

# Why change is so difficult

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The latest research in neuroscience tells us that when you want to make changes in your life the brain will not necessarily be on your side and might actually hinder you in achieving what you want. Let me explain.

## **Don't take it personal**

Many people resist change not just you. Even when people's life is threatened through smoking, overuse of alcohol wrong eating habits etc changing it seems often near impossible. Have you ever wondered why so few weight loss diets work? Here is the answer. It all has to do with habits and conditioning. Neuroscience has found that that part of the brain that deals with habits and what is familiar requires little energy. When something is a habit or routine it does not require much attention and you do things automatically. Because of this no matter how damaging it is to you your behaviour or habit it is familiar and therefore 'comfortable'. You also don't have to think about lighting up that cigarette or putting that food in your mouth, it also comes natural to you.

This frees freeing up the more conscious or thinking part of the brain to deal with more complex tasks such as processing new information. This part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex or the executive part of the brain, is not as energy efficient and required more energy.

Just imagine driving your car. You no longer have to consciously think about it, most of it is rather automatic till you are confronted with an unusual situation. Now imagine driving your car in another country where they drive on the other side of the road. Do you think your driving will be less automatic? Probably yes. You now have to think about what you are doing consciously and you feel less comfortable and confident, till you get more use to it.

Before you do however it feels strange, it is not what you are use to, it required more focus energy and effort. Given half a change you would probably like to revert back to what is comfortable and familiar. It takes the brain time to get use to the new situation but before it does something else happens. You need to know this if you want to make important and necessary changes in your life.

## **1. The brain resists change!**

Your brain actually resists change; not because it is trying to make things hard for you but is does so for a very good reason. Your brain's basic function is to keep your safe and its main interest your survival.

In order to keep you safe your brain is designed to detect if there is something different in your environment, something unusual or unfamiliar as familiar as this could mean that there is a threat. The brain has a reference library and will compare all incoming information to see if it matches. It will determine if what is happening is different from your experience, expectations and assumptions. When it detects a real mismatch it will activate an alarm in the brain, just like an error code. You brain will send a powerful message that something is amiss.

When the alarm is sounded the fear circuitry in our brain gets triggered off you become unsettled or worse you become stressed and anxious. This is what is supposed to happen as without this you would not survive.

When an error message show up your animal instincts takes over, the most primitive part of your brain gets activated as you need to be ready to fight or run away.

When this part of the brain, the amygdale, gets activated you tend to become more emotional, act impulsively and it becomes more difficult for you to think logically and decreasing your capacity for higher thought. Rather than overriding the error message you retreat to what is familiar. Just like any primitive creature you retreat to your familiar habitat, your 'home' your default position.

Are you already getting the picture? Change leads to error message, leads to feeling unsafe, leads to wanting to retreat to safety of what is familiar which is?... you guessed it... whatever you are used to, your habit, your food, cigarette, alcohol or whatever else your habit is.

So comparing information and alerting us to a mismatch is great for survival it is not so good for wanting to make changes. As for as the brain is concerned, change is a pain in the ..... brain!

## **2. Focusing on the gain not the loss**

Another reason that change is so difficult because of the way you drive your brain. There is a technique that racing car drivers use; don't look where you don't want to go. In other words look where you do want to go. Most people fail making changes in their life is because they focus on what they have to give up rather than on what they will gain. When the brain perceives a loss it interprets it as giving up part of its security; you want to give something up that is familiar? Not if I have my way! I am here to protect you. You want to go give up the familiar neuropath way and create a different one? No thanks I'd rather I rather stick to well trodden and familiar on.

When you focus on the loss rather than the gain it is hard for the brain to get excited and support you. Your brain needs a better reason or motif to start making changes and losing, giving up something trusted and familiar is not it.

## **The solutions**

So what you do if you want to make changes in your life change? Answer, you need to get your brain on board and get it to support you.

How?

1. Remember that if the brain's error code and therefore its alarm system gets activated by making a change, this does to mean that the change is wrong and you are in danger.
2. You need to realize that the brain protective mechanism is reactive, impulse based and prone to overreaction.

3. You need to override the rather primitive alarm system with reasoning and logic and understand that it is mostly a false alarm.
4. Realise that the data processing system is very fast and automatic and very fuel efficient
5. That the logical and reasoning part of the brain is much slower and very fuel consuming.
6. That this part of the brain rather than being automatic needs to be activated consciously.
7. Realise that it takes the brain time to get use to a new situation.
8. That the error code will keep popping up for a while till a new neuropath way is established and the new behaviour become a habit.
9. It takes about 30-60 days for a new behaviour to become engrained
10. That when you regress during that time you often have to start from the beginning. That is where discipline and determination come in.
11. That when under stress you need to be extra vigilant not to regress to old ineffective behavior. For example people will often revert back to smoking, drinking or over eating during times of stress, hence the saying; during stress we often regress.
12. Focus on the gain and the solution rather than the loss. The brain does not have to trigger of the alarm as it gains rather than loses something that is familiar.
13. Visualise want you to change or achieve. See the end in mind. Studies have found that your brain will already start to create new neuropath ways by visualizing what you want.
14. The unconscious part of the brain does not know the difference between what is real and what is imagined.
15. Understand that you are in charge of your brain and therefore your thinking. Let is serve you not the other way around.
16. Mind your mind
17. Understand the power of language. You command your brain by the words you use.
18. Your brain will believe what you tell it. So be careful what you say to yourself. You are a lazy so and so instructs your brain to become more of a lazy so and so.

19. Make sure that you tell yourself that you already got what you want. I am successful rather than I am going to be successful. I am getting slimmer every day not I am going to lose weight. I am a non smoker rather than I am trying to give up smoking.
20. Your brain can't reverse. Try not to think of a pink elephant. See!
21. Tell your brain what you want rather than what you don't want.
22. Be specific in what you would like to change and develop an action plan.
23. Solutions are uplifting, problems weigh you down.
24. Learn to become your own ally and supporter
25. Whatever you do don't beat yourself up it is bad for your brain!
26. Learn to accept your humanness
27. Don't be a tyrannical perfectionist
28. Keep on focusing and committed
29. Create a vision board or vision video (A collage of pictures with images that you want)
30. The brain takes itself very seriously make sure you lighten it up by having lots of laughs.

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