



## 14.- How To Make Lasting Changes



### *Any Time Is A Good Time For Healthy Changes*

*Each year, many people make resolutions for change, and each year, most of those resolutions go...unresolved. This isn't due to people's lack of desire for a better life; it's just a by-product of the reality that change is difficult. **Our habits become ingrained and automatic; changing them requires constant effort until a new habit is formed.** This resource can help you to make necessary alterations in your expectations, attitudes, and methods of change so that you can experience real results that last. The following ideas can help:*

**Think in Terms of “Goals”, Rather Than “Resolutions”:** While most people make resolutions that they're determined to keep, a better tactic would be to create goals. What's the difference, you may ask? With traditional resolutions, people generally approach change with the attitude, “From now on, I will no longer [name a given behaviour you'd like to change]”.

The problem with this is, after one or two slip-ups, people feel like failures and tend to drop the whole effort, falling easily back into familiar patterns. **By setting goals, one instead aims to work toward a desired behaviour. The key difference is that people working toward goals expect that they won't be perfect at first, and are pleased with any progress they make.** Rather than letting perfectionism work against them, they allow motivation and pride to do their magic. The following ideas can help you with meeting your “Goals”:

- **Remember That It's A Process:** Expect to work your way up, rather than maintaining perfection and feeling let-down if you don't achieve it immediately.
- **Work Your Way Up:** In setting goals for new behaviour, aim for once or twice a week, rather than everyday. For example, instead of saying, “I'll go to the gym everyday”, plan for “every Wednesday” or, better yet, sign up for a fun exercise class, and you can work your way up to more often.
- **Set Yourself Up To Succeed:** Set small, attainable goals, and add more steps as you complete each one. This way you gradually work your way toward the life you want and the necessary changes, but you experience much more ‘success’ along the way, rather than feeling like a failure if you don't experience ultimate change overnight.



**Have A Goal Each Month:** If you're like most people, you may have several changes you'd like to make in your life; if so, it may be a good idea to tackle one each month. This way, 1) you can focus more, as you won't be trying to make several sweeping changes at once; 2) you can re-commit yourself each month to a new idea, so you keep growing all year and self-improvement becomes a way of life; and 3) you can build on each success, so you can first free up time before you take on a new hobby or get involved in an important cause, for example. Also, habits generally take 21 days to form. This setup enables you to devote energy to forming new habits more easily before moving on to the next, so you're not relying solely on will-power.

**Reward Your Progress:** While many of your resolutions carry their own reward, changing your habits can be challenging, and it's sometimes easier to do so if you have a little extra help. (Remember how positive reinforcement from a supportive teacher helped you learn, even though the knowledge itself was its own reward?) Providing extra rewards for yourself can help you to stay on track and maintain your motivation, even if you sometimes don't feel like making the effort solely for the sake of the benefit the change itself will create. The following are ways you can create rewards for yourself:

- **Team Up:** Have a buddy who knows your goals, and encourage each other, even if you're working on separate goals. This will provide you with someone who can give you a high-five when you deserve one, and a little encouragement when you need it.
- **Reward Small Successes:** Divide your goal into bite-sized steps and have a reward waiting at the completion of each.
- **Align Rewards With Goals:** Have rewards that are in line with your achievements (like new workout clothes for every 5 gym visits, or a beautiful new pen if you stick with your journaling habit for two weeks).

