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*"I wanted to change the world. But I have found that the only thing one can be sure of changing is oneself."
~ Aldous Huxley*

Are You Ready to Make Some Changes?

Ever wonder why some changes in your life or business are easier to make than others?

In an [earlier newsletter](#), I wrote about the power of habits in making new connections in your brain's circuitry. It is through these neural connections that our most basic functions are learned and carried out.

In a very simple sense, every time a new thought, skill, or activity is learned, it is represented by a brand new neuronet in your brain. And, each time you repeat a new thought, skill, or activity, those connections are strengthened, until the new way of thinking or acting becomes habitual for you.

But it seems that for some changes, getting to the point where you are ready to commit to changing a behaviour and making a new habit is the tough part. James Prochaska is a researcher at University of Rhode Island and the Director of the Cancer Prevention Research Centre, and his work on the stages of readiness for change can be very helpful in understanding

why we may feel so resistant to certain changes... and what to do to move forward.

Over decades of research, Prochaska has studied change processes in more than 30,000 people and he has suggested there are 5 stages in any successful change process:

1. Precontemplation/Obliviousness
2. Contemplation
3. Preparation
4. Action
5. Maintenance

may occur in a business setting when a person realizes that consistently being late for meetings damages her credibility, but she is not yet willing to change this habit. Likewise, in the personal realm, a person is in the contemplation stage when he realizes that he needs to stop smoking and plans to do it 'some day', but he isn't quite ready to make the change yet.

In the next stage, *preparation*, people come to realize that they need to make the change

immediately and are no longer willing to put it off. This sense of urgency may happen because of an incident which propels them out of contemplation. Drawing on the examples above, such an incident may be losing a big client because of being late

for an important meeting, or being diagnosed with a lung disease.

In the preparation stage, people begin to investigate potential ways of changing their behaviour, finding resources and putting supports in place for when they make the change. It is an important period because, as with any project, careful preparation *(continued on page 2)*



Precontemplation is the stage before people know that they need to change something – they are still oblivious to the problem.

Contemplation is the phase in which people become aware that a problem exists and they begin thinking about changing their behaviour, but have not yet made a commitment to do so. The realization that some form of change is necessary

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prevents people from leaping into action without a well thought out plan.

The *action* phase is perhaps the stage that most people would identify with 'change'. It is the period in which people put their plans into action and there are observable, measurable differences in their behaviours or attitudes. At this stage, commitment is one of the most important tools people have, as is drawing on supportive relationships to keep up their motivation levels.

The final stage in the change process is *maintenance*. Successful change is change that is sustained over time and, while the actual action phase may only last a few months, to be successful in the long term the maintenance stage is a long term process. As Prochaska notes, for maintenance to be successful, two fundamental factors are necessary: sustained, long-term effort and a revised lifestyle.

So, now that you have a brief explanation of the process of effective change, think about an area in your life or business in

which you are having difficulty making changes – can you identify which stage you might be at?

Is it possible that you have jumped straight into action without properly planning for a new change initiative? Or perhaps you have found yourself in 'analysis paralysis' by spending too much time in the contemplation phase, thinking about how you will change 'some day'.

Are you ready to make some positive changes? Join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths* Challenge.

"If we don't change our direction we're likely to end up where we're headed."

~ Chinese Proverb

Coming to a Radio Near You!

Listen in as *In Search of Excellence* will be featured on the eWomenNetwork Radio show on Sunday May 20, 7:00 pm (CDT). This is an American program on WBAP News/Talk 820, featuring business women from across North America sharing insights for personal and professional growth.

Denise will talk about her business, how to choose the right coach for your needs, and her research about how coaching helps people in their businesses. In case you can't tune in live, the interview will be posted on www.insearchofexcellence.ca in the coming months. Stay tuned!

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge

Once you have identified what stage you are at in Prochaska's stages of change, the next step is to successfully move yourself forward through the phases.

1) If you are in the *contemplation* stage, it may be effective to use emotional arousal techniques to increase the sense of urgency about making the change. For example, imagine that you are a few years in the future and you haven't made any changes, or have let the problem get worse. How has it affected your life, your work, your relationships? By imagining the future, you successfully counter the problem of these negative consequences seeming removed from your present reality and are likely to make changes sooner.

2) If you are in the *preparation* phase, increase your commitment to moving into action by gathering necessary supplies or resources,

making your intentions public, and gathering support from colleagues, family and friends. It is also very useful to create your own plan of action, based on your individual strengths and knowledge of past successes. Don't rely on one-size-fits-all approaches—you are unique and your solution for change must also be uniquely yours.

3) If you have a plan in place and are ready to move into *action*, remember to reward yourself for small steps and successes along the way. Don't wait until the change is complete to give yourself a pat on the back. Long-lasting change comes a series of small, continuous actions that eventually become habits. Frequent acknowledgements along the way will keep motivation levels high until the new behaviour is habitual!

Could you use some guidance with this challenge? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session. Start living *your* strengths!

Do you have suggestions for upcoming newsletters or success stories you want to share?

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