

HEALTH

Making changes stick

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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Change can be tough. Just ask Joseph. Last month he tipped the scales at 250 pounds and was diagnosed with adult-onset diabetes. His doctor warned him that he will face dire consequences unless he takes immediate steps to eat better, lose weight and begin exercising. Unless he gets his diabetes under control, Joseph could quickly end up with heart disease, kidney damage, nerve damage and blindness. But old habits are hard to break — even when we know better.

Despite the best of intentions, Joseph just can't seem to say no to fast food. Drive-through is just so convenient. Besides, healthy food can be expensive and take a lot of time to prepare. Exercise is tough too. After all, Joseph works long hours and the free time he does

have is spent taking care of the kids. It is so hard to get motivated.

Joseph is not alone. Many of us know we should make one or more changes in our lives. Perhaps the change is something we should do more of, such as exercising, eating healthier or spending more time with family. Maybe the change is something we should do less of or not at all, such as smoking, overeating or excessive spending. Most of us can identify something we know we should do differently. We can also give a laundry list of all the reasons we should make the change: to improve our health, to increase our lifespan, to improve our relationships. We know exactly what we should do, but we just aren't able to make the change stick.

Research has shown that for change to occur, three conditions must be met. First, we must be sure that the change is important to make. After all, changing habits can take a great deal of time and effort. If there are no convincing benefits to making a change, it is just much easier to maintain the status quo. Second, we must feel confident that we have the ability to make the change happen. If we don't believe we have the knowledge or skills it takes to make a change, it is likely that we won't even bother trying. After all, it

makes much more sense to just stay at home than start a journey to a destination we are convinced we can't reach. Third, we must be mentally, physically and emotionally ready to make the change.

The fact is, if there is something we know we should change but we haven't done so, we may not be ready because we are actually ambivalent about making the change. There is part of us that wants to change, and part of us that doesn't. While we can see benefits for moving forward, there is a payoff for staying exactly where we are. For Joseph, the idea of a longer and healthier life was certainly attractive. On the other hand, he resented the idea of having to cut back on eating the food he loves, one of his favorite pleasures, and just the idea of taking up jogging made his knees ache.

To motivate ourselves towards change, it is helpful to acknowledge the benefits for our staying exactly where we are. Ignoring this reality can increase our chances of slipping back into old behaviors, as we may grow to resent the sacrifices we have made. Exploring our ambivalence, perhaps by making a list of pros and cons for making a change, can help us get clear about whether or not the change is important enough for us to make.

Here are some additional con-

siderations in deciding whether to make a change and figuring out how to make a change stick.

- No one can make you change. Whether you are getting pressure to change from a doctor, boss, partner, parent or parole officer, no one can make the change for you. Ultimately, your life is your own, and you have the right to change your behaviors or not. Of course, on the right hand of freedom is responsibility. Your body, family, friends or society might hold you accountable for your decision not to change.

- Recognize that setbacks are normal. Ever made a New Year's resolution? Research shows that to sustain six months of change, the average person makes 3-5 years of consecutive pledges to change. Knowing that he may slip along the way will keep Joseph from feeling ashamed of himself on the day he says yes to a double cheeseburger. Shame is a poor motivator and typically results in longer and more extreme periods of regression.

- Visualize what your life will look like after you make the change. Use words or pictures to create a clear vision of how you would like things to be after you have put the change in place. How will your life be improved? How will you feel? What will you do differently?

- Think about a time in your life when you have been successful at making a difficult change. What resources did you use? What personal strengths did you call on to make it happen? Who was supportive of your making the change? How can you use your strengths and resources to help you reach your current goal?

The Tao Te Ching, an ancient Chinese Taoist text, asks: "Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?" Recent research has proven the wisdom of this approach. Successful change is all about timing. Be gentle with yourself. Don't rush into making a change until you are ready to do so. There are benefits to embracing and exploring one's ambivalence. There is much to be learned in the space between thought and action.

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10 tips for weathering a recession

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With the threat of recession looming, or even upon us, many businesses are asking themselves how they can survive in the face of declining customer spending, tighter credit periods and the general doom and gloom that comes with an economic downturn.

Naturally, the answer will depend on your business model, B2B, B2C, and so on. But, in principle, for the entrepreneur the "cash last" approach should always be the first priority, either in a start-up situation or for a growing business.

The following are my tried and tested methods for tightening the company belt:

1. Sweat your assets. Only replace hardware when you absolutely need to. Even if items are fully depreciated, as long as they function, keep them.

2. Keep stock moving. Even if you have to cut price, the worst thing you can do is let stock become obsolete.

3. Talk to creditors and free up cash flow. Arranging or extending credit can free up a lot of cash and this can help with many things.

4. Tactical, below the line marketing. Despite recession concerns, keep up your marketing activity. Simple, price-based offers on cheap leaflets distributed locally or other cost-effective methods are often adequate for keeping you on your

customers' radar. Businesses still need to spend and consumers still need to buy — sometimes as a tonic to help deal with the recession.

5. Build up a cash reserve. Arrange short-term finance options early. The last thing you want is to run out of cash so put facilities in place from a range of affordable sources even if they are a little dearer than longer-term debt, better to have the option than to go cap in hand to the bank.

6. Work on a skeleton crew. If necessary, look to reduce staff hours to those that are core to your business. It may be unpopular but hopefully some of your staff will see it as a short-term measure to ensure longer-term survival and

growth.

7. Look to reduce general establishment costs: Use recharged print cartridges, reduce call charges using SKYPE, shop around for cheaper substitutes on key materials. Don't be afraid to push your suppliers.

8. Restructure longer-term debt if necessary. Lenders are generally happy as long as debt is being serviced and if you're talking to them, they are reassured of your professional approach to management. A little restructuring is always an option to free up some cash.

9. Where possible, defray overheads. Let out spare office capacity to other businesses, consider joint advertising with partner businesses, share key services and use DIY

alternatives for repair and maintenance issues.

10. Longer term, look to move your business model to a lower cost base. By analyzing the key costs of the business and the revenue they generate, it is possible to rationalize and focus on core business. Even if it is painful to cut some things out, business is about adapting to the prevailing conditions.

Some of these expedients require you to make some difficult decisions, but it is a route to survival. Ultimately, a leaner, fitter business will emerge, all the more competitive for having weathered the storm. Your only question will be "why didn't I do these things sooner?"