



10 Steps to Personal and Professional Growth

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- 1. Awareness***
- 2. Dissatisfaction***
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- 4. Responsibility***
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First, think of something you can do so well that you can teach another other person how to do it. Second, now think about the stages you went through on that mental and physical journey and the time it took to achieve your current proficiency. Third, now apply that understanding to this article and your professional career.

Anyone who has attained a certain level of proficiency in any endeavor, whether that be in a professional business setting, in academia, or in various sports and hobbies have all gone through and experienced a similar ebb and flow of struggle and growth. I have outlined these stages so that one may know how to more reliably attain the goals you have in your mind.

1. AWARENESS

Awareness of existing behavior, including thoughts, feelings, images, sensations and actions that are experienced as problematic: For example:

- A. Catastrophic thoughts: e.g., "If I express my true ideas and opinions my colleagues or superiors will think I'm stupid."Or my VP's, supervisors and staff won't think I know everything and will not have faith in me..... or will try and take my position."

- B. Distressing feelings: e.g., anxiety, depression, guilt, etc.
- C. Disturbing images: e.g., an image of yourself as ineffective in your position, unsuccessful leader or a poor decision maker. (this is also known in the early stages in one's career or promotion as the "imposter" syndrome).
- D. Discomforting sensations: e.g., generalized anxiety, headaches, shoulder, stomach or back pain etc.
- E. Ineffective actions: e.g., procrastination, inhibition, ineffective communication (listening and/or speaking), poor decision making skills, poor managing or leadership qualities.

(I have worked with experienced Presidents, CEO's and other leaders who were technically capable yet inadvertently unaware and on their way to, or currently in the midst of, sabotaging their organization and subsequent careers because of their "blind spots" and fear of working with someone through them.

2. DISSATISFACTION

Dissatisfaction with present behavior: This can either produce motivation for change or the extinction of awareness through various psychological and/or outside influence's or "distractions." e.g., denial, obsessive compulsive behaviors, excessive alcohol & drug use etc.

3. AFFIRMATION

Affirmation of your present behavior's original survival value: People will often *justify* the present behavior as needed or valued. I had a client who was a very smart woman and valued her ability to "multitask." Yet her directors and staff saw this behavior as not valuing them, being distant, and not involving them in decisions. Inadvertently, projects fell through the cracks because she would often "forget," communication between her departments became more strained because they all needed to stay on her "good side." She did not fully comprehend the gravity of the situation until the President asked me to work with her and her division.

When this affirmation step is omitted, people frequently undermine (Sabotage) their motivation for change with self-blame or "finger-pointing" e.g., blaming others.

For example, let's look at the two possible scenarios. Inhibition, placating, letting others always have their way (non-assertiveness) might have been an affective technique for a ten year old child when dealing with a harsh and critical parent. Conversely, the other extreme can be just as damaging as when that child took the abuse at home and then redirected that anger toward others.

As an adult these symptoms can play out as: a person needs to be the center of attention and rarely allows others a voice, unreasonable expectation of others, requires excessive attention/admiration, lacks empathy, envious, or has a sense of entitlement. As you can imagine and have no doubt experienced, a professional manager, Vice President or CEO with these tendencies can sabotage an otherwise successful team, department and/or career. Working through this step is integral in establishing a strong sense of self and an intrapersonal attitude that is conducive to professional growth, self improvement and change.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

For instance, some people in the workplace may have a “chip” on their shoulders. As a result, and as the previous example disclosed, their personal thoughts can be punitive and harsh as can their behavior toward others. Their actions can also be either too kind or too harsh given the reality of the situation. As a result, they are ineffective and cause themselves and others grief and the organization time and money with the bottom line being they come across as victims displaying some of these behaviors (e.g., attention seeking, need for admiration and lack of empathy, feelings of inadequacy, submissive and clinging behavior or preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism and control). On the surface the symptoms may appear to be diametrically opposed, however, the underlying issue is the same and resolution to this challenge is to take personal responsibility for one’s life (not blaming oneself or others). This must be a *major* first step toward becoming a more satisfied individual, an appreciated co-worker and a successful leader.

The examples below highlight the difference between a person which allows the “victim” mentality to have control and a person who is being responsible, taking an active role in their thoughts and applying personal growth strategies:

A. **Responsible position:** "I feel depressed because I've “bought into” the belief that I don't deserve to feel good about myself."

Victim position: "I feel depressed because nobody seems to care."

B. **Responsible Position:** “I have a point that will add clarity to why our marketing penetration is off by 7%, but I will wait until Gloria is finished speaking before I present my findings.”

Victim position: Gloria is constantly talking and not saying anything useful, I’m going to interrupt her and present my data now. It’s more important anyway.”

C. **Responsible position:** "I haven't been willing to assert myself because I tend to doubt myself when others disagree with me."

Victim position: "I haven't been able to assert myself because I keep getting shot down"

5. PERSONALIZED GOAL

Set an achievable goal, that is, a change that is under one's own control rather than dependent on someone else's approval. Trying to gain another's approval may be regarded as a desire (or want), but not a personalized goal which is under one's own control. Focusing attention and energy on personalized goals increases one's sense of *personal power*.

Conversely, focusing primarily on desires or approval by others tends to increase one's sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. Some examples are given below:

A. **Personalized Goal:** "I'd like to reprogram the belief and overcome my anxiety of speaking up in meetings.

Desire: "I want others to care about me so that I won't so scared to speak up in meetings.

B. **Personalized Goal:** "Effective leaders set the example and are respectful of others, when Gloria is finished I will tie her ideas into my new data so she saves face and the group gets the updated information required to hit our marketing target of 12% penetration.

Desire: I am the Executive VP and I should be able to interrupt at anytime to present my information and move these meetings along.

C. **Personalized Goal:** "I'd like to support myself in the face of other's disagreement so that I am willing to express my ideas and opinions more assertively during our meeting."

Desire: "I'd like to have my colleagues accept me so that I can express myself more assertively."

6. DEMORALIZATION

Frustration and demoralization often occur at this stage when one discovers that steps 1-5 do not automatically produce change. There is often a mental struggle going on inside of you where one part is wanting to quit, but the other knows that if you work through this "stage" then success will be forthcoming.

Example, Think of any previous success you have enjoyed whether that is sports related, academic achievement or any act that made you “endure” over a period of time. If you draw on the mental processes, steps and strength it took to achieve that milestone or success then, you no doubt, know the next steps you must take at this cross road. In essence, revert to what you know and have been successful at (the processes, concepts and struggles that were needed) and apply them to this particular challenge.

7. INTENTION

A strengthened resolve to give the goal implementation process vigilant attention is required at this critical stage. This is the step at which one's personalized goal is translated into an intention to change. An intention to change doesn't guarantee change; however, it does have more action potential than wishing or wanting to change.

“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elemental truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.

I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

‘Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.’”

-W. H. Murry

from the Scottish Himalayan expedition to Mt. Everest

8. ACTION

One's intention is then translated into specific action steps. These steps must be intentionally repeated, over and over again, until the new behavior begins to be expressed automatically. This frequently takes more time and attention than people are willing to devote.

But success is assured to those who persevere and apply sound Problem Solving, Decision Making and Implementation skills.

9. SELF-SUPPORT

Learning to support yourself through the period of vulnerability that occurs right after one lets go of the old familiar pattern of behavior and up to the point where one begins to feel secure with the new behavior or habit. One must model consistent mental and physical behaviors until which time the “experimental behavior” is firmly established, thus requiring increasingly less attention to maintain the change. A personal or professional mentoring group can be very helpful at all stages but especially this stage. Think of them as your personal “Board of Directors.” Corporations have them, why not you?

10. SUSTAINED – CHANGE

Congratulations. You have successfully completed your personalized goal. Now apply each step of this process to the small and large challenges that life presents to you each day and a happier more successful life will be yours as the old unhealthy patterns slowly fall to the wayside and the new patterns build up momentum and show themselves to you in ever self-fulfilling and profitable ways.

“10 elements of Intentional behavior Change” was originally developed by Dr. Joe Russo and stemmed from the work of James O. Prochaska of the [University of Rhode Island](#) and colleagues who developed the Transtheoretical model beginning in 1977 . I morphed these time tested behavior modification techniques and have applied them to the corporate environment for individuals and organizations who want to achieve “sustained change,” not just read about it, go through some idealistic steps and pretend change has occurred, when in reality, it has not. If one aspires to achieve extraordinary results, then extraordinary thoughts, behaviors and actions are needed. Are you ready to start?

For more information on this topic and other Individual and Organizational Development insights, please contact Kelly Graves “The Corporate Therapist.”