

Take Control Module 9 - Make Big Changes...with little steps



Objectives

You will:

- Learn about the Theory of Change as a tool to reaching your goals
- Understand what Kaizen is and how to apply it to your project.
- Re-evaluate your project with a new perspective to make sure you are on track.

“A year from now you will wish you had started today.”

--Karen Lamb

“If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.”

--Lao Tzu

“By changing nothing, nothing changes.”

--Tony Robbins

Instruction

After reading the welcome and previous eight modules on taking control of the clutter in your life, you have likely realized that this system does not come with a magic wand. But following the steps you have read and practicing with your coach will allow you to create the change you seek in your life.

The phone rang as I waited to hear from Laura for our complimentary coaching session. We were meeting to determine if working together would be a good fit. As I typically do, I had asked her a few questions to think about ahead of time.

1. What do you believe is your biggest organizing challenge?
2. Describe in vivid detail what an ideal day looks like for you.
3. What are you missing out on today because of your schedule, home or office? Where will you be a year from now if nothing changes? How will you feel if that happens?

Laura had prepared for our call and shared that laundry was by far her biggest organizing challenge. It was clear that laundry and her problem with handling it encompassed all other issues she was having with clutter. She lacked a schedule and routine for handling clothing. She was shopping and bringing too much in. She had more than enough clothing to begin with and she was avoiding going through it because tackling the project was just too much. Money was also an issue and so was motivation. Laura actually knew what she needed to do but would procrastinate until ‘motivation arrived’ in the form of a guest visiting or running out of underpants.

After our discussion, Laura decided she would stop clothing shopping, ask for ‘no clothes’ at her children’s birthdays and invite a few friends over on a weekend to help her tackle the mountain of clothing she had amassed. They could help her with washing, sorting, donating and putting away everything. The plan sounded great but... it never was implemented. Nothing happened until...

A few months later, Laura picked up a copy of the book, The Total Money Makeover by Dave Ramsey. The book spoke to the heart of her problems. She decided to become debt free and focused all of her energy on this project. In doing so, her family decided to downsize their home and move into a smaller space while saving to purchase their ideal home. The time to tackle the clothing had finally come. Holding on to all that excess and putting off the project was no longer possible. Now, Laura tackled the clothing with focus and intensity. She brought it under control and her family was able to move into a smaller space as planned. The clothing project was no longer daunting. It was just one small piece in a bigger puzzle that ends with her family moving into their dream home. The questions of what to keep or let go of answered themselves when she held them up to the measure of, “Does this mismatched, too small sock fit into our new tiny apartment?”

This quote from David Tolin’s book Buried in Treasures is the cornerstone of making changes, “People start to work on their [hoarding] problem when the reasons for change outweigh the reasons for not changing, and not a minute sooner.”¹ For Laura, until she had set that higher goal that encompassed her whole family and life, as irritating as the laundry problem was, it was not enough to motivate a change.

The Theory of Change

Wikipedia.org states, “Theory of Change (ToC) is a specific type of methodology for planning, participation, and evaluation that is used in the philanthropy, not-for-profit and government sectors to promote social change.² Theory of Change defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions.”³ Does this sound familiar? If you answered, “yes,” then you have noticed the path that we have been creating through the last eight modules of the Take Control Organizing System. While this methodology is typically used in the non-profit, government and business type sectors, the ideas and concepts translate well to creating change in a household or office setting.

¹ Tolin, et al Buried in Treasures Oxford University Press: New York, 2007. pg44

² Wikipedia.org “Theory of Change” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change Accessed 3/5/15

³ P. Brest (2010). "The Power of Theories of Change". Stanford Social Innovation Review. Spring.

The Center for the Theory of Change goes on to define the “Theory of Change” as, “ a roadmap to get you from here to there. If it is good and complete, your roadmap can be read by others and show that you know how to chart your course. ”⁴ You have created your road map, your vision, taking time to set goals that are measurable and specific. It is likely that you, or anyone else, could pick up your plan and understand where you are going, why are you are taking action and how you plan to do it.

An important piece of Change Theory is the measurability of the system so that you can track progress.

“The ultimate success of any Theory of Change lies in its ability to demonstrate progress on the achievement of outcomes. Evidence of success confirms the theory and indicates that the initiative is effective. Therefore, the outcomes in a Theory of Change must be coupled with indicators that guide and facilitate measurement. Indicators may be said to operationalize the outcomes – that is, they make the outcomes understandable in concrete, observable and measurable terms.”²

You must be able to ‘demonstrate progress’ in order to move forward in your change. In other words, you must be able to show improvement or progress towards your goals so that you know your changes are working.

Already on this journey you have marked your starting point by tracking your time, taking photographs and identifying your stumbling blocks. In addition, you have created SMART Goals that are time sensitive and measurable. You can use these goals to check your progress and adjust for any necessary changes.

Although we have talked about ‘Small Steps’ in previous modules, we are now going to delve deeper into small steps, or a method called, ‘Kaizen’.

⁴ Center for Theory of Change “What is Theory of Change” <http://www.theoryofchange.org/> Accessed 3/5/15

Kaizen - Why it Works

When talking with clients, potential clients and people I have met networking; I hear the same word repeatedly and that word is 'OVERWHELMED'. It is always the same word to describe how the clients I work with feel about the challenges they are facing.

But why is it always this word? Overwhelmed means buried or drowned beneath a huge mass, defeated completely, inundated.

So, if you are feeling 'buried beneath a huge mass' how can you unbury yourself?

Kaizen is one technique. You are probably already familiar with this technique even if you have never heard the word. Let me give you some proverbs as examples:

“The longest part of the journey is said to be the passing of the gate.”

[Marcus Terentius Varro](#), On Agriculture
Roman scholar (116 BC - 27 BC) 1st Century

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

[Lao-tzu](#), The Way of Lao-tzu
Chinese philosopher (604 BC - 531 BC) 6th Century

“When eating an elephant, take one bite at a time.”

Creighton Abrams,
American Army General 1914-1974 20th Century AD

Kaizen is small thoughts, questions. or actions that when repeated over time add up to big changes. Kaizen is the first step of the journey, the passing of the gate and one bite of the elephant.

Overview

In 1940, W. Edwards Deming, an American engineer, statistician, professor, author, lecturer, and management consultant⁵, introduced continuous quality improvement to help American manufacturers accelerate their manufacturing capacity at the beginning of World War II. Later, Japan adopted Deming's process to rebuild itself after World War II. The term **kaizen** was born.

Robert Maurer, Ph.D., introduced the application of kaizen to individuals in his book [One Small Step Can Change Your Life](#), published in 2004. Maurer also explained the neurology of why kaizen works.

In this section, I will share the work of Maurer to help understand the brain and to explore how you can use the small steps of kaizen to help challenge chronic disorganization.

First Let's Explore: How Your Brain Handles Change

Why Does Kaizen Work?

The small steps of kaizen disarm the brain's fear response, stimulating rational thought and creative play. Fear of change is deeply rooted in our brain's physiology. When fear takes hold, it can prevent creativity, change, and success.

⁵ Wikipedia.org "W. Edwards Deming" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W. Edwards Deming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Edwards_Deming) Accessed 3/6/15

Our amygdala, which resides deep in the midbrain, is the part of brain that controls automatic systems. This part of our brain is crucial for survival because it controls the fight, flight, or freeze response. It is designed to alert parts of the body for action in the face of immediate danger. Difficulty arises because this part of our brain sets off alarm bells whenever we want to make a departure from our usual, safe routine. Kaizen allows our brain to bypass the amygdala because it reduces the novelty and increases the engagement of the cortex. The cortex is the part of the brain that controls executive function (higher order thinking such as time management, short term memory, organization, etc) and creativity.

David Rock, author of Your Brain at Work, refers to this function of the amygdala as our **error-detection circuit**. We do not want it to engage in these instances of positive change. Instead, we want to keep the cortex working. The little steps of kaizen are a stealth solution to bypass triggering fear.

Our brain begins to create “software” for our desired change by laying down new neural pathways and building new habits. Resistance to change begins to weaken.

In his book, One Small Step Can Change Your Life, Robert Maurer uses examples from his work as a psychologist to highlight the effectiveness of the Kaizen method.

He suggests six actions which can be approached using the ‘smallest possible step.’ (Module 4, Module 6 page 3)

1. Ask Small Questions

“Make your questions small, and you reduce the chances of waking the amygdala and arousing debilitating fear. When fear is quiet, the brain can take in the questions and pop out answers on its own timetable.” ~Robert Maurer

- a. What is one very small step you might take to improve our process or product?
- b. Your brain loves questions, they are like puzzles
- c. Once it starts figuring out the answers to the questions, sometimes behavior changes automatically.
- d. What is one small step you could take to begin working on your decluttering project? Example: Where do you leave your keys?

2. Think Small Thoughts -

“Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field.” Dwight D. Eisenhower, September 11, 1956

Although, my understanding of this quote is likely not what Eisenhower meant, the idea of thinking about an activity is much easier than actually engaging in that activity.

- a. Use Mind Sculpture – Imagine, with all your senses, performing the action you are resistant to. Do it for SECONDS every day. You will soon be ready to begin that activity and your resistance will be reduced. You will be successful.
- b. Example: Imagine you are filing, imagine where you will put the files, use all of your senses and imagine a positive outcome such as having the information you need when a coworker asks or feeling calm when sitting at your desk.

3. Take Small Actions

Take actions that are so small you know you can complete them as surely as you know the sun will rise. So small they are silly.

- a. They require no will power, money, big investments in time or major supplies
- b. The mind will develop mastery and obey the instructions we are sending it.
- c. Small actions melt resistance.
- d. Doing even a little is better than NOT doing a lot.
- e. Examples: File 1 piece of paper per day, delete one email per day, march in place for 1 minute per day

4. Solve Small Problems

- a. Solving Small problems prevents big ones down the road
- b. This action allows for continuous improvement just like Deming described prior to WWII
- c. Learn to spot small problems:
 - i. Recall a time you made a major mistake, determine if there were ‘warning signs’
 - ii. Identify one small mistake you made today without judgement
 - iii. Does the small mistake reflect a larger problem?
 - iv. Are there ways you irritate others?
- d. Watch out for blind spots at the beginning and end of the process and when facing an overwhelming challenge. Such as: I always forget to take out the trash.

5. Bestow Small Rewards

- a. Small rewards create intrinsic (internal) instead of extrinsic (external) motivation
 - b. They are free or inexpensive
 - c. They are appropriate for the goal and the person
 - d. Examples: Put a gold star on the calendar, give a pat on the back when you do your small step.
6. Identify Small Moments
- “The true creator may be recognized by his ability to always find about him, in the commonest and humblest thing, items worthy of note.” – Igor Stravinsky
- a. Appreciate the small moments, be mindful
 - b. Notice when things are happening and when they are not
 - c. Examples: “I got the trash out! Yay!” or “The sunset is my favorite color...”

Through the small actions of Kaizen you can bypass your fear and anxiety towards making a change, build new habits and create the change you desire.

You can remove OVERWHELM from your vocabulary by unburying, one small step at a time.

Pulling it All Together

Novelist Ellen Glasgow said, “All change is not growth, as all movement is not forward.” Making changes just to make changes will not necessarily be a benefit. What you are seeking to accomplish in this program is to make the most effective changes you can in order to reach your desired long term outcome. This is your “vision”. The reason that Laura was not successful in changing her laundry habits originally was because her vision was not, “to have a home free of laundry woes”. Her vision was something else entirely. Once she was clear on her vision, to move into her ideal family home, her focus and the tasks that were needed to reach that vision became exceptionally clear.

At this point, please review the vision that you created for yourself in Module 4: Where To Begin. Does it still make sense? Is this vision clear? If not, take time now to re-write your vision.

Next, what conditions must exist for you to realize your vision? These conditions should align with the goals that you wrote in Module 5: Goal Setting 101. If not, take time now to re-write your goals to explain clearly the conditions that must exist to realize your vision.

Last, using the ideas from Kaizen that you have just read, what are the steps you need to take to create the conditions to reach your vision? Whittle your steps down to the absolute smallest step, thought, question, celebration that is necessary to begin. Once this small piece is complete, ask yourself what is the next small step, thought, etc needed?

Your goals had markers, points of review, to remind you to check in on your progress. For instance, you may have set a goal to clear your desk by the end of the month. When the end of the month comes, or by the 15th of the month, you should check in with your goal to see what progress you have made and if you are being effective towards accomplishing what you set forth to do.

Additional Reading:

One Woman's Trash is Another's Treasure: How Your Clutter Can Benefit Others

Do you think you have enough? It is easy when we are affected by the issues of severe national debt, a slow economy, and high unemployment to feel like we just do not have enough. But compared to the rest of the world, we are still extremely affluent.⁶ Not only that, but the majority of us fit into Pareto's principle, the 80/20 rule, that states we use only 20% of what we own.

After a season of giving, when our wallets are feeling a bit empty but our hips are feeling a bit fuller than usual, and the toy chests are over-flowing, I am always distinctly aware of having more than enough. The beginning of the year is a natural time to reset good habits and remember what is essential. It is also a great time to declutter.

⁶ <http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/why-give/how-rich-am-i>

Aside from the obvious benefits of freeing up space in your home, giving you peace of mind, knowing where to find things and creating systems, decluttering has another benefit; sharing our abundance with others. For some, this side perk is just another reason to smile about the progress you are making. For others knowing that your excess can help others is motivational. Consider the blankets in your closet. Do you change them seasonally? Do you have any that are not your favorite? There are people who have no power or heat. Do you think your extra blankets could help someone in need?

The Stuff Stop⁷ is a website created to connect your unwanted stuff with those in need. You have the options to search by your location or by what you have to donate. Additionally, freecycle.org is a network that allows you to join a group in your area. You post the items you have and others respond with their need. Everything is exchanged for free.

The benefits do not stop with the humanitarian need either. When we donate our clutter rather than hoard or discard it, there are significant environmental benefits as well. Often when we hold on to our stuff indefinitely, the items lose their value either by becoming obsolete or breaking and must be thrown away in the end. However, throwing items away overburdens our landfills. If we truly cannot let go of our excess, then our families are left to handle it when we pass leaving a legacy of stress and frustration, and stuff that rarely ends up in the best possible place.

But when we declutter along the way, we bless others with our excess, we feel good about ourselves and we give our families a gift of peace when we pass. I have yet to see a person that feels great because she has so much stuff and yet repeatedly the opposite is true.

If you wish to learn more about a minimalist lifestyle, I recommend The Joy of Less by Francine Jay and Enough by Will Jr. Davis. In the end you will find that you do have enough to benefit others and that the feeling of abundance and joy in our lives increases when we do so.

Tasks

⁷ The Stuff Stop thestuffstop.com

- ❑ Re-evaluate your WHY. Make sure it is greater than your desire to stay the same.
- ❑ Review your Vision and Goals to ensure they still make sense to your project
- ❑ Using the theory of Kaizen, create the next step for each goal you are working on.
- ❑ Continue to act on your plan created in Module 7: Get Organized
- ❑ Complete the [Review of Module 9](#) and meet with your coach.