

# The Secret Science of Change: Stop Being So Hard on Yourself

By Suzie Wolfer LCSW  
[www.suziewolfer.com](http://www.suziewolfer.com)

**Most people have an Inner Critic that tries to brow beat or guilt them into change.** You may hear that little voice saying “You should . . .” or “You shouldn’t . . .” I call this *shoulding* on yourself. It’s not very much fun.

**If you feel bad enough, you may make temporary changes,** but then fall back in to the old pattern once the self-hate-motivation has worn off. And guess who’s waiting to tell you what a loser you are . . . the Inner Critic again.

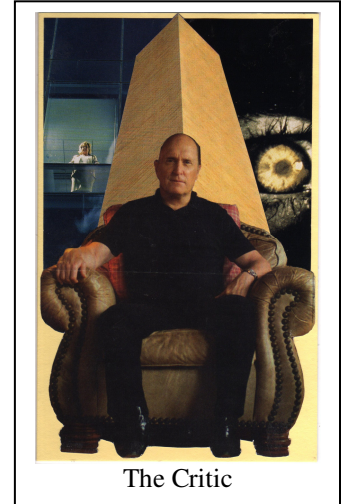
This cycle can be very discouraging.

**Most people mistakenly believe that change is a simple 2 step process:**

1. You make up your mind to change
2. Then you change.

Opps. Not so easy.

Behavioral scientist, John Prochaska, studied 1000s of people who successfully changed an important pattern in their lives. And he found some amazing results



**It takes 5 distinct stages to create long lasting, satisfying, sustainable change.**

And each stage has a number of tasks. It’s a little like a baby learning to walk or riding a bicycle. So give yourself a break!

**Think of something you’d like to change.** It might be arguing less with your child, going to the gym, eating more healthy food, cutting down on alcohol or drugs, dropping a few pounds. Then take this little survey. It will help you identify what stage of change you are in and perhaps be a little more gentle with yourself. You can tell the Inner Critic to get off your back.

Circle the number based on how true each statement feels for you right now, not what you have felt in the past or would like to feel.

Then see the scoring below and what it means. Then if you’re ready, get to work!

**1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Undecided    4 = Agree    5 = Strongly Agree**

**What I should do** \_\_\_\_\_

**What I want to change is** \_\_\_\_\_

Typical thoughts of each stage	Disagree					Agree				
1. As far as I'm concerned, I don't have any problems that need changing.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. I guess I have faults, but there's nothing that I really need to change.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

3. I have worries but so does the next guy. Why spend time thinking about them?	1	2	3	4	5
4. I've been thinking that I might want to change something about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a problem with _____ and I really think I should work at it.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I wish I had more ideas on how to solve the problem with _____.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I'm talking with people who can help me with _____	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have started working on my problems with _____ but I would like help.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have a plan to start one of these days when it feels right.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Even though I'm not always successful in changing, I am at least working on my problem with _____	1	2	3	4	5
11. I've been making these changes for the last 3 months and it's starting to feel pretty good.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Anyone can talk about changing; I'm actually doing something about it.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I have been successful in working on my problem with _____ for quite a while now. Sometimes I slip, but overall it's going well	1	2	3	4	5
14. I thought once I had resolved my problem with _____ I would be free of it, but sometimes I still find myself struggling with it.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I'd like some help so I don't slip back with the positive changes I've made again	1	2	3	4	5

### Scoring

Stage of Change	Item Number	Total Score
Pre-contemplation Stage	1 - 3	
Contemplation Stage	4 - 6	
Preparation Stage	7 - 9	
Action Stage	10 - 12	
Maintenance Stage	13 - 15	

Notice in which stage you are in and notice what you expect of yourself. Are you working on the most effective tasks?. If you are trying to be in the action stage but have not completed the tasks of the stage before, you may feel frustrated and discouraged. **It may be time to revise how fast you think you can make change, so that it is a satisfying and sustainable new part of your life.**

Read on to find examples of each stage, and a check box for the tasks of each stage.

Stage	Building the "House of Change"	Example of someone with diabetes	Tasks
-------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------	-------

<p><b>Pre-contemplation</b> - You probably <b>don't recognize that there is a problem.</b> People may tell you there is a problem but it's either not important, or you simply don't agree</p>	<p>You're living in a tent and it's just fine with you.</p>	<p>You have periods of blurred vision, can't think straight. Your feet feel funny at times. You're thirsty all the time. Or you may not even notice any of these symptoms</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Notice that there are problems or disadvantages to the current state of affairs</p>
<p><b>Contemplation</b> - In this stage <b>you start to see that there is a problem.</b> You wonder if the things you do, think or feel bring about the problem. You start to see that choices you make lead to unwanted consequences. <b>You may believe that you can't do anything about it,</b> but you see your role. The more you define and explore the problem, the more clarity you get that a solution may be possible. You may develop a little more confidence that a better way is possible. You are contemplating. You can not skip this stage! For some people it can last weeks, months, years and even most of one's life. You think maybe some day you'll do something about it.</p>	<p>You notice that it's drafty in the tent. You don't have friends over much. You think life might be easier if you had a house with electricity, plumbing and heat. This awareness is the foundation for our New House of Change</p>	<p>You start to notice that every time you eat a big dessert in the middle of the afternoon you feel awful. You can't think straight. You're VERY thirsty. And you have to pee all the time.</p> <p>You start to see the connection. You might talk to friends about this and they suggest maybe you have diabetes.</p> <p>You may even go to the doctor and find out you have Type 2 Diabetes. But you're not quite ready to give up your big desserts, exercise or lose weight.</p> <p>You are a little curious but not really serious about doing anything about it yet.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Become aware of problems associated with behavior.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Notice ambivalent regarding positives and negatives.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Explore the potential to change.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Develop the desire to change behavior and some confidence and commitment.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Considering change in the future, not now</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Start to focus on future not past,</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>Decision Point</b> <i>Something happens that wakes you up, Makes you think.</i></p>	<p>Your tent floods and you know you don't want to live like this any more.</p>	<p>You get so mentally foggy that your miss a deadline at work and people are really mad at you. You know you need to make some changes.</p>	<p>This is an event, not a stage that helps you realize that negatives of the behavior outweigh the positives. And you are now motivated to take action.</p>

<p><b>Preparation</b> – When you arrive in the land of Preparation, <b>you clearly see that what you do, think and feel, brings causes the problem. It isn't someone else's fault.</b> You start to see that since you are the cause, you may be part of the solution too. <b>You start to develop confidence</b> <b>You start thinking about a plan to change.</b></p> <p><b>IMPORTANT!</b> Notice that you are not changing anything yet! But you are getting ready. And like the contemplation stage, you cannot skip over this stage.</p>	<p>You put up the stud walls, plumbing, sheet rock, get the wiring done, lay on the roof, install the windows, doors. The structure is set up, but it's not ready to live in yet. It's not sustainable as a permanent dwelling</p>	<p>This time you talk to your doctor about a meal plan, and what might be good enough exercise. You ask a friend if they would be willing to take a weekly walk with you. You think about getting a dog.</p> <p>You're laying the foundation for changes that you can sustain without Herculean effort.</p> <p>You make a plan you can live with and implement gradually, a step at a time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Accept responsibility to change behavior.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate and select techniques for behavior.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a plan.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Build confidence and commitment.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Have a start date in mind for intended changes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resolved ambivalence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Motivate yourself with pros not the con,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Design workable, concrete, practical plan, made up of small manageable steps</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action</b> – Now <b>you have a concrete plan to make the changes that really matter to you.</b> You've got the support, information, time, money and energy to change and all of a sudden it seems much more easy. <b>You've broken your plan into manageable steps.</b> And you take that first steps on your new improved life.</p>	<p>You pound the last nail, the utilities are hooked up delivering water, electricity, and gas. The carpets and furniture invites you to move in and take permanent residence.</p> <p>You're Home. You've taking residence in the House of Change and believe you could live here comfortably for many years.</p>	<p>You begin a light exercise program, walking every other day for 10 minutes. You start having a low sugar smoothy for breakfast every day.</p> <p>You start to feel better. So you start walking every day for 10". You take an easy dance class. You play music when you get home from work and have a light healthy snack.</p> <p>You realized you've changed, and it wasn't so hard after all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage in self-directed behavior change effort that is sustainable because it was some immediate rewards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gain new insights and develops new skills.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consciously choose new behavior.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Learn to recognize and redirect unwanted behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Have sustained positive changes for 3 - 6 months</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get help and support to sustain positive motivation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Maintenance</b> - In this stage, <b>you have successfully made your changes, and are enjoying the benefits.</b> You've had a few slips, and you practice how to get</p>	<p>You've lived in the house for many years and realize there is still work to do. Even a well built house needs maintenance</p>	<p>You've had good blood sugar levels for quite a while. And the doctor reports your test revealed a problem, so you discuss additional strategies to lower your blood sugar levels and implement them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Master the ability to sustain new behavior with minimum effort through the ups and downs of life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Establish desired new behavior patterns and self-control so they take a minimum of effort, and are</li> </ul>

<p>back to a new improved plan that works better each time you revise it.  <b>You know your danger zones and how to either avoid them or maneuver through them.</b> You have help and support when you need it. The change seems to sustain itself, simply because you feel better and are more happy.</p>			<p>a simple part of every day life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Remain alert to high-risk situations and have a plan to manage them</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Focus is on lapse prevention.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has changed behavior for at least 6 months</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adopt a new self-image consistent with desired behavior and lifestyle.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Feel confident and enjoy the sense of mastery</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy a healthier and happier life.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify and manage relapse challenges</li> </ul>
--	--	--	--

**Using SoulCollage can speed up your progress by working with the Shadow.** Imagine finding the culprit inside who thinks you'll never succeed. Or the part who believes changes is impossible. Or the part who's trying to solve a different problem, using the "problem behavior." You may be mistaking yourself for these different points of view inside you. Meeting this "story" with compassion can accelerate the process of change. .

**SoulCollage can also give you confidence and hope when you meet the wise and healthy parts of you.** Imagine meeting the One who is the engine of change, ready to get to work, filled with enthusiasm and confidence. Yes this part still lives in you! Together we'll find this voice inside you and activate this healthy partnership.

It might even be fun!

If you are struggling with changing a pattern in your life, and you need a little support to move through these stages, counseling can help. **If you'd like to set up an appointment, please give me a call or email to find out how the Secret Science of Change can help you succeed.**

[Suzie@suziewolfer.com](mailto:Suzie@suziewolfer.com) or 503-224-3318

### References

McConaughy, E.N., Prochaska, J. O., & Velicer, W.F. (1983). Stages of change in psychotherapy: Measurement and sample profiles. Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 20, 368-375.

<http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/Measures/urica.htm>