

HOW TO CREATE MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE



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INTRODUCTION

We aren't wired for change.

Rather, our brains are wired to keep us safe, not to embrace the unexpected and unknown. The brain likes what is most familiar. **There's a piece of our brain called the basal ganglia that wires our brain and actions toward routines, so if we want to create change, we literally have to figure out how to change our brains.** The good news is that you can!

If your brain experiences enough change in a variety of ways, it'll allow you to operate with the understanding that change is something you can survive and even benefit from. You won't fear it so much because the information stored in your head provides evidence that fear is unnecessary. Of course, getting to this point takes a little work.

With the world experiencing change at an overwhelming pace, it's never been more important to feel the fear and embrace change anyway! Like Joseph Campbell said, "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."

So, if you are ready to rise to the occasion and embrace your own change journey, these six ideas will help. Go hero ... you've got this!

“THE CAVE YOU FEAR TO ENTER HOLDS THE TREASURE YOU SEEK.” — JOSEPH CAMPBELL



CREATE A COMPELLING VISION OF YOUR FUTURE

Whether you are making a change in your business or your professional life, one of the most challenging issues when it comes to navigating change is being able to create a vision of what your desired outcome is. In stressful times, this becomes even more imperative.

Begin with the end in mind. All change starts here. You have to get crystal clear about what you want and why it's so damn important.

So here's a powerful exercise that can help you vision your way forward:

First, quiet your mind. Shut your eyes.

Then, pick a random Thursday, five years into the future. And ask yourself these questions: What does your perfect random Thursday look like five years from now? Who are you next to? What does your coffee taste like? What does the first hour of the day look like? What work are you doing that engages you?

Now, open your eyes. Write everything down. Be specific. Paint the most beautiful day that you can imagine. Go deep. Dream big. Color it with beautiful detail. Write the story of your best day of your future life.

This is the compelling vision of the future that you need to help guide your decisions.



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REVERSE-ENGINEER YOUR OUTCOME

Once you create your compelling vision of the future, it's time to figure out how you can make it a reality. But getting to where you want to be can seem incredibly daunting.

And while change is never easy, remember that change is not an event — it's a process. And like any other process, it can be broken down into step-by-step components that will add up to far more than the sum of their parts.

So let's take that perfect Thursday five years from now and reverse-engineer it. Are you tracking toward the perfect day's utopia? What needs to change?

This is the moment where you have to confront yourself and construct a plan that moves you in the direction of your destiny. This is the exact exercise that proved to be the catalyst for starting my business and completely changing the course of my life!

But you have to write down the steps and micro-decisions that it will take to get you there. And no doubt, you'll likely be faced with some really hard decisions. Good! That means your vision is big enough and worth it!

So, prove it to yourself. Write down how it will feel if the vision is realized. What will it mean to you? Why is it important? Who else will benefit? How will it impact the people you love?

But you're not done yet. The second part of this exercise is to consider the consequences if you don't change. What will your day look like five years from now if you do nothing? What are the consequences of that? What gets worse? How does that regret feel five years from now?

Odds are, it's not going to be a day you're looking forward to.

Now, you've got the road map you need to help you be intentional about the decisions needed to create that perfect Thursday. And you've got the right mindset to stay focused on achieving your goal.



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CREATE A QUIT LIST

When I started my business during the Great Recession, a mentor of mine gave me advice that I always keep in the back of my head during times of change: “Approach this moment like your life depends on it. Because it does.”

In other words, if the life you want depends on making a change, what habits or behaviors do you have that are currently not serving you?

So, I recommend doing what my mentor and I did — create a Quit List. This is a list of those behaviors and habits that are not serving you well; quitting them will help you create some space for the consistent effort and action required to move you further and faster in the direction you desire. And while it may be difficult to give up takeout or weekend tee times, the time, energy and money you will save will go a long way toward helping maintain focus and discipline for a critical period of time.

Delayed gratification is a hallmark of Stoic philosophy and, as you gain momentum, you might find it’s exactly the discipline of sacrifice and self-control you relish. Those are qualities that set you up well for long term success.

Making short-term sacrifices in the name of a long-term goal will also help you build the resilience you need to weather whatever adversity and obstacles you encounter. And when it’s time to reintegrate things that you’ve given up, they’ll be all the more satisfying on the other side.

“APPROACH THIS MOMENT LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT. BECAUSE IT DOES.”



FIND ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS

Just because you are going on this journey doesn't mean you have to go it alone. In fact, attempting to go at it alone may not be the best thing for you. Research published in the MIT Sloan Management Review found that informal support from colleagues and mentors has a huge impact on an individual's career and personal growth

Finding an accountability partner can help you be more accountable to yourself, and they can also provide the support you need at critical inflection points during your change journey. Perhaps it's your spouse or a friend. Or a therapist or support group. Maybe it's someone going through the change journey alongside you. Either way, it's someone who can be there for you and check in regularly.

My accountability partners often include my Personal Board of Directors. This is a group of carefully vetted advisers whose opinions and judgment I trust and respect. They lend invaluable expertise and competency that shores up my own gaps, and I call upon them for guidance and insight whenever I need them.

I need that support system. So do you.



EMBRACE YOUR SETBACKS

Setbacks are inevitable. And that's OK.

But the real obstacle isn't the setback itself. It's the catastrophizing after a setback that can prevent you from moving forward in your change journey. So if you have a setback, don't panic or beat yourself up. Instead, try to cultivate a sense of self-awareness to examine why it occurred.

One of the best ways to do this is through journaling. Sit down at a table with a pen, ready to write. Think about when you got off track. What was the triggering event that caused it? Why do you feel this way?

Write down your feelings, and be honest with yourself. It's probably going to be difficult. You might not like the thoughts or feelings that surface, but that awareness is valuable.

There's a reason we avoid self-examination — it's not easy. But it's a highly therapeutic process that will ultimately leave you with a higher level of compassion toward yourself. That compassion can be a catalyst to help you move beyond the pain and disappointment of a setback with a renewed sense of commitment.

And finally, remember to forgive yourself. Compassion and forgiveness are critical steps in the cycle of transformation. Setbacks are a natural part of the change journey, and you are human. Simply expect them, and remember that every morning, we get to start over. Don't get caught up in a cycle of discouragement. Simply keep right on going. Progress is success!



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COMMIT TO ROUTINES AND RITUALS

When things get difficult, it is easy to default to our old habits and patterns, and before you know it, your Quit List becomes your To-Do List.

However, you are not your patterns or decisions. Committing to daily routines and rituals will help you keep a disciplined mindset in order to manage the change process — and they are a powerful catalyst for maintaining a positive attitude.

Those rituals and routines look different for every person, but I'll give you an example of what's most important to me: my morning routine. I think it's so important to get the day started right. On my best morning I wake up early, spend a few minutes getting myself centered through breathing or meditation (try the Headspace app), and then I journal. That often includes a gratitude reflection and a few minutes of visualizing what I want to accomplish and deliver that day to make an impact. "Win the morning. Win the day."

The rest of my day typically varies, but those first 15 minutes set the tone, and no matter what your routine is, make sure you have those rituals that cultivate a positive mindset and keep you moving in the right direction.



It's so important to get the day started right. Here are some rituals to consider that can help you win the morning:

- Wake up early
- Center yourself through breathing and/or meditation
- Journal
- Gratitude/reflection time
- Prayer
- Exercise
- Cold therapy
- Quality time with loved ones
- A long walk
- Time in nature
- Inspirational reading/listening
- Visualize accomplishments for the day
- A healthy breakfast



STAY IN THE LEARNING LANE

Ultimately, change is more than a process. It's also a mindset.

And the most effective way to maintain this mindset is to constantly challenge yourself through learning. As you plan each week, abide by the "Five Hour Rule." Set aside five hours a week for deliberate practice or learning.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you should devote all five of your hours to progressing in your field. Perhaps you take the time to acquire a new skill or hobby. If you want to accelerate success I also recommend considering a coach. I leverage coaching and professional guidance in multiple areas of my life. It's huge for accountability and perhaps the fastest way to create big gains or a breakthrough.

There is simply no way I stay consistent with exercising 5x a week or going as hard as I do without enlisting a personal trainer. It's an investment, but I subscribe to the Jim Rohn philosophy of personal growth: "The best investment you can make is an investment in yourself."

What's most important, though, is to cultivate that mindset. Learning new things — and failing at them — helps you build the resilience and self-awareness you will need to move forward.

“THE BEST INVESTMENT YOU CAN MAKE IS AN INVESTMENT IN YOURSELF.”



TAKE ACTION NOW

No matter what type of growth you're seeking in your life, the experience of going for your win will serve you well in the long run.

In conclusion, I will leave you with a quote from Jim Rohn: "We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference is discipline weighs ounces, while regret weighs tons."

Now put this down and take action.

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— JIM ROHN



Ryan Estis helps progressive companies embrace change, attack opportunity and achieve the next level of breakthrough performance.

Ryan has been recognized as one of “the best keynote speakers seen or heard” by Meetings & Conventions magazine. His writing has been featured in Forbes, Inc., Fast Company and Entrepreneur Magazines. Ryan’s consulting and advisory work addresses leadership, sales and strategy challenges. Ryan provides a unique blend of experience, perspective and process to help executive teams navigate the increasingly complex business landscape and find solutions that deliver growth.

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