

Counselor's Corner: New Year's Resolutions...How Do We Change?

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Are you considering a change in your life this New Year? People frequently approach counselors with questions about how change happens and what they can do to succeed, especially in areas of their life where they've been frustrated by previous change attempts. One helpful, research-based model for understanding change is the "transtheoretical model of change" (TTM), developed by psychologists James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo DiClemente from their study of people who have accomplished important goals. This model suggests that change is a complex, difficult and personal phenomenon, but that we can discover patterns for success if we understand change as movement through progressive stages toward a desired goal.

The TTM identifies six stages. Each stage describes a way of thinking about and acting toward the change we desire. Precontemplation is our mentality before we recognize we have a situation that merits attention. (For example the person with anger issues who doesn't see anger's impact on relationships, or the alcoholic in denial.) Contemplation begins when we recognize an issue and are considering change, but have not yet begun the work. We think about the issue, research our options and weigh the pros and cons of making change. Preparation is an active stage. Here, we determine to change and gather the resources we'll need. We make specific plans. In the action stage we put the preparations we've made to work as we start or stop specific behaviors (most people think of "change" as only this stage!) In the maintenance stage, we solidify gains as we settle into new ways of being and doing. When keeping the new behaviors in place requires very little effort, we have moved into the termination stage. (Depending on the behavior in question, we may need to stay in the maintenance stage indefinitely.)

The TTM should be seen as an ascending spiral rather than a straight line. People tend to "recycle" through the six stages, moving from one into the next and then back again as they learn more about themselves and what may be required for change. Tailoring the strategies we use to motivate, encourage or support our change to the stage we're in optimizes our chances for staying engaged. Since many changes can be challenging (and at times discouraging) these perspectives can be helpful. If we recognize that "relapse" from action to preparation, for example, can be seen as the need to fine tune our plans in order to set ourselves up for better success, rather than as flat-out failure, it may be easier to try again.



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New Year's resolutions have the best chance for success if we have a solid plan for what resources we will need and what strategies may work best—the end of the preparation/beginning of the action stage. That doesn't mean we shouldn't consider brand new goals this close to the New Year, but it might be helpful to consider whether we are actually ready for action at this point, or might not be better served by pursuing change-supporting activities that are helpful at the contemplation or early preparation stages.

More information about the TTM and how to take advantage of it for your life can be found in Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente's book *Changing for Good* (1994, Avon Books).

To read an online article about Norcross's research on New Year's resolutions, visit www.apa.org/monitor/jan04/solutions.html.



2006 Confirmation Class

The 2006 confirmation class has completed the first eight classes of their year of study.

During the Christmas Season, confirmands are involved in many family activities and children's music programs.

Classes resume on January 4 and run through February. During this time, there will be a retreat and confirmands will serve at the monthly FEAST dinner.