Chapter 11: Methods for Changing Behaviors

If you don't know which methods to start with, try methods #1, #2, and #16 first. They are useful in almost any situation.

Introduction

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Consider a few of these methods for your self-improvement project--the first section of each method will give you a simple

introduction to the procedure. You only need one or two methods to start with.

For basic information about changing your behavior, it is best to start with chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 outlines the steps in any self-help project. Chapter 4 helps us understand our behavior and thoughts. It introduces the basic learning and motivational concepts, upon which the methods described here are based. This chapter provides straight-forward, detailed instructions for 20 behavior-changing methods. More complex treatment plans for problems are given in chapters 3 to 10; this chapter only deals with level I of the problem, the overt behavior and simple thoughts.

As discussed in chapter 2, much has to be done before you are ready to work on developing a self-help plan. For example, you must accept and become aware--highly conscious--of your problem. You must definitely decide to change and get motivated to do the work involved in changing. As Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente (1994) have shown, if you aren't ready to launch into a self-change project, you must start in the stage you are at (e.g. facing the problem and/or learning enough about it and its consequences that you are determined to change). When you are exploring specific ways to make the changes in your life you want to make, it is time to skim these methods. If three or four seem of possible interest, read them in more detail and select one or two for your plan. Don't forget the other four parts of your problem (see chapter 2).

If you don't know which methods to start with, try methods #1, #2, and #16 first. They are useful in almost any situation. A combination of self-help behavioral methods is often the most effective approach you can take. For instance, a popular writer, Anthony Robbins (1991), suggests first getting motivated to change by associating as much pain as possible with the unwanted behavior or with not changing. At the same time, associate as much pleasure or rewards as possible with changing, i.e. with the new desired behavior or lifestyle (methods #5, #13, #14, #16 & #18 and see chapter 14). This emphasizes that when you need to stop or disrupt the old unwanted pattern of behavior (methods #10, #11 & #12), you must be sure to develop new desirable ways of getting the same pay offs as were provided by the old unwanted behaviors (method #2). The new behavior must be practiced and reinforced strongly (method #16 again) until it is well entrenched as a habit. This motivate-and-reinforce-a-new-behavior plan usually works, but if it doesn't, you need an individualized plan. Just as important as the scientific basis of your self-change plan is the do-ability of your plan; an intellectually impressive treatment plan is worthless if it isn't used. The to-be-learned behavior needs to fit in with the rest of your life; it needs to be simple enough to do routinely; it needs to be something you can learn to enjoy.

Within each of the following descriptions of behavior-change methods, the basic idea is first described, then possible uses are listed,

but the "meat" of this chapter is in the detailed, explicit steps for applying the method in your life. There are also brief discussions of the time and common problems involved in using the method, as well as a cursory assessment of the effectiveness of the method and the risks involved. Each method is outlined in the same way. Useful references are cited at the end of most methods. Much of the practical information about using each method comes from the experiences of my 3,000 students who attempted to make some important change in their life.

Antecedent Methods:
Self-Help Methods Used Prior to the "Target" Behavior

Change the environment to change your behavior

The environment has a powerful influence on subsequent behavior. Many of our responses are automatic: we drive with effortless attention to the road and lights, we take notes in class without thinking about how to write (or what was said, sometimes). In the long run the frequency of these behaviors may depend on the consequences (the payoffs for driving or writing), but at any one moment it is primarily the stimuli in the environment that control our behavior.

Some stimuli are compelling: a ringing telephone! Can you let it ring? Other such stimuli are an attractive person going by, someone talking about us, messages or sounds of alarm, and so on. All of us have habits that occur at certain times and places--we brush our teeth every morning before showering, watch the evening news during supper, etc., etc. Environmental and internal stimuli set off these habitual responses.

In classical conditioning, stimuli produce an immediate response. For example, Schachter (1971) demonstrated that obese people respond to external cues, such as the sight or smell of food or any reminder that "it's lunch time," rather than to internal messages from an empty stomach. The best way to avoid overeating is to avoid food or any reminder of food. Likewise, for any other temptation! "Out of sight, out of mind."

In operant conditioning, the environment guides our behavior by providing cues about the probable payoffs. For example, when initially interacting with an attractive person of the opposite sex, most of us are keenly aware of how they are responding to us; we look for signs that they are interested in, amused by, or attracted to us. We adjust

our behavior, becoming more "friendly" or pulling away, according to how we read their signals. Likewise, we are using antecedent cues any time we are observing the situation and trying to figure out "what to do" (which means trying to predict what the consequences will be). As self-helpers we are able to alter the consequences somewhat by providing special rewards and punishment--and we can alter our view of the consequences, emphasizing important values and long-range goals which might otherwise be overlooked.

In modeling, we learn specific ways of behaving in certain situations or what the consequences are likely to be if we act a certain way in a situation. Again, the environment is influencing our actions.

It is said "the road to hell is paved with good intentions," meaning that announced intentions are often useless and not believed. The bad reputation of intentions is not entirely deserved. Science shows that intentions are somewhat related to later behavior, but only modestly (Gollwitzer, 1999). Good intentions account for only about 20%-30% of the variance in the desired behavior. Of course, strong intentions have more influence than weak intentions but strong and weak often fail. Fortunately, research, as summarized by Gollwitzer, demonstrates several ways to increase the power of the environment to implement our intentions. Step 4 spells out these methods which use self-instructions to strengthen the stimulus-response connection. The process is called "implementation intentions" and has some obvious similarity to self-instructions as described in the next method.

Thus, within the change-the-environment method there are two basic techniques for self-control: (1) avoiding situations that lead to unwanted behavior and (2) providing stimuli that prompt desired behavior.

Purposes

- To decrease the frequency of undesirable responses. Examples: over-eating, procrastinating, "bad" habits, irritability, self-criticism, etc.
- To increase the frequency of desired responses. Examples: doing chores, studying, being understanding, being assertive, etc.
- Incidentally, the environment has the same kind of effect on emotions as on behavior (see chapter 12).

Steps

STEP ONE: Recognize the "bad" environment.

This may be easy--rich, delicious food surrounding the dieter, friends urging the budding alcoholic to get drunk or the budding scholar to "have some fun," or the discussion of certain topics that lead to arguments, and so on.

It may not be so easy--habits like smoking or nail biting tend to occur without your awareness, but certain conditions encourage these

habits. The stimulus for avoidance responses, such as shyness, may not be obvious; indeed, there may not be any external event, only a fleeting thought that you will have to carry on a conversation if you go to lunch with co-workers. Your avoidance (because it reduces stress) may occur almost unconsciously, yet the environment provides cues for you to withdraw. Method #9 will help you discover the stimuli controlling your behavior.

STEP TWO: Avoid situations that lead to unwanted actions. Provide warning signs. Break the chain early.

We can either avoid an environment entirely or change parts of it so that it is less likely to produce the unwanted behavior. Examples: if a group of friends push you to do things you'd rather not do, avoid them. If you and your parents frequently argue about a certain topic, steer the conversation away from that topic.

Thoughts and fantasies are frequently triggers for our actions. Thus, dwelling on temptations, as we found out in chapter 4, makes it harder to resist. Depressive or angry thoughts may give rise to unwanted actions. Thoughts can be stopped or changed to be more constructive.

Providing warning signs certainly changes the environment. Examples: a timer set to ring after one hour of TV viewing, a medical picture of cirrhosis of the liver placed on the refrigerator door as one gets out his/her second beer, a picture of a gruesome accident stuck on the steering wheel until the seat belt is fastened.

It is also helpful to recognize that many unwanted behaviors are the outcome of an easily recognized series or "chain" of behaviors. Each step along the chain of events serves as the stimulus for the next step. Examples: Over eating, getting drunk, getting in an argument, having an affair, etc. For instance, to gorge on cake and ice cream at home, one has to go to the store, pick up the fattening food, pay for it, store it at home, prepare it, and eat much more than needed. To have an affair, there is usually a series of events: one would approach an attractive person, make an effort to impress him/her, suggest lunch or a drink, talk about personal matters, do enjoyable things together, indicate an attraction to the other person, touch each other, go where you can be alone, be affectionate, get undressed, and "make love." Obviously, if one wants to avoid an affair, a person had better avoid the first few steps because it gets harder to stop the further along the chain one goes. That is, "break the chain early!" Otherwise, one is beyond self-help! The early steps become the warning signs to stop. Method #4, relapse prevention, gives the details for coping with temptations and compulsions.

STEP THREE: Provide cues or environments that prompt desired behavior.

The simplest rule is to "put yourself in the right place at the right time." The procrastinating student has a much greater chance of doing his/her homework if he/she is in a library rather than in front of the TV. The flabby, winded couch potato is more likely to work out if he/she is in a gym rather than about to fall asleep in an overstuffed chair at home. The lonely teenager is more likely to make friends playing sports or joining a club than playing with his/her video games at home.

Hodgson and Miller (1982) describe a 42-year-old businessman with a drinking problem, mainly, before supper and near bedtime. So, they rearranged his schedule. He either ate immediately upon arrival home or did something else that avoided drinking before supper (going shopping, visiting, playing with children). He ordinarily didn't drink after supper until 9:00 P.M. or so. So, every night at 9:00 instead of drinking, he was scheduled to exercise, meditate, or have an intimate conversation with his wife (without alcohol). After about a month, with help from his wife, this rigid schedule became an enjoyable, healthy, easy routine.

As illustrated in this case, one of the more obvious means of structuring your environment is by using a schedule, a to-be-done-list, or a contract (see method #16). Making up a realistic daily schedule is, first of all, an opportunity to carefully consider what is the best use of our time in light of our values and long-range goals. Secondly, a carefully prepared schedule is a good memory aid and can guide much of our actions (see chapter 13).

Reminders can initiate desired behavior. Examples: Signs can remind us to exercise or give a compliment or express our affection for a loved one. Put the signs where you won't overlook them--on your lunch bag, on your coffee cup, on your mirror, etc. Timers or alarms or dependable behaviors can be used as signals, e.g. set an alarm as a reminder to clean up or do the dishes, use coffee drinking or going to the water fountain as a reminder to take 15 minutes for relaxation, use smoking or looking at your watch as a cue to say something positive about yourself to increase self-esteem (write "I'm OK" on the watch crystal).

Making a public commitment, e.g. to lose weight, to contribute more to meetings, or to start telling more jokes, provides considerable motivation.

It is crucial that we remember that other people make up a vital part of our "environment." So, don't just think of the physical setting, think of changing other people's responses which will, in turn, encourage desired responses in us. Example: it is easy to tell the

student to go to the library; getting there is the problem. The detailed steps involved in getting to the library may include (1) finding a friend who does or will go to the library regularly, (2) asking to study with this friend, and (3) reinforcing the friend for being a good study partner who reinforces you (Brigham, 1982). Throughout this book we find that our behavior is a result of "the company we keep." We can change our friends and/or find different friends.

STEP FOUR: Implementation intentions: Mental preparations that increase the effectiveness of environmental cues to prompt desired behavior.

As discussed in chapter 2, goals are usually more helpful if they are (a) are very specific (time, place, and exact behavior) rather than vague, (b) are in the near future, not distant, (c) involve learning desired behaviors rather than evaluating of how well you are doing, and (d) lead to positive outcomes instead of reducing negative behaviors. Once the desired goals are in mind and committed to, i.e. you have "intentions," this step helps you turn them into actions. Rather than using self-instructions to guide yourself through to your goal (as described in the next method), this approach uses self-instructions to strengthen the connections between specific environmental situations and specific desired/intentional behaviors. This is done by deciding in advance when there may be good opportunities to perform the desired goal-directed behaviors. Then you give yourself instructions that prime the specific situation to elicit a specific response, e.g. "as soon as I get home this evening and change clothes, I will start to walk… jog… exercise… swim…". This emphasizes the positive goal behaviors while avoiding the competing old bad habits, distractions, and unwanted behaviors. This and the following few paragraphs are summaries of a well documented article by Gollwitzer (1999).

Not all desired behaviors can be pre-planned at specific times and places. Suppose you want to tactfully mention to your husband that most of his pants are out of style and too tight. By having some thoughts earlier in the day ("pre-deciding") about commenting "let's look for some new pants for you, honey" while having a good time shopping together that afternoon, you make it much more likely that you will think of it at an appropriate time and do it in an effective way. To some extent in this method the burden of self-control is shifted from your conscious mind to an automatic perceptual process--now when the appropriate shopping situation arises, it reminds you to make the comment you have previously rehearsed.

Likewise, implementation intentions can be designed to catch a fleeting opportunity. Examples could be: "when I see a black man, I'll be friendly, not suspicious" or "whenever I meet an old person… someone with a strong southern accent… a homeless person… an oriental person…, I'll try to avoid stereotyping them." "When someone makes a sexist or critical remark, I will question the validity of their

comment." Your responding becomes faster and easier, needing less conscious effort like a well established habit.

If you are having trouble beginning a hard-to-start project, research has shown that working out in advance specific ways of implementing your intentions will more than double your chances of getting going. One impressive example is from Milne, Orbell, and Sheeran (1999) who worked with patients with heart disease in an effort to get them to follow doctor's orders. They found that a motivational/health benefit educational program, which focused on building self-confidence in health care matters, teaching ways to reduce vulnerability to heart disease, and emphasizing the importance of exercise, increased compliance with doctor's directions by only 10%, from 29% to 39%. However, when the educational program was augmented by the development of explicit implementation intentions by each patient, the rate of compliance jumped up to 91%! Much earlier studies had also shown that telling people the dire consequences of smoking or not brushing or refusing inoculation shots didn't work well. The message is much more effective if a person also makes a commitment (to others and to him/herself) to carry out specific healthy behaviors at a specific time and place--an implemented intention.

If you tend to get distracted from your good intentions, say working or studying, it may be more helpful to tell yourself in advance to "ignore the distraction" rather than to say "just re-double your efforts." If you are already motivated, you can't add much drive but you can reduce your distraction. Also, when you face a known bad habit, like gorging on junk food in the evening, it can help to think at supper time "I will eat this gorgeous peach instead of the usual chips & dips... candy... ice cream... cookies... etc., if I get hungry this evening." This kind of advanced thinking/planning of desired behavior can be used in so many situations, e.g. to counter an angry retort, to stifle your own prejudiced thought/feeling/remark, and so on. Perform this new intended behavior often enough, it becomes a habit and you become a better person.

STEP FIVE: Practice responding faithfully to the stimuli you have arranged in your environment and to the situations implementing your intentions.

You must heed your plans, warning signs, prompting cues, schedules, and the stimulus situations you have designated to activate some wanted behavior. Faithfully avoiding situations that lead to unwanted outcomes is also important. Keeping records and rewarding your successes will also help. If you find yourself disregarding the signs, cues, schedules, and your best of intentions, learn and practice the new desired behavior still more (Method #2), avoid or reduce the distracting habits, add more reinforcement for the desired behavior (Method #16), and study more deeply the causes and needs underlying the compelling disruptive behavior.

Time involved

Only a few minutes will probably be necessary to make up a sign or a schedule for the day. It takes awareness and good intentions to avoid certain situations but ordinarily not much time. The "programming" of implementation intentions takes only a few minutes but it has to be done in advance of getting into the action-initiating circumstances. So, like the other techniques in this section, advanced planning is required.

Common problems with the method

Most unwanted behavior occurs because we, in part, want it to occur and put ourselves in situations where it is hard to avoid. The would-be dieter has more than 1200 calories of food on hand; the smoker has a whole pack on him/her instead of just 5 cigarettes. Likewise, desired behavior occurs when we are in the right place. Recognizing the power of the environment to control our behavior and providing a variety of reminders can help, but we may frequently ignore the warning signs or prompting cues. If so, soon we won't even bother to put the signs up or we won't bother to go to the "right" place. The usual difficulty with the implementation of our intentions is that we don't take the time to plan and make the mental connection in advance between a specific situation and a specific behavior.

Effectiveness

Changing the environment is one of the best methods of self-control you have; it is simple, safe, effective, and quick. The disadvantage is that we are frequently unable to impose the method on ourselves--we "forget," cheat, give up, "change our minds," or decide to start changing tomorrow. In that case, perhaps more reminders and rewards for doing the desired behavior are needed and/or more punishment for neglecting the signs. Nevertheless, it is one of the best self-help methods. The laboratory experiments done with implementation intention suggest it is quite effective in that setting; how it does in ordinary life is yet unproved but more practical research is being done.

Additional readings

Watson and Tharp (1972) are good; see their chapter 9. The more radical behaviorist, contrary to what one might expect, places more emphasis on changing the environment than on self-reinforcement (Brigham, 1982). Birkedahl (1990) is a cognitive-behaviorist. See a new book by Gollwitzer, P. M., Schaal, B., Moskowitz, G. B., Hammelbeck, H. J. P. & Wasel, W. (1999) about reducing stereotyping and prejudice.

Case illustration

Several years ago a junior in my class wanted to make three self-improvements: study more, spend less time in "bull sessions," and use fewer drugs. He proposed changing his environment to solve all three. I thought that was too simple; that he should reward the desired behavior, learn better study skills, make out a schedule, use punishment or covert sensitization, etc. He decided to do it his way.

He lived in a fraternity house, where it was difficult to study. So, he planned to go to the library after supper until 10:00 P.M. Sunday through Thursday. He still had time after 10:00 for bull sessions with his brothers. On Friday or Saturday night he had a date; on the other night he partied with his drug-using friends.

Most of his friends accepted these changes (the heavy drug users "became less friendly"), after he explained. He found it satisfying to study; indeed, he met a girl there who also enjoyed studying. His grades went from C's to A- that semester. He spent about $12.00 less per week on drugs and alcohol. Last I heard, he had just started practicing law in his home town.

Learn new behavior; follow a model; use self-instructions; try the "as if" method.

Self-observation and self-evaluation (methods #8 & #9) may result in our feeling a need to change. One way to change our behavior is to change the environment, as we have just discussed. Another way is to learn some new and better way to respond in the old situation. That's obvious! What's not obvious--indeed, it's confusing--is all the different ways of learning new behavior. Consider this:

A number of self-change methods were described in chapter 4, including operant, classical, and observational learning methods. There were also discussions of how to increase motivation and reduce procrastination, how to stop bad habits, how to prevent relapse, and how to develop a comprehensive behavior modification plan. Moreover, this entire book deals with changing some form of behavior--changing values in chapter 3, changing emotions in chapters 5 to 8 and 12, changing skills in chapter 13, changing your mind in chapter 14, and so on. These behaviors are dealt with separately simply because it won't all fit in one chapter. However, even when we limit ourselves to simple, unemotional, conscious behaviors, there are lots of tricks and gimmicks and techniques for "changing behavior" or preparing to do so (including all 20 methods in this chapter).

This section really focuses on three major learning techniques: learning from observing others, the use of self-instructions, and practicing new behaviors. These approaches to learning new behavior are generally useful in many situations to replace many different kinds of unwanted behaviors. All three are among the most commonly used approaches to changing. Each will be briefly described.

Purposes

- To consider periodically one's options in a given situation to determine what are the better alternatives in the long run (so you keep changing as circumstances change). In some situations we are meeting our needs in ways that could be better met by some other behavior, e.g. a specific plan will solve a problem better than endless worry, a commitment to helping others reduces feelings of uselessness better than endless depression, becoming an alcoholism counselor meets many of the same needs as the drinking met, going back to school may offer better ways to make a living than continuing in the same old minimum wage job, etc. In short, you may need new behaviors.
- To develop new and better ways of responding to a situation by observing models or reading and discussing it with others.
- To learn how to utilize self-instructions to modify behavior and increase self-control.
- To understand the need for repeated practice of a new response before we become accustomed to using it and it eventually becomes an established habit.

This might involve changing your response from being late to being punctual, from being impulsive to being careful, from criticizing to giving compliments, from being alone to socializing, from being a late sleeper to being a 6:00 AM jogger, etc.

Steps

STEP ONE: Consider alternative ways of responding; select a part of your life that needs to improve.

In some cases, it is painfully clear to us that we are failing, goofing off or hurting, and need to change. In other cases, we may simply see, hear or read of someone handling a situation well and want to try doing something better than we have been. On still other occasions, we may have given no thought to handling a situation differently...but perhaps we should. Wise observers realize most of us frequently respond out of "habit" rather than because we have consciously decided that this is the best way to handle the situation. We are "flying on automatic" or "set in our ways," even if we are young. Of course, you can't question every little thing you do. However, it pays to be open-minded about the possibility of improving.

A few examples might help: suppose you are always agreeable and compliant and willing to "give in," perhaps you should learn to be more self-directed and assertive (chapter 13). Suppose a person is very close to a group of old friends; he/she is very comfortable with these friends; yet, that person might grow more, experience more, and become better adjusted and more successful if he/she had other friends in addition to these. We can become our own worst restricter,

our own inhibiter, our own blinder. So, try new responses and new environments!

There is no way to know what is the best way of responding in a given situation, except by trying out new behaviors and seeing what happens. So, begin by considering a wide variety of alternative responses--even some radical ideas. Read about the problem and solutions. Make a list of coping responses. Ask friends, teachers, parents or counselors for ideas. Maybe brainstorm with a group. See decision-making in chapter 13. Decide on a general approach to acquire these new and better behaviors.

STEP TWO: Learn the details of a new experimental response by observing a model.

Before practicing and polishing, we need to know exactly what to do, precisely how to behave. Where does this information come from? It often comes from observing others, preferably good models and people you respect. Sometimes good ideas come from books that give detailed descriptions of how capable people behave, including self-help books. You could ask someone to carefully instruct and demonstrate a new approach to you (see role-playing in chapter 13).

You will need different kinds of models in different situations. For example, if you wanted to learn how to dance, sell air conditioners, or ask someone for a date, you would want your instructor to be an experienced expert. In these cases you need knowledge. On the other hand, if you are 16-years-old and want to get better at public speaking, driving a car, or handling a snake, the best instructor or model is probably not a great speaker, a championship race driver, or a professional snake handler. You need a competent model but someone you can identify with, someone who isn't too different from you who will guide you through your next few steps. In fact, watching a model who has some fears of snakes overcome his/her fears is a much better experience for a snake phobic than watching a totally relaxed handler. The spectacular expert may only intimidate you more.

Have the model demonstrate and explain whatever you want to learn. It will also be helpful if the instructor (model) also acts out and describes the common mistakes you will need to avoid. Then the model should show you the best way to do it again, perhaps several times, until you are ready to go through the process slowly yourself, step by step, with his/her guidance. The instructor gives you constant feedback, suggestions (modeling again), and encouragement. When you are sure you have the idea, you may want to practice alone for a while. Later, you can again demonstrate your new skill to the instructor and get feedback. Eventually, self-observation, self-correction, and self-reinforcement as you practice this task will be your job.

You may be surprised how often you already know how to behave, you just need practice using your readily available skills in new

situations. Examples: the same social interaction skills are used with new friends as with old ones, even though the new friends are much more into athletics (or community service) than the old friends. Your ordinary social skills are all you need to become a Candy Striper at a hospital or a volunteer at a local nursing home; yet, your life might change. The task is to put those old skills to new uses.

STEP THREE: Develop self-instructions that guide the initiation and carrying out of the desired behavior.

If you think about it, a new behavior (one that isn't habitual) is ordinarily linked with thoughts that tell the behavior when to start, how to proceed, when and how to stop, and so on. We have a "coach" inside our head. Thus, changing behavior might more accurately be described as self-instruction modification. There is a therapy approach called Cognitive Behavior Modification. Donald Meichenbaum (1977) has developed and summarized many of the techniques using self-talk. Our self-talk both guides our behavior and explains and evaluates the outcome (see Attribution theory in chapter 4). It is our awareness and our thoughts. Consider this example of uninsightful thinking and much more aware and self-guiding thinking by an overeater:

Uninsightful thinking	Insightful thinking
I don't have the will power to cut down on my eating.	Stop giving yourself excuses. Will power has nothing to do with it; you just don't plan what you will eat and you haven't yet controlled your environment. Let's get healthy!
My life is so dull. I deserve a good meal in the evening.	Another self-con! Come on, all this weight is no fun. I don't look good; I have high blood pressure; I'm lonely. I deserve the more fun and health I'd have if I lost weight.
A small steak and a bowl of ice cream later won't matter.	You are kidding yourself again. That is what you said last night. It does matter; this eating has to stop. Why not now?
No one is ever going to be interested in me, any how.	What a pessimist! That kind of thinking is ruining our life. Come on, let's go to aerobics and have a cup of yogurt afterwards.

This is how we control ourselves much of the time--we talk to ourselves. We know when our thinking is leading down the wrong path. We can recognize excuses, rationalizations, depressive, and self-defeating thinking, and then we can correct those thoughts. As a result, our behavior is much more reasonable and results in our reaching more of our highly valued long-range goals in life. Become mindful of your mind.

How else can we use self-talk? Let's suppose we wanted to become less shy and there was a particular person we would like to get to

know better. This is the kind of self-talk that might occur before we approach this beautiful hunk of man or woman: "When can I talk to him/her? Let's try to catch him/her between English and Math. What can I say? What about, 'Hi! How is the ___ team coming along?' Sounds pretty good but I am afraid he/she just won't want to talk to me. Hey, get off that self-putdown stuff; it's a compliment to be approached. I really care about him/her." Later, between classes, we do see him/her and our internal coach says: "OK, go up to him/her and smile and say, 'Hi! How is…'. You can do it. Don't make such a big deal out of just speaking. Hey, I know it's scary but go ahead! It doesn't matter that a friend is with him/her. Do it NOW." The self-talk keeps us on track, checks out our feelings, calms us down, and keeps us from taking the easy way out. Finally, after talking for a few minutes, the self-talk might go like this: "Wow, I did it! It went well. And he/she was friendly! By gosh, I'm going to call him/her tonight. I feel great!"

As your own therapist, you become your own directing, comforting, inspiring, rewarding coach. A sample of "guiding" self-talk is "OK, what do I need to do now?" or "Make a plan" or "What can I say if he/she seems real friendly?" etc. A sample of "calming" self-talk is "Don't get uptight, it doesn't help" or "Take a deep breath…relax" or "I can handle this," etc. A sample of "rational" self-talk is "It isn't the end of the world if _____ doesn't think I'm fantastic." or "Oh, God, I don't know anything about that. He/she will think I'm dumb. I'll pretend I know. No, I don't need to do that. I'll ask questions…I am interested and he/she can explain it to me," etc. (See Challenging Your Irrational Ideas in chapter 14.) A sample of "rewarding" self-talk is "I did it!" or "I'm getting better" or "I'm tough enough to stick it out; it will work out; I have a good plan," etc.

The self-instructions need to be as well thought out and as practiced as the behavior. Self-statements should be in your own words, tailored to your specific situation, and designed to lead to more reasonable judgment and desired feelings and behaviors (Meichenbaum, 1977). See chapter 12 for a more detailed description of self-talk as a method of self-control with emotions.

STEP FOUR: Practice the self-talk and the desired behavior.

One might start by rehearsing mentally, imagining giving self-instructions, and carrying out the desired behavior. Then talk out loud and act it out. Then one might role-play with a friend (see chapter 13). Practice as long as you need to, don't procrastinate, and then DO SOMETHING.

STEP FIVE: Try out the new self-talk and behavior; see how it works.

In 1893, William James, speaking about breaking bad habits, gave this advice: Learn a new habit to replace the old one. To do this, he said (1) launch yourself with as much initiative as possible (change

your schedule; make a public pledge and so on), (2) permit no exceptions until the new habit is established, and (3) seize the first opportunity to act on every resolution you make ("the road to hell is paved with good intentions" that never get acted on). Well, some things haven't changed in 100 years.

William James also gave another bit of advice, a self-help method called the "as if" technique. He said, "If you want a quality, act as if you already had it."

It may be wise to start with an easier situation or behavior and work up to more challenging circumstances. Get at it. You are building a stimulus cue (external or internal, i.e. self-talk)--new behavior-- reward sequence. Record and reward your progress.

Try a thing you haven't done three times. Once, to get over the fear of doing it. Twice, to learn how to do it. And a third time to figure out whether you like it or not.
-Virgil Thomson

Time involved

Developing a new dependable response is seldom easy. It may take an hour or two to consider new options, especially if you do some reading or talk to a friend. It may take another hour or so to devise new self-talk and behavior. It will take more time to practice and try out the newly learned behavior. Total=2 to 4 hours. Keep in mind that many, many new responses might be involved in changing from a shy, scared, quiet, poorly informed person into the opposite. So, the impossible takes a little longer.

Common problems with the method

Not sticking with it; pessimistic attitudes; giving up after the first defeat; deciding you want to do something else when the going gets tough. And, backsliding when you move on to work on some other self-improvement.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

People do change, presumably through some process like this (see chapter 4). Research has shown repeatedly that people learn new behaviors from models. An advantage is that this method focuses on mental and behavioral processes that are related to almost any self-improvement.

How effective is self-instruction training? Meichenbaum (1977 and 1985) says it is promising but not yet conclusively proven. It has been used with many kinds of people with many different problems with some success. Dush, Hirt, & Schroeder (1989) found that self-instruction modification, as done by therapists, was quite effective in some studies but of marginal value in several others. It seems to work better with adolescents than with younger children--but in either case the improvements don't seem to last. Self-statement modification done by your self has not been evaluated yet. Perhaps other self-help methods need to be used along with self-instruction training.

However, since we are all watching successful models and talking to ourselves anyhow, the methods pose no new risks, except that occasionally we may try a new behavior that produces unexpected unwanted consequences. That's an unavoidable aspect of growth.

Additional readings

Meichenbaum, D. *Cognitive-Behavior Modification*, New York: Plenum Press, 1977.

Meichenbaum, D. & Jaremko, M. *Stress Reduction and Prevention*, New York: Plenum Press, 1983.

Using controlling or conditioned responses to change behavior

Some of our actions are easy to control and, indeed, some desired responses are conditioned to occur automatically. For instance, if we brush our teeth after every meal or buckle our seat belts every time we get in a car, it becomes automatic. Actually, more than that, we become uncomfortable if we don't carry out these habits.

It is reasonable to use easy-to-control behaviors to control harder-to-control behaviors. "Controlling behavior" is Skinner's term (1953) and is really another form of method #1, changing the environment. In other situations, if an activity can be gotten under stimulus control (via conditioning), and the stimulus can be maintained, then self-control is easy. This is called a "conditioned response."

Purposes

- To use an easily controlled response for "controlling" another response. Examples: buy only healthy foods (easy) to control eating junk and sweets (hard). Invite someone to go jogging or to diet with you (easy) to increase the chances you will exercise or diet (hard).
- To increase a desired behavior, make it "conditioned" to a certain situation and place yourself in that situation. Example: Study only in one place and only study there; go there often.

- To decrease a behavior, get it under stimulus control and then gradually avoid the stimulus. Example: Condition worry to one chair, then sit there less and less.

Steps

STEP ONE: Identify the "controlling" response or the controlling "conditioned" stimulus preceding the behavior to be changed.

What response does or could facilitate or interfere with the "target" behavior? Suppose you want to discuss current events more with friends...or tell more funny stories or jokes. Obviously, "controlling" responses might be to do some reading (newspaper, joke book, etc.) and rehearsing what you could say and then saying, "Hey, I've got a joke for you."

What very specific situations could be associated with the wanted or unwanted "target" behavior? What easily produced stimuli could be paired with desired "target" behaviors? Examples: suppose you worry a lot, you could limit your obsessing to a particular place and time (say a certain chair). Suppose you are frequently critical and suspicious and distrusting of others, either openly or secretly. To counteract this distorted and inhibiting view of others, you could condition yourself to think something positive whenever you are in a certain situation, e. g. taking a drink of any liquid. Think positive with every sip and your view of others will be conditioned to be more positive.

STEP TWO: Pair repeatedly the controllable stimulus with the "target" behavior.

Here are some examples: Start limiting your worrying or feeling depressed to your "worry chair." Don't restrict the total time spent worrying (yet) but do restrict the worrying to that chair, as much as possible. This is conditioning the worry with the chair.

Start pairing a positive, complimentary, trusting thought about others with some stimulus, e. g. taking a drink or seeing or thinking of a close friend. Eventually, it will become automatic but at first you will simply have to keep reminding yourself over and over...or practice by taking a sip or thinking of the friend and immediately having a positive thought. Prepare in advance a list of accurate, reassuring, caring, trusting statements to say to yourself.

Start smoking a cigarette when a timer's bell sounds, rather than when you have the urge or see another person light up, see an ash tray, have a beer, etc. Smoke as much as usual, but get it conditioned to the bell.

STEP THREE: Start using the "controlling" response; start changing the frequency of the controlling conditioned stimulus.

Certain controlling *responses* can be used immediately, such as buying only nutritional foods or learning new jokes. A particular *stimulus* only becomes controlling with time; it may take several days or a few weeks to condition effective study to the study chair or worry to the worry chair. In the case of studying, remember, no TV, only soft music, no talking, no daydreaming, no writing love letters, no reading Playgirl or Playboy, just concentrating on your work in the "study" chair. The same is true in the case of worry, only worry in the designated chair, later you can start decreasing the time in the chair (or move it to the basement) but only after the specific worry is conditioned to and limited to a specific chair. Otherwise, you would worry just as much, but somewhere else.

Likewise, the timer, once it has become the conditioned stimulus for smoking, can be set for longer and longer intervals between cigarettes. In a similar way, the timer could become the stimulus for a procrastinator to begin working for a fixed period of time, say 30 minutes, without interruptions. At the end of each work period, decide to stop or to complete another 30 minute block. Use thought stopping (see method #10) to keep distractions away.

In the example of learning to be more optimistic and trusting of others (or more self-confident or self-accepting or whatever), one may need to repeat the positive statements several times a day for several weeks (with every sip of everything you drink). Say the positive statements "with feeling" and with an earnest intention to change your own feelings. Soon you will be feeling better about people (see chapter 14).

Record and reward progress.
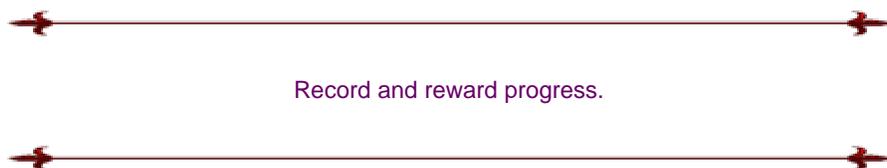
Time involved

Making sure you only study or work or worry or cry in one place may not take much time; it might save time. However, establishing a conditioned stimulus-response relationship so strong that one can reduce an unwanted reaction by controlling the stimulus will take frequent attention to details over several days or, more likely, weeks. Also, remembering to pair desired thoughts or attitudes with frequently occurring stimuli, takes constant attention to the details of what is going on in your mind. Total=2 or 3 hours spread over several weeks. Yet, considering the enormous time wasted by some of the unwanted behaviors, the methods are a bargain.

Common problems with the method

Even if it is done gradually, it isn't easy to learn to eat, smoke, worry, etc. in one place. There are so many old stimuli that are conditioned to produce the unwanted response; they are hard to break. On the other hand, pairing a desired response (study, positive beliefs) with a new stimulus or environment is not hard, but it is tedious to remember to do.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

Intuitively, the efficacy seems to depend on the problem and the method. It is effective to study or work in one place--after about a month or so of daily experience. Yet, it would take more than controlling responses in the grocery store to restrict the diet of most hungry midnight raiders (who can down a quart of low fat yogurt), but controlling responses can help. However, my experience with classes suggests that only a few people use conditioning procedures to change habits or attitudes.

Relapse prevention; temptation resistance training; cue exposure

One of the hardest parts of self-control is stopping some unwanted, but compelling behavior. Once stopped, then there is the problem of staying in control. For this reason a section of chapter 4 was devoted to the crucial step of preventing relapses. Read that section, it is important. Coverage here will, therefore, be brief.

The basic approach is to avoid the stimuli that produce the unwanted response (method #1) or, the opposite, to confront the tempting situation repeatedly without responding in the undesired way (methods #2); thus, reducing the habit's control over you.

The drop out rate from treatment and exercise programs is high, often 50% or 60% in the first three months. The relapse from weight loss and alcohol or drug treatment programs is notorious, maybe 90% or more. Maintaining our gains in self-control is a serious problem. But we are learning much more about relapse prevention and research shows that adding these techniques to other methods, such as treatment for obsessions or compulsions, significantly improves the outcome.

Purposes

- To break the grip that certain urges have over our behavior. Examples: the urge to drink, to smoke, to gamble, to masturbate, to be excessively concerned with or to avoid work or responsibilities, to over-eat, to be compulsively clean and organized, to shop, etc. (Compulsions and obsessions are dealt with in chapters 5 & 12 because they are primarily ways of handling anxiety, not just simple behaviors.)

- To avoid relapses after stopping the unwanted behavior.
- To avoid losing the gains we have made in self-improvement.

Steps

STEP ONE: Identify the high-risk conditions for you, including the external circumstances and your internal moods and thoughts. Analyze your needs and motives.

See method #9 and relapse prevention in chapter 4. Not only do you need to know the conditions that give rise to the objectionable behavior, but you need to understand the learning principles at work and the needs being met.

A relapse isn't an unpredictable "accident," it is somewhat predictable. High-risk as well as moderate and low-risk situations can and should be identified, so you can prepare for them or avoid them. There is evidence that many former addicts inadvertently make decisions that put them back into risky situations. Recognizing these "foolish moves" can serve as early-warning signals alerting us to denial and self-cons.

STEP TWO: Avoid the high-risk situations if you can; otherwise, learn to cope with them; meet needs; avoid self-deception.

Methods #1, #2, #7 & #11 are relevant. Especially important here is learning to meet one's needs in an acceptable way. Find another way, instead of the compelling habit, to deal with loneliness, guilt, inferiority, stress, boredom, etc. (See chapters 5 to 9)

You will need to carefully plan ways of avoiding high-risks. You will also need to learn skills for coping with unavoidable low and moderate-risk situations. This may involve learning from a model, self-instructions, rehearsal in fantasy, stress management skills, building your self-esteem and self-efficacy, recognizing the long-term consequences of your habit, avoiding denial of risks, stopping the obsession with the "it-will-fix-everything-if-I-relapse" thinking, and completing the advanced preparation for a possible relapse discussed in chapter 4. Constant vigilance is needed. Addiction experts speak of developing a new "life style," i.e. finding new sources of fun, new values, and life goals.

It is also important to realize that a person with one addiction (food, alcohol, work, sex, drugs, shopping, socializing, etc.) often has others or is prone to adopt another if deprived of his/her favorite. For example, almost every drug user is a smoker or former smoker. Quitting smoking may lead to eating more. So you not only need to guard against relapse but also the development of a new addiction.

STEP THREE: Temptation resistance training; Extinguish old response.

When we have an overpowering bad habit that runs amuck and out of control, surely it's wise to weaken if not destroy it. But, how? One way is to simply expose oneself to the situations that give rise to the urge and resist the temptation to give in. This is also called "cue exposure" (Hodgson and Miller, 1982) or going "cold turkey" or "total abstinence." For instance, a compulsive hand washer might deliberately touch a door knob, their own underclothes, someone else's underclothes, a dirty dust cloth, etc. without washing his/her hands afterwards. This is a process of extinction which eliminates the irrational reduction of distress or disgust (negative reinforcement) after touching something by washing. It also forces us to do some reality testing to find out that nothing awful happens when one doesn't wash.

A craving or compulsion or addiction or habit often helps us immediately avoid some disagreeable feeling or situation. Negative reinforcement (reducing some unpleasant feeling) strengthens the unwanted habit. Examples: Food helps some of us forget loneliness, alcohol helps us avoid fears and feel powerful, working enables the workaholic to reduce anxiety, repetitive checking of locks reduces fear, compulsive masturbation may help us forget our troubles and self-doubts even though it may add guilt, street drugs alleviate depression or stress or boredom, cigarettes relax us, etc. None of these purposes is bad, but the long-range consequences of these stopgap "solutions" are likely to be catastrophic.

St Augustine, an early religious leader, was, as a young man, a compulsive masturbator. He wrote that an unchecked desire produces a habit, and an unbridled habit leads to a compulsive urge. True, modern learning theory says a satisfied desire reinforces the preceding behavior. So, why aren't we all masturbating and eating compulsively? Is it because some of us try harder to restrict the behavior? Is it because more needs are met in some people than in others? We don't know. Also, unfortunately, we do not know all the feelings that were relieved by St Augustine's masturbation, almost certainly he didn't either.

Hodgson and Miller tell of a married man who masturbated once or twice a day. He was concerned about the compulsive aspects (he couldn't stop it), the religious aspect (he often thought of the crucifixion while masturbating) and the unfaithful aspects (he also looked at pornography or at prostitutes on the streets). The therapists recommended that he expose himself to the situations that often preceded masturbating: being criticized at work, feeling depressed, being home alone, watching a sexy neighbor, and the situations mentioned above that concerned him. But he was instructed not to masturbate. At first he did this in front of the therapist, which presumably helped inhibit masturbating. Later, he did these things alone. After a year he was masturbating only once a week.

Take the risky situations identified in step one (see Marlatt & Parks, 1982, in chapter 4) and arrange them from low-risk to high-

risk. Prepare some self-instructions and behaviors for avoiding the compulsion in each situation, e.g. ask a friend to bring his/her own beer while you have only coke to drink. Expose yourself gradually from easiest to hardest to control situations. Don't give in! Take pride in your growing self-control and changing attitude. Remember the example of temptation control given in chapter 4, the beautiful hot fudge sundae that melts and gets yucky. Besides behavioral control, one learns to believe "I am strong! I can resist these silly urges!" rather than thinking, "I am helpless and weak." (See chapter 14)

STEP FOUR: Be forever on guard against the old urge.

The life experiences of many people suggest that an old habit remains lurking in the background for a long time--maybe forever-- waiting for another chance to act. People who have avoided a cigarette or alcohol for months will have an occasional urge and remember "how good it tastes." Once they give in to the old urge, it takes very little time for the habit to be re-established at full strength again. Thus, prepare in advance to curtail any relapse as soon as possible (see chapter 4). If you are in treatment but relapse, stay in treatment. After relapsing, work hard to avoid or to prepare for your next lapse. It can be done… it has been done by millions.

Time involved

Probably several hours per week over a period of months is required if it is a well ingrained compulsive habit that requires learning new behavior and extinguishing old habits via exposure to old temptations.

Common problems with the method

In some cases, such as alcoholism and drug abuse, it would certainly be foolish to suddenly re-expose your self to your favorite bar and drinking or drug-using buddies. Without special preparation, few people could resist. The idea is to build the skills necessary to avoid relapse. Many experts believe it is dangerous to re-expose oneself even to situations involving mild risks. Exposures, such as a former alcoholic going into a bar, are certainly not necessary; yet, other tempting situations, such as a neighbor offering you a beer on a hot summer day, are not entirely avoidable. Besides, the needs that were met by drinking, such as social needs, feeling more powerful, and having fewer worries, must now be meet in different ways. With many compulsions, there are many tempting situations that can't be avoided, e.g. those prompting eating or smoking or socializing or watching TV. If you ever gain some additional self-control, preventing a loss of that control is absolutely essential for growth.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

Rachman, Hodgson, and Marks (1973) reported 75% success rate with compulsive rituals using the cue exposure method for just three

weeks. In general, studies of relapse prevention have shown it to be effective (Irvin, Bowers, Dunn & Wang, 1999).

Relapse is an ever present danger. But if successful, victory is sweet.
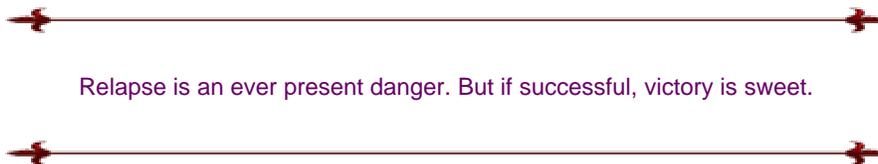
Additional reading

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Chiauzzi, E. J. (1991). *Preventing relapse in the addictions*. New York: Pergamon Press.

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Birkedahl, N. (1990). *The habit control workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Motivation training—increasing your drive level

As discussed in chapters 4 and 14, our motivation, self-concept, attributions, and other cognitions (thoughts) have an enormous influence on our behavior…and on our emotions, perceptions, bodies, etc. Frankly, I believe motivation is our psychological "black hole"--an important, powerful force which we scientifically know very little about thus far. We don't know what makes one person become highly motivated, driven to become an Olympic athlete or an outstanding scholar, while another similar person in their mid-twenties has no goals, wants only to be supported by his/her parents and avoid work.

Chapter 4 has a large section about achievement motivation, attributions associated with achievement, the need to under-achieve, and attitudes or personality factors that enhance academic success. Chapter 14 provides many suggestions for building the self-concept, expectations, and inspiration that lead to heightened motivations. The ideas in chapters 4 and 14 will not be repeated here.

Purpose

- To increase your drive and determination to achieve your important goals.

Steps

STEP ONE: Read about motivation in chapters 4 and 14, looking for methods that might help you achieve your goals.

This reading will underscore that increasing motivation may involve a wide variety of self-help methods: decisions about values, goal-setting, scheduling, self-confidence, assertiveness, rewards, intrinsic satisfaction, fantasies, "games and life scripts," thinking about "ultimate consequences", etc. See chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 13 and 14 for more.

In addition to the many suggestions already given, three more methods for increasing motivation will be briefly described here: (l) making a list of reasons for changing, (2) thinking of the ultimate consequences, and (3) effort training.

STEP TWO: Be very clear in your mind why you are eager to accomplish your major goals and keep the desired final outcome firmly in mind.

Lloyd Homme (1965) believed thoughts triggered habits or actions. He also thought thoughts could be modified just like behavior is modified. So he devised ways to change our thinking (our motivation?). We all know reasons why we shouldn't overeat, for example. The problem may be that we don't think of those reasons very often or at the right times, e.g. when taking a second serving or snacking late at night.

Horan (1971) studied the effects of Homme's motivational approaches on loosing weight, using four groups: (l) no treatment, (2) given a 1000 calorie diet and asked to count calories, (3) asked to make lists of positive consequences (look better) for loosing weight and of negative consequences for staying heavy (shorter life); asked to repeat 1 positive and 1 negative reason seven times a day, and (4) asked to make the same lists; asked to pair thinking of 1 positive and 1 negative consequence with a frequently occurring behavior (drinking something) at least seven times a day. The percent of each group who lost 1 pound per week or more was: (1) 5%, (2) 20%, (3) 21%, and (4) 52%. The dieters who thought the most about the consequences, lost the most weight. Vivid emotional fantasies of the consequences might also help. The point is: unless your needs compel you to think about your major serious goals many times a day, you need some method (like that in group 4) of keeping your "good intentions" in the forefront of your awareness.

STEP THREE: Learn to be hard working.

There is a law of least effort in psychology; it says we try to get the rewards we want with the least possible effort. That makes sense. But in real life, greater effort usually leads to a bigger pay off. If that were always the case, we would all have become hard workers

(because hard work would have been well rewarded and, thus, would have become rewarding itself). Unfortunately, perhaps, sometimes life is easy and the law of least effort is operating. When people have been able to get what they want without much effort, they haven't learned to work hard, i.e. be motivated, nor have they learned to tolerate tedium or the "stench and grime" of hard conditions. As an old farmer might say, "They haven't forked manure or dug post holes in hard ground, yet."

Learned helplessness is the hopeless attitude of the pessimist or the depressed person. Such a person is unmotivated (see chapter 6). *"Learned industriousness"* is the opposite notion, namely, that hard work that has paid off results in higher motivation and less aversion to unpleasant but unavoidable work situations (Eisenberger, 1992). How do you learn to be industrious?

You need some confidence in your ability to do the job (see self-efficacy in chapter 14) but this doesn't explain *great perseverance* on simple, tedious, and boring tasks. Clearly, you also need to be able to handle--to tolerate--the aversiveness of hard work and bad conditions when they are part of getting to your goals. The reinforcement of high effort (worthwhile extrinsic and intrinsic pay offs) on a variety of tasks seems to accomplish both, i.e. strengthens our general tendency to try hard and to "stick it out" though rough times. The childhood histories of motivated workers bear this out; they were highly rewarded for trying hard. That's how the "work ethic" is created. If you were left out of that process, you can still teach yourself the merits of intense effort. "Effort training" consists of reinforcing hard, serious trying on many tasks over a long period of time. There is evidence that such training even increases our motivation on enjoyable tasks (perhaps because all tasks and subjects have their dull and difficult parts).

You will have to select your own tasks to try hard on and to reward well (see methods #15 & #16). While research has shown that industriousness generalizes well from one task to another, it is not known how far it generalizes. Thus, if I wanted to be more motivated to study hard, I wouldn't just do my "effort training" in an exercise program or in a sport, although that might be helpful. I'd write a hell of a English theme paper, trying to enjoy it as well as giving myself rewards (plus a good grade). Then I'd take on Calculus or Geography intending to do outstanding work (again with satisfaction and rewards). Followed by, a proud, concerted effort to make the next Dean's list, etc.

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.
-Thomas Edison

STEP FOUR: Measure the results of your efforts.

Frequently review your reasons for your goals, the results of your effort training, and other techniques for increasing your motivation. Take pride in your successful self-help efforts.

Time involved

The time commitment varies greatly depending on the methods used. The listing and remembering of your reasons for changing or achieving something would take less than an hour initially and only a few minutes each day. The "effort training" approach involves almost no extra time, just the arranging of effective rewards for special efforts.

Common problems with the method

The obvious difficulty is that the unmotivated person has been rewarded for not utilizing all their potential and for not putting out maximum effort. It is unlikely that their environment (or their values) will change radically and quickly from accepting minimal efforts to demanding hard, unpleasant work. If a dramatic personal revolution is not possible, perhaps gradual changes would be possible.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

As with the methods for increasing self-efficacy, there is very little research demonstrating effective procedures for increasing one's motivation. It is obvious that motivation is vitally important; we are just beginning to investigate practical methods for increasing industriousness. It is hard to see how this could be dangerous, unless there are health risks associated with high drive levels.

This method is included here primarily to remind you that motivation may be the most important and least understood aspect of self-help, even when changing simple behaviors.

Additional readings

Eisenberger, R. (1989). *Blue Monday: The loss of the work ethic in America*. New York: Paragon House.

Meeting basic needs (so they won't get in the way)

A major contribution of Humanistic Psychology is the idea that basic needs must be satisfied before we can proceed on to other more

advanced tasks (see chapter 4). Otherwise, unsatisfied needs will demand our attention and energy. This is a possible explanation for many of our failures in self-improvement. And the implications of these failures are: (l) find out what unmet need is interfering with your progress, (2) satisfy that need, and (3) go back and try again to achieve the original self-improvement.

Purposes

- To identify and effectively cope with our basic physical, safety, belonging and love, and self-esteem needs, which, as long as those needs are unsatisfied, will undermine our efforts at mature love and self-actualization. Examples:

Lower Needs	Higher Needs Interfered With
Procrastinate by playing or socializing	Responsible achievement
Sexual conquests to build ego	Seeking love
Staying dependent on parents	Becoming independent
Excessively seeking attention	Self-esteem and mutual love
Seeking a mate	Fulfilling your potential

STEP ONE: Discover the need(s) that is interfering with progress.

The place to start, rather obviously, is by observing what needs (activities) are interfering with our achieving some goal. Read about Humanistic theories in the motivation section of chapter 4. Look especially for the needs to belong (have friends) and to be loved (be part of a family) as well as for self-esteem needs (feel competent, successful, worthwhile). These are the needs that most often interfere with being your real self, loving unselfishly, and living up to your potential. Using method #9 may be very helpful in finding your more basic needs.

In addition, any of the methods at level V in chapter 15 could help identify your hidden basic needs. Notice that method #5, reframing, in chapter 15 is designed for exactly this purpose, and, furthermore, that method asks unconscious parts of us to devise acceptable ways for meeting these needs. Here we are supposedly just dealing with the conscious mind, although we are not aware of the ways or the extent that lower needs are messing up our lives.

STEP TWO: Plan ways to satisfy your unsatisfied basic needs.

These unsatisfied "interfering needs" tend to be enormous holes or voids in our development. So, don't expect a quick, easy solution. We can't eliminate our feelings of inadequacy and basic shame or our doubts about our lovability with a stroke of magic. However, correct diagnosis of the problem is important. For example, suppose a student feels an uncontrollable urge to go out with the opposite sex. If the basic unmet need is love (and lower needs have been met), the socializing, if done effectively, is probably the right course of action, even though dating will certainly interfere for a while with studying. On the other hand, if the basic unmet need is feeling competent and having self-esteem, then seeking a mate may be very premature and a denial of the basic flaws inside, not a solution. For this person, instead of dating the opposite sex at this time, perhaps he/she should concentrate on developing meaningful friendships, being very responsible at work, improving family relationships, and becoming a good student as a means of feeling successful and adequate. Later, when this person likes him/herself and feels competent, he/she will be better prepared for a love relationship.

As illustrated by the above example, finding the solution to the unmet basic need(s) may take us out of level I. Search chapters 3, 6, 8, 9 and 14 for ways to deal with shame and increase self-esteem. Chapters 9, 10, &13 are most likely to help with finding love. These are major self-help projects and important ones but so is becoming a good student. Consider developing a "positive addiction," described in chapter 4, as another way of removing barriers to your progress. Lastly, since anxiety is commonly a barrier to achievement, consider some kind of relaxation (see chapter 12).

STEP THREE: Satisfy the basic needs in an acceptable way.

Make and carry out plans for correcting the major hurts. Revise as necessary.

STEP FOUR: Go back and try the self-improvement project again.

If Maslow's theory is correct and if you have correctly diagnosed the basic needs and solutions, the self-help efforts should go more smoothly this time. If not? I'd suggest getting professional advice, you've made a good effort.

Time involved

The time involved varies. But considering the scope of the developmental deficiencies in Maslow's first four levels (feeling unloved, feeling dependent or inadequate, feeling insecure), it may take considerable time each day for months to have significant impact. On the contrary, one might get a friend, develop a meaningful relationship, and feel much more lovable within a couple of months.

Common problems

It is not easy to guess the unmet need. Since the need may never have been adequately satisfied, relieving a long-standing deficiency will probably be difficult.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

Refer to the specific methods used. An advantage of this general theory and "method" is that the self-helper may be guided to find the "real" problem. Herein lies the danger as well, namely, one may falsely assume that a basic need is unmet, label oneself as deficient, and embark on an unnecessary self-improvement project.

Recognize unconscious motives and defense mechanisms

There is no doubt that sometimes we are not realistic. Not all of our actions are rational and intentional. Sometimes we avoid reality, we deny the truth, we fool ourselves. We may see the world the way we want to, not the way it is (example: a person falling in love or going through divorce). We may use excuses or rationalizations for avoiding an unpleasant but important task (example: procrastination instead of studying or self-indulgence instead of thinking of others). We may seek hidden payoffs through some action (example: fat helps us avoid sex or putdown games build our ego). The purpose of these distortions and self-cons is to make us feel better about our behavior, to defend ourselves against anxiety, and/or to conceal an unworthy purpose.

The self-evident solution to this self-deception is to be honest and realistic with ourselves. But how do we do this? There are powerful reasons for our distortion of reality; how can they be overridden? How can we deal with our own unconscious?

This is much too large a topic to be covered in one method. Chapters 14 and 15 help us understand unconscious factors. If we understand our unconscious motives and distortions, we can intervene and counteract these forces. The intention here is merely to draw your attention to a complex array of ideas and self-help methods that may need to be considered if you have an unwanted behavior that persists:

1. Irrational ideas may exaggerate our problems, arouse very disturbing emotions, and/or provide excuses for unreasonable behavior--see chapter 14 for important explanations and solutions. Almost everyone has some irrational ideas. Changing your behavior probably won't change your troublesome ideas.
2. Attributions, assumptions, and conclusions are constantly being made by everyone. They aren't all logical and accurate. We are unaware that our thinking is not straight in many situations (see method # 8 in chapter 14). There are methods for double-checking these assumptions, e.g. "I'm dumb" is testable and

"She is this way because that is her personality" can be checked by asking (see method #7 in chapter 13 and Laing, 1965).

3. Defense mechanisms reduce our anxiety but also distort reality, e.g. one "projects" his/her bad traits to others or a worker rationalizes why he/she got a bad evaluation (often involving "sour grapes" and "sweet lemons"). See chapters 5 and 15. There is a test to determine how much you use specific defense mechanisms. Would a person ever change if he/she saw all his/her negative evaluations as being biased or meaningless ("Oh, they just don't like my kind of person!")?

4. Interpersonal "games" are played for sickish purposes--to putdown others, to putdown ourselves, to build our fragile egos. Such games yield unconscious pay offs. If you are a game player, adding a few rewards for some desired behavior is not going to wipe out the urges underlying your games. See chapters 9 and 15.

5. Old leftover emotions unconsciously influence our current behavior, e.g. old failures produce today's reluctance to try again or a fight with a person with certain physical characteristics 10 years ago leads to unreasonable suspicions of a similar looking person today. See chapters 9 and 15.

6. Unconscious motives and hidden pay offs undermine many of our self-control efforts. Not all of our motives are sensible and noble, and when they aren't, we'd prefer not to know about them. Many people do things and make decisions that are self-defeating, e.g. people do poorly at work to avoid getting more responsibility or to become the office clown or gossip. People push others away because they are afraid of getting hurt or they assume others will not really like them.

If you do not understand your behavior or if some behavior is remarkably resistive to change, investigate the role of unconscious factors (see chapter 15).

Self-Change Techniques Applied Simultaneously With the Target Behavior

Record "target" behavior; self-monitor and check your progress

There is no doubt that being "mindful" has practical benefits (Langer, 1989). We need to attend to what we are doing, to how others are responding, to alternative ways of doing things, to the steps necessary to get to our final goal, etc. Some of us by nature are much more watchful than others, but all of us can become more aware and

more accurately aware if we objectively record significant events about us.

The importance of making accurate observations was underscored in a recent study of people who had failed to lose weight on 20 or more diets and weight loss programs. They all claimed "I eat like a bird but I don't lose weight," "it's in my genes," "it's my metabolism," and "I eat less than 1200 calories a day!" When researchers carefully recorded these people's activities 24 hours a day, it was found that they ate twice as much as they said they ate. They were unmindful.

Careful recording of specific behaviors, reflecting your adjustment in a problem area, is important for several reasons: it helps assess the seriousness of your problem, it helps you identify the most important behaviors to change, it contributes to setting concrete goals and time-tables, it measures your progress in changing, it is rewarding, and about 15% of the time self-observation is all you need. Setting goals also increases progress.

Self-observation, recording the "target" behaviors and goal setting are so important that they are part of the steps in any self-help project. The comments here supplement chapter 2, steps 2, 4, and 7. You may not count or rate target behaviors in every project, but there should be at least vague awareness of (l) the more significant behaviors to change, (2) daily observation of those behaviors, (3) where you want to go (goals), and (4) some assessment of how the behavior is changing over time.

Purpose

- Any of the possible purposes mentioned above.

Steps

STEP ONE: Select clearly countable or ratable behaviors or feelings to record.

Chapter 2, step 2, gives directions and examples for doing this. Be sure you are clear about the behavior to be recorded, otherwise many of the above purposes will not be accomplished.

It may be helpful to specify the conditions as well as the desired behavior, i.e. record the behavior-in-a-situation, especially when the environment enhances the behavior (Methods 1 and 3). For example, a student might record the minutes per day studying efficiently in his/her "study" chair (and, therefore, not including the time spent mostly watching TV but occasionally glancing at a book).

Your self-help plan may involve developing a new and improved behavior. Therefore, the desired response will not be available for counting and recording until well into the project. A new index of progress can be added just as soon as the new target behavior has been developed.

In contrast to behaviors, feelings are seldom in discrete, countable episodes, so you will need rating scales. Examples:

Depression

Scale	Behavior
1	very happy, one of the best days of my life
2	happy, generally a good day
3	sort of happy, more + than -
4	mixed, both + and -
5	sort of unhappy, more - than +
6	bad day, quite unhappy
7	a terrible day, one of the most unhappy of my life

Anger

Scale		Behavior
1		no anger, well controlled, able to avoid or forgive.
2		a little irritation but quickly controlled or handled assertively
3		some irritation, others noticed, I was a little sharp or sulky
4		irritated most of the day
5		one or two angry outbursts which I didn't handle well
6		a bad day, big angry episodes kept me upset most of the day
7	<BR< td>	a terrible day, I lost control of my anger and was hurtful and/or destructive.

These are just examples; devise your own scales tailored to your problem, your situation, your response style, and your eventual goal. One can rate anything: tension, energy, aches and pains, goodness (as you define it behaviorally), self-esteem, self-acceptance, tolerance of others, assertiveness, belief in self-help, sexual adjustment, etc., etc.

STEP TWO: Keep a daily count or make a daily rating (see chapter 2, step 2).

See chapter 2, step 2.

STEP THREE: Make a chart of your progress.

The daily counts or ratings can be plotted on a weekly or monthly chart, as illustrated in chapter 2. Both counting and charting are easy to forget; try doing them at scheduled times or pair them with some dependable event. Examples: count calories before each meal; plot daily total calories before doing exercises every evening; rate "target" emotion before having your evening drink; plot hours spent studying effectively every night before going to bed.

STEP FOUR: Use progress chart as a motivator; set reasonable immediate, intermediate and final goals.

"Taking one small step at a time" or "one day at a time" is good advice. Long-range goals may seem overwhelming, but a reasonable goal set for the next 15 minutes, the next hour, this afternoon, or today may seem quite manageable. For dieters, for example, focusing on self-control during the next few hours is more effective than setting weekly or monthly goals. Indeed, setting your own immediate goals which will enable you to reach your long-range goals, in terms of the "target" behavior, may be one of the better techniques for facilitating change (Chapman & Jeffrey, 1978). Completing the desired behavior is even more likely if you are frequently recording your progress; you need to be striving for some immediate goal as well as improvement each day or each week. The records will tell you if you made your goals. See chapter 2, step 4.

Post the progress chart in a conspicuous place, over your "study" chair or "depression" chair, on the refrigerator door, near where you exercise, some place where others can see your progress too.

STEP FIVE: Frequently evaluate your progress by comparing achievements with baseline data and with sub-goals.

See step 7 in chapter 2. The concept of baseline data is explained there. The self-rewards and praise (or punishment and self-criticism) we give ourselves have a powerful effect upon our behavior.

STEP SIX: Note special events on the progress chart.

Of particular interest to record will be (l) possible causal factors and (2) major outcomes. First, any event that might help explain a change in your target behavior should be recorded: got a new job, started dating steadily, had argument with my boss, doing poorly in math, and so on. Second, as chapter 2 recommends, one would ordinarily record each day the most immediate and direct indicators of progress, e.g. calories consumed, hours studying each day, minutes involved in meaningful conversation with spouse, a rating of daily tension, etc. However, it is the big, long-range achievements that are

really important to us. So, the progress chart should also reflect major outcomes, like: lost 10 pounds this month, got a new dress! Got 3.6 GPA last semester! GI series indicates ulcer healing! (Record disappointments, too.)

With a little creativity the progress chart can come alive and be more than sterile numbers. It can picture, even illuminate your life. Use symbols (or a secret code) for certain events. Add "before" and "after" pictures or descriptions. Perhaps the progress chart could become part of a diary or journal of your life (see chapter 15).

Devising the counting or rating procedures and progress chart will take only an hour or two. Less than 10 minutes per day are needed for counting and recording. Very little time is needed to set daily or weekly sub-goals and assess progress. The time will be well spent.

Within many of us lurks a rebellious critter who frequently shows him/herself when some routine task, like record keeping, needs to be done. Anything mechanical or clerical will be resisted by about 1/3 of us in my observation. Another related problem is just forgetting, after several days, to do the recording and eventually dropping the recording. Try to keep doing the project even if your record keeping gets sloppy.

It has definitely been shown that self-monitoring aids changing. And setting short-range goals helps. There are several other advantages from being more objective and accurate in observing and in self-evaluation. There are no dangers.

Additional readings

Watson, D. L. and Tharp, R. G. (1972). *Self-directed Behavior*, chapter 6, Brooks/Cole.

Thorensen, C. and Mahoney, M. (1974). *Behavioral Self-control*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Birkedahl, N. (1990). *The habit control workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Record <u>antecedents and consequences</u>; do a behavioral analysis

If we can understand what causes a particular behavior, we are more likely to be able to change that behavior. One way to better understand some specific behavior is to carefully observe its antecedents and consequences, i.e. what occurs just before and right after the behavior. By using knowledge of learning (see chapter 4) we should be able to analyze the situation and explain the behavior.

Purposes

- To understand what in the environment is causing a behavior or emotion or interpersonal interaction. (If nothing external, look inside for thoughts, memories, feelings or physiological factors.)
- To use this knowledge to figure out how to change the behavior or to determine why a self-help effort isn't working.

Steps

STEP ONE: Remember the circumstances preceding the behavior or emotion or interaction.

Think back and remember as much as possible about what happens right before the "target" behavior:

- time and physical setting, any environmental cues that set you off--
- your actions, thoughts (self-talk), and feelings--
- any defeatist ideas, e.g. "I'll never get better," "I can't change," "I'm just that way"--
- others' behavior and feelings (including believing they think you are stupid, etc.)--
- nature of interaction with others--
- are there any signs of possible consequences (+ or -) that influence your behavior?
- your physical condition (tired, hyper, drunk, etc.)--
- your use of or lack of skills--
- + or - expectations or values--
- is this situation similar to a situation or person you have had experience with before?

List the stimuli that seem to occur right before the behavior in question. In this method, you can concentrate on the antecedents of desired or unwanted behaviors, feelings, or interpersonal interactions.

STEP TWO: Think about the possible + or - consequences following your behavior or emotion or interaction.

It will also be helpful to consider the payoffs for both the unwanted and the desired behavior, perhaps comparing the two. If you are dealing with a bad habit, you may feel "I don't get anything positive out of the habit." Don't believe it; get started carefully observing the results of your habit. The positive pay offs outweigh the negative consequences. Each habit has its own unique set of positive and negative consequences. It is important to consider many possible consequences to uncover them all:

1. desired pay offs--consider both extrinsic rewards (material, interpersonal, or symbolic of success) and intrinsic satisfaction (enjoyable feelings, relief, and self-esteem), both in the immediate and long range future. Often performing a well-

learned habit just makes us feel better but we don't understand how or why; it is still a consequence.

2. negative reinforcement--relief or escape from stress, self-criticism, interpersonal pressure, or any other unpleasant experience. Ask: were there any cues in the situations that enabled you to anticipate and avoid something unpleasant without actually feeling bad at all? (Example: one might avoid an argument by avoiding a topic. In this case, escaping the threat of a fight reinforces avoiding the topic, but there has been no resolution of the conflict between the two of you.)

3. unwanted consequence--punishment, criticism, deprivation of something you wanted, increased self-criticism or interpersonal conflicts, unpleasant thoughts about terrible possible outcomes, having to correct the mistake you made, or any unpleasant outcome.

Consequences may be positive and negative, expected and unexpected, immediate and long-term, extrinsic and intrinsic, material and symbolic (a failing grade), emotional and interpersonal and even unconscious. To understand ourselves, we have to be honest about all the possible consequences.

It is very important to ask yourself: Is it possible that a part of me really unconsciously wanted the consequence I got? Also, ask yourself: How does the outcome make me feel about myself? Do I have an unconscious need to put down or hurt someone else? to rebel or resist pressure? to put down myself? to fail? to feel bad or guilty? to live out a "life script?" Chapters 4, 9, and 15 might be helpful. Also, writing out one's explanations might clarify the situation and help with the decision of exactly what to observe in the next step.

STEP THREE: Observe and record the antecedents and consequences of the behavior, emotion, or interaction.

Every time the "target" behavior occurs observe carefully and record the exact conditions that preceded it and followed it. Consider the factors mentioned in steps one and two which you think could possibly be relevant, or any other possible cause.

Record your observations on 3 X 5 cards. Do this for several days, or at least until 8 or 10 occurrences of the target behavior have been observed. Several observations are necessary to determine if the behavior is only occasionally reinforced.

STEP FOUR: Complete a "behavioral analysis" using both your recall and your recorded observations of antecedents and consequences.

For each target behavior, list the stimuli that seem to elicit the behavior and the payoffs that result from and reinforce the behavior. This should "explain" the behavior, i.e. what causes the behavior and why this one behavior is dominant over all the competing behaviors.

Chapter 4 describes operant, classical, and social learning. These theories will help you understand how antecedents-behavior-consequences relationships are formed and maintained. Chapter 4 also explains why some behaviors are hard to understand; this may help too. Some of the questions above also involve many other factors that might influence our behavior besides learning procedures, such as values, unconscious needs and motives, games, unresolved emotional situations, etc. These other factors are discussed in chapters 4, 9, 14, and 15.

This process called "behavioral analysis" is the essence of all efforts to understand human behavior. The various theories--psychoanalysis, social learning, humanistic, behavioral, Gestalt, etc.--simply emphasize different factors among the antecedents or the consequences. By repeatedly attempting to understand human behavior in this way, you are becoming an "insightful" psychologist. Be sure to discuss your "theories" with others; you need to consider many points of view.

STEP FIVE: Use the self-awareness from the behavioral analysis to exercise better self-control.

The knowledge from this method leads directly into using Methods 1 and 3, involving antecedent stimulus control, and Methods 16, 17, and 18, involving control of the consequences, in order to develop plans for creating a new response, a new way of handling a problem.

Anyone who has learned a new habit--exercising, picking up dirty clothes, overcoming shyness--realizes that the new behavior is hard to start. At first, the old behavior is so much easier, it's still automatic. However, after 3 to 4 weeks of daily practice, the "hard" new habits become automatic and easy too. There is no known alternative to simply pushing yourself to carry out the new better habits until they become "natural."

As we learned in chapter 5, almost any change is stressful, even though it is an improvement. Furthermore, the ramifications of seemingly small changes may be far reaching. Examples: deciding in the sixth grade to go out for several sports may influence your career, your choice of friends and spouse, your life-long interests, etc. Likewise, if you decided to become a serious student... In some cases, however, the "cost" of the new habit, in terms of effort and ramifications, may seem too high.

Time involved

An hour or so will be involved in the arm chair philosophizing about the role of the antecedents and consequences. The actual observation and recording will take 10 to 30 minutes a day for a couple of weeks. The behavioral analysis will be another hour if you keep your explanations strictly behavioral. (If you branch out into other theories, e.g. "what games am I playing?" or "did my relationship with my

father influence this behavior?" it will take much longer--and may be more exciting.) Total=about 10 hours. Of course, one could be more casual and sloppy about it. In some instances, you may have no choice since a change may not be possible without the better understanding of a careful analysis.

Common problems with the method

As mentioned before, some people naturally abhor keeping systematic records, especially about themselves. A lesser problem is going through the process and finding that you didn't record the relevant information or that you don't yet know enough about the theories to make sense out of the data you have observed.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

A careful observer almost always learns facts about his/her own behavior that he/she hadn't realized. In that sense it is effective. It is unknown how often it leads to effective self-change, however. No dangers although it is possible you may not like all the things you find out about yourself.

Additional readings

Nelson, R. (1976). Assessment and therapeutic functions of self-monitoring. In M. Hersen, R. Eisler, & P. Miller (Eds.), *Progress in behavior modification*, Vol. 5. New York: Academic Press.

Also see Watson and Tharp (1972), Thorensen and Mahoney (1974), and Birkedahl (1990).

Disrupt the unwanted habit; thought stopping; self-distraction

A habit flows along smoothly. Once interrupted, however, it is easier to stop or alter its course. Likewise, an unwanted response, like an outburst of anger, can be reconsidered if there is a pause in the process before any action occurs; thus, the wisdom of the old adage, "Count to 10 before getting mad." Furthermore, it is easier to avoid temptations if there is a delay of gratification and attention is directed away from the temptation. Walk away and get your mind involved in something else.

Unwanted worries or fantasies can sometimes be delayed or ordered to stop, which is a form of disruption. However, in other cases, attempts to suppress an obsession make it worse (see method #12 and chapter 5).

In order to develop a new behavior, we may have to weaken the old habit, especially if it is a strong habit. In order to study, we have to break our habit of watching TV all the time. In order to eat more healthy food, we have to break our habit of eating lots of red meat. Sometimes the old habit can be broken instantly, "cold turkey," but often some technique is needed.

Purposes

- To disrupt habits that are so automatic that they are done unconsciously. The disruption draws your attention to the habit and gives you a chance to stop it. The disruption also enables you to develop a more desirable habit to replace the unwanted behavior.
- To provide a pause to think and reconsider in the middle of an otherwise impulsive, ill-considered response.
- To stop unwanted thoughts, especially depressive ideas, anger-generating fantasies, and worries.
- To increase your confidence in self-control.

Steps

STEP ONE: Plan in advance how to disrupt the unwanted behavior.

Mostly this consists of making "rules" which you then have to enforce. For example, it is common to recommend this rule to dieters: pause between every bite, putting down your fork and savoring the food. This breaks the automatic habit of rapidly shoveling in the food. It is also recommended that 2 or 3 five-minute "rest periods" be incorporated into every meal; this gives you practice at stopping eating and a chance to reconsider if you really want to eat more during that meal.

Smokers are given rules that disrupt the habit, such as put the pack in a different pocket, use a different lighter, use a disliked brand, smoke with the other hand, and so on. Invent your own disruptions.

In the case of impulsive behavior (anger, sarcastic remarks, seductive actions, etc.), learn to recognize the early signs and plan for a pause: "Count to 10," "Stop the insults and think of a compliment," or "Stick to business." Important rules for restraint are: wait 10 minutes, think about the consequences, and use distraction (think about something else).

In the case of unnecessary or bothersome thoughts, try "thought stopping." This is simply yelling (loudly but silently to yourself), "Stop! Get out of here!" And, believe it or not, the thought often goes away. It will come back, so yell again. Eventually, by telling yourself that you don't have to put up with useless or hurtful thoughts, you can frequently control "your mind" (see method #12 when this makes things worse or doesn't work).

One of the most common methods for dealing with temptations or unwanted thoughts is self-distraction. The ordinary person tries to think of something else, say the chair he/she is sitting in, but before long the unwanted thought or feeling is on his/her mind again. So, since thinking about the chair didn't work, he/she tries to think about something else, maybe the knot in his/her stomach this time. The process goes on and on like this. It does keep the unwanted thought out of your mind fairly well, but afterwards the method may produce even more of the unwanted thoughts or emotions. This is because every time you see or think of the chair, or become aware of some sensation from your stomach, etc., you think of the unwanted thought or feeling again. Thus, it is better to *use only one distracting thought, preferably something pleasant*, such as your favorite hobby, vacation spot or even a very enjoyable, absorbing part of your work.

Robbins (1991) cites a case of a chocoholic who got a lot of attention because of his love of candy. Robbins told the chocoholic to only eat chocolate for several days. After about four days, he was sick of chocolate, making it easier to give up his 4-bars-a-day habit (see method # 12).

STEP TWO: Practice the disruptive process mentally before having the real experience.

Try to accurately anticipate situations where an old unwanted habit will occur, an strong emotional impulse will erupt, or an unwanted obsession will continue and continue. Practice until the idea of when and how to interrupt the process is well ingrained (see method #2).

In the case of an obsession, say a worry, you need to select and prepare *in advance* alternative topics to think about. Otherwise, a worrier will just shift from one worry or depressing thought to another one. Select only one positive topic to think about (as a distracter from unwanted topics), perhaps an enjoyable hobby, some pleasant aspect of your work, or maybe you could think about praying and God. You need to practice using this topic by imagining the onset of the unwanted thoughts and immediately turning your attention to the more enjoyable topic. (Don't forget to also use environmental factors to control your thoughts. If depressed, be around fun, happy people, get active in interesting tasks, make plans for the future, search for beauty and good, exercise, clean up and look good, etc.)

Consider a variety of additional ways of responding to or solving the needs or concerns underlying the unwanted behaviors or thoughts: avoidance and change of the environment (method #1), assertiveness and self-esteem (chapters 13 & 14), forgiveness (chapter 7), a desired or substitute response (methods #2 & #11), paradoxical intention (method #12) or scheduling the worry, and decision-making (chapter 13) instead of continuing the worry or bad habit.

STEP THREE: Try out the method several times, starting with the next opportunity; observe the results.

Don't expect instant results. Keep improving your method. Continue until a better way of handling the situation is well established.

Time involved

Total time=1 or 2 hours. In many ways these methods will give you more time, i.e. reduce time wasted on unwanted acts (eating), worrying, getting into arguments, etc.

Common problems with the method

Most common is forgetting to disrupt or stop the ongoing response. Frequently, one's self-concept interferes with behavioral control. Example: if one sees him/herself as "hot headed," "flirtatious," "weak willed," or "too old to learn," this counteracts the effectiveness of any self-control method directed towards eliminating these reactions. (See cognitive methods and self-concept in chapter 14.)

As Wegner (1989) points out, effective suppression temporarily of thoughts may cause problems, because the troublesome thoughts may return even stronger; suppression, he says, doesn't solve problems. To solve a problem you often have to get it out, deal with it, talk to someone about it, make plans to change, etc.

Effectiveness, advantages, dangers

No carefully controlled research is available. However, practitioners frequently recommend this type of method. It is easy to learn and you can see immediately if it works. There is no danger, unless strong emotions are involved, such as intense anger and suicidal depression. The method should reduce the risk of destructive action but everyone must exercise maximum caution when potentially violent emotions are involved. In such cases, seek professional help and support from family and friends immediately.

Additional readings

Lazarus, A. (1971). New techniques for behavior change. *Rational living,* 6, 1-13.

Substitute a new response to replace the unwanted habit; Habit Reversal Training

An old habit can be broken by replacing it with a new, more desirable habit. Azrin and Nunn (1977) use this approach to controlling habits (see chapter 4). A similar concept is used in two other situations: (l) more acceptable responses can replace unwanted habits, e.g. one could listen instead of give advice or chew gum instead of smoking, and (2) a better way of meeting one's needs could be found, e.g. one could handle loneliness by learning social skills

rather than by watching TV or by joining a support group rather than merely complaining to relatives about having nothing to do.

Purposes

- To find a better response than the current one and start using it.
- To break an old habit by replacing it with an incompatible new one.

Obviously, there is a similarity to method #2. This is more a simple substitution at the time the old response starts. There is a lot of advanced preparation in method #2.

Steps

STEP ONE: Become highly aware of the unwanted habit.

Learn to recognize when the unwanted habit was about to begin. Watch the habit occurring, note which muscles move and how they move. Attend to when and under what conditions the habit occurs. Do this over and over and for a few days keep a record of every time the habit happens. You need to know the habit well, including its base rate.

STEP TWO: Select a substitute behavior and be prepared to use it.

Think of a desirable substitute. Make the necessary arrangements to carry out the new behavior. Example: if you are going to eat celery instead of a regular meal or jellybeans instead of smoke cigarettes, the celery must be bought and cut and the jellybeans bought in advance.

To overcome a habit, the new response should be (l) not distracting to others, (2) able to prevent the old response and ideally (3) something you can do for 3 minutes while carrying on normal activities. Examples: feel the change in your pocket instead of the bad habit of pulling your hair or pressing your foot against the floor instead of the habit of nervously shaking your leg (see chapter 4). Sometimes the substitute behavior can't be held for 3 minutes, for instance if one has an eye blink tic, the new behavior might be gently and discretely closing the eyelids for only a few seconds.

As with any other well ingrained habit, it is difficult, in the beginning, to try to satisfy well established needs or behavior patterns in another way. Even when substitute activities are already organized and welcoming you to use them, it may be hard to change: it is considered so hard for alcoholics to go to Alcoholics Anonymous that many people believe they must "hit bottom" before they are desperate enough to join AA. Many of the same social needs for camaraderie and power and acceptance are satisfied in AA or in church as were met in

the bars, but not all of them. It's still hard to go. Similarly, it is hard to seek out self-help groups, like a club for single parents, or a therapist. Although it's difficult, consider the consequences of not changing.

STEP THREE: The substitute response may need to be practiced. Exactly what competing behavior you intend to use must be well thought out.

The overriding response, say pressing your foot against the floor (so no one notices), to an urge to perform a habit, such as anxiously bouncing your leg, may need to be done in front of a mirror until you look natural and can do other things, like talk, at the same time. Action designed to replace the bad habit must be so well planned and practiced, so it can be used immediately (before the unwanted habit occurs).

STEP FOUR: Make the substitution at every opportunity.

Every time you feel the slightest tendency or urge to do the old habit, perform the new response. Be especially watchful when you are in the situation where the habit usually occurs, e.g. if you bite your nails while studying, be alert for the first tendency--say just touching your face--to bite the nails and immediately carry out your competing response which might be making your hands into a fist instead of extending your finger into your mouth.

In many self-help projects to overcome a bad habit, it may be helpful for the person to continue the substitute behavior for a minute or two after it has overcome the unwanted urge. Try to stop the unwanted habit every time. Don't give up too quickly… habits do not die easily.

Time involved

Relatively little time ordinarily is involved in this simple method, just thinking of an alternative, practicing it, and assuring that you faithfully substitute the alternative behavior. On the other hand, don't expect quick results in every case. Often the unwanted habit decreases in a few days but it ain't dead yet. If you stop the habit reversal at that point, the old habit is likely to come back. Don't be surprised if it takes two or three months to truly conquer the old habit. Remember old habits may *never* die completely--millions of smokers have gone back to smoking weeks or months after "breaking the habit."

Common problems with this method

Sometimes the substitutes have unwanted consequences, e.g. eating instead of smoking may increase your weight (usually by only a few pounds--and that can be guarded against). Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this method involves the fact that many unwanted habits occur when we are occupied by some other activity…or when

we are tired, sleepy, and not alert. Becoming aware enough to catch the onset of the bad habit may be hard, requiring special attention and effort until the habit weakens. Each relapse or failure is like dropping a ball of string you are winding; it is a challenge (but important) to keep the old habit from occurring at all.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Azrin and Nunn (1977) claim the method is very effective, successful over 90% of the time. This success rate was with people who completed a therapist-administered treatment of this kind. How many people actually complete a strictly self-help project, as recommended in the their book, is unknown. However, a 90+% success rate is impressive.

This is a simple way to break certain simple habits. Even in more complex situations you may find ways to meet pressing needs in more acceptable ways. This doesn't require a radical modification of one's needs. Yet, there is ample evidence that people resist learning new behaviors: many refuse to go to AA and psychotherapy. Consider how many marital problems and parent-child conflicts are never dealt with in counseling or marriage enrichment programs. Also, relatively few people seek help in helping themselves. We don't know why.

There are no known dangers.
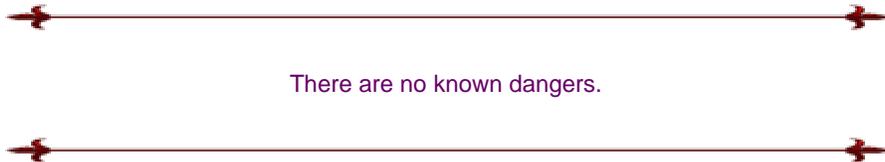
Additional readings

Azrin, N. and Nunn, G. (1977). *Habit control in a day*, New York: Pocket Books.

Satiate behavior or flooding; negative practice; paradoxical intention; stop suppressing unwanted thoughts

We can learn from intentionally making mistakes, called "negative practice." For instance, I often type ie instead of ei. This could be corrected by my practicing typing "w*ie*ght" or "th*ei*r" over and over (as long as I remained aware that I was doing it wrong). Tics (jerking muscles) have been cured by negative practice, i.e. doing it over and over willfully rather than against your will. A similar method is described next.

If you are a compulsive house cleaner, being asked (by a therapist) to spend twice as much time cleaning can be taxing. If you do it, however, and the therapist then seriously suggests that you dust everything, wash all the dishes (clean ones too), and wax the floors twice a day, it becomes ridiculous--hopefully, you can even see how funny your cleaning needs are becoming. The procedure of asking the person, or yourself, to do the unwanted and already-too-frequent behavior *even more often* is called "paradoxical intention." This method is discussed in detail in chapter 14, method #6.

Many unwanted habits become unpleasant when they are continued for a long time, i.e. satiated. Example: if one smokes too much it may become nauseating, even to the addicted smoker (especially in a very small room). Being required to bite your nails or to worry continuously for 5 minutes every hour may become unpleasant (see "aversive conditioning"--method #18). Thus, these behaviors should occur less frequently.

In some instances, paradoxical behaviors result in the person saying "enough is enough" and learning a new behavior. In other instances, the continuation of the unwanted behavior becomes punishing and so we drop it. In other situations, an unwanted behavior that seems determined to occur in spite of your opposition will go away as soon as you start demanding paradoxically that the behavior occur *more* frequently (like a crying child, who hopes he/she is bothering you, stops when asked to cry harder and longer). In the opposite direction, Wegner (1989) contends that obsessions develop because we try to suppress them, which causes the thought to come on even stronger. Therefore, the solution is to "stop the stopping" and, instead, just let the thought occur or perhaps encourage it.

Purpose

- To reduce compulsive, repetitive behaviors (or thoughts).

Steps

STEP ONE: Determine how often the unwanted behavior is occurring.

See method #8

STEP TWO: Set a goal of drastically increasing the frequency of the unwanted behavior.

In many applications, the increased frequency eventually makes the situation unpleasant. For this to happen in some cases, the behavior has to be done in special circumstances--like smoking with your head in a box. In other cases, the habit just naturally produces discomfort if overdone.

In the case of an obsession, say lusting for a coworker, or a worry, it is possible that this unwanted thought results from your repeatedly suppressing it and then letting it happen. When this is the history, it may help to let the fantasy or worry run its course. You could even insist that it occur frequently for a day or two. If the thought is dangerous, however, see a therapist.

STEP THREE: Continue the unwanted behavior until it is very unpleasant or disgusting or loses its strength.

Hopefully at that point the habit will be punished enough that it is extinguished. Watching yourself in a mirror might increase your distaste for a habit, like nail biting. In other cases, the worry or obsession fades away when you demand that it continue. A strong habit or worry may not go away easily; however, so several attempts to satiate-to-exhaustion might be required.

Most people are so busy fighting the habit that it doesn't occur to them to change sides and "go with this desperate need." See paradoxical intention in chapter 14. Also, most of us avoid self-punishment, even if it is for a good cause.

Obsessions are hard to eliminate; success rates with these techniques are about 50% but this is with extreme cases. There is almost no research with common compulsions, such as perfectionism, indecisiveness, rule-boundness, stinginess, workaholism, etc.

It is a simple idea, sort of "turning the tables." There are some dangers, especially with destructive obsessions. Therapists may encourage a person to dwell on and try to convince him/herself of the validity of ideas like "I'm going crazy" or "I'd be better off dead." The assumption (and hope) is that the contrary, rebellious part inside of us will suddenly start to oppose the dangerous idea instead of pushing it as before. That is too risky to do by your self without professional help. Yet, the approach could be used with less dangerous thoughts, like "I'm going to fail" or "He/she is probably going out on me." By the way, sarcasm might help, for instance, the falsely accused partner could say, "Yes, I went to bed with three people last night." People have found that repeatedly denying the accusations and saying, "I love *you*, of course I don't have affairs, it's a silly idea, don't say such things, …" are usually ineffective (Fay, 1978).

Additional reading

Lichtenstein, E. & Danaher, B. G. (1976). Modification of smoking behavior: A critical analysis of theory, research, and practice. In M. Hersen, R. M. Eisler, & P. M. Miller (Eds.), *Progress in Behavior Modification,* Vol. 3, New York: Academic Press.

Frankl, V. (1965). *The doctor and the soul.* New York: Knopf.

Challenge defeatist attitudes; let your body and mind work automatically without constant criticism and coaching; get into the "flow"

Seeing ourselves as helpless or as bungling has dramatic effects--we perform poorly, we stop trying, and we get depressed (Seligman, 1975). Some people respond to an actual failure by "falling apart;" others try harder. What determines the difference? One simple factor is how the performer explains the failure: if you say, "It's my fault, I can't do it," you do more poorly next time and give up. If you say, "I need to try harder, maybe I can do it," you'll do better after failure. The really good news is that people can learn to interpret failure as a sign they need to work harder (not a lack of ability), can draw from their experience to learn a better approach, and can develop their own self-instructions to achieve success (Diener & Dweck, 1978).

A related idea is that a restful, noncritical state of mind is the most efficient. Thus, teachers try to relax students and coaches try to calm players. Gallwey (1974) in *The Inner Game of Tennis* describes how we have two identities: one is playing tennis (or whatever we are doing), the other is telling ourselves how to do it! It certainly seems that way. The goal of this method is to quiet the critical coach that confuses things with a stream of instructions and upsets things with accusations, doubts and fears.

Gallwey's concept of performing uncritically is close to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of "flow." Sometimes you "get in the groove" and everything goes just right. You are calm and concentrating intensely on the task; things just click and you are really enjoying doing a super job. When this happens you are totally absorbed in the work. That's flow.

This method is not concerned with all aspects of low self-regard (see chapters 6 and 14) but rather (1) with detecting the barriers that keep you from trying and doing your best, (2) with reducing the inner voices of criticism and helplessness that disrupt your efforts, and (3) with finding ways to reach your maximum efficiency.

Purposes

- To recognize a lack of confidence and do something about it.
- To reduce the inner critic so one can do one's best.
- To achieve maximum efficiency and interest in a task.

Steps

STEP ONE: Become aware of self-doubts.

The self-doubts and putdowns may be obvious--self-critical statements may run through your head, your stomach may be tied in knots, you may want to get away. Examples: "I'd never be able to get an A in chemistry, so forget medical school" or "She'd probably laugh at me if I asked her to go to the game with me" or "I'm such a terrible volleyball player, I hope they don't push me into playing" or a good tennis player might say, "I can't hit the serve hard and get it in" or "I don't get set before I hit the ball, I'll bet I look awkward."

The self-statements may not be so clear-cut: you may simply believe you aren't able to do something and think very little about it. You may have never even considered the possibility; the self-doubt has always been there and prevented even a wish or a fantasy. Examples: Women may think of being nurses, stenographers, personnel managers, teachers, stewardesses, but never consider being doctors, lawyers, managers, owners, professors, researchers, pilots, etc. Men may never seriously consider a more enjoyable line of work or a promotion based on new skill.

It may be necessary to ask yourself how you feel about your ability to handle certain situations, e.g.:

- How certain are you (on a scale from 0% to 100% confident) that you could and would approach a group of strangers at a social gathering and join the conversation? _____%
- How confident are you that you would approach a person of the opposite sex at a party?_____%
- How certain are you that you would call them up for a date later if they hadn't called you?_____%

These are just examples. The questions have to be tailored to your specific concern. If you have reason to believe that self-doubts stand in your way, the next task is to reduce the doubts. It is probably clear to you that doubts will remain until proven wrong, i.e. until you start performing better, proving you have the ability. As long as you think you don't have the ability, you will either not try or let the doubts interfere with your performance. So the assumption that you don't have the ability has to be tested out which requires you to consider, at least temporarily, a more hopeful way of viewing your behavior.

STEP TWO: Make the assumption that your performance can be improved with more effort, more practice, and/or fewer emotions.

The only true test of your potential is to prepare as best you can and give it a try. However, there has to be some hope before one will prepare and try. Where does this hope come from? (l) Skills training often increases optimism (see chapter 13). (2) Insight into attitudes and self-defeating "games" might help (see Chapters 9 and 15). (3) Generally feeling better about oneself will increase motivation (see chapter 14). (4) Talking to someone who has been successful in the same area or getting encouragement from relatives, friends and others

may do the trick. (5) Maybe you can just make a firm commitment to yourself to give it a good try and see what you can do.

If the internal critic is disrupting your efforts, try Gallwey's suggestions in the next step.

Don't say foolish things to yourself, like "I can do anything if I try" or "I will make all 'A's' (if you have been a C and B student)." Keep your optimism within reason. If you are a beginning tennis student, don't aim to win a tournament at the end of the summer. How about after three years (if you practice hard)?

Experiments clearly indicate that expectations (our own and others') influence our performance; this is called a "self-fulfilling prophesy." So, a new, honest expectation of gradual improvement should encourage practice and facilitate improvement (see next method).

The "flow" concept is not based on the idea of an internal critic. It simply says that to be interesting an activity (our work) must utilize our abilities. Too easy a job is boring. Too difficult a job is stressful. When an activity matches our capabilities we are interested, absorbed, and entertained, which is flow. Thus, tennis is best when we are playing someone our equal and doing our best. An exciting career is neither too easy nor too hard for us, permitting us to use all our abilities and when we do, we do a fantastic job. Since we will be getting more able with experience, our jobs need to be made more difficult at the same time. If a job becomes stressful, it needs to be re-defined (in your mind) so it is do-able. Then with abilities equaling the demands, we are "grooving" or in "flow."

STEP THREE: With an optimistic or open-minded or non-critical attitude, prepare well and try to do your best.

After adopting a new attitude or gaining new skills and preparing, undertake an objective test of your ability. Compare your performance with prior performances. If you are able to do better than before, it has to be due to greater effort, a better attitude, or more skill. You didn't grow more innate ability! Keep on improving by using failure as a signal that you need to try harder (but do that without using disruptive criticism).

If your performance in any area is hampered by self-criticism or a defeatist attitude, try Gallwey's suggestions: (1) concentrate on the activity (say tennis or doing a lab exercise or selling a product), watch the ball (or customer), learn to 'love' it. (2) Trust yourself, don't

demand perfection, do your best and enjoy it, marvel at how well you can do things. (3) Focus on what is happening, not on fears or hopes of what will happen. (4) Stop trying to win, let yourself go, get in a groove where the effort is effortless, go full force but without criticism. (5) Accept yourself, fears and mistakes and all; play a good inner mental game and the external performance will be OK; don't try too hard.

If you are seeking "flow," as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), you need to set your own goals (you can't get wildly enthusiastic about carrying out someone else's life mission) and work on tasks that are really important and meaningful for you. Your goals determine the challenges you face and the skills you need to succeed. Since the goals are of your own choosing and involve interesting challenges, the tasks-to-be-done or your "work" fascinates you. This is especially true if you make your specific assignments difficult enough to match your current skills and drive level.

Next, throw yourself into the work with zest, immerse yourself in the activity. Keep the difficulty of the work at a level that stretches your ability and skills. Set challenges for yourself! Develop your ability to concentrate on the task at hand. One can't get into "flow" if you are frequently distracted (you aren't in control). Skills need to be developed constantly--and the job made more difficult (or the goals set higher) in order to use those new skills.

Concentrated attention leads to thorough involvement. A great athlete must concentrate, just as a good reader or a good listener must. You become so involved that you do not attend to the external world beyond your task and, therefore, you are not self-conscious. You lose your sense of self; you become a part of the system of activity (just as a good basketball player concentrates on all the players, not just on his/her actions).

The person in "flow" enjoys the experience. Even when great goals are not being pursued, because one has learned to control his/her mind, the ordinary experiences of life (and the grimy tasks) will be satisfying. You will appreciate a song bird, watching children play, walking in a park, etc. But the final result of being so efficient and productive will be creative achievement. To remain a high level of self-satisfaction, you will develop more and more skills; thus, you will be successful in doing something worthwhile if you have chosen your goals well. You will achieve an optimal performance almost without effort; you forget time and your troubles.

You can't stay in "flow" all the time, just try to stay in the groove as much as possible.

Time involved

Little time is required to ask your self if you are hassled and/or obstructed by an inner critic. If so, it should not take long to see the logic of trying out another mental attitude. If a new skill is needed to bolster a more optimistic attitude, that will take more time.

If the nature of the job needs to be changed to match your capabilities, it may be something you can do rather easily by yourself by making it more or less demanding. If the job has to be changed radically or can't be made to challenge your mind, that may be very difficult (see chapter 13 for suggestions about choosing a career).

Common problems with the method

A defeatist attitude is hard to change. Don't confuse this destructive self-putdown attitude with the demanding attitude of perfectionists. The tennis pros may have a severe inner critic (when they get mad at themselves) but they expect to play fantastically well. The pros also know the importance of "settling down," of "loosing ourselves in the game (flow)," and of having a good mental attitude. Some people just can't let go of their self-criticism, perhaps it serves some important purpose (like avoiding criticism from others).

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Our interpretation of doing poorly (not enough ability or not enough effort) is known to influence our subsequent performance. In some cases, our self-evaluations can be easily changed (such as by reading some self-help material). In other cases, renewed effort produces convincing results: "I'm damn good at this." There are no known dangers. We will, in a life-time of testing our limits, of course, have to occasionally face the conclusion that we are lacking in ability or that the payoffs are not worth the effort required. The alternative is to live without knowing our potential.

Additional readings

Gallwey, W. T. (1974). *The inner game of tennis*. New York: Bantam Books.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Develop positive expectations; increase self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a very old notion (self-confidence or belief in oneself) but a popular new psychology term (Bandura, 1977b, 1980a). It influences what we try to do and for how long. Where does a belief

in our ability to control or change a certain situation come from? (1) From relevant success experiences. (2) From observing others handle the situation successfully. (3) From being persuaded that we can do it. (4) From perceiving our physiological state as being prepared for the task at hand. Self-efficacy is discussed at length in method #9 in chapter 14.

Bandura contends that self-efficacy is a major underlying factor explaining the effectiveness of all therapies. That is, behavior or cognitive therapy (or a self-help method) works to the extent you believe you can use it to change. There is, in fact, a high correlation between expectations and one's performance. That doesn't prove one causes the other, however. Perhaps we just know our abilities pretty well. Nevertheless, as a theory, it suggests a simple approach: increase your positive expectations in order to improve your performance. It is noteworthy that Norman Vincent Peale's famous book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, begins with these words: "Believe in your self!" And 100 years ago William James wrote: "Our belief…insures the successful outcome.…"

The previous method #13 focuses on the removal of certain destructive parts of the self. This method focuses on strengthening the positive self-expectations parts of the self.

Purpose

- To improve performance by realistically increasing one's expectations.

Steps

STEP ONE: Find ways to increase your faith in your ability to change things.

Explore the ways listed in "General idea" above. (1) Nothing works like success to increase our confidence. Actual experience is much more convincing than imaginary experience. Try to insure success by taking on easy tasks first and then working up to harder assignments. Or, start by mentally rehearsing, role playing with a friend, and practicing (see chapter 13). (2) By observing others accomplish some task, we learn how to do it and we become convinced that we too can do it (if they are similar to us). (3) Our expectations are open to persuasion. Others can increase our confidence; we can talk ourselves into believing in ourselves. Reading about successful people builds our hope. The popular "Positive Mental Attitude," how-to-be-successful, and inspirational religious books may help (see chapter. 4). By their nature, most self-help books are encouraging. (4) Believing that we are physically ready to achieve some goal increases our confidence.

STEP TWO: Build confidence and increase your skills at the same time.

Although researchers need to differentiate expectations (faith or confidence or placebo) from ability (knowledge or skill or motivation), in everyday life they are usually clumped together. Unrealistically high expectations can't last long. One way of feeling competent is to be competent. Learn the skills you need and practice, practice, practice. And let the confidence grow too. The self-efficacy will motivate you to try and persevere, whereas before you hesitated and gave up.

STEP THREE: Try again with more self-confidence.

The proof is in the pudding.

Common problems with the method

As implied above, if one lacks talent, a positive expectation is of little value if that talent is required. On the other hand, if one has the necessary skills, then self-confidence will encourage their use until success is achieved.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Except for the well documented relationship between expectation and performance, there is very little knowledge, as yet, about how to change self-efficacy or about how powerful a factor it is. A problem is separating (1) the actual effectiveness of a self-help method from the impact of (2) simply having faith in an ineffective self-help method and (3) having faith that I, as a self-helper, have special aptitude in this area that will make me especially effective. (In medicine, the effect of the drug has to be separated from the patient's improvement based on believing an inert placebo pill will help.) Placebos in medicine are fairly effective. In self-help, probably all three factors are significant factors.

If any simple method can increase the effort we will exert, it is valuable. There are no dangers.

Additional reading

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*, 191-215.

Increase intrinsic satisfaction in the activity

There are many important activities that could be pleasurable but aren't: school, much of our work, child care, caring for others, etc. We are born curious and excited about learning. We want to be and feel competent. Yet, we get bored with school. Why? We have jobs that provide a great service to others (making a shirt or car). Yet, we may hate the work. Why? We like to give to others. Yet, paying taxes to provide schools, medical care, help to the old, the poor, the

unemployed, etc. is an unpleasant chore. Why? Because we overlook the potential intrinsic satisfaction in these activities! (See a long section,   Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation in chapter 4)

A recent summary of 145 articles (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001) in this area shows that providing extrinsic rewards following a behavior usually *increases the intrinsic satisfaction* one gets from performing that act. The exception to this is when the behavior is already quite interesting or satisfying and the reward entails some pressure or external control on the actor, for instance the delivery of the reward is contingent on successfully completing a specific step, or the reward is provided in such a way that it communicates to the actor that he/she is failing, doing poorly, or needs to speed up. A verbal reward, such as praise or positive comments, almost always increased the interest in the activity, even if it was already high in interest. Even tangible extrinsic rewards, like an award, increased interest if the rewards were given for simply finishing a task, for scoring above a certain level, for doing better than others, and for just solving a problem.

Intrinsic motivation is high when the activity is interesting, is challenging but not too hard, requires some skill, arouses your curiosity, and permits the actor to make his/her own decisions, exercise control, set his/her own pace in pleasant surroundings, and can get totally into the behavior as it occurs. (See the discussion of flow near the end of the page.) Keep those points in mind as you carry out this method being sure you realize the high-interest activities may need to be reinforced with rewards in different ways than low-interest tasks.

Deci (1975) recommends that employers pay a good salary in order to recruit a good employee and satisfy his/her basic needs. But the salary should not be used as an incentive for greater productivity because it interferes with intrinsic satisfaction from the work. How? Because we may start working for a salary increase or a commission-- not for the pleasure of doing the work. Deci says the employee should be given (1) interesting, challenging tasks and responsibilities, (2) considerable control over how to solve the problems, and (3) support and good relationships with co-workers, which add up to intrinsic satisfaction. About the same recommendations are made for schools by critics of traditional schools.

Purposes

- To enhance the intrinsic satisfaction in an activity.
- To use the intrinsic satisfaction as our motivation instead of or in combination with extrinsic rewards.

Steps

STEP ONE: Carefully identify the possible sources of intrinsic satisfaction in the activity.

Let's take studying as an example. What are the intrinsic satisfactions?

- Learning new information is interesting; it satisfies our curiosity; it feels good to understand.
- Much of what we learn about nature or our bodies and our minds is beautiful and awesome. The mystery and complexity of the origin and development and purpose of everything in the universe is mind-boggling--a challenge to the greatest minds.
- Pulling old and new information together so that it "makes more sense" is satisfying. Like solving a puzzle.
- When we acquire enough information that we feel competent and knowledgeable relative to others, we feel a sense of mastery.
- Using the knowledge by doing something, such as writing or talking to others... and thinking about doing so...is gratifying. It can be creative.
- Planning our own learning experiences and exercising the self-discipline and responsibility involved can produce pride.
- Learning to solve problems and help others is deeply satisfying.

A similar list could be made for any positive activity or situation.

STEP TWO: Repeatedly affirm the value and pleasure obtained from the ongoing activity.

While undertaking the activity, focus your attention periodically (briefly every 10 or 15 minutes) on the possible intrinsic satisfactions. Marvel at and appreciate the beauty involved. Take pride in your activity. When finished with each work period, take a minute or two to appreciate your work and to think about how the information can be used and enjoyed in the future.

STEP THREE: Provide as many rewards and pleasant circumstances as possible. If the activity is already positive, carefully avoid overemphasizing the external rewards and/or making them unduly controlling, pressuring, or negative.

Positive, desired extrinsic rewards, such as money, will usually increase the pleasure one gets out of the rewarded low or high-interest activity. However, if one believes he/she is doing something for an extrinsic reward, this may reduce the awareness of potential intrinsic satisfactions (Deci, 1975). Example: a student who is highly motivated to go to law school and dreams of the status and material rewards he/she will achieve as a lawyer may overlook the pleasure of learning about government, rules of evidence, and tax laws. Not only will this result in less enjoyment during pre-law and law school, but it could also lower the probability of keeping up with the professional reading a good lawyer should continue to do.

Keep the extrinsic and intrinsic satisfactions in perspective--in balance. You need to be aware of both and the interplay between

them. There are unpleasant jobs that need to be done--extrinsic rewards must be used. But, remember, as with hidden talents, you might have a potentially high intrinsic interest in some activity and never realize it, unless you are encouraged or encourage yourself to explore many areas. Example: Many students have had the experience of coming to love a required course that they thought they would hate. Many activities are started because of the external rewards (being paid for it or wanting to be with friends) but continue because we like the activity. Thus, you may need to initially self-reward some new activity but gradually reduce the importance of the external pay offs so the intrinsic satisfaction can grow: "I do it because I like it" or "because it's morally right."

Common problems with the method

Our old beliefs and current social milieu are so different from these positive attitudes about intrinsic satisfaction that it may not be believable to you that learning, working, paying taxes, sacrificing for the needy, etc. could be enjoyable. Think about it.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

As we have seen, there is some research about the interaction between intrinsic motivation and rewards. But there is hardly any study of producing and utilizing an increase in intrinsic satisfaction as a self-help method. Indeed, we know relatively little about how to increase intrinsic satisfaction. Regrettable! You can look around though and see the power of intrinsic motivation in action: a voracious reader, a skilled perfectionistic craftsperson who obviously enjoys his/her work, the 60-hour-a-week worker who loves his/her job, etc. That's the advantage. No danger is known.

Consequence Methods:
Applied after the "Target" Behavior Has Occurred

Reward the desired behavior; positive reinforcement

A response followed promptly by an effective reward (reinforcement) will be more likely to occur again. This is called the "law of effect;" it is the basis of operant conditioning and the major means of changing voluntary behavior. These learning principles can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) the motivated learner--who might ask, "What do I have to do to get the rewards I want?" and (2) the behavior modifier--who asks, "What rewards (or punishment) do I

have to offer to encourage the desired behaviors (in others or oneself)?"

Let's consider some examples from each viewpoint: (1) the motivated learner knows the rewards he/she wants but not how to get them. The Little Leaguer wants to hit the ball hard but it takes a lot of practice to learn how. Each successful hit is a reward, i.e. a source of satisfaction and motivation to keep trying, and a source of information about what to do to be successful in the future. The young man starting to date must learn (often by "exploration," of course I mean trial and error) how to behave to get the rewards he wants from his girlfriend. Much of life is discovering what works for you to get what you want (see method #2). Once we "know what to do," i.e. we have learned the lawful relationships between behavior and payoffs. Then we use this knowledge over and over, whenever we want the payoff, and the behavior may become a habit.

(2) Sometimes we have learned behaviors and/or sought goals that are not ideal; they are bad habits. We become dissatisfied and want to change. In this case, operant learning principles simply say: reward the desired behavior (or behavior approximating the desired behavior) and don't reward the unwanted habit.

There are innumerable illustrations of the power of rewards in psychology--children's behavior change, students' study habits change, patients' symptoms change, self-concepts change, topics of conversation change... when the rewards are changed. This is positive reinforcement. B. F. Skinner believes it is one of the most powerful and useful ideas in psychology. It provides a solution of many human troubles.

Good and evil, reward and punishment, are the only motives to a rational creature: these are the spur and reins whereby all mankind are set on work, and guided.
-John Locke, 1690

The major problem with positive reinforcement is that our Creator forgot to make it automatic to give rewards, praise, and love when things are going well. Note that the Creator remembered to build in automatic irritation when things don't go our way. Strange isn't it? Fortunately, the Creator seems to have realized the mistake before humans were finished and stuck a glob of 150 billion nerve cells on top. We call it our brain. To effectively use positive reinforcement, we have to think! And, what's worse, we have to think to do something when we are pleased and satisfied and feeling good. Or, just as difficult, think in advance of rewards to give later when good behavior

occurs--that's called contingency management or contracting. That is this method.

Many people believe that most things we do voluntarily are the result of reinforcement, that there are payoffs (or hopes for one) for everything we do (see method #9). If that is the case, the good self-controller would surely be (l) busily investigating the behavior-rewards connections and (2) making certain their good traits (caring, loving, self-discipline) are well rewarded or performed right before some pleasurable life event (like eating or going to the bathroom or being appreciated by others).

In method #2, we are designing and learning a better behavior for getting the rewards we want. In this method, however, we (self-modifiers) are changing the consequences to get the behaviors we want. Or, we (learners) are agreeing to behave in new (probably already learned) ways to get some payoff we want.

Rewards may be viewed as (1) a source of motivation or (2) reinforcers of the strength of the preceding response as a habit. Both are accurate views. We use rewards to encourage desired behavior to occur now and in the future. Chapter 4 has a section explaining more about reinforcement.

Self-helpers need to consider the entire context of their self-reinforcement.

Keep an overall perspective: This method helps you single out a simple behavior and carefully administer repeated rewards to strengthen the desired action. However, while trying to change one minuscule behavior, one must not forget that there are thousands of other behaviors, some rewarded for years and well established habits, which are competing with the single behavior you have decided you want to occur more often. Only the strongest or most reinforced behavior gains the right to occur. It is important to keep in mind the universe surrounding you, namely, hordes of swirling habits accumulated over a lifetime and a myriad of reinforcers ready to be attached to many behaviors. Consider these examples in which this morass messes up your self-control.

(1) Strong old habits are powerful, ask any smoker, any beer lover, any social or Internet addict, any late night snacker, and on and on. New habits are weak and need special and frequent reinforcement.

Naturally occurring powerful reinforcements may often mess up your long-term self-help efforts. You will have to reduce or control them. Consider these examples--fast food, desserts and candy destroy healthy diets; watching TV and drinking a beer make exercising very unlikely; good tasting soothing cigarettes lead to illness, not health; anger enables you to get your way but you lose friends and loved ones; passivity saves you from confrontation but leads to domination; habitually thinking "I can't _____ " avoids the hard work of trying, etc.

Thus, to arrange successful reinforcement of the new desired behavior, very often you have to avoid or counter old habits that undermine your more important goals.

There are many ways to counter the problems of powerful competing habits that derail your important long-term goals. Basically, the methods include: (a) avoid the situations in which the strong habits occur, stay away from drinking buddies, don't buy fast food or desserts, etc. Also, if possible, (b) reduce the payoff of a strong habitual behavior by reminding yourself of the bad long-range consequences of this unwanted behavior, e.g. read about the health hazards and make a record before smoking every cigarette, paste your balance and the monthly interest charges over the face of your credit card , and make a list of the people you have hurt by being overly critical, etc. (c) Learn new skills that can replace powerful bad habits, e.g. read about assertiveness and insist you try "I" statements instead of using demands, bitching, or angry rages. And, finally, (d) make the desired new behaviors easy to carry out and pour on the rewards and self-praise for these behaviors that will eventually enable you to achieve your long-range goals.

(2) Immediately available pleasures/rewards distract us from more important long-term achievements. An overall perspective is needed.

Humans will, to varying degrees, take an immediately available small reward (say, $2 for a chore) rather than waiting for a week for a 50% greater reward ($3.00 for the chore). Maybe we doubt the bigger reward will be there a week later. In any case, research shows this to be so. Yet, we all know that instant payoffs overpower wiser but later satisfactions, e.g., we buy attractive toys and gadgets rather than save for bigger things for the future, we spend time with our girl/boyfriend instead of studying, we watch sexy funny sit-coms and "forget" writing the lab report, we have unprotected sex and get or give a STD lasting a life-time, we have a brief affair destroying a good long-term relationship, etc., etc. So, it isn't just derailing strong old habits that we have to guard against, but also tempting immediate pleasures which disrupt our achieving long-term goals.

Of course, one should avoid such immediate positive situations as much as possible and develop other incompatible responses, like assuming more of a responsible leadership role at work instead of playing around. Warning signs can help. Self-talk can guide our behavior to some extent by constantly reminding ourselves of our important goals and what has to be done to get there.

(3) Avoiding mildly unpleasant tasks may eventually result in major problems or in the failure to achieve some important goal.

Examples: Not going to the doctor to have a check up when you actually have high blood pressure, avoiding dealing with a marital problem until your partner files for divorce, neglecting to buy condoms or to take the pill until an unwanted pregnancy occurs, not studying

hard enough to get into medical or law or graduate school, or avoiding dealing with shyness which eventually prevents dating, marriage and children.

When one neglects unpleasant but needed immediate tasks, one should schedule frequently and reward heavily the goal-directed behaviors. At the same time, one can also focus on learning to enjoy the behaviors that leads to your long-term goals, e.g. study or work in ways you enjoy, use your new knowledge, take pride in doing well.

In summary, there are various ways of increasing the probability of good outcomes--avoid temptations, make it easy to do the right thing, practice the desired behavior until it becomes a habit, repeatedly remind yourself of the good and bad consequences of your behavior, give yourself inspirational pep talks, carefully observe and actually record your behavior, and feel proud and get support from friends, coworkers, relatives, or whomever you can. The other behavioral methods of self-control in this chapter will help you make these changes.

You need to be aware of the complexity of behaviors. You need to know yourself and what reinforcements have you under control. Are you a slave to strong habits? Do you give due weight to future outcomes or do you pretty much live for the moment and avoid unpleasant tasks? Do you succumb to old habits or focus on the "goodies of the moment" and forget the more important distant goals? Do you neglect distasteful chores, like doing a report or buying a new battery for your old car, leading to dire consequences? These are formulae for failure. If you overlook or minimize the probable bad consequences of bad behavior (even though it may be fun right now) or play down the possible good consequences of good behavior (even though it may be hard unpleasant work), you need to learn how to accentuate the importance of those long-term outcomes! One needs to keep his/her eyes on the big long-range consequences (see motivation in chapter 14).

When we are fully aware of all the consequences of our actions (the resulting reinforcement), we can have more self-control and more payoffs in the long run. This isn't easy. But rewarding desirable behavior, as now described in this method, is very important.

Purposes

Rewards can be used any time a new response--behavior, thought, feeling, attitude, skill--is needed to overcome a problem or to be a better person. Rewards can be used:

- To motivate you to do a desired behavior that isn't a self-sustaining response yet. Eventually, a new behavior should yield enough natural payoffs to sustain itself.
- To encourage you to keep trying to find a way to a goal.

- To strengthen the tendency of a desirable habit (or thought or feeling) to occur again in the future.
- To create a new and better response by (a) shaping, i.e. rewarding some behavior that approximates the desired behavior (keep rewarding changes in the desired direction until the desired behavior occurs), or (b) rewarding a substitute behavior, e.g. if one has a whiny, pessimistic roommate, one could reward pleasant, optimistic comments.
- To reinforce the reduction of an unwanted response (cutting down a bad habit).
- To sweeten up an unpleasant but necessary task (the usual employment situation).
- To make up for the loss of harmful pleasures, e.g. pride in your looks can make up for giving up rich delicious food, fun times with an athletic team can make up for fun times with drug-using friends, etc.
- To discover and increase intrinsic satisfaction: (1) to initiate an activity that you may discover to be naturally satisfying or (2) to associate a reward with a task, e.g. studying, so that the task becomes more pleasurable (see method #15).

Steps

STEP ONE: Identify the desired behavior in very specific terms; Set subgoals (daily, weekly, and monthly) as well as final goals.

First of all, it is hard to improve oneself if one doesn't know exactly what to do...and when and where to do it. So, one has to convert vague goals, like "I want to get organized" or "I want to be more loving" or "I wish I had less of a temper," into specific desired behaviors, like make up a daily schedule, talk and do fun things together 30 minutes every day, and try specific methods from chapter 7 for reducing my anger.

Since positive reinforcers are supposed to primarily strengthen the responses given during the previous few seconds or, at most, minutes (unless the situation is recreated in one's mind), therefore, the to-be-rewarded response must be brief, easily identified, and very clearly associated in your mind with the payoff. Otherwise, how will you know when to give the reward at the right moment?

Likewise, since you expect gradual improvement in your behavior, you need to set realistic daily, weekly, and monthly subgoals which will be reinforced as soon as they occur. Examples: For the first week of jogging, you might decide to jog 1/2 a mile every day. For the second week, 3/4's of a mile daily. For the third week, a mile a day. The rewards should be given right after running. If you want to be more assertive, the behavior needs to be developed gradually, just like jogging. So, set subgoals and final goals, which will be used in the contract in step 3.

Also, since the environment determines much of our behavior, it may be helpful to specifically prescribe the situation in which the desired behavior will occur. Watson and Tharp (1972) suggest

describing the desired behavior-in-a-situation, i.e. exactly what behavior, in what situation including when and where. Example: during the lunch hour in his office I will talk to the boss about my being expected to make the coffee every day in the office and tactfully indicate that I would like to share that chore with other people.

STEP TWO: Find and arrange for rewards (or positive reinforcers) that should work for you.

The rewards must be available, under your control, and powerful enough to motivate you. At first, it may be hard to think of any. That's because you haven't been taught to think in this way. It is important that you realize the wide variety of reinforcers there are in the world (that realization alone may increase your intrinsic satisfaction with life). This awareness may have a profound impact on how you think about your life, moment by moment, if you start using more of these potential rewards.

Lengthy check off lists of specific reinforcers have been published. I will only give examples; you'll have to devise your own specifics. Keep in mind that a good self-reinforcement program (see next step) will require small *and* large rewards, because we ordinarily can't give a big payoff for every little 1-10 minute response. What are some possible rewards?

1. Money or tokens--anything that can later be cashed in or traded for something valued. The advantage of this type of reward is that it is easy to give in small, frequent amounts, say 10 cents for 10 minutes "work." The small rewards can be saved for something big.

Actually, giving up many bad habits can generate a lot of money, perhaps $400 to $1,000 per year from excessive eating or smoking or $500 to $4,000 per year from drinking.

2. Material things--small: pencil, greeting card, picture, etc. Medium: record album, something to play with, books, etc. Large: new clothes (in a smaller size?), telephone, radio, sports equipment, furniture, etc. A variation of this that costs nothing is to give a friend some of your valued possessions with the understanding that they will be given back to you as you reach certain objectives in your self-help project. Otherwise, you lose them to Goodwill.
3. Physical pleasures--small: a bite of candy, stick of gum, glass of beverage, snack, etc. Medium: eating a nice dessert or meal, drinking a glass of wine, taking a relaxing nap, getting a 10 minute back rub, etc. Large: a good workout and shower, a whole body massage, a special meal out, being held by a lover, etc.

4. Fun activities alone--small: smell a rose, daydream, watch people, read a short article, play with pet, plan a party, etc. Medium: watching TV, reading, exercising, taking a shower, taking a walk, working in garden, writing a letter, etc. Large: do something creative or artistic, go hiking, start a hobby, go shopping, fix up a car, learn to fly, etc.

5. Social activities--small: talk on the phone, tell a joke, go out for a snack, offer to help someone, invite someone over, etc. Medium: go to a movie or theater or ball game, go to or give a party, play sports, etc. Large: go on a vacation, join a club, go to a concert or a dance, start doing volunteer work, invite a foreign student to live with you, etc.

6. Appreciation and rewards from others--small: getting a compliment or show of appreciation from others, someone fixes you a dessert, receiving a thank you note or a call saying, "You were so nice," etc. Medium: getting a letter of commendation, someone offering to do all the cooking while you are on a diet, hearing that someone has said really nice things about you, etc. Large: someone saying "I love you" or "I admire you" or "You are fantastic," someone offering help in getting a job, your relatives offering help when you need it, etc. The difficulty here is being able to control these powerful, valuable payoffs. That is, you aren't in control of when these rewards will be offered. Perhaps friends will cooperate.

7. Self-appreciation and praise--small: saying to yourself, "You did that well!" or "You deserve a break." Medium: telling your family about some success, being quietly proud. Large: the thrill of success, like the football player's "dance" after scoring a touchdown or the college student screaming down the dorm hall, "I got into Law School!" The self-satisfaction can involve an accomplishment, an enjoyment of your own body after losing weight, a respect for your own abilities and a good feeling when you live up to your highest values. It can be the opposite of material gain as when a priest or nun takes a vow of poverty but feels spiritually rich or when one feels super good after helping and giving to a neighbor whose house has burnt.

8. Frequently occurring behaviors--Premack observed that such behaviors act the same as reinforcers. Thus, one can use puffing on a cigarette, drinking coffee or water, combing your hair, brushing your teeth, looking at your watch, calling a friend, going to the bathroom or any habit as a reinforcer. Sounds weird but it works.

Hopefully, these examples will stimulate lots of ideas about how to reinforce many desired behaviors.

STEP THREE: Plan how to immediately reinforce the desired behavior; write a contract.

The simplest way to use rewards is to make a deal with yourself: as soon as you do _____, then you get a reward of_____. Suppose you have two things to do in an afternoon--clean up the kitchen and play tennis with a friend. Many people would play tennis first and do the dishes later. A better way would be to do the dishes and reward that with tennis.

There are numerous opportunities to make a contract with ourselves. Indeed, our lives are filled with rewards, so an alert self-

manager will arrange for these potential reinforcers to follow some desired behavior, rather than be "wasted" in the sense of not being used for self-improvement. Examples: study before play, positive comments about yourself before eating (to increase self-esteem), dreams about achieving before going to sleep etc.

Most projects to develop new desired behaviors require longer, more complex contracts. Take one desired behavior at a time, figure out how to reward it often, perhaps every time it occurs or after a few minutes. Arrange for small, accessible, effective rewards. Then set an appropriate behavior change for the end of the first week, and select a bigger reward for reaching that goal. Do the same for a certain major improvement in behavior by the end of the month. Such a contract may need to be tailored to your needs for the next 2 or 3 months. Mahoney (1974) has shown that specific behaviors, e.g. calories per day, *not* pounds lost in a month, should go into a contract, like this:

A contract with myself

As soon as I have done: (what, when, where)

_____
_____

_____
_____

I will immediately reward myself with: (what, when, where)

_____
_____

_____
_____

Goal and reward for day: (what, when, where)

_____
_____

_____
_____

Goal and reward for week: (be specific)

_____
_____

_____
_____

Changes in the goals week by week: (exact)

_____
_____

_____
_____

Goal and reward for month: (be precise)

_____
_____

_____
_____

Contract completed__not completed__and reasons why:

_____
_____

_____
_____

I, the undersigned, do solemnly swear to keep this contract, rewarding myself faithfully and encouraging full compliance with the requirements. Should I fail, I will revise the plan and try again.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

A relationship contract is another example. Where the problems involve a relationship with someone else, try to negotiate a contract specifying the changes each partner is willing to make to please the other one. Both get certain changes they want in the partner; that's the reward for their changing themselves. Example: I'll fix supper early if you will do the dishes before 7:00 P. M. It is important to be specific, reasonable, fair, honest and genuinely concerned about the relationship. Don't try to get a "bargain," just a fair exchange. Azrin, Naster and Jones (1973) had a 95% success rate.

Some couples find contracts too formal and controlling. So, another approach to creating more positive behaviors is for each person to put their wishes in writing in a "wish box." The wishes should be specific, such as "tell me how your work went today," "how

about taking a walk," "it would be nice if you picked up your dirty clothes," etc. The partner can at any time grab one of your wish notes and make it come true.

STEP FOUR: Schedule the desired activity and reward, carry out contract, adjust your contract as needed.

Such a contract may need to be tailored to your needs for the next 2 or 3 months. If possible, anticipate and schedule a specific time for the desired behavior and reward. The first few hours or days of a self-help project are especially important; do everything possible to get the new behavior to occur and be rewarded. Getting started is crucial.

If you just can't do it, revise your goals. Take smaller steps. Give bigger rewards. Try again. It may take 15 to 20 small steps to get from where you are to where you want to be. In this way you "shape" your behavior gradually over a period of weeks. As the behavior modifiers say, "If it's hard, you are doing it wrong. Think small!" Examples: gradually increase time spent exercising, studying, being a good listener, etc. Gradually decrease smoking, calories, TV, critical comments, etc. More specifically, the American Cancer Society recommends the reduction of cigarettes by 25% each day with a specific time set to quit within a week. That may be much too fast a pace; smokers may need weeks to quit. Just keep "tinkering" with the contract until it works. Don't give the unwanted behavior any hope that you will eventually give up.

Besides "reward behavior as soon as possible" and "shift from full reinforcement to partial reinforcement," chapter 4 gives some other rules for using reinforcers: (1) don't over-reward or give rewards for very easy tasks, (2) don't give extrinsic rewards for enjoyable tasks and only give rewards a short while for potentially interesting activities, such as studying, (3) don't let your rewards inadvertently reinforce some unwanted behavior (e.g. don't take a break while mad or when daydreaming), (4) avoid using rewards as bribes or enticements, if possible; "surprise" or unexpected rewards work better, and (5) don't neglect either the short-term or the long-term reinforcers of your unwanted behavior. Use both immediate and long-term payoffs to make the wanted behavior stronger and more frequent. Chapter 4 will help you generally understand behavior.

STEP FIVE: Fade out the rewards; develop naturally satisfying responses.

You shouldn't have to keep rewarding every new desired behavior forever. In fact, the behavior, once it is occurring consistently, can be further strengthened by *reducing* the rewards. See discussion of partial reinforcement in chapter 4. Reduce the extrinsic reinforcement, but increase the intrinsic satisfaction (see method #15), and try to arrange naturally occurring rewards. For instance, if your new behavior, say smoking or eating less, is saving you money, make the saved money very visible and available for special uses. Or, if you are

improving your social interaction, recognize the new and/or deeper friendships as being your rewards.

STEP SIX: Make plans to maintain the gains you have achieved.

As noted in chapter 2, most bad habits have a way of gradually growing back. So, once you have achieved an acceptable weight, it pays to monitor your weight closely, at least every week for 3 or 4 months (probably forever). As soon as you gain two pounds, immediately start watching your diet and exercise for the next few days until you lose the two pounds. After several months the desired behavior will become so routine that it will require little attention, except for a moment of attention occasionally to be sure you are still on target.

Time involved

The simple "behavior-reward" agreements take almost no time at all, just rearranging the order of things in our lives to serve our purposes. More complicated contracts take more time. The first three steps may take 1/2 to 2 hours. The actual reinforcement of every response (or after a few responses) will take detailed scheduling and arrangement of rewards--perhaps 30 minutes every day but more likely five minutes. Later, it takes less time. It will probably be several weeks before the new response is automatic (see "positive addictions" in chapter 4). Habits are hard to predict, some changes are easy, some are unbelievably hard.

Common problems with the method

Many people resist the idea of having their lives mechanically determined by rewards and punishment, even if they are entirely in control of rewarding the desired behavior. Some people just aren't organized enough to count and frequently reward a specific behavior. Nevertheless, the method works well, so if possible, give it a try.

When required to make a self-improvement, reinforcement is the most common method used. I've seen thousands of such projects. There are two really common problems: (1) the self-helper wants to depend on the naturally occurring consequences. Examples: "Better grades will be my reinforcement for studying more" or "Good friendships will be my reward for being more outgoing and social." My response to those proposals is "those rewards have always been available to you for studying or socializing, and they haven't worked yet! More reinforcement is probably needed to get you to change." (2) The reinforcement is not closely associated with the necessary daily behavior. Often the payoff is months later. Examples: "I'll get lots of new clothes when I'm down to a size 8" or "My health will be so much better after I have been on an exercise program." My response is "you need to reinforce every little behavior along the way--every refusal of fatty meat, dessert, a beer, etc. and every 10-minute walk, aerobics

exercise, bike ride, game of tennis, etc." The steps above emphasize this point.

When trying to change someone else's behavior, bribes are often confused with positive reinforcement. Bribes are promised payoffs for someone else's future behavior; they are offered a reward before the briber's desired target behavior occurs. If you think about it, the offer of a bribe often actually reinforces unwanted behavior, not the desired actions. Example: a parent says "you can watch the ball game now, if you promise to do your homework right after supper." That is a bribe. Rewards are offered before the homework is done. What does the offer of a bribe actually reinforce? Watching TV! Putting off studying! And making promises! Reinforcement follows the target behavior. If a parent said, "After you do your homework, you can watch an hour of TV," that would not be a bribe; it is an antecedent that describes the conditions under which Junior can get a reinforcement.

Sometimes a person feels that extraneous rewards should not be given for desirable behavior because they aren't deserved. For example, "students should study without being paid for it" or "my spouse should give me attention without any extra reward." Such a viewpoint is understandable but unrealistic. For a while, extrinsic rewards may be necessary until the desired behavior becomes a habit and/or the intrinsic rewards can take over.

B. F. Skinner argued that self-reinforcement requires self-deprivation first (until time to give the reward). This "punishment" could be associated with the desired behavior and, therefore, interfere with self-control rather than enhance it. That seldom seems to occur. People realize why they are delaying their own self-reinforcement. The much more common problem is cheating--taking the reward without doing the behavior.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Massive research with behavior modification (of others), especially token economies, indicates that reinforcement works well in many situations (not all) but the behavior does not continue long after the rewards are discontinued nor does the rewarded behavior transfer readily to new, non-reinforced situations. Both these limitations make sense as long as people are performing the behavior strictly for a reward decided on and given by someone else. But, what about our own behaviors we want to change or feel we morally need to change? In partial answer to that question, Bellack and Hersen (1977) conclude that self-reinforcement methods are as effective as therapist controlled methods, sometimes better. We can always monitor and reward our own behavior, even if we move into different circumstances.

Much about self-reward is still unclear, however. Some researchers (O'Leary & Dubey, 1979) say self-reinforcement is "one of the most powerful self-control procedures;" others (Brigham, 1982) say there is little evidence of its effectiveness, thus far. Most studies are therapist-

controlled and based on short-term external reinforcements. I believe we need to know much more about natural, long-term, covert and intrinsic reinforcement, including cognitive processes and value judgments about our own behavior, before we understand the process of self-reinforcement. We are a long way from understanding why some students love school work and others hate it, why some physicians practice with the poor (instead of making $200,000-a-year), why some people (like Lincoln) learn a lot without good schools, credit, or degrees, why some societies would fight for a controlled economy and others would die for free enterprise, etc. These things don't "just happen." There are reasons--payoffs (real and imagined). But the payoffs are not consciously planned either. When we are all more aware of our reasons and pay offs, the world will be better off.

Positive reinforcement can be used with almost any problem or self-improvement. Usually a new and better behavior is needed to replace an old discontinued behavior. The reinforcement idea is simple; the method is usually easy to use, if changes are made gradually. Not only are there personal benefits from this method but an enlightened society might solve many problems by the wide-spread use of reinforcement. Examples: better parenting by rewarding good child care, less crime by reinforcing moral behavior, better preventative health care by reducing health insurance premiums for losing weight or exercising, increased generosity by rewarding giving, higher productivity by reinforcing industriousness and efficiency, better learning, better marriages, etc. There are no dangers, except (1) believing reinforcement can solve *all* or *no* problems and (2) undermining our intrinsic satisfaction by the unnecessary use of extrinsic rewards (see discussion in chapter 4). Kohn (1993) has carefully summarized the down-side of rewards which all self-reinforcers should be aware of.

Kohn suggests several ways to make rewards, when administered by others (teachers, parents, supervisors), less detrimental to intrinsic satisfaction. (1) It is best when rewards do not make people feel controlled by others or manipulated by externally imposed circumstances. (2) It is better to avoid basing our praise of others (or our own self-evaluations) on comparisons of one person with another. Praise others for improvements in their own performance. (3) Whenever the task can be gratifying and rewarding, help the other person shift his/her emphasis from getting extrinsic rewards to experiencing even more intrinsic satisfaction.

Additional information

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Negative reinforcement; escape and avoidance learning

It is relieving--rewarding--to get away from anything unpleasant: a hostile person, a hard job, paying a fine, punishment, self-criticism, etc. Therefore, any action by you that enables you to escape pain or discomfort is reinforced by the relief you experience. This is a very important concept. You can't understand human behavior and emotions without this notion.

Chapter 4 gives several examples of negative reinforcement. People have difficulty grasping the idea. Consider this example: suppose you try to quiet a crying child by offering it a piece of candy and the child responds in a rage by knocking the candy out of your hand with a stick. Your approach to the problem has been punished by the child; you won't try that again. Then, suppose you get mad and scream angrily at the child, and the child immediately becomes quiet and compliant. Your screaming has just been negatively reinforced (you would say "rewarded," i.e. the unpleasant crying stopped) and you have become a little more likely to get mad and yell when faced with a crying child in the future (unless, of course, you become more aware of what is happening to you and over-ride this tendency with your brain). This child getting quiet has had the same effect on your behavior as if the child had given you a delicious candy bar for getting mad and yelling.

In short, positive reinforcement (being rewarded) and negative reinforcement (getting rid of something unpleasant) influence the immediately preceding behavior the same way; they both strengthen it. Yet, when we are in the actual circumstances, we see the situations very differently. We humans seem to have much more difficulty recognizing that negative reinforcement is shaping, modifying, manipulating our behavior and emotions than in seeing that money, friendship, love, sex and M & M's influence us powerfully. We must become more aware.

Punishment is also frequently confused with negative reinforcement, partly because of the negative label but primarily because the threat of some punishment is often the cause of the stress that is avoided or escaped (producing the relief). Suppose a teenager is grounded, i.e. "punished," for not cleaning his room. And, suppose he now starts cleaning his room every week. Somehow a cleaning response was reinforced. How? The parent used negative

reinforcement: the threat of further punishment was created and that threat could be escaped by cleaning the room. (Or, the tendency to procrastinate or rebel was punished and lost strength.) Cleaning his room is called an "escape response" because the threat of punishment is turned off. An "avoidance response" is when the teenager cleans his room even before being threatened with punishment; his cleaning avoids punishment and the threat of it, thereby reducing his stress. Reinforcement (+ or -) is the opposite of punishment but the same as escape from anything unpleasant.

An easy way of telling the difference between punishment and negative reinforcement is to consider the effects. If the target behavior declines rapidly, it was probably punished; if the target behavior increases, it was surely reinforced. Fining yourself for eating more than 1200 calories per day is punishment; threatening to fine yourself for not studying two hours per day is negative reinforcement *if* it results in studying two hours a day or more. Often, punishment produces immediate changes (escape) whereas negative reinforcement (avoidance) takes time (Miller, 1980).

Finally, don't be confused by negative reinforcement being involved in producing both desired and unwanted behaviors. We learn to avoid punishment by being good (the clean room miracle mentioned above) and we often acquire unwanted behaviors (fears, a hot temper, submissiveness, shyness, and bad habits, like drinking) because they help us escape unpleasant situations.

There are only a few self-help methods based on negative reinforcement or avoidance and escape. It is vitally important that you understand negative reinforcement so you can understand yourself. This learning principle is referred to many times in previous chapters, especially in chapter 4.

Purposes

- To appropriately avoid, escape or handle an unpleasant situation, person, thought, feeling, possible punishment or unwanted consequence. (And to recognize your harmful ways of avoiding and escaping so you can develop better ways.)
- To use the escape or avoidance of something unpleasant (either naturally existing or intentionally created) as a reinforcer of a desired behavior.

Steps

STEP ONE: Identify the unpleasant experience you want to turn off and/or the desired behavior you want to strengthen.

The unpleasantness may come from any source: the physical environment (heat, cold, pain, hunger needs), interpersonal relationships (anger, excessive demands, boredom), or internal

thoughts or feelings (self-criticism, stress, dependency). Be clear in your mind what you want to avoid.

As in method #16, you should also have a specific desired behavior in mind if you want to use negative reinforcement to strengthen it. Remember reinforcement (negative or positive) primarily strengthens immediately preceding responses.

STEP TWO: Identify existing unwanted behaviors that may be maintained by negative reinforcement; plan a better way to handle the situation.

You may not need this step. But if you have a fear reinforced by avoiding something, anger strengthened by getting your way, passivity based on avoiding confrontations, self-putdowns that reduce the criticism of others, procrastination that avoids stress and immediate challenges but neglects the future, etc., then you need to recognize what is going on. Usually these unwanted behaviors are effective in reducing the immediate stress but destructive in terms of your long-range life goals.

You need to achieve the immediate relief with new, healthier behaviors that will also facilitate your life goals. This new behavior will have to be learned, reinforced, practiced, and perfected. Examples: Learn to face a fear rather than avoid it, learn to be assertive instead of aggressive or passive, learn to be self-accepting in spite of criticism, learn to be organized and prompt instead of putting things off, etc. (See 3 in the next step).

STEP THREE: Arrange for the desired behavior to reduce some unpleasant experience.

All of these self-help methods involve getting away from an actual or potentially unpleasant situation. In some methods you create the unpleasantness yourself, in others the unpleasantness exists without effort on your part. Here are some examples:

1. Learn how to tactfully and effectively avoid or escape something unpleasant (see method #1 and chapter 8). Examples: Suppose you have a very talkative friend, try simply saying, "I really must go." The relief reinforces your assertiveness. Like a defensive driver, you can anticipate conversational pitfalls and avoid topics that lead to fruitless heated arguments or embarrassment. (Of course, carried to an extreme you may become a wimp...or a statesperson.)
2. Set up on-going unpleasant conditions which you can escape by doing the desired behavior. Examples: A dieter or smoker or procrastinator can become self-demanding and repeatedly recite to yourself the disadvantages of the bad habit, then escape the self-criticism by being "good." Someone else could nag you (at your request).

3. Learn skills and methods of reducing unpleasant emotions that bother us, such as fear, guilt, chronic stress, self-criticism, etc. Examples: Anxiety about our work can often be reduced by doing extra work and preparing better. Gradually confronting and challenging your shyness rather than avoiding social interaction can reduce the discomfort as well as alter the course of your life. See chapters 5 to 9 for more information.
4. Make a rule that something bad will happen if the desired behavior doesn't occur as you want it to. Examples: "If I don't do the dishes, I pay $2.00" or "If I swear, I give $5.00 extra to the church (or to the KKK)" or "If I eat dessert, I have to run 2 miles." If you can't impose the rules on yourself, ask your friends for help: e.g. if you tend to be late, ask friends to get mad at you and only wait 5 minutes. If you fail to do your clearly-defined share of the "dirty work," arrange to have friends give away your favorite clothes or records.
5. Becoming more aware of the feelings of others may provide the motivation you need to do the desired behavior. Suppose your boy/girlfriend told you that he/she is bothered by your being a "C" student (or really dislikes a habit of yours), wouldn't that be motivating? You now have a chance to make reasonable self-improvements and avoid stress between you.

STEP FOUR: Try out your new plan and see how it works.

This may involve a contract (as in the last method), such as agreeing to try a new way to get out of a disagreeable situation, setting a fine for certain actions, increasing self-dissatisfaction that can be avoided, etc. Try to arrange the relief from the unpleasant stimulus immediately following the desired behavior.

Time involved

Devising and practicing a better avoidance or escape mechanism may take an hour or two. As with positive reinforcement, it may take a few minutes every day for several weeks to carry out a contract to reinforce certain behaviors in this way.

Common problems with the method

Breaking the rules is the most common--"I just sort of forgot." Also, many people realize that they might break the rule so they avoid making an agreement that has serious consequences. When this happens, ask if you are serious about changing. Very few people will raise their own level of dissatisfaction; the rationalizations and excuses we use pay off so highly. But if you are serious about changing, you will probably want to set serious penalties for failing to do what you want to do.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

There is no doubt that threats work in many situations: we drive at 65 mph, we pay more taxes than we would without penalties for cheating, students study more when threatened with low grades, we are intimidated by pushy, aggressive people, etc. Sometimes we rebel against threats, or we disregard threats because we are so emotional (for example in murder cases). But, many "rules" and fines or mildly critical reminders influence our behavior easily and very effectively (Miller, 1980).

Research with alcoholism and homosexuality has had limited success with avoidance and escape training (Bellack and Hersen, 1977). It is set up so that drinking or unwanted sexual behaviors lead to nausea or electric shock. The nausea and shock can be avoided by staying sober and avoiding certain sexual thoughts or actions. The drop-out-of-therapy rate is high with these problems using threats of physical punishment, so using similar self-help methods are dubious in these cases too. However, the threat of mild self-administered shock associated with taking out a cigarette has been fairly effective.

The techniques for avoiding an unpleasant situation, e.g. change of environment or being assertive, have a good rate of success. The efficacy of creating your own stressful situation and then lowering the stress by being "good" is not well researched, although it is a common procedure in diet, exercise, and study programs. We humans are remarkably adept at disregarding the harmful long range consequences of over-eating, taking it easy, and putting off studying. Stressful self-confrontation may be the best solution to getting ourselves going.

These negative reinforcement methods can be fairly simple, especially getting out of bad situations and making up threatening rules. But, it is not easy to recognize the payoffs for unwanted behaviors (see method #9) and change those situations. Creating your own stress may also be hard and should be done with caution. I suspect that people who are already prone to be overly critical of themselves are attracted to self-criticism as a self-help method (which contributes to their problem, not to the solution).

There may be some risks associated with these methods: if you build the stress (to be avoided in order to be reinforced), you may then avoid the threatening situation altogether when it is to your advantage to stick it out. For example, if you make studying much more important (by emphasizing the long-range consequences), the additional stress may result in your partying and drinking more (to forget the future), instead of studying more. So be sure only desired behavior is being strengthened by the avoidance of unpleasantness. Furthermore, creating more stress might be psychologically and physiologically unhealthy.

Additional readings

Miller, L. K. (1980). *Principles of everyday behavior analysis* (2nd ed.), Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Self-punishment

Punishment is administering something hurtful immediately following an unwanted behavior so it will stop. We all understand how it works…and it works effectively if the punishment is immediate, severe enough and administered consistently. Aversive control of others permeates our culture: parents yell at and spank children, society fines and imprisons law-breakers, schools give low grades and fail students, employers threaten to fire workers, religions damn us for sinning, governments go to war to kill others. Yet, it is a procedure so fraught with difficulties and unpredictable consequences that many people, including psychologists, think punishment should not be used with others at all. Punishment may arouse fear and anger; it doesn't teach any improved behavior and it may only suppress some behavior while the punisher is watching.

However, punishment can stop certain behaviors. Even watching someone else be punished can have a powerful impact on our behavior in the same situation for a long time. The questions are: can self-punishment have a powerful influence on our own behavior? Does self-administered punishment have bad consequences too? Surely not the same feelings of fear and unfairness as when someone else is punishing us. Unfortunately, science doesn't know yet what goes on in our head in terms of attributions, self-instructions, and self-esteem when we self-punish? Nor do we know the emotional or behavioral consequences of self-punishment.

Just as punishment of others is a common, "natural" response to a hurt or insult, self-criticism and self-directed anger is a common response to failure in some people. Just as psychologists don't know, yet, the consequences of venting our anger caused by others, we don't know if venting anger against ourselves is helpful or not. Clearly, some great athletes and scholars are highly self-critical if they make a mistake, but we don't know if that contributed to their greatness or detracted from it. Prolonged self-hatred is extremely harmful, but what about temporary and specific self-criticism? Does self-censure have the same effects on our behavior as self-punishment? We don't know but we know many people are self-critical (in the extreme they become depressed). For now, each of us has to find out for ourselves when self-hurt--physical and emotional--is harmful and when is it helpful? (Actually, we probably adopt or reject this technique early in childhood sans scientific data.)

Purposes: Please note that this method deals only with *self*-punishment.

- To reduce the tendency to behave in a certain way, usually an unwanted habit or emotion or thought.

When the unwanted response is so dominant or strong that the desired behavior doesn't have a chance, you may need to punish and thereby weaken the unwanted response so the desired behavior can develop.

Steps

STEP ONE: Identify unwanted behavior.

Specify exactly the behavior--what, when and where--that you would like to reduce in frequency or eliminate. Example: suppose you are a loner, but want to be more socially outgoing and involved with others. You might identify several target behaviors: (1) stop finding it more comfortable to stay at home than to socialize a couple of times per week, (2) stop eating lunch alone in the office, eat with a friend twice a week, (3) stop merely speaking to people, have meaningful conversations, and (4) stop taking coffee breaks alone.

Remember the unwanted "behavior" can be a thought or attitude or perhaps a feeling too, like a depressed thought or a jealous feeling.

Note: Before using punishment, it is worthwhile to study carefully the situation the unwanted behavior occurs in and the reinforcement the unwanted behavior seems to be receiving. If you can stop the behavior by modifying the environment or stopping the reinforcement, that is probably a better approach than self-punishment.

STEP TWO: Devise an appropriate punishment.

There are several ways, consider these examples:

1. Physical discomfort--flipping yourself on the wrist with a rubber band, smoking in a closed space, biting your tongue, doing extra exercise, going hungry, having to do a hard, dirty job, etc.
2. Taking away something pleasant--no dessert, not getting to go to a show or shopping, no TV, can't see friends, giving up valuable possessions, etc. Behaviorists call this "time out" if it is only a temporary loss.
3. Rules, fines, and penalties--"you can't have coffee unless you are talking with a friend," "if you don't exercise, you can't watch your favorite soap at noon," etc. Behaviorists call this "response cost." They also refer to "consequences" (an unpleasant task is required if unwanted behavior occurs),

"correction" (must make up for the harm done by the unwanted behavior), and "over-correction" (more than make up for, e.g. if you haven't done your share of the dishes for two days, you must make up for the dish washing you have missed *plus* wash and wax the floor as well). Common penalties include giving a lot of money to hated causes, having to publicly confess one's sins, etc.

4. Self-criticism--talking to yourself like a critical parent can be punishing: "you can do better than that!" or "that's a dumb thing to say, why don't you learn more about this" or "if you had spent more time preparing, you wouldn't have been so embarrassed" or "you should be doing this perfectly by now, what is wrong with you any how?"

5. Confronting the real consequences--list the disadvantages and dire possible consequences, especially long-term ones we tend to overlook. This is particularly good for harmful, expensive habits, like drinking, drugs, smoking, overeating, gambling, reckless driving, and so on. Example: suppose you have a quick temper and a tendency to blame and criticize others. There are lots of disadvantages: it's hard on your body, it interferes with being empathic and caring, it jeopardizes every relationship (with parents, children, spouse, co-workers), and it forebodes an unhappy life in many ways. Dwelling on these outcomes can punish the unwanted behavior.

   Don't exaggerate the awful consequences, just be honest. Consider what could be done instead of the unwanted behavior, e.g. how could the time, perhaps 10, 000 hours, and $10,000 to $50,000+ be spent in a more loving way than drinking? How could the time, energy, and thought spent on hate, fruitless arguing, and blaming in a life-time be better spent? My favorite example is that most 18-year-olds could probably have a MD or Ph.D. if he/she had given up TV and music.

6. Have horrible fantasies--using the list of disadvantages, it may be helpful to vividly face the awful possible outcomes of the unwanted behavior. Examples: the smoker can read about and get a clear picture of lung cancer and heart disease made more likely by smoking. You might even do volunteer work at a hospital to get a better picture. The angry person can imagine being dissatisfied with his/her spouse, having terrible fights brought on by critical, demanding, derogatory comments, hurting the person who has been closest to him/her, and ending up being divorced, bitter and alone until he/she dies.

7. You may want help from others in administering the punishment--just letting others know your self-control is failing may be punishing, especially if you have a rule that you have to show others your bitten fingernails or the roll of fat on your stomach or how little work you have done. Friends can also punish you at your request: they can remind you of your goals, they can criticize, they can give away money or valued possessions if you fail to reach a goal, they can refuse to do things with you, etc.

STEP THREE: Make up a contract for the administration of the punishment.

Be very precise about when the punishment will be given, what it is, and what it is for. See method #16 for an example of a contract. Don't cop out.

There are two basic methods of aversive conditioning: "punishment training" and "classical conditioning." Example of punishment training: Over 35 years ago 5000 alcoholics were given drugs to induce nausea and vomiting after drinking alcohol. They had a 50% success rate after 6-10 hours of treatment; that's remarkable. Examples of classical conditioning: pairing electric shock with the sight and smell of a glass of whisky or shocking a homosexual while he/she is fantasizing some homosexual experience.

The learning principles in punishment training are about the same as learning desired traits by positive reinforcement: administer the punishment immediately following the unwanted behavior, administer it full strength and 100% of the time at first (but not so often one gets "used to it"), and provide support for desired behaviors to replace the unwanted behaviors.

In addition to punishing the unwanted behavior, it may be helpful to "punish" (pair with something unpleasant) the stimuli and cues that precede (in the behavior chain) or initiate the unwanted behavior as well. Example: flip your wrist with a rubber band when you do anything associated with smoking, e.g. buy a pack of cigarettes, open the pack, feel the urge to smoke, see an ash tray, feel tense, want a beer, etc.

STEP FOUR: Try the punishment and see the results; encourage the desired behavior.

In most cases there are behaviors that should be substituted for the unwanted behavior. They should be learned and practiced and reinforced before the old behavior is punished. Often the avoidance of punishment is the negative reinforcement for the desired behavior (see method #17).

Time involved

Total time involved=1 to 2 hours. It may take a few minutes each day to carry out the punishment. But the entire procedure is usually quick, 1 to 3 weeks, if the punishment is effective.

Common problems with the method

Quitting or just "forgetting" is common. Don't forget, the pain from self-punishment is punishing your self-help efforts to change just as much as it is punishing the unwanted behavior. Also, for unknown

reasons, sometimes the punishment is not effective. For instance, just as a scolding may not work with a child (because the attention is more rewarding than the criticism is punishing), certain fines may not work. They may not be big enough or the money may go to a worthy cause. Many people have found that giving money away to *disliked* causes, e.g. Nazi or KKK or Democrat/Republican (your choice) Party, is more painful and effective.

Research has suggested that horrible fantasies are not effective, such as thinking of having rotting, painful teeth as a means of motivating tooth brushing. Apparently, one tries to forget the horrible consequences and in the process also forgets to brush their teeth too. However, this suggests the horrible fantasies do have power, if you are able to use them in an effective way.

A teacher who uses too much punishment is likely to become disliked by the students, the classroom may become oppressive to the students, and the students may start hating school. The menacing aspects of the punishment generalize to everything surrounding the punishment. Likewise, your own excessive focus on the unpleasant consequences of not studying could result in less interest and pleasure from learning, but this doesn't seem to be very likely. In chapter 14, we will see that academic motivation is increased by having fantasies of a great life as a result of studying and having fantasies of being miserable if you fail to study. Be sure to work on increasing intrinsic satisfaction from the desired behavior at the same time (see method #15) you self-punish.

The drop-out rate from therapy using painful electric shock (non-convulsive) is as high as 85% in some studies. Self-punishment may not have nearly as high a rate, but if it causes self-helpers to avoid trying other methods or other projects of self-improvement (or therapy), that could be a serious problem.

Effectivness, advantages and dangers

Don't use electricity as a source of pain without consulting with a therapist. Certainly don't build your own electric shocking equipment. Household current can be deadly.

As with punishment, if self-punishment is sure, swift, and severe enough, it will probably be effective. There is very little research in this area, thus far. Aversive conditioning has been done with many different kinds of unwanted behavior with mixed results, but in general the specific target behavior punished within a specific setting is quickly stopped. However, the unwanted behavior (usually unwanted by someone else, not the actor) is often not stopped *if* the person is with other people or in other situations (away from the punisher), and the behavior resumes after the punishment is stopped. Perhaps the benefits from self-punishment will quickly disappear if you don't seriously intend to resume the project if the unwanted behavior

returns. Also, the self-punisher should place considerable emphasis on learning the desired behavior to replace the unwanted behavior.

Time out, overcorrection, and response cost are effective in the short-term with handicapped patients, although in some cases symptom substitution occurs (other unwanted behavior increases). The long-term results of aversive techniques in humans are not known yet.

There are some dangers, in addition to the physical risks and anti-self-help attitudes mentioned above. Any potentially high emotion and/or self-demeaning method could cause harm, I suppose, but this has not been observed. Yet, self-critical persons urged to become even more self-critical could be harmed.

Additional readings

Bellack, A. and Hersen, M. *Behavior modification,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Matson, J. L. & DiLorenzo, T. M. (1992). *Punishment and its alternatives*. Springfield, IL: Springer.

Covert conditioning; covert punishment; covert rewards; intrinsic satisfaction and pride

Our thoughts control or influence our behaviors and emotions to a considerable extent. This is not surprising since our thoughts include intentions ("I'm going to be the top salesperson this month"), plans ("I'll work until 9:00 every day and on weekends"), rational and irrational thinking, all our knowledge (including self-help methods), and so on. It seems pretty clear that our thoughts can be changed through experience (reading, watching, listening, experimenting), logical reasoning, learning processes (rewarding certain thoughts), and many other ways.

Some psychologists believe we can also change the frequency or strength of specific thoughts by reinforcing or punishing the thought. In other words, the conditioning processes might work inside our heads with thoughts just like they work with behavior, except it is all covert. Actually, no one would be surprised if his/her urge to approach someone increased after having a lot of sexual fantasies about that person. That all takes place inside a person's head. Likewise, if you imagined studying math on a beautiful warm beach, fantasized winning a scholarship in math, and on and on, it is possible you would start to feel more positive about math. What is less clear and more complex is whether or not the person will actually approach the person they have been thinking about sexually or if you would actually take a math course. There is a giant leap from fantasy to reality.

About 2000 years ago, Epictitus taught that our thoughts can change our feelings and actions (see chapter 14). So by modifying our thoughts, which may be easier than changing some behavior or having some experience (such as giving a great speech), we can possibly change many things--actions, emotions and other thoughts.

More recently, Homme (1965), Wolpe (1958), and Cautela & Kearney (1986) have developed many *covert* conditioning procedures: reinforcement, punishment, classical conditioning, modeling, avoidance, etc. for many disorders.

Some mental rewards and punishments (paired with a specific behavior) have already been described (methods #16, #17, and #18). Covert modeling was referred to in method #2. Only brief descriptions will be given here and the effectiveness will be evaluated.

Purposes

- To increase, decrease or change a behavior, a thought or a feeling by changing our own thoughts and imagery using covert methods.
- Most often used for learning new behaviors (covert modeling or reinforcement) and for stopping unwanted behaviors.

Steps

STEP ONE: Clearly and specifically identify the "target" behavior or thought or feeling that you would like to change.

This can be an overt behavior, an experienced emotion (actually acted out or just imagined), or a covert thought which isn't to be acted on.

STEP TWO: Learn how to apply one of these covert conditioning methods, depending on your purpose.

There are several methods and variations on those methods:

1. Covert reinforcement--imagine performing the desired behavior (or feeling or thought) and follow it with a pleasant image (playing on the beach, being kissed by a lover, eating a delicious meal, etc.). Variations: an actual behavior followed by an imagined reward or an imagined behavior followed by an actual reinforcer (an M & M). Example given by Homme: a person with a low self-concept makes a positive statement about themselves just before lighting a cigarette.

   Intrinsic satisfaction (see method #15) is another (and usually much better) form of covert positive reinforcement. Not only the genuine pleasure in performing the behavior but also

personal pride in the skills, self-discipline and values involved in the activity.

2. Covert negative reinforcement--first imagine a very unpleasant scene and then start imagining the desired target behavior and feelings which are associated with the termination of the unpleasant scene. Example: a shy person could imagine being very nervous at a party and dreading being approached. He/she further imagines being approached and asked some questions which he/she handles nicely and even with some wit. The nervousness goes away as he/she responds to the questions (thus, reinforcing the social interaction). A similar example would be a person suffering speech phobia; he/she could imagine being terrified before a TV interview but as he/she handles the situation adroitly in fantasy, the terror immediately subsides. See discussion in method #17. In some cases, it may be better to terminate a fear, threat, or unpleasant fantasy that is completely different from your actual concern (it is another trial at learning the unwanted fear).

3. Covert sensitization or punishment--imagine the unwanted behavior vividly and in detail, followed immediately with fantasies of some very unpleasant event, such as vomiting (Cautela's favorite punishment or UCS). Examples: a smoker might imagine having the urge to smoke and getting ready to light up. He/she immediately imagines getting nauseous and finally, just as he/she thinks of lighting the cigarette, he/she imagines vomiting all over the cigarette, his/her clothes, people near by and so on. The same could be done with food, alcohol, unwanted sexual urges, worries, jealous thoughts, angry thoughts and acts, etc., i.e. pair them with vomit or any other unpleasant thought.

4. Covert extinction--imagine doing the unwanted target behavior and receiving no reinforcement or reaction of any kind. Example: a person with lots of aches and pains could imagine telling his/her complaints to many people who have no reaction at all. A clown or flirt or braggart or gossip or spiteful person could do the same thing.

5. Combinations: Homme suggested a sequence of four thoughts--(a) the unwanted urge, (b) an unpleasant thought, (c) a desired behavior, and (d) a pleasant thought. You can see how (b) and (d) punish and reinforce (a) and (c). Suppose one is sexually turned on by an inappropriate person (wrong sex, too young, too old, married, otherwise unavailable or uninteresting). One might imagine the urge (only briefly, not too much!) followed by unpleasant thoughts ("I'd get hurt" or "That would get me in terrible trouble" or imagining vomiting). Then think of a more realistic, loving and available relationship, followed by a pleasant scene or a small reward.

The method of "thought stopping" is another useful covert procedure (method # 10). In a therapy case, Cautela commonly uses several covert techniques at the same time to change several behaviors or emotions.

STEP THREE: Arrange to use the methods daily; as with all aversion techniques, learn better ways of handling the situation.

To be effective these methods must be repeated over and over, preferably 5 to 10 times twice a day. Covert reinforcement and punishment can be used every time the actual behavior occurs or even starts to occur, as well as during time set aside for imaginary experience. That's a 100% schedule of reinforcement (or punishment).

If you are using an unpleasant thought, the more disgusting or upsetting or intensely it is experienced, the more effective the method seems to be. Therefore, experience the awful details of vomiting as fully as possible, e.g. imagine the food and bile starting to come up, notice the sour taste and lumps of decaying food in your mouth, the sickening, awful smelling puke fills your nose, you vomit all over yourself and others, see it drip off, you are crying from total embarrassment, etc., etc. Gross! If you use an accident, make it gruesome.

It may be helpful to have a hierarchy of unwanted behaviors, so that you vomit on them (or something equally disgusting) in order from mildly tempting (addictive) to highly enticing. Likewise, since the conditioning is very situation-specific, you may have to vomit on each kind of high-calorie food you crave or on several kinds of hostile, sarcastic remarks you make.

Therapists have found that our imagery is clearer when we are relaxed, so try some relaxing first.

Time involved

The planning time is minimal. The two sessions per day will take 15 -30 minutes or so for a few weeks.

Common problems with the method

Dropping out is a problem with any aversive approach. The images are gross in cognitive sensitization. Also, many people don't believe there is a strong relationship between fantasy and behavior. Just because a sexual fetish with bras has been associated hundreds of times with imagined vomit, it doesn't guarantee that the attraction to real bras will be extinguished. Remember from chapter 4 that for conditioning to work, the association between the CS (bra) and UCS (vomit) must make sense.

Perhaps these methods work because the people who persevere are "believers." The role of suggestion is unknown in most self-help methods.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

There are some advantages for covert conditioning: (1) the ideas are simple, (2) no help, no special environment, and no equipment is needed, (3) there are almost no limits to what can be done in fantasy--vomiting, instant sex of any kind, vacations, hurting oneself, etc., and (4) it can be done anytime (since your head is almost always with you). But does it work?

The research centers on covert sensitization. It has worked fairly well with sexual deviations (homosexuality, exhibitionists, incest) but not very well with obesity, alcohol, or smoking (Bellack and Hersen, 1977). More research is needed with the other covert methods.

The results are promising enough to try these methods, especially if the approach has an appeal to you and is believable. Remember the research thus far has been done with long-term clinical disorders, not ordinary problems.

Additional readings

> Cautela, J. R. Covert conditioning. In A. Jacobs & L. Sachs (Eds.), *The psychology of private events*. New York: Academic Press, 1971.

Extinction; making sure the behavior doesn't pay off

If a behavior yields no pay off, it should gradually stop, i.e. be extinguished. Thus, it is sometimes better to disregard an unwanted response than to punish it. Extinction and punishment lead to the same results: stopping some behavior. However, in extinction the unwanted response is allowed to occur freely. The person learns "this behavior just doesn't work; it gets no results at all." Note the striking contrast with the person whose behavior is punished by someone else, the punishee might think, "Wow, they (the punishers) are really upset. Well, maybe I'll cool it while they are around but I know how to drive them crazy if I ever want to. I'm powerful!"

In this method, we remove the reinforcement of unwanted behavior, but the neglect of good, desired behavior (that's extinction too) is the source of many problems in the world. Parents and teachers attend far more to bad than to good behavior; we forget to tell the people closest to us that we love and appreciate them; we take our own good behavior for granted but get upset by failures, etc. Thinking by the brain is required for reinforcement and for extinction (where you have to think, "I'm not going to respond to this."

Purposes

- To stop or reduce an unwanted behavior.
- To do the above without harsh, unpleasant punishment.

Steps

STEP ONE: Specifically describe the unwanted behavior that you want to extinguish.

This may be a behavior or emotion or thought.

STEP TWO: Do a careful behavior analysis to determine the consequences that support the unwanted behavior.

See method #9 because it is necessary to know all the pay offs for the behavior. Otherwise, how can you eliminate all the reinforcement?

Extinction works best with new, recently learned behaviors and/or with behaviors that are reinforced almost every time. However, you need to identify any occasional or intermittent reinforcement. Indeed, all the reinforcers (there may be several--see method #1 in chapter 15) must be identified; any one alone may sustain the behavior.

STEP THREE: Plan to prevent all reinforcement for the unwanted behavior.

Every time the unwanted behavior occurs, all pay offs should be eliminated. Let the behavior occur but without pay offs. With children, this is done by just leaving them alone, which is hard if the behavior is disturbing. Likewise, when we are working with ourselves, it may be difficult not to respond to our own unwanted behavior. Suppose you resent or are upset by your own behavior, can you control that reaction? (If not, the resentment and upsetness may reinforce the behavior.) Suppose you get some relief from stress via the unwanted behavior, can you avoid that negative reinforcement? Suppose you get a lot of concessions from others because you are the boss or intimidate them with your anger, can you give up that power?

In addition to your reactions, you have to eliminate reactions from others too in order to extinguish a response. Suppose you get attention by being loud, by being critical, by bragging, or by telling embarrassing ethnic jokes, but you want to stop. Can you continue the behavior but tell friends you want to quit and, therefore, would like for them to not respond to your behavior? Not likely. They might help you monitor your behavior and point it out when you goof up.

STEP FOUR: Carry out the plan.

Extinction usually works slowly. Self-destructive children may hit themselves 10,000 times in 8 to 10 days before self-abuse is extinguished by ignoring the behavior. Also, children often increase the frequency of the to-be-extinguished response whenever the usual reactions and pay offs are not forthcoming. They frequently get mad, even though no punishment is involved. So, with yourself, expect to feel some frustration. But stick with it.

Whenever a void is created by doing away with a behavior, it is important to be sure that reasonable, valued and desirable behavior takes its place. Work on strengthening the desired responses.

Time involved

The behavioral analysis will take an hour or so a day for a couple of weeks. Depending on the frequency of the response, it will take 2 to 4 weeks of extinction. Assuring that there are no pay offs may take only a few minutes each day.

Effectivenss, advantages and dangers

Research on the extinction of crying, tantrums, disruptive behavior, self-injury, vomiting, bizarre behavior, excessive questions, "fits," etc. has shown some success (Bellack and Hersen, 1977). Many studies of crying young children and disruptive school children have shown that ignoring the behavior works quickly, indicating that attention is often the reinforcement for these behaviors (Miller, 1975). Little is known about self-extinction.

Compared to punishment, extinction is likely to be less stressful and perhaps easier to carry out. But it takes longer (because all reinforcement has to be stopped), so punishment may be more humane in some situations, like self-abuse. There are probably fewer side effects and dangers with extinction.

Bibliography

References cited in this chapter are listed in the Bibliography (see link on the book title page). Please note that references are on pages according to the first letter of the senior author's last name (see alphabetical links at the bottom of the main Bibliography page).