

Process for Changing Behaviors

Behavioral Change: Reflections on Past Experience

Part 1

Brainstorm some behavioral changes you've made in your life, ones that you've felt good about and that you've sustained. These could be really big changes (such as quitting drinking or starting a healthy exercise regime) or little changes (such as checking Facebook less frequently or going to bed earlier). These could be related to work life, or not. Use the sentence stems here to describe these changes.

Example:

I used to: *Skip lunch, and by 4:00 I was famished and I'd eat a whole bag of potato chips.*

And now I: *Buy frozen burritos so I can always take one to school with me, and I also keep a bag of trail mix in my desk just in case.*

I used to:

And now I:

Select one of those behavioral changes to reflect on. What led you to make a change? What motivated you?

What was challenging about stopping an old behavior? What did you have to give up by stopping a behavior?

What was challenging about starting a new behavior? What did you need to do or learn so that you could enact the new behavior?

How do you feel recognizing the change you've made? In retrospect, did it seem harder or easier than you'd anticipated to make the change?

Part 2

Now identify a few changes that you've tried to make, but didn't sustain (such as getting up early to exercise or quitting fast food). Select those that you wish you had sustained.

Example:

I tried: *Lesson planning for the following week for two hours on Fridays after school.*

Because: *Otherwise I spent the weekend dreading Sunday afternoon, when I'd need to plan, or leaving it until Sunday night when I didn't want to do it.*

But I didn't maintain this behavior because: *I was so tired by Friday afternoon that I couldn't muster the mental or physical energy, and I just wanted to leave school.*

I tried:

Because:

But I didn't maintain this behavior because:

I tried:

Because:

But I didn't maintain this behavior because:

I tried:

Because:

But I didn't maintain this behavior because:

Reflect on this question: Looking at this history, what can you learn about yourself when it comes to making changes?

Behavioral Change: Identifying Grain Size

When it comes to making behavioral changes, a common mistake is to choose a goal that is so big that we quickly fail. Finding the right grain size is somewhat personal—what's right for you might be miniscule for someone else, so it takes some messing around to find that right size. As you're playing with size, ask yourself, *Is this really doable?* It's better to go with too small than too big. Make it manageable to set yourself up for success; later you can add another goal or make the first one bigger. Most of us are overambitious when it comes to setting goals, and there's far more danger that we'll feel defeated by a big goal than that we'll accomplish a small one too easily. Go for small. Accomplish it, then add another.

Here are some behavioral changes of a good grain size that I've coached educators to make or that I've made myself. They are high-leverage behavioral changes to make, given our work. Put a star by those you already do, and a check by some that you feel would be valuable for you to make.

- Sleeping eight hours a night
- Exercising a few times a week
- Eating a healthy lunch
- Reducing coffee or soda intake
- Having a date night with a partner once a month
- Doing 10 minutes of meditation every morning
- Doing yoga once a week
- Attending a religious service a couple times a month
- Reading inspirational texts in the evening
- Taking a class just for fun
- Reducing TV time
- Turning off the TV an hour before bedtime
- Journaling a few times a week
- Keeping a gratitude journal
- Looking at social media only on the weekend
- Not checking email upon waking
- Checking email only during two specific time blocks (for example, 7:00–7:30 a.m. and 5:00–5:30 p.m.)
- Cooking food on Sunday to eat throughout the week
- Doing all laundry and ironing Sunday afternoon
- Finishing school work by 5:00 p.m. and not taking work home three nights a week
- Cleaning up the classroom right afterschool
- Doing lesson plans for the next week on Thursday afternoon
- Prepping the next week's lesson materials on Friday afternoon
- Grading tests within two days of administering them
- Making one positive phone call home to a student's parent every day
- Responding to email within 24 hours
- Taking the entire weekend off once a month



Now list 3–5 behavioral changes that you'd like to make, and make sure the grain size is manageable.

There are two ways to go about choosing a change to make:

1. Select the change that you feel most excited to work on, the one that you know would make a big difference in your life.

OR

2. Sequence these changes in a way that makes sense. For example, if you reduced your TV time and checked social media only on the weekend, you'd have time to write in a journal, which might allow you to go to sleep earlier and get eight hours of sleep, which might allow you to wake up early enough to exercise before school, and so on. With this approach, you would start with the first behavior you've identified.

Some of us love to make plans. (Personalities of the Judging type are most inclined to do this.) Whether or not you love making plans, creating a change plan can help you understand the change process. (Appendix B in *Onward* describes this process, and now you get to try it.)

Which behavior change did you identify in the previous exercise that you most want to make?
Write it here:

1. **Start at the end:** Sit back, close your eyes, and spend a minute visualizing yourself doing the behavior. Then capture your reflection: How did it feel to see yourself doing it?
2. **Backward-plan:** What might you need to learn or know how to do in order to adopt this habit? Is there someone you know who does this well from whom you can get some tips?
3. **Make little tweaks:** Is the change you want to make a manageable grain size? Is there a way you can break your behavioral change goal into smaller components and then take one element at a time? Can you identify what those components might be?
4. **Fire up emotions:** What emotion could help you make this change? Write it here and reflect on how it could help.

5. **Watch your mindset:** Is this a change you believe you can make? What's your internal dialogue saying about making this change? Write down some of those phrases.

6. **Activate autonomy:** Create a few "want to" or "get to" statements about this change (for example, "I get to meditate every morning" or "I want to eat a salad for lunch three times a week").

7. **Identify choice points:** Which are the points at which you'll need to choose to do something different in order to enact this behavior? What are a few things you can do to set up those choice points to direct you to do the behavior?

8. **Piggyback behaviors:** Is there a habit that you already do onto which you can latch this new habit?

9. **Make a precommitment:** What might be obstacles to getting you to do this behavior? Create a few “if-then” statements to problem-solve the obstacles. For example, “If I wake up late and don’t have time to meditate, then I’ll meditate at lunch for five minutes and I’ll also check my alarm clock to make sure it’s set for tomorrow.”
10. **Soak in the satisfaction:** After you do the behavior the first time, reflect on how it felt—even doing it just once. Jot down those reflections here.