

CHAPTER 19

Awareness of Resistance

As long as imperfections exist within oneself, there is room for change and growth. However, all of us have some resistance to change, because change involves the possibility of threatening whatever makes us feel comfortable and secure. Our resistance to change often stands in the way of real freedom and happiness. Only by recognizing our resistance can we overcome it and grow into the persons we want to become.

Am I completely satisfied with myself the way I am?

Before we begin on the path of changing our habits or attitudes, we are confronted with the question, "Why? Why should I change?" This question may be answered by yet another question, "Am I totally satisfied with the way I am right now?" Have you ever wished that you had acted differently in any situation? Are there times when you wish you had acted differently with your parents, brothers or sisters, teachers, friends, or grandparents? Everyone has an idea of the way he would like to be different. Imagine yourself as you would like to be.

Within each person there are many undeveloped facets and talents. If we want to realize the fullest potential of our inward gifts, we must grow out of or change habits, thought patterns and ideas that may hold us back.

Recognizing these things — the things that hold us back from our true potential — and acting to change them to habits, thoughts, patterns, and ideas that are complementary to our higher selves is not easy, but it is probably the most fulfilling thing that we will ever try to do. Often we hide our real selves under layers of pretense. People think you are a certain way, when in actuality you are very different. As you change, you grow closer and closer to being the person you are capable of being. At each stage you shed a cloak of your unreal self, or the part of yourself you had temporarily created in order to fit in or to get by.

You may begin by asking yourself, "How could I act differently so that I would feel better about myself and be better understood by others?" This may be something very simple — such as doing something for someone else — or very complicated — like trying to change the way you understand things by taking another person's point of view in a conflict.





To grow, you'll need to give yourself permission to have many new ideas, to be creative. You are creating the most important thing in your life — yourself. You could stop the whole process right here, by convincing yourself that you just can't, or that you might "look foolish," or that your "luck's always bad." You may ask yourself, "What's the use anyway?" or "Why am I even bothering to take this course?" or anything else to keep you exactly where you are now. It is because of such myths that people are kept trapped, hopeless and helpless by their convictions about the impossible. But if you have the courage, start with some idea about how you would like to be: more assertive, less serious, more open, less hard-working, more honest, more determined, or anything you want. You decide!

Now that you're ready — ready to change — you may say again, "But, but, but I ... can't." Why not? Before continuing, let's take a look at the reasons many people give themselves for not changing. Becoming aware of your own resistance is the first step to overcoming it. After looking at some excuses for not changing, we'll get back to discussing how to overcome the resistance that lies within each of us.

How do we resist change?

Our actions often show our resistance:

Changing the subject in a conversation; leaving the room; being late; getting sick; doing unnecessary work, wasting time; refusing to pay attention; ending a relationship; looking away or out of the window when someone is talking to us.

We often assume things about others to justify our resistance to change:

It wouldn't do any good anyway.

My friends won't understand.

I would have to change my whole personality.

Only crazy or really sick people need to do that.

No one can help me with my problem.

My parents have never been able to help me.

My case is different.

I don't want to bother them.
It will work itself out.
If you were in my place, you'd do the same.
It's better just to leave things as they are and not to cause a big problem.

We grow up with beliefs that become resistance to change:

It's not done. It's just not right.
It's not acceptable. A real man isn't like that.
My family never did that.
I'm not that kind of person. It's impossible. It'll never work.

We give our power and responsibility to others and use that as an excuse for our resistance to change:

This isn't the right environment.
They won't let me change. I don't have the right book.
If my teacher were different, perhaps it would work out.
I don't have time.
They will have to change first.
My parents won't let me.

Sometimes we deny the need to change:

I'm all right. There's nothing wrong with me.
I like my life just the way it is.
I can't do anything about it.
What good would it do anyway? Problems are just a fact of life.

By far the biggest category for resistance is fear:

I'm not ready yet. I might fail.
They might reject me.



What would my friends think of me?
I don't know enough.
I can't.
I don't want anyone to know I have this problem.
I don't want to talk about it.
I don't have the energy.
Who knows where I might end up? I may lose my freedom.
It's too hard.
I can't do it well enough.
I might lose my friends.
I don't trust anyone.

Concepts we have about ourselves that we use to resist change:

I'm too old, young, fat, thin, short, tall, ugly, attractive, lazy, strong, weak, stupid, clever, poor, worthless, silly, serious, stuck.

The benefits

With all the reasons we have not to change, let's look at the benefits that we will experience as a result of changing. Start with the pros of how you are now, the benefits from your present way of acting. Look carefully at the hidden benefits whenever you have a situation you would like to change. Unless you recognize the benefits and replace them with some other gains, you may be defeated in your attempt to change.

You are actually re-creating yourself when you change. You are the end result of many factors — the way you were born, the way your parents treated you when you were a baby and a young child, the relationships you made, the culture you live in, the decisions you have made. The facts about your origin cannot be changed, but you can change your understanding and your response to your situation.

Many of the renowned people in history came from seemingly impossible circumstances, but regardless of their circumstances they developed their inner potential. To do this takes work and determination, and in many cases people have accomplished great things in part due to the obstacles that life brought to them. They succeeded not because of what they were or had originally, but because of what they did.

In order to change, you have to decide what you want specifically to change and then imagine yourself as that new type of person, or someone who acts in a new way given a similar circumstance. When you are able to actually change your bad habits and nurture within yourself the kind of characteristics that you respect in others, you will feel a great sense of achievement and satisfaction. You will realize that you are able to control many things about your life that may have been controlling you. And over a period of time (after you have changed your old, undesirable habits into new and desirable ones), you will feel the effects of your change in many ways — the way you feel about yourself, the way other people see you, the uncovering of hidden talents or skills. Read through the following list of bad habits turned into good habits, and see if any might belong to you.

Instead of saying or agreeing with unkind words about other people when they are not around,

You can ...

Refrain from agreeing with negative comments about others and even defend their reputation when they are not present.

You get ...

Good feelings from your conscience and you are building a reputation as someone who is trustworthy.

Instead of avoiding new experiences or challenges because of a fear of failure, such as not trying out for the football team or dance group,

You can ...

Get involved in activities and explore new challenges to learn to develop your talent.

You get ...

Satisfaction from overcoming your fears about failing, and you may make new friends while you are doing it. You may also find that other people have similar fears. You can learn that you are able to overcome your resistance more easily the next time because of the intrinsic rewards of doing what you really want to do.

Instead of constantly waking up later than you would like,

You can ...

Rise in time to do everything you need to do to prepare for the day.

You get ...

A great feeling of control over your body, instead of feeling that you are at the mercy of your body's desires. You may even find that you start your days more consistently, leaving yourself more energy for the rest of the day.

Instead of eating non-nutritious junk food that you don't need and that makes you feel a little sick,

You can ...

Choose healthy food most of the time.

You get ...

Better physical health, which helps you to get up early in the morning, gives you more energy and gives you a feeling of confidence that you can control your physical desires.

Instead of telling your friends and family nice things or giving them compliments when you really feel what you're saying is not sincere,

You can ...

Practice being honest about what you think and how you feel in a polite but forthright manner.

You get ...

A feeling of satisfaction and pride that you have not compromised your integrity.

These are just some of the things people often don't like about themselves and seek to change. Of course, many other bad habits or manners could be listed as candidates for change. Can you make your own list? Make sure to list not only the bad habit, but also the good one you might turn it into and the benefit of changing it. Start out by trying to develop good habits which are not too difficult, and do not try to change everything at once. Give yourself time, and be your own friend by letting yourself have success in the beginning. If you try to do too many things at once, you may become frustrated and discouraged. So, just change one habit at a time and enjoy the remaking of you!

The secret of managing your fears

Stand back and look at the fears that stop you from changing and increasing your self-respect and happiness in life. Chances are that you fear rejection, failure or some other sign that you do not “measure up” or that your worst fears about yourself might be true. Possibly you would rather be afraid that you are defective than be convinced of it. For that reason you are afraid to try a change or even to consider one.

Andre — A Case of Fear

That year I had decided I would be on the chess team. My school had just begun a team, and the first tournament was in only a few weeks. The other kids in the class didn't know I could play chess — I never told anyone — but I had been playing with my uncle Anton since I was really young, and honestly speaking I was very good. I had to sign up that week. There was just this paper on the wall to sign up outside the director's office — no big problem. But every time I walked by to sign up, I couldn't. I even picked up my pen a few times and almost signed my name, but every time the same thing would happen — I would begin to think about what would happen when the other kids saw I had signed up. They didn't know how good I was, and they might make fun of me, and even if no one noticed or said a thing, what if I couldn't play during the games? I always got so nervous in front of other people. But I really wanted to play. How could I be on the chess team? I couldn't even think about it without getting knots in my stomach, and every time I picked up that pen to sign up, my heart would race a little and my palms would start to sweat. I was stuck, I was afraid, and I know it seems like such a little thing, but I never did bring myself to sign up for the chess team. Anyway, it's not that important, and it would probably interfere with my schoolwork. I guess it's not that important to me.



Something to think about



Do you think Andre was honest with himself? What was he afraid of? If you were his friend, what would you say to him? Do you think he is afraid of many other things in his life and this is just one way his fear shows? How do you think he could get over his fear?

No one is intrinsically bad. Everyone is capable of both superb and horrible actions and everything in between. The challenge of life is to make the best of what you have within you, and part of being the best you can be is to go beyond your fears. Fears about failure come from thinking that you are not good enough, or that you have a high probability of failure. How many people have you seen fail? When you see someone try with all his effort and fail, do you shun that person and think that he should never have tried? Or do you want to see that person get up from where he left off and try again? Even in the Olympics, fantastic athletes fail sometimes — skaters trip, runners fall, and gymnasts flounder — but this is the exception, and it does not mean that the person is not worthy or talented — it just means that he has to keep trying.

Which person do you respect more, the one who tries to do something really difficult, who stretches himself to the point of his limitations, even though he may not gain complete victory — or the person who never even tries? Trying takes effort, and going beyond your fears takes a lot of effort. The next time you want to change, to grow, to recreate yourself in some way, think about it: What do you have to lose?



What do you have to gain? Try this reasoning: “If I try to do what would increase my self-respect despite my fears, then I am courageous, I am doing the best right now that I can.”

Focus on your strengths

Mastering change requires you to use your strengths to take action, to choose to overcome weakness and pessimism. Change is basically a question of whether you want to focus on your weaknesses or your strengths. In order to focus on your strengths, you must begin

by identifying your strengths. What are you good at? What personality characteristics do you have that are positive? Are you good at listening to others and understanding them? Are you good at taking responsibility for important things and getting your goals accomplished? Are you good at remaining calm and level-headed in the midst of confusing or frightening circumstances? Are you flexible, able to adjust easily to new ideas, people and places? Are you reflective and able to understand the motivation behind the actions of others? Are you good at leading groups of people? Can you speak publicly? Where do your strengths and talents lie?

To identify your personal strengths, begin by making a list. Ask yourself what is really good about the way you think or behave or the talents that you have developed. You may look at this in two ways: personal characteristics (things about your character that are good), and things that you do well. These may complement each other, or one may lead naturally into the other.

Fold a piece of paper in half, and label each half 1-5. The list on the top half of the paper should be five personal characteristics that are your strengths, and the list on the bottom half should be five things that you are good at. You may choose to make a longer list, but think of at least five things for each category.

Example

Personal Characteristics

- ✗ I am patient with other people, even when they are rude or difficult.
- ✗ I like people. I enjoy being with all kinds of people, and I have a fairly open mind when it comes to talking to people who may be very different from me. (I like to talk to old people, and young children too.)
- ✗ I have a lot of energy, and I usually finish something I have made a determination to do.
- ✗ I am perceptive and usually can understand what people are really saying or feeling.
- ✗ I have a good sense of humor, and do not take problems and upsets too hard.

Things I Am Good At

- ✗ I am good at math.
- ✗ I am good at making birthday cakes.
- ✗ I am good at working out finances (sometimes I help my Dad to figure out our family's finances).
- ✗ I am good at creating things on the spur of the moment — for example, if I am asked to speak in class on a topic for which I did not prepare beforehand, I usually can do so without great difficulty.
- ✗ I am good at arguing a point, sticking to my beliefs, while still having an open mind and listening to what someone else has to say.

Once you are aware of what you are good at doing, you may start to use these characteristics and abilities to help you grow to your fullest potential. Realizing that you have so many positive traits may come as a bit of a surprise at first, but if you can be honest with yourself, you will find that many good things lie within you, and it is up to you how you use these abilities.

In Conclusion

Know and believe that you are fine, even magnificent, despite your human defects,

Because you are so aware of your humanness ... or just:

Because you are alive ...

Because you are unique ...

Because you can choose ...

Because you are sensitive enough to feel life's inevitable conflicts ...

Because you try ...

Because you are willing to take a chance ...

Because you are willing to fail and learn from each mistake ...

Because you feel pain ... jealousy ... anger ... loneliness ...

Because you have the potential to help someone else appreciate their uniqueness and beauty ...

Because you may see something no one else has noticed ...

Because you are you, with all your strengths, weaknesses, fears, hopes and limitless potential.

For Your Journal



- ✗ Make an "I can" list. Complete the sentence "I can ..." with 10 things you are capable of doing.
- ✗ Propose an experiment to improve your current life situation. What are the risks? What are the benefits? Who will decide if it is worthwhile to try?
- ✗ Is fear the major thing that blocks you from changing? Are you waiting for something to decrease or eliminate your fears before doing what you'd like to see yourself doing?
- ✗ Have you ever loved something or someone so much that you did not mind facing all kinds of obstacles on their behalf? Describe who or what you loved and the obstacles you had to deal with.