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK**

Distributed in cooperation with U.S. Department of Agriculture in furtherance of the Acts of Congress on May 8 and June 30, 1914. Rutgers Cooperative Extension works in agriculture, family and community health sciences, and 4-H youth development. Dr. Karyn Malinowski, Director of Extension. Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension provides information and educational services to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension is an Equal Opportunity Program Provider and Employer.