

New and Improved
THE 1999 MODEL
by Claudette E.S. Coombs

In the marketplace, market forces drive the revision of current consumer products or the introduction of new ones. Sometimes a product loses its distinctive appeal in an environment being bombarded with shiny new versions. Other times, an original becomes lost in a world of imitations. Sometimes an ingenious entrepreneur recognizes an unfilled niche, and fills it. In any case, a decision is made that the consumer world is ready for a change!!

Motivation for Change

We also experience our reasons for change. When motivation is high enough and benefits of change outweigh benefits of the status quo, then we are ready for something new. The triggers that motivate us range from trivial events to drastic life traumas. Think of the following. Have you ever been influenced by any of them to change thoughts, a behaviour or an approach?

- ... the first page of a new exercise book.
- ... the end of an old year and beginning of a new year.
- ... the threat of, or results from, a medical visit.
- ... illness or death among family or friends.
- ... an unsatisfying work environment.
- ... difficult home conditions.
- ... a personal moral dilemma.
- ... new financial challenges.
- ... an accident, which did have, or could have had, significant consequences.
- ... an unexpected confrontation.

We use these triggers and numerous others to kick start our efforts for improvement. We may have already thought about making changes and these give added incentive; or, we may have been surprised by an incident and suddenly realize that things have to change quickly!

Areas Open for Revision

We can easily create a list of areas for beneficial change. The mental and physical energy required to make change happen varies, as does the magnitude of the impact of our changes. The following are common, everyday examples of areas in which we frequently try to initiate and maintain change.

- ... lifestyle -- nutrition; fitness; substance use (prescribed or not).
- ... interpersonal relationships -- communication; trust; security; mutual understanding; conflict resolution.
- ... personal growth -- positive thoughts, attitudes, conversation and activities; forgiveness; emotional coping.
- ... personal skills -- organization; time management; goal setting; stress reduction.
- ... professional enhancement -- knowledge; skills; techniques; relationships.

Increased medical information or a specific health problem often leads to a decision to replace current practices with healthier choices. Reducing caffeine and increasing activity are two choices which make our bodies healthier but also provide psychological benefit.

Interpersonal relationships present one of the greatest sources of stress for teachers. This becomes a terrible cycle when difficulties at work lead to stress which then impacts negatively on relationships at home or, the reverse. Identifying flaws in the patterns of interaction, then learning the skills to enact change can produce rewards which go far beyond the originally defined problem area.

Maslow describes "self actualization" as the ultimate goal for humans. We may dream of reaching our potential in each of our roles in life but we rarely believe that we will ever do that. For some of us this is enough to give up trying. However, when we experience a level of success, we feel a renewed sense of accomplishment and may once again believe that self improvement is worth the effort. Reading, observation and self-monitoring are valuable ways to identify personal areas to explore.

Enhancing personal skills can lead to a greater sense of satisfaction with our daily lives and the way we manage the world around us. Learning to re-establish and accept priorities gives us emotional freedom to do the things we believe are most important, rather than feel guilty for all of the other things we are unable to accomplish.

The most significant limitation in our professional development quest is not necessarily the strength of motivation, but is instead related to our access to necessary resources, including time. This often causes frustration and a feeling of futility. Don't waste the energy there. Instead, selecting a favourite (or the most critical) area and establishing a workplan and timeline can help to incorporate professional growth into even the most restrictive of schedules.

Readiness for Change

We are not likely to make changes, especially if they are difficult; require a lot of effort, time or resources; or, if we really don't believe that we need to change. Yet, when we are determined that we want things to be different, we can make things happen. Change can be viewed as a process with several consecutive steps.

The first step is an awareness of the issue and a recognition that there is some value in change. However, this is only the beginning and it does not guarantee action. After all, everyone knows that smoking is a health hazard, but there are many people who do not want to change their smoking habits.

The next step relies on the personal belief that "I" can benefit from a change and I have the intention to make the change. Although this is an essential next step, it also does not guarantee action. If we learn that our cholesterol level is borderline, most of us intend to change our eating patterns. At least we did intend to change until we were faced with a special treat at a dinner party or the option of homemade french fries at lunch.

So how do we get to that magical point where we actually do something? Well, that's the next step. We prepare for the change and make a commitment to start. There really is nothing magical about it, so don't bother waiting for the lightning to strike. At this point we check out the fitness schedule, buy the right socks and go to the first class.

Have we finally arrived? No, not quite yet. Now the work begins! It's called "maintenance". We have recognized the benefit of change, learned how to make it happen, and have even practiced it. Now we must incorporate the new way of thinking or behaving into our daily life so that it actually becomes the natural and preferred way to respond. We are creating new attitudes and habits which lead to **the new and improved '99 model**. Have you ever decided to have more patience or communicate differently with a colleague, partner or child? Have you also discovered that after the first attempt you revert to old ways, either automatically or deliberately? If your answer is yes, then welcome to the real world of change. Even though we believe that it is important to behave differently, and we want to do it, and we really do try, it is still hard work. We are trying to replace well established ways with new, sometimes uncertain, ways. It takes strong commitment and lots of repetition to get it right. For most personal changes, the key to success is being able to stick with our decision. The awareness, the skills and the test run are essential pre-requisites, but the commitment to action is mandatory in order to achieve results.

Consider your triggers for change: a health concern? a threat to your relationship? unexpected difficulties? private discontent? conflict?

Now consider your motivation for change: the potential benefit outweighs the cost; the risk of waiting or not acting isn't personally justifiable; a belief that life can be better.

Where do you stand? Are you ready to start the process of gathering the information, learning new skills, then practicing and incorporating the changes into the revised '99 model? Good luck in creating a model that will be a match for the challenges of the year 2000!

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