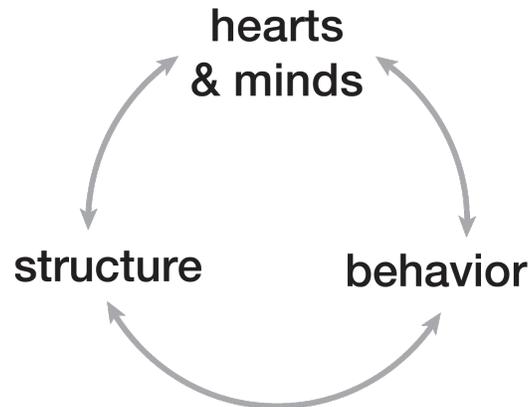


*"One of the most difficult things is not to change society – but to change yourself."*

Nelson Mandela

The Wheel of Change is a powerful tool for facilitating individual transformation – our own and those with whom we may coach, mentor or support.



Many of our efforts to make change in our lives fail. Gym memberships skyrocket every January as a result of New Year's resolutions. However, 80% of new members drop out within 30-60 days. And less than 5% stick with their exercise goals.

Professional help is no magic bullet for individual change efforts. Almost 50% of psychotherapy patients drop out before completing treatment. For those who persist, success is debatable. For example, research shows that fewer than 50% of married couples completing counseling end up happily married.

The Wheel of Change is a systems approach to change. We humans are a complex system, encompassing an inner life (our thoughts and feelings), habits of behavior, and an external environment that has huge impact on us. Systems by their nature tend to resist change. Most change efforts fail because they fail to address the system as a whole. We may experience what seems like progress, or even a breakthrough, but all too often the system, like a rubber band, tends to pull us back.

The Wheel of Change guides us to attend in an integrated way to each of these three domains:

- 1. Heart-Mind<sup>1</sup>**                      our inner life: our beliefs, emotions, motivation, etc.
- 2. Behavior Change**                      our behavior, our habits, the choices we make to act and not to act
- 3. Structural Change**                      our environment: everything external that makes up our "life"

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<sup>1</sup> Many cultures consider the heart and mind to be one integrated system. Classical Chinese philosophy, for example, use the word *Xin* to express the unifying concept of heart-mind, said to guide all human actions.

## HEART-MIND

A skillful personal change program usually begins with attending to our heart-mind. If we start by getting clear about our motivation, our desires and our concerns, we are far more likely to engage skillfully with changing our behavior and the structures of our life. Our inner work helps us bring our best to the change effort, rather than fighting the phantoms of our own ambivalence. By working skillfully with our heart-mind, instead of failed New Year's resolutions and backsliding, we stay the course.



Inner work is a journey, not a destination. We initiate our personal change programs by attending to our heart-mind, but we continue our inner work throughout the change process.

Here are just some of the many ways we might attend to the needs of our heart-mind in a personal change program. Think of this as a checklist. We don't need to address all these elements in every change process, but evaluating the need for each element ensures we attend to all the key variables that might further undermine the changes we seek.

### 1. Purpose

It's always useful to begin by reconnecting to our Purpose – our deeply felt experience of that which gives our life meaning. Purpose is like a guiding light, providing direction as well as a source of power and wisdom from which we can draw. *Why* do we want to make this change? The stronger the 'Why' the greater our motivation to change our habits and the externals of our lives.

### 2. Intention

Be clear and aligned on exactly what we want to create. We want to harness our will and deal proactively with any unclear intent or ambivalence so that we can engage the full power of our heart-mind behind the change process.

### 3. Mindfulness & insight:

What are the beliefs or mental frames that potentially stand in the way of change? What are the shifts in mindset that will open our heart-mind to new possibilities? How will we stay focused and self-reflective throughout the pace and trance of everyday life? What practices and tools can we use to remember who we are, what we're about, and our intent to change? How can we continue to strengthen our new, empowering mindsets?

#### 4. Self-compassion

Too often the impulse to change is driven by our inner judge, that parental/societal voice chronically harping on us about who we should be and what we should do. This harsh nagging inevitably generates inner conflict and various forms of passive resistance. We fail to follow-through on our New Year's resolutions. We get impatient with ourselves, and get demoralized or give up when change doesn't come easily. The process of change is actually facilitated by a practice of self-compassion.

#### 5. Self-responsibility

Lurking in the background behind the things in our lives we want to change are often feelings of victimization: *"I can't... But... I have to... It's too hard... They won't let me... I have too much to do..."*

We have reasons, stories and excuses about why things are the way they are. There may well be real world obstacles we face in trying to make changes in our lives. We may fail. But in order to skillfully meet these external challenges, we must face and meet our inner obstacles. Taking full responsibility for our choices helps us mobilize our full power to accomplish our goals.

### BEHAVIOR CHANGE

This inner work is the foundation for personal change, but change usually also requires us to shift our habits of behavior--to begin making different choices about what we do and don't do.

#### 6. Goals

We begin by translating our intentions into clear goals and outcomes. What exactly are the new behaviors needed to realize our goals? How will we know when we have achieved them? We need to set milestones along the way to our larger goals, to help keep us motivated and on track.

#### 7. Commitments

It's important to make very clear, specific do-able commitments. But we should only make those commitments we absolutely intend to keep. It's usually more skillful to make a series of smaller, more manageable commitments at which we are likely to succeed. This builds confidence and sustains motivation for the change process.

#### 8. Practices

Our habits are... habitual. We have spent many years unconsciously "practicing" our patterns of behavior – some functional, others less so. These repetitions form neural pathways in the brain that are the biological basis of habit. To change behavior, we must consciously practice new behaviors – again and again, until they become a new habit.



## 9. Feedback

We need regular feedback to help us keep moving in the direction of our goals. Imagine if you were trying to learn to play golf and never saw where the ball landed. We need to get creative about tracking our progress: journaling, feedback from those who know us, or actual metrics (e.g. # of times we exercised this week or # of days our mood was positive).

## 10. Support

We don't have to go it alone. We all can use encouragement and help in creating our new habits. This might look like: mobilizing our support network, reaching out to friends and colleagues, training, coaching, a class or workshop, etc.

## STRUCTURES:

We are profoundly impacted by our environment. To create sustainable change, we will almost always need to make changes in our external life. These structural changes feed our heart-mind and support our new behaviors, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of change (hence the name, The Wheel of Change.)



## 11. Activities

Which of our current activities support or inhibit the changes we wish to make? What changes in activities will best empower the change process? Joining a gym? Cutting down on net surfing or Facebook? Shifting our role at work?

## 12. Schedule

A Martian anthropologist studying human behavior might well conclude that many of us are in a slave-master relationship to a small piece of machinery (called "our calendar") that appears to continually give us orders of what to do next. We often appear to forget that we are in charge of our schedule, not vice versa. What changes might we want to make in the nature, the timing, and the pace of how we schedule our lives?

## 13. Relationships

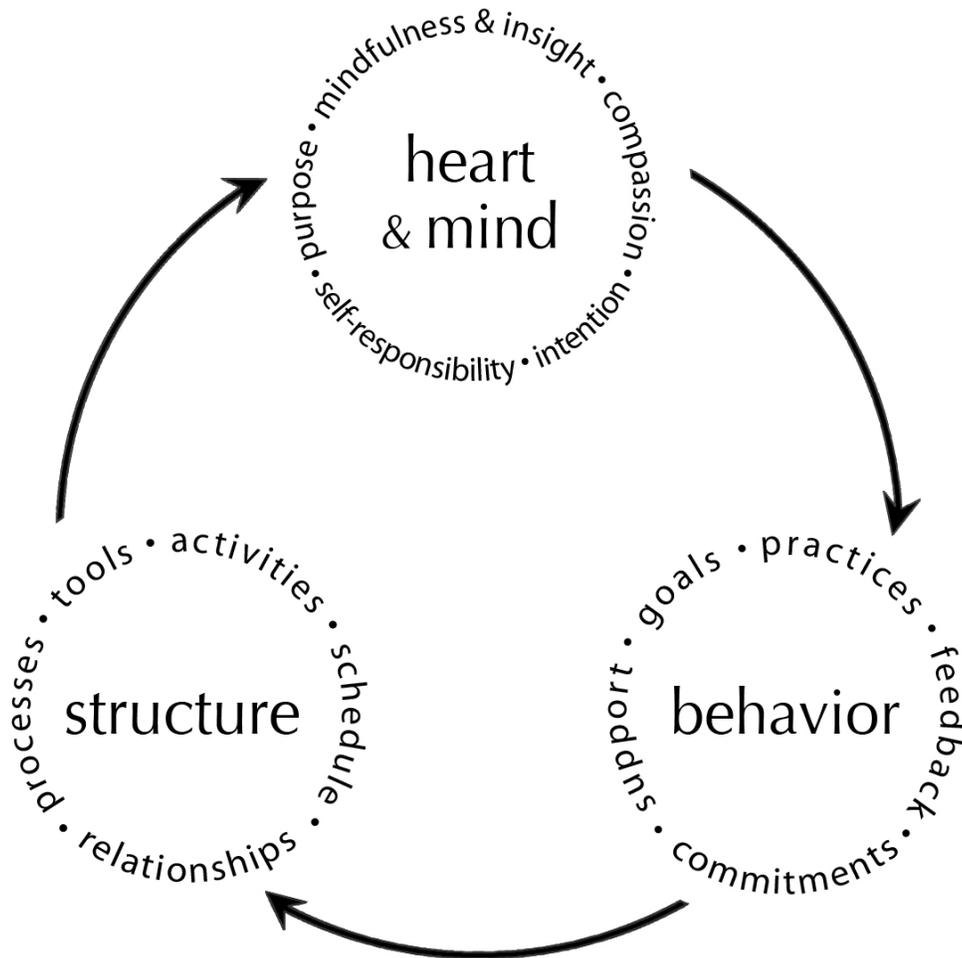
We are very influenced by the people we associate with. We want to be conscious of this in creating our plans for change – just like those struggling to stop drinking need to avoid social situations where there is alcohol. Are there certain relationships (or groups) that either support or inhibit the changes we want to make? Are there certain relationships in which we want to invest more (or less) to best support the changes we seek to make?

**14. Processes:**

Processes are the routine methods by which we do things. Some examples of processes include: how we do our personal planning, the way we organize our work flow, how we delegate, the way we organize our desk or computer files, or our routine for keeping our home clean. In planning for change, we want to step back and examine all relevant processes with a fresh eye to see how they might support or undermine the changes we seek.

**15. Tools**

Tools include any physical object: ranging from computer software and smartphones to bikes and home exercise machines. What additional tools might support the changes we wish to make?



In planning any given change, we won't need to attend to every one of these elements, but the Wheel of Change can help us to identify and address all the critical drivers of change in each of the three domains of our lives:

- What is my inner work – the needed shifts in my heart-mind?
- What changes do I need to make in my behavior?
- What changes do I need to make in my environment – the structures of my life?

Here are two examples of what this looks like in action:

**Challenge #1:**

I need to limit my increasing number of speaking engagements without offending allies.

**The Plan:**

Heart-Mind

- Set for myself a clear and compelling personal vision for change.
- Fully align behind the vision. Deal with any inner unclarity, such as:
  - needing to be needed
  - fear that if I say 'no' I may never get more invitations
  - guilt about saying "no"

Behavior

- Communicate to others about the huge increase in requests.
- Turn down requests by saying: *"I am only able to make XX speaking engagements this year, and have already committed to those."*

Structure

- Set very clear guidelines for my assistant regarding:
  - how many engagements
  - how much travel
  - criteria and prioritization for selection
- Establish a high fee structure for talks that will eliminate many requests (but have a fee waiver process to allow politically important ones back in).

**Challenge #2:**

I'm not getting sufficient exercise

**The Plan:**

Heart-Mind

- Do some self-reflection why I've failed to be consistent in the past.
- See what I might do differently this time.
- Connect to the heartfelt desire for more exercise rather than exercise feeling like something I should do.

Behavior

- Commit to yoga class once a week and two 30-minute practice sessions at home.
- Commit to *Zumba* class twice a week. It's more fun than the workout machines that I consistently have failed to do regularly.
- Engage my partner as an active support for my new choices.

Structure

- Join the new health club that is a bit more expensive but much closer to my house.
- Buy a DVD yoga class to practice with at home, as I find it hard to do it on my own without structure.
- Find an exercise buddy who will go to *Zumba* with me. I seem to do better with company.
- Renegotiate carpool for picking up the kids from childcare to accommodate the *Zumba* schedule.
- Create a monthly checklist to track my exercise commitments.

By engaging in this systemic approach to change, we create a virtuous cycle in which changes in one domain provoke and reinforce change in the other two domains.

The Wheel of Change is a model for transformation: change that is profound and fundamental, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed will never go back to exactly what it was before.

*"We must be the change  
we want to see in the world."*

Gandhi