

Root Your Change to Bear Fruit That Lasts

Nobody likes to waste effort. So, as you make lifestyle changes, you'll want to anchor or root them so they don't shrivel up in a few weeks or months. Here are some thoughts on this.

Most of the changes you've made can be thought of as new behaviors. In a book about selling, I once read that "goals initiate behaviors, and rewards maintain them." If you look at your own behaviors, you'll probably see that many of the things you continue to do are things you find rewarding. Rewards are then one key to maintaining a change.

Two more things can be said about rewards. First, they can work against you, if you feel a call to something deeper. Whether it's a good-paying job that you don't love, or temporary pleasure in a relationship that you know has no future, you can be held back from something that's healthier for you. Perhaps the key to deciding what to do is to weigh the reward of the old behavior against the sum of the penalties that comes with it and the penalty of not being able to do something new that might be more deeply rewarding.

Another thought about rewards is that you anchor a change more deeply if you can spread the rewards to your support system or family. Something that only benefits you but not others around you may create a tension or a penalty from them each time you are rewarded.

To maintain a new behavior permanently, the forces that inspire the new behavior need to be constant or stable. I can think of only seven stable centers or motivators:

- * the requests of stable individuals with whom you're in an ongoing relationship
- * self-image, a personal vision and/or self-story¹
- * love
- * a deep hunger or restlessness
- * values, including personal, family and cultural values
- * the demands of stable organizations
- * God, sometimes through a close-knit religious community

People can have more than one center operating. I know a few people who seem not to have any stable center. They seem to be victims of

moods, advertising, brainstorming, and instincts. They seem doomed to superficial lives.

If your change is rooted in one or more of the stable centers, however, then it's likely the change will endure. This is because the centers will continually exert influence, make their request, or provide some kind of reward. Notice that in some cases, rooting is a matter of discovery, such as discovering that a certain activity is part of your mission or self-image. In other cases it's a matter of commitment as in a commitment to love someone, to serve an organization, to fulfill an obligation or agreement, etc.

Remember, though, that these stable centers can work against you. Bad seeds rooted in good soil are the hardest to kill. Also, not all of these "centers" are fully guaranteed to remain stable. For instance, even stable organizations die or suddenly change. On the other hand, these centers are more likely to supply a constant focus or demand for action than moods, ideas, acquisitiveness, pain and other temporary states.

Two other processes help solid rooting take place: "Want management." Just as weeds can encroach on and overcome a plant or tree, spreading yourself too thin and overplanting your field of action can be fatal to some of the more precious plants. Pull out the less essential desires, preferably by the root. Also, weed out symbolic wants before they sap too many nutrients. These are the things that you *think* you really want, but later find out they were only symbols of a deeper need or more essential desire. For instance, you might spend years building a career or saving for a house, only to find that they were symbols for recognition or emotional security.

The second process is to teach others. To continue with the farming analogy, if you help others get their farms started, not only will you solidify your own knowledge, but in case your farm or barn is destroyed, they'll likely give you sustenance or help you rebuild. In other words, you will more fully grasp whatever skills you teach others.

I notice so many people who are stuck and going nowhere, and so many others who try to make changes but take two steps forward and two steps back. What is holding them back? On one level each might be missing a key ingredient of change, and there are hundreds. Or each might be facing a particular obstacle, and there are thousands. Yet on

another level, I have a hunch it comes down to them not having a stable center of motivation and support. Because with that, they would probably have the driving force for finding any ingredient or overcoming any particular obstacle.

Questions for Reflection

1. What "seeds" have you planted or are attempting to plant in yourself? In other words, what goals or relationships do you want to have succeed?
2. What stable "centers" or motivators are in your life?
3. If you have more than one center operating, do they create any ongoing conflicts for you?
4. Do any stable motivators work against you?
5. What can you do to help your best "seeds" take root? Can you join a group or in some way form a stable center?