

# THE POSITIVE POWER OF RELAPSE

## - THE FIVE STAGES OF CHANGE

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In a previous resource outlining the 5 Stages of Change, you learned to identify the process people go through as they experience change – self-initiated change, that is. At times, change is thrust upon us and we have no choice but to ride along and adjust as best we can. Yet even in those situations, we have the opportunity to self-initiate change within ourselves in order to turn virtually any situation into an advantage and opportunity for personal, professional, or spiritual growth.

Being able to identify the characteristics of each stage of the change process allows us to generate questions we can ask ourselves to determine first, which stage we might be in and second, ways we can motivate ourselves to move to the next stage and ultimately to success. For example:

- Stage 1 – Pre-contemplation – ask yourself, “Is it possible that something needs to change in your life to make it more enjoyable and rewarding?” “Is there anything in your life that you would like or wish could be different?”
  - Action step: Provide yourself information and feedback to raise your awareness of the problem and possibility for change. Or, choose a trusted friend or family and ask them these questions about yourself and gather their feedback and perspective of your life from the outside.
- Stage 2 – Contemplation – ask yourself, “If you’re not satisfied with some area of your life and wanted to change one thing, what might that be?” “Is there a way of thinking or a behavior that you wish you could change about yourself?”
  - Action step: List the benefits that would come if you were to make this change. Answer – “How would you know when this change has been successful? How would your life be different? What would it look like?”
- Stage 3 – Preparation – ask yourself, “What would have to happen first for a plan of success to start moving?” “What would a possible plan look like for making this change a reality?” “How would you measure your progress?”
  - Action step: Write out a plan of action that would be realistic, acceptable, accessible, appropriate, and effective. You may need to seek the aid of another person to help you develop this.
- Stage 4 – Action – ask yourself, “What step are you working on now?” “How is your progress?” “What things are easy for you to change?” “What things are proving to be more challenging to change?” “Do you need help to make any of the changes?”
  - Action step: You **must** have a partner in this process; someone who can encourage you, hold you accountable, be a sounding board, and support you through this process. Who will that person be? (Note: While family members often seem like the logical choice, they often fail because they have no personal vested interest in seeing you succeed – not because they don’t love or care about you but because they are comfortable with the way things are. Change is hard, even for those who will be “effected” by your desire to change.)
- Stage 5 – Maintenance – ask yourself, “What are you doing to keep this change going?” “What helps you be successful in maintaining this change in your life?” “Does the change seem permanent at this point?” “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most confident, how confident are you that you will be able to maintain this change over the next week? The next month? The next year?”

- Action step: Identify the possibility of relapse and what could cause you to relapse and return to your previous state. What strategy could you put into place to keep yourself from relapsing?

Relapse...it's a scary word but a word and condition we must address honestly if we're to be successful in making and maintaining change for long term success. Relapse happens, to all of us. We've all found ourselves going backward or retreating to what is known, comfortable, and familiar. It can be a vicious cycle and drive us absolutely crazy. But it can be a benefit. There is tremendous power in relapse. Say what?! Power in relapse? You must be mistaken!

Nope, not mistaken. Relapse is often a reality and if you're going to be successful in making any lasting change, the best way to view relapse is as just another stage in the process of change...Stage 6. In fact, several models of this change process include relapse as a viable stage in the process of change.

View relapse as part of the process and not necessarily as failure. Failure implies you're done, finished, and there's no point in moving forward or trying again. Bull! We all fall and the only time you fail is when you stop picking yourself back up to go again. It's not how many times you get hit and knocked down that matters...it's how many times you can get back up. Clichés abound and you've heard it all before...but it's true. You're much more likely to quickly return to the desired stage of action or maintenance when you see relapse as nothing more than part of the process. On the other hand, when you see relapse as complete failure, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Just because you fell off the proverbial wagon doesn't mean that you're doomed to return permanently to a state of lethargy, lifelessness, or simply going through the motions. However, if you think you are, then you are, and you will return to that state. It has everything to do what you tell yourself, what you believe, what perspective you take, and how well you understand yourself. Don't let yourself become discouraged. Discouragement, worry, depression and the like are opposite of faith, trust, and belief. It's more than a positive attitude or positive thinking, it's positive being based on what you know to be true. Never let a few minutes, hours, days, or even weeks of falling back into your "old self" dissuade you from fighting (and yes, it can be a fight!) to reestablish the person you want to be. None of us were born being the person we want to be...we learn to be who we are and poor things in our lives can be unlearned and replaced. The question is: How badly do you really want to change?

- Stage 6 – Relapse – ask yourself, “When are you most susceptible to relapse.” “When was your last relapse?” “What happened that triggered it?” “What are your plans for avoiding this or other relapses in the future?” “Have you been able to keep from relapsing?” “What do you attribute your consistency to?”
  - Action step: Do your best to see your situation as holistically as you can.

The power of relapse is found in your not being surprised by its appearance. Moreover, power can be found in your ability to anticipate it, prepare for it, guard against it, and ultimately overcome it. I routinely say to people, “perspective is everything!” How do you see yourself? Who do you serve or belong to? (and we all serve someone or something, don't fool yourself) What are you here for and what is your purpose? It's your perspective that brings you the application of power. Knowledge is power and knowing who you are, whose you are, and what to expect prepares you and releases power into your life. True power is found in something much deeper...a discussion for another time. Live your potential!