

Coaching Yourself

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Do you know the self-development you need in order to reach your goals? Do you have an ambition that you've not fully initiated? Perhaps you'd like to stop a bad habit, build a new skill, or simply improve your performance. Or perhaps you would like to help someone else achieve their ambition. Where do you start and what should you do?

The first step is making the choice to improve yourself. Or more accurately, to get out of your comfort zone and develop. University of Scranton psychology professor John Norcross conducted a study of two-hundred New Year resolution-making adults over a period of two years. Those who succeeded in sticking to their resolutions employed a variety of strategies, such as avoiding temptation-laden situations and reinforcing good behavior with rewards. He also found that the single best predictor of New Year's resolution success was readiness to change, how prepared the person was to enter the action stage of behavior change.

Being ready to change is both a mindset and ability. The mindset is having an accurate awareness of what you need to change, the motivation to change, and the belief that you can truly develop in a new way. For adults, development usually involves unlearning something old while learning something new which is why change is so difficult. It often involves stopping an old routine and replacing it with a new one. This requires determination and discipline, and therefore having the right mindset is the foundation to self-improvement.

An integral part of developing the right mindset is having no doubt that you can handle temptations and overcome your fears. Through a combination of your genetic make-up, life experiences, and knowledge, your brain has built up a resistance to certain things. If part of your development requires overcoming that resistance, you need to know how to do so before you embark on your development. When people are angry, hungry, tired or emotionally aroused in some way, they don't react rationally. So plan for these circumstances ahead of time giving yourself the confidence and know-how to confront or avoid them.

With the right mindset in place, turn your attention to developing the ability to change. Having the ability to change is first having the knowledge of how you can best develop in the area you want to develop and selecting the best approach to follow. Next, it is creating a written plan of easily started incremental steps that move you through a progression of specific milestones. It includes actions that free up the time and energy that reaching your goal will require. It also includes specifying the dates and conditions under which you will start and complete your actions which you will track.

Another component of having the ability to change is having the assistance of other people. Others are a must for giving you feedback to establish an accurate awareness of how you need to develop. Others give you encouragement and help hold you accountable. Others are also a rich source of pleasure as they join you in celebrating the achievement of your milestones.

Lastly, the ability to change includes making the change permanent. It is retaining what you learn, moving your new behavior into your subconscious, and making your new habits part of your normal routine. It is allowing your old network of synaptic connections in your brain that represented your old style, approach, attitude, or behavior to be replaced with a stronger new network of synaptic connections representing your new self. It is plying yourself daily and following your plan until your desired behavior is as natural as brushing your teeth with your dominate hand.

This article is adapted from *Activating Your Ambition – A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others*. For more information, visit www.activatingyourambition.com.

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