

If You Don't Change your Mind, Your Mind Will Change You

By Chuck Gallozzi



Many people are not entirely happy with their lives, and they have felt that way for many years. Most realize that if they want things to change, they will first have to change themselves. But if that is so, why don't they change? Well, some don't want to.

Others don't try to change because of a false belief. And those who do try, often give up too soon. Those who would like to change, but don't even try usually have one of the five false beliefs that follow. If you wish to get the most from life, make sure you don't subscribe to one of these myths.

FALSE BELIEFS:

1. Before you can change, you have to understand the cause of your behavior.
This is not true. It doesn't matter what caused you to become the way you are. You are always free to change. As long as you decide to change, commit to change, and persistently practice, you will be able to modify your behavior.
2. It takes too long to change, especially if the habit is deeply entrenched.
False. It doesn't have to take time to change. Even lifelong habits can be broken in an instant. A smoker who quits cold turkey is proof of this. Even if you don't experience instantaneous change, you can improve far faster than you imagine. Don't underestimate the great power you have.
3. If you change too quickly, it won't last.
Not true. Prove this for yourself. Reflect deeply on your life. You will be able to recall many changes you have made quickly, some big and some small, yet those changes have remained permanent.
4. I can't change because this is the way I am; it is my nature.
Not so. It is your nature to do what you repeat over and over again. In other words, it is your nature to act out of habit.
Change your habits and you will change the way you are.
5. I am too young or too old to change.
Nonsense. We have the ability to change at any age. I'm 70 and continue to change daily, and expect to continue doing so.
Remember, we live in the world's largest room: the room for improvement. Make it a rule to be better today than you were yesterday, and better tomorrow than you are today.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Some people claim to be suffering and say they want to change. Yet, their actions suggest otherwise. Why would someone who is unhappy refuse to change? Well, they may not want to give up their misery because it is a tool they use to win sympathy, manipulate others, or play the role of a martyr. So, those who are thinking of change should begin by asking themselves, "Do I really want to change?"

Wanting to change is the first step. The second step is accepting responsibility. We are responsible for our happiness. Not our parents, friends, coworkers, neighbors, doctor, government, religion or God.

Accepting responsibility means we stop blaming the world for our suffering. It means we stop looking for excuses and start looking for solutions. Sidney Madwed explains, "Every man is the architect of his own life. He builds it just the way he wants it. However, after he has built what he wants, he sometimes decides that he doesn't like what he has built and looks for someone or something to blame instead of changing himself."

If we are unhappy it is because we are doing something wrong.

Nothing will change until we do. That is, we have to change our thoughts, beliefs, and view. The fact is, it is not what happens to us that causes our unhappiness, rather it is our negative interpretation of the events. Until we grasp this point, we will be unable to move forward. To improve we have to be able to say, "It is not what happens to me that causes my suffering, but how I react, fight against, and struggle with what happens." Here's how Samuel Johnson (1709 ~ 1784) expressed the same thought, "He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts."

Many people, despite a sincere attempt to change, give up trying to and return to their old ways. The main reason for this is they expect too much too soon. They expect to see changes overnight.

And when they don't, they give up. To avoid making the same mistake, carefully monitor and record your thoughts, feelings, behavior, and results of your actions. Look for changes in intensity, duration, and frequency.

Here's what I mean. Let's say Laura can't sleep at night, picks fights with her neighbors, and bites her nails. She monitors her thoughts and tries to improve. At the end of the month she finds that although she still fights with her neighbors and bites her nails, she is sleeping at night. That is a change in the INTENSITY of the problem. She has made progress. As long as she is aware of the progress, it will motivate her to continue. But if she focuses on the problems that remain, rather than the one she overcame, she may mistakenly believe she is a failure and give up the program.

Another example. Perhaps Laura has negative thoughts 16 hours a day. After sincere attempts to improve, she brings it down to 10 hours a day. This is an improvement in DURATION. She has made progress. Again, if she focuses on the fact that she still has negative thoughts, she may believe she failed and give up. But if she focuses on the fact that she has reduced her negative thinking by six hours a day, she will have much to celebrate and it inspire her to further reduce it.

Still another example. Laura feels depressed most of the time.

Once she monitors herself she discovers she feels depressed every other day. She now ardently tries to focus on what's right with her instead of what's wrong with her; she looks for the good, instead of the bad; she seeks solutions instead of excuses; she finds things to be grateful for instead of complaining. After a month, she finds she is still depressed "most of the time," but because of the records she kept, she knows she is now depressed every third day, instead of every other day. This is an improvement in FREQUENCY. So, if we fail to note our improvements in intensity, duration, and frequency, we may wrongly believe we are not making progress and give up.



Make-Up Program

What do you do if you wish to make a change, but despite your "best" efforts, you "can't" do it? For example, you may want to get along with a coworker, but find her "obnoxious" behavior too much to bear, so you simply "can't" change. Well, suppose I were to give you \$250,000 if you could forgive, accept, and befriend that coworker. Would you then be able to get along with him or her? If so, this proves your "best" attempt to change was not your best, and what you thought you "can't" do is really something you can do, if you wanted to. So, before giving up, apply this \$250,000 test. After all, if you would do it for money, why wouldn't you do it for your own happiness?

Together, we can prove that Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828 ~ 1910) was wrong when he wrote "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Let's change the world by changing ourselves.

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