

Top Tips for Successful Change

*"If you can visualize it,
if you can dream it,
there's some way to do it."*

Walt Disney



DR LEONIE WHITE

www.drleoniewhite.com



*In this ebook:
Understanding Change
Homeostasis & Change
Ten Top Tips for Successful Change
Learning Application Questions*

Whether it's a personal, professional, individual, or family change, change can be tricky. Find out what makes change so challenging, and how to make change a success using ideas and strategies drawn from Systemic Psychotherapy, Solution Focused Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Neuroscience.

Make the most of this ebook by keeping a journal with you while reading. Make a note of any quotes and ideas that catch your attention. Record your thoughts and answers to the reflection questions.



*"If you do not change direction,
you might end up where you are heading."*

Lao Tzu



Understanding Change



"Why is change so tricky?

There's a Systemic Family Therapy concept that helps to understand why change can be a challenge – *homeostasis*. Think of homeostasis as patterns that keep the “status quo”, and patterns are powerful.

Homeostasis can also be “better the devil you know” – it's a familiar way of being and familiar is often more comfortable than the unknown."

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Have you ever wanted to make a change but didn't know where to start or how to go about it?

Have you ever made a New Year's Resolution only to find it falls by the wayside?

Have you ever found yourself slipping back into old habits despite your best hopes and intentions?

Whether it's a personal or professional change, an individual or family change ... change can be a tricky and sometimes slippery thing.

There's a Systemic Family Therapy concept that helps to understand why change can be so challenging – it's called “homeostasis”. Homeostasis is the name for self-regulation processes that allow a system to maintain itself in a state of dynamic balance or equilibrium by creating patterns i.e., the status quo. What's a system? A system could be you as an individual, your couple relationship, your family, your friendship group, your sporting team, or even your team of colleagues in your workplace.

Individuals and families develop homeostatic patterns to maintain stability and balance, especially in times of stress. Think of homeostasis as the “status quo” or “better the devil you know” – it's a familiar way of being and familiar patterns are often unconscious and more comfortable than the unknown. These patterns can be patterns of daily life like where you do the groceries, coping strategies whether healthy or not so healthy, and relationship patterns like how you connect or manage relationship tensions. Maintaining stability is important, helpful, and helps us get through daily life and challenges as best as we can. And also, sometimes we reach a point at which the stable pattern that developed no longer serves us and we'd like to change something.

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Homeostasis & Change



Why is it hard to change the homeostasis? Some things contribute to keeping the homeostasis and get in the way of change.

These include:

- Fear and worry about things we can't control.
- Not having a compelling reason to move out of our comfort zone and change.
- Not having a solid process for change.
- Not having a clear and specific goal.
- Self-doubt.
- Setting goals that are so big they feel overwhelming and leave you not knowing where to start.
- Too much focus on the problem
- Not enough on the solution.

"If you want to be happy,
set a goal that commands
your thoughts, liberates
your energy, and inspires
your hopes"

David Carnegie

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What can we do about the pull of the homeostasis
so that change is possible?

Change begins with changing the way we see things, what we are focusing on.
In the words of Socrates,

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy,
not on fighting the old, but on building the new”.

Socrates

But what does this change of focus actually look like?

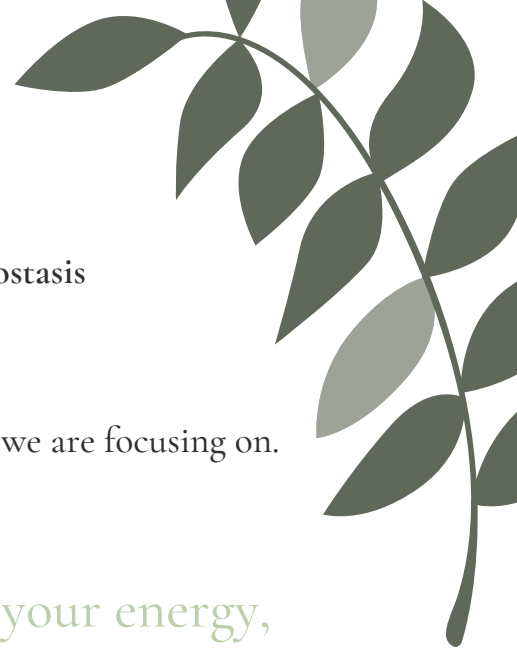
In general, it means focusing on what you want, times when the problem isn't present or isn't as bad, positive emotions, advantages, strengths and resources, opportunities, successes, and your preferred future. This is what's known as a solution focus, and it's different from a problem focus. A problem focus means a focus on problems, what you don't want, causes, negative emotions, disadvantages, deficits, risks, failures, and the undesired/feared future. This isn't to say it's not important to consider problems. It is, but if we always stay in a problem focus, we can miss solutions. Taking a solution focus is a conscious, intentional shift in focus.

So once you decide to acknowledge the problem, and then take a solution focus what do you actually do to help with the change process?

In this ebook is a list of my top ten tips for successful change.
These tips for change are based on a combination of ideas from Systemic Psychotherapy, Solution Focused Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Neuroscience.

“There is no passion to be found in settling for a life that is less
than the one you are capable of living”.

Nelson Mandela



Ten Top Tips for Successful Change

I. Align change with your values

A compelling reason to move out of your comfort zone and change will set you up for success. One way to find your compelling reason is to connect to your values. Values are like a compass to help navigate the changes and challenges of life. Values aren't a goal to achieve, but instead values are about how you choose to live – to act and behave as a way of living in relation to how you treat yourself, others, and the world around you. Taking time to consider what you value, what is important in life is the first step towards change.

Values are: "verbally constructed, global, desired, and chosen life directions".

Dahl, Wilson, Luciano & Hayes
in LeJeune & Luoma, 2019

Reflection Questions: What are your top 5 values in life?
How do you know these values are important to you?



Values-Based Change Questions

What does the goal mean to you?

How does it fit with who you are?

How does it fit with your values and how you want to be in the world?

How does it fit with what you want your life to stand for?

How does it fit with the kind of person you'd like to be as you journey through life?

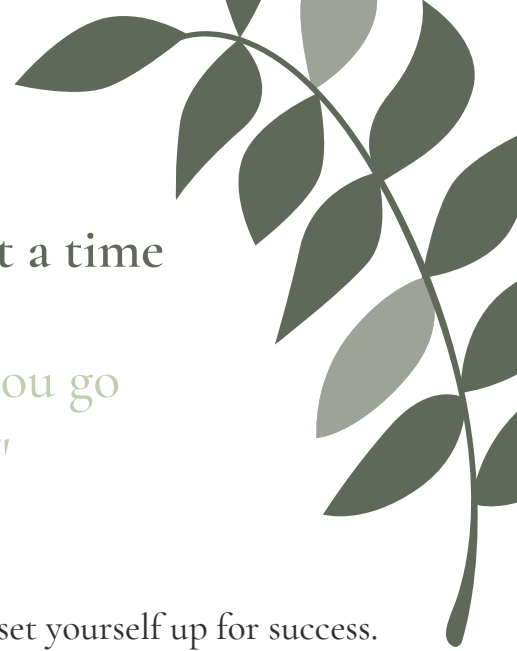
"Always remember your focus determines your reality".

George Lucas

2. Target only 1 or 2 changes at a time

"It does not matter how slowly you go
so long as you do not stop."

Confucius



Planning for successful change means making strategic choices to set yourself up for success. One strategic choice you can make to set yourself up for success is to start small by targeting only 1 or 2 changes at a time. If you have more than a couple of things in life you'd like to change, then make a list and prioritize which ones to work towards first.

Working on too many changes at one time can be overwhelming and splitting your energy and focus in too many ways can dilute your change efforts.

Think of this as taking steps up a ladder towards the life you would like one at a time to succeed, rather than trying to step from the bottom rung straight to the top rung.

Reflection Questions: What would you like to change? Make a list of things you'd like to change. Prioritise the list and choose what you would like to focus on first. Revisit the list from time to time as your goals can change.



3. Create 'goals' that describe the outcome

"Setting goals is the first step
in turning the invisible visible."

Tony Robbins

Not all goals are created equal.

Great goals focus on the details of the change in specific ways, describing what will be different when the change has happened. Think of it as if you are going on a holiday and plan your destination (goal) in detail rather than thinking about the place you are at now.

Great goals are:

Positively worded: This means using language that says what you will be doing instead of what you won't be doing e.g., "Spend more time playing and being fully present with my family"
NOT "Stop using my phone so much".

Well defined: This means that the goal will be clear and specific. A great question to ask yourself to get a specific goal is, "Right now, at this time in your life, in what aspects of family life would you like to be more present for and involved in?"

Concrete, behavioural, and measurable: This means goals that are well described – clear and specific e.g., if your goal is to spend more time with family, how much time will this, what exactly will you be doing, and when and where will you be doing it?

Achievable: This means goals are modest enough to be achievable. If you have a big goal it can help to break it down into smaller pieces and consider each of these pieces as steps to success. Take one step at a time. What is one small step you can take towards achieving your goal?

Reflection Question: Take a minute to think about a goal you have right now. Is it positively worded? Well defined? Concrete, behavioural, and measurable? If not, how can you reword your goal?

For added benefit, write down your goal....on paper with a pen. Committing something to paper actually helps us to take actions towards the goal, and the physical act of handwriting helps with application. As Mueller and Oppenheimer say in the title of their paper, "the pen is mightier than the keyboard".



A popular recipe for goals is "SMART Goals". Over time an "ER" has been added to make SMART Goals even SMARTER. Find out more about SMARTER Goals on the next page.

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SMART is an acronym that gives criteria to guide goal setting.

It can be used for personal development, relationship goals, family goals, workplace goals, and organisational goals.

Over time, people have added E.R. to make goal-setting even 'smarter'. Depending on whom you are talking to the E and the R can have different meanings but all are helpful to consider.

SMART Goals

S - Specific - target a particular area of functioning & focus on building this area.

M - Measurable - results can be gauged: quantitatively or indicated by qualitative attributes. This helps monitor the progress after executing the plans.

A - Attainable/Achievable - goals are targeted to suitable people and are individualised & take into account no single rule suits all.

R - Realistic - goals are practical and planned in a way that would be easy to implement in real life; helps in execution of the plan.

T - Time-bound - an element of time makes the goal more focused & provided a timeframe for task achievement.

Add E and R if needed.

E - Evaluative/Ethical - interventions and execution follow personal and professional ethics.

Or E - review your goal and your progress, making adjustments as needed.

R - Rewarding - end-results of the goal-setting are positively rewarding & bring a feeling of accomplishment to the user.

Or R - Revise your goal as needed following your review.

Reflection Questions: Choose one of the changes you prioritised. What would a SMARTER Goal be for this change? Practice SMARTER Goals by writing down your goal.

Tips for Relationship & Family Goals:

Consider who is involved in the goal and their motivation and commitment to the goal.

For relationship and family goals to work, there needs to be agreement on the goal, and the goal needs to focus on the family as a whole instead of just one or two family members.

Remember different family members progress at different rates - keep in mind the developmental levels of family members.

Involve all family members in the review and in celebrating success.



4. Notice what is already working

"When you focus on problems,
you get more problems.
When you focus on possibilities,
you have more opportunities."

Zig Ziglar

If you take some time to really think about it, you will likely find that there are moments and times when you are already doing things in line with your goal, and that things are happening that support your change. It's particularly easy to miss this if you are focused on the problem, so take some time to think about the ways in which you are already moving towards your goals. Shift the focus to think about what is already working and already in line with your goal.

This might be:

Plans you have

Actions you've taken

Feelings you have

Statements you make

Qualities you have

Desires and dreams you have

Thoughts you have

Beliefs

Abilities

Commitments



Reflection Questions: Looking at the list above, what do you notice in life that is already present for you? What is already happening? Or heading in the direction you'd like?

5. Do more of what is working

"Find out what works and do more of that."

Steve de Shazer

Once you've noticed what is working and helping you work towards your goals, just keep doing more of it. Yes, this part of the change process really is that simple! Why? Think of the thing you are already doing (even if it's small) as a snowball rolling down a hill. The positive change may start as a very small little snowball, but as you keep noticing and doing more of what works, that's the snowball gaining size as it rolls down the hill...the positive change getting bigger and bigger.

In counselling and therapy this is called "amplifying" the change.

Reflection Questions: How can you consciously amplify what is working? How can you strengthen what is already present in relation to your goals?



6. Develop an action plan

“Be not afraid of going slowly,
be afraid only of standing still”

Chinese Proverb

It's important to develop an action plan for the goal.

Break the goal down into small achievable steps and work on one step at a time. Remember the ladder analogy – one step at a time lays a foundation for successful change. If you are having trouble with a step, consider the size of the step...can it be broken down?

Progress is progress no matter how small.

Reflection Questions: How can you break your goal down into small, bite-sized chunks? What are those chunks? What would need to happen first? Next? Next? Etc.



7. Visualize the change

"If you can visualise it, you can actualise it."

Dennis Connor

Visualisation is a powerful technique that can help you to reach your goals and live your dreams. Visualisation increases your confidence and helps you 'practice' your change. The more specific you are and the more details you imagine the better the effect. And the more you practice the more effective the visualization – just like exercise or learning any new skill, you'll keep improving with practice. That's how brains learn and grow.

Create a picture in your mind of your goal achieved, and add as much detail as you can, e.g., the location (wall colour or garden flowers), clothes you are wearing, and people present. And be sure to use all your senses e.g., sight, sound, taste, smell, touch.

Spend time in the visualization and appreciate how the feeling that comes with seeing the change in your mind's eye.

Reflection question: How can you make time in your schedule to practice visualising your goal?

"[Visualisation] works most powerfully when you realise that it is already a reality on the unseen level. It's already there."

Erkhart Tolle

8. Create a 'cue' for your goal

We make mental notes all the time, e.g., grocery lists, to-do lists, post-it note reminders. Think of a 'cue' as a tangible mental note for your goal. This could be a word, a quote, a picture, or even a vision board. Work out what a great cue would be for you and then put this somewhere easily visible like your desk, bedside table, bathroom mirror, phone wallpaper.

Reflection Question: What would be the most helpful "cue" for you?



9. Review your progress

"As you head toward your goals,
be prepared to make some slight adjustments
to your course. You don't change your decision
to go - you do change your direction to get there."

Zig Ziglar

Set aside time to review how you are going and keep up regular reviews.

Reflection Questions for Reviewing your Progress:

Ask yourself things like:

When am I taking steps in line with the change I'd like?

What were those steps?

What helped me take those steps?

In what situations and relationships was it hard to take steps towards or maintain the change?

What can I do to manage this challenge by doing just one thing differently?

E.g., timing, body language, words said, actions, thoughts, location.

If you are having trouble thinking about what you could do differently, think of a person you look up to and what they might do.



10. Practice self-compassion

“Self-compassion – being kind to yourself, especially in the face of stress and failure – is associated with more motivation and better self-control”.

Kelly McGonigal



Self-compassion means treating yourself with kindness; being warm and understanding towards yourself as you would to a friend who might be struggling with something. It’s about realising that no one is perfect and that struggles, challenges, setbacks, and failures are human.

Practicing self-compassion means being gentle with yourself as you work towards change, especially if you have a hiccup or setback, or if things don’t go as quickly as you’d like them to.

Did you know that self-compassion matters at a neurobiological level?

An attitude of kindness activates a relaxation response in the brain and parasympathetic neurotransmitters are released that positively shape thoughts, emotions, and sensations. So, in the words of Shauna Shapiro “*Even if you are in a difficult situation, simply adding the resonance of kindness changes the chemical soup*”. What we know from neuroscience is that when our brains and bodies are experiencing a stress response it is harder to engage the part of our brains that help with thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, planning, and connecting with others. This means that being hard on ourselves makes change harder but self-compassion and kindness to self makes change easier – this is a critical part of any change endeavor.



Reflection Questions: What compassionate words would you say to a friend or loved one if they were having trouble making a change? Practice saying this to yourself as often as needed.

Questions for Consideration & Application of Learning

Which of these tips you are already using?

Which ones would you like to use more?

Which ones caught your attention?

Which ones did you get a better understanding of?

Which ones would you like to add in to your change process?

If you'd like to make a change in life, remember that
change is always possible,
change can happen at any time,
and there are different ways to approach change.

I hope these ideas are helpful and useful in inspiring and supporting any changes you'd like to make in life, relationships and family. Change is different for everyone so choose what fits for you. And remember...

“Change is hardest at the beginning,
messiest in the middle and best at the end”

Robin S Sharma.

Dr Leonie White

Clinical Family Therapist and Psychologist

Helping people grow, connect and thrive in life's unique journey.



Please note - this ebook is educational in nature
and does not constitute therapy advice.
Please seek help from a professional if you require support.

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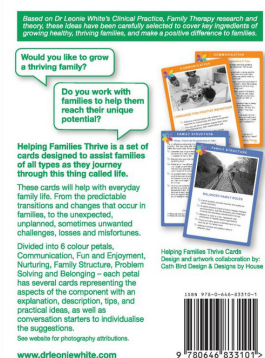
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If you'd like to make changes in family life, consider the Helping Families Thrive Cards as a resource on your change journey.

<https://www.drleoniewhite.com/helping-families-thrive-cards>



Top Tips for Successful Change

1. Align change with your values
2. Target only 1 or 2 changes at a time
3. Create 'goals' that describe the outcome
4. Notice what is already working
5. Do more of what is working
6. Develop an action plan
7. Visualize the change
8. Create a 'cue' for your goal
9. Review your progress
10. Practice self-compassion

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