

change

THE NEW  
SCIENCE of  
PERSONAL  
SUCCESS

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↑... thing

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When people can't change, it's rarely because they lack the will. It's usually because they're blind and outnumbered: They're blind to all but one of two of the six sources of influences that make them do what they do. Our research shows that people who learn to see and use all six sources of influence are ten times more likely to create profound, rapid, and lasting change in their lives and the lives of others.

### **Be the Scientist and the Subject**

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# Preface

## Our Promise

The promise of this book is simple. If you apply the principles and tactics we outline, you can rapidly, profoundly, and sustainably change your own behavior (even long-standing bad habits). And by learning how to change your own behavior, you can dramatically improve results in almost any area of life. To discover what it takes to change how one behaves, we at the Change Anything Labs examined the struggles and strategies, trials, and triumphs of more than five thousand people – all of whom were searching for ways to overcome personal challenges. These intrepid searchers were looking to

- **Accelerate their careers.** Eighty-seven percent of the employees we surveyed reported that they have been passed over for promotions or pay increases because they were unable to make the changes their bosses had requested. All understood that they needed to change their behavior, but they weren't sure how to do it.
- **Become financially fit.** Fewer than one in five adults believe that they are tending to their personal finances in a way that will secure their futures – and their primary barrier to success is

their own behavior. All knew they needed to spend less and save more, but none were certain how to get themselves to do that.

- **Save a struggling relationship.** Our research into 350 relationships on the brink of failure revealed that relationships don't fail because of *chemistry*; they fail because of *behavior*. Those who regain and deepen their friendship or intimacy succeed by changing how they treat their friends and loved ones.
- **Thrive in the midst of organizational change.** Many subjects were struggling to adapt to challenging changes imposed on them by their employers. Many felt like victims of these involuntary demands – but some examined the changes strategically and adapted to them in ways that restored their sense of control and even improved their professional prospects.
- **Lose weight, get fit, and stick with it.** The number-one cause of illness and death today is neither viral nor genetic. It's behavioral. Individuals who succeed at getting off the diet treadmill don't discover a magic pill or an all-powerful tool; instead, they create a robust plan for change that creates lifelong habits of health and wellness.
- **Break free of addictions.** Overcoming addiction isn't just about finding a cure; it's about changing seemingly intractable habits. Those who succeed at kicking debilitating addictions do so because, whether they know it or not, they apply the science of personal success to their own challenges.

As we examined these everyday people in the throes of either overcoming addictions or improving failing careers and relationships, we found hope. Hundreds of people in our study (we'll call them Changers) not only succeeded in changing their unhelpful habits, but also maintained these changes for at least three years. We were particularly interested in this vital group, so we studied them carefully –

and from them we learned the science behind personal success. That's because whether you find them in Kilungu, Kenya, or Carmel, California – or whether they're dealing with an alcohol addiction or an indolent lifestyle – all of the Changers drew on the same principles of influence.

Now, as successful as they were, many of them lamented how long it took them to succeed in their change. Our Changers tenaciously stumbled their way into success in the way anyone who succeeds will have to. What you'll learn in this book, however, is that with a little more study, you can do a lot less stumbling. When you understand the science behind their success, you can be much more deliberate in your attempts and efficient in your progress. The principles and tactics we outline in this book will enable you to intentionally apply what others only struggled to discover – dramatically accelerating your progress on your path to success.

And success *will* be yours. Our most recent research revealed that those who apply what you are about to learn are not just marginally more effective at bringing about change; they are exponentially so. In fact, those who apply the science of personal success are more than 1,000 percent more successful at producing change than those who try other means.

And now for the final piece of good news. Whether you're trying to change a habit in your work or personal life, you'll receive benefits on both fronts. For example, many of the individuals we studied experienced a challenge in their personal life that, by their own calculations, also dragged down their work performance by as much as 50 percent. In their case, fixing one problem meant fixing two. Our Changers likewise reported that improving their lot at work created benefits that relieved stress and increased confidence at home as well. Changers are almost always twice blessed.

So take hope as you get ready to learn more about the science of personal success. People can and do change – and stay on course for years thereafter. By following in their footsteps, you too can become a

Changer. And once you do – once you learn the principles and skills of personal change – you can change anything.

With the purchase of this book, you now have exclusive access to [ChangeAnything.com](http://ChangeAnything.com), a dynamic website that helps people make changes in their personal and professional lives. You'll notice references to this site throughout the book. From weight loss to corporate change initiatives, [ChangeAnything.com](http://ChangeAnything.com) combines the best social science research with the principles of social media to ensure your change effort is successful. You will find an ID code inside your book. Log onto [www.ChangeAnything.com/exclusive](http://www.ChangeAnything.com/exclusive) and use your code to sign up for a free limited-time premium subscription. It's that easy to get started.

## PART I

# THE SCIENCE OF PERSONAL SUCCESS

## Escape the Willpower Trap

Any book that claims that it can help you change *anything* in your personal and professional life – from increasing your disposable income, career options, and physical fitness, to decreasing your smoking, food intake, and relationship struggles – had better be based on careful scientific inquiry. It had better report results – to three decimal places. Most of all, any recommendations it makes had

better come from careful study of human subjects – not just rodents or simians.

With this in mind, we'll start our journey down the trail of personal success with a rather engaging piece of scientific inquiry into the habits of real people. This particular experiment was conducted at the Change Anything Labs. It is in this lab that we conduct research, pore over contemporary social science findings, and interview people we call Changers. Changers are individuals who once faced enormous personal challenges, wrestled them to the ground, and have remained successful for at least three years. These Changers and this research provide us with both the practical advice and the scientific results people need to not only change, but change for good.

This particular day, we used the Change Anything Labs to conduct a rather fascinating study. There, in a room by himself, sat a four-year-old boy named Kyler. We were examining his ability to resist temptation, and from the strained look on his face, it looked as if he just might lose. To test his ability to delay gratification, we seated Kyler across the table from a formidable foe – a scrumptious marshmallow.

Five decades ago, the legendary psychologist Walter Mischel demonstrated that kids who could sit down with a marshmallow in front of them and *not eat it* for a full fifteen minutes did better in almost every area of life than more impulsive kids who scooped up the treat and ate it right away – in spite of the fact that they were all instructed to wait.

As Mischel followed his research subjects for the next two decades, he learned that children who delayed gratification eventually scored hundreds of points higher on standardized school tests. They also had stronger relationships, were promoted more often, and were happier. Mischel showed that the capacity to delay gratification is, indeed, a big deal.

## THE WILLPOWER TRAP

Unfortunately, to this day most people draw the wrong conclusion from this study. They fall into what might best be called “the willpower trap.” They assume that the *only reason* (among many possible reasons) certain kids were better at delaying gratification than others was that nature had endowed them with more willpower. Period. The research subjects who withstood temptation showed more moxie or strength of character. It’s little wonder that their lives unfolded in happier and more successful ways. They were innately stronger.

This is the same simplistic assumption most of us make when explaining why we fail to change our own bad habits. When we fall off the wagon, go on a shopping spree, give in to our hair-trigger temper with a co-worker, procrastinate over work tasks, or binge eat, we blame our failure on a lack of willpower. We obviously just don’t *want it* badly enough. We don’t push ourselves to the limit. Of course, when we succeed, we brag about our grit, tenacity, and commitment. Either way, when explaining why we do what we do, we see, think about, and eventually blame or give credit to one thing – our willpower.

This simplistic view is not only wrong; it’s tragically wrong. It’s wrong because it’s incomplete. And it’s tragic because it gives us nowhere to go when we struggle to change our own bad habits or improve our lot. When people believe that their ability to make good choices stems from nothing more than their willpower – and that willpower is a quality they’re either born with or they’re not – they eventually stop trying altogether. The willpower trap keeps them in a depressing cycle that begins with heroic commitment to change, which is followed by eroding motivation and terminated inevitably by relapse into old habits. Then, when the built-up pain of their bad habits becomes intolerable, they muster up another heroic but doomed attempt at change. We feel as if we were ascending a summit

when in fact we're simply walking a treadmill: lots of effort, no progress. That's the willpower trap.

Fortunately, Mischel's research goes further than most of us realize. A few years after his original study, he and Albert Bandura (another titan of psychology) asked a crucial question. They wondered if what appeared to be *will* might, in fact, be more a function of *skill*. The two scholars suspected that the kids who controlled their cravings weren't simply more *motivated* than those who gave in to their temptation, but were more *able*. They had learned a skill or two along the way.

This was an important issue to settle, because if Mischel and Bandura had it right, it would mean that failure to harness one's impulses is *not* fixed at birth. Although grit and its close cousin character may be genetic, *skills* can actually be learned. This alternate explanation offers hope to all of us. It's also the reason we were studying Kyler and twenty-seven of his four-year-old peers in the Change Anything Labs. We wanted to know if we could teach contemporary children skills that help them actively delay gratification rather than sit back and hope they won the willpower lottery.

To test our theory, we replicated Mischel's original experiment. We asked a group of kids to sit in front of a marshmallow and promised them that if they resisted eating the treat for fifteen minutes, we'd give them a second sugary treat. These kids made up the control group, and to nobody's surprise, they performed just as the original subjects had in 1962. About a third of the subjects gutted it out for fifteen minutes. The other two-thirds lunged for the sweet.

The plot thickened as we brought in the experimental group – Kyler and thirteen other four-year-olds. We made Kyler's group the same offer, but this time we taught them skills they could use if they wanted to wait. Rather than simply instructing them to hunker down, we taught them to use distance and distractions to influence their own behavior.

Here's where it got interesting. Six minutes into the experiment, Kyler knitted his brow as he appeared to imagine the first delicious contact between the marshmallow and his tongue. He started to melt into submission. But then the skills we taught Kyler kicked in. He turned his body away from his nemesis and began mouthing the words to a story his parents often tell him before bedtime. He was doing anything he could to distance and distract himself – helping supplant his need for will.

A few minutes later, Kyler exited the Change Anything Labs proudly clutching a marshmallow in each hand. He had succeeded. “I did it!” he proclaimed as he stuffed the two marshmallows into his mouth. In fact, 50 percent more kids were successful at holding out for the second marshmallow when taught a couple of distraction skills – demonstrating that one of the biggest barriers to personal success is not one's lack of moxie, chutzpah, or willpower, but the mistaken belief that willpower is *the* key to change.

## **WE'RE BLIND**

What do we learn from Kyler and his friends? Mastering temptations is not solely a function of personal motivation. When it comes to changing our behavior, skills also play an important role. That means that the model of human behavior that most of us carry around in our heads – the model we use to figure out how to change our own habits – is woefully incomplete. By relying on our handy but incomplete tough-it-out model, we routinely ignore the many sources of influence that are working for and against us – *personal ability* to name just one. As it turns out, there are lots of different forces out there that are acting on us all the time.

You yourself may have fallen into the willpower trap. For instance, if you're currently trying to give up smoking, alcohol, or drugs, wouldn't simply going cold turkey be your shortest route to success?

The same is true when it comes to withstanding the temptation to buy the latest electronic device, or keeping your temper with a loved one, or getting up early to study for a course you're taking to better your career. Just gut it out and you'll do fine, right?

The problem here isn't that you believe in the importance of willpower for creating personal change. Willpower obviously plays a role in our choices. The problem arises when you rely exclusively on a tough-it-out model and ignore the legion of other sources of influence that are working for and against you.

For example, when you walk into a casino, you're practically assaulted by the crass influence methods the owners employ to separate you from your next rent payment. For instance, the hotel registration counter lies at the back of the casino, so you have to walk through a labyrinth of tempting game tables and cool-looking slot machines just to get a room. Then there are the chips you see in such abundance. Social scientists have shown that you'll lose chips more willingly than you'll let go of cash, so the casino owners insist that you play with chips. And who can miss the exciting sound of other people winning – Bing! Bang! Cha-ching! Oh boy, maybe you can win too!

These influence techniques are fairly easy to spot, but take care, because there are lots of other more subtle techniques in play – all carefully designed by individuals who have one goal: to separate you from your money. Casino designers manipulate the type and level of the music playing in the background, the colors and shape of the room, the length of the arms of the slot machines, the color and pattern of the carpet (they install carpets that are so visually jarring that patrons look up and away from them and toward the slots). The methods of influence are nearly endless.

When it comes to more routine human activity, such as eating, drinking, interacting with co-workers, and shopping, you could fill a library with books that explain how people are working feverishly to

get you to act in ways that bring them huge profits while giving you unwanted pounds, a failed liver, divorce, and bankruptcy.

For instance, did you know that the sound that's most likely to get your attention is the sound of a baby giggling? A baby giggles, and everyone turns to see. Sound experts know this, and they use it to their advantage in advertising. Did you realize that there was a time when the organist at the North Rim Grand Canyon Lodge played peppier music when the restaurant line grew – influencing people to eat faster and get out of the restaurant sooner than they had originally planned? Do you think the patrons realized that they had just wolfed down a meal that they had intended to enjoy at their leisure – because the music hustled them along? It's doubtful.

That's why when it comes to personal change, we first think of our own lack of motivation. Our primary problem isn't that we're weak; it's that we're blind – *and when it comes to long-standing habits, what you can't see see is usually what's controlling you*. Also, since we can't see how many sources of influence are working against us, we blame our setbacks on the one source of influence we can spot – ourselves. This particular source of personal influence is obvious, handy, and simple to consider. Plus, if our problems stem from our lack of personal motivation, that puts us in the driver's seat. We can whip ourselves into a motivational lather and head off in search of change – for a while.

## **WE'RE OUTNUMBERED**

Fortunately, when it comes to combating the myriad forces that encourage us to overeat, overreact, overspend, lounge too much, smoke, drink too much, sleep too much, and play video games too much, we don't always respond with a call for more willpower. We try other influence methods as well. We tinker with an exercise bike, try a stop-smoking patch, put up a motivational poster, take training courses, and so forth. The bad news is that more often than not we

bring these influence tools into play one at a time. Little good that does. The forces that are working against us are legion – and they work in combination. So when it comes to solving personal problems, people are not only blind; they’re also outnumbered.

To see how your typical change effort takes form, consider the following metaphor. Your rather large car runs out of petrol a short distance from a petrol station – just over a gently cresting hill. You decide to push the beast to the nearest pump, but this isn’t your old, tin-foilbased VW bug that you could easily push by yourself; it’s a huge people carrier. So you wave down a half dozen rather large and muscular strangers to help you. Each puts in a full effort. Each grunts and strains and pushes against the massive bulk – *one person at a time*. In response, your car just sits there with a smug look on its grille.

Now, as hopeless as this example sounds, it’s about to get worse. Imagine that in addition to the fact that the people assisting you are working in isolation rather than in combination, there are six hefty strangers all pushing together to propel your truck back *down* the hill. Now you have an accurate image of why your change attempt feels so overwhelming. Our problem is not just that we’re using only one source of influence at a time; it’s also that those who aren’t pushing for us are usually pushing against us.

This is precisely why we fail in our attempts at personal change. There may be half a dozen sources of influence sustaining our old bad habits, and we muster just one clever strategy at a time to offset this overwhelming combination. Then we act shocked when our anemic idea falls short – and set out to punish the “slacker” who authored it: ourselves. It’s a hopeless, discouraging trap.

## **IF YOU CAN SEE IT, YOU CAN CHANGE IT**

So how can you get both vision and numbers working in your favor? Kyler and his marshmallow-resisting friends give us a hint of what can

happen. After learning a couple of simple skills, 50 percent more of the experimental subjects were able to resist the temptation. When they added a little skill to their existing will, their odds of success shot up substantially. Could the same thing work for adults? When it comes to fighting our own personal demons, what if we could match the multiple sources that are working against us with multiple sources of our own?

To answer these questions, we'll return to the Change Anything Labs. In this experiment we'll collaborate with a teenage scientist named Hyrum who wondered whether older kids could be as easily blinded and outnumbered as adults. His research team blitzed a group of ten-year-olds with six sources of influence to see if this affected their behavior. The team also examined the question of whether the kids were aware of what had happened to them.

To test the power of multiple sources of influence, the research team designed an experiment to tempt kids to do what many adults routinely do – spend themselves into bankruptcy in spite of their best intentions to save for the future. The study started on a Saturday morning as a group of nervous parents watched their ten-year-old children on a closed-circuit TV monitor. The adults knew that the researchers would be attempting to influence their children to save or spend money – depending on the luck of the draw – and were anxious to see how they would fare. Would their child be a spendthrift or a fiscally responsible money manager? Inquiring parents wanted to know.

As each child entered the lab, Hyrum explained the upcoming activity. Each kid would be given a “career” that would last ten minutes and include four simple tasks. The kids would be paid ten dollars for completing each task. If they did as they were told, they could earn up to forty dollars. Hyrum also warned them that they'd be offered opportunities along the way to spend their earnings. To help them resist these temptations, he invited them to think about what they would like to do with forty dollars once they returned home.

As the kids talked about the money they could earn, it was clear that they all had exciting plans for the loot. They all seemed motivated to resist the temptation to spend.

Then, one at a time, the kids began their careers. They were surprised at how simple it was to make money. In the first task they ranked assorted sweets from least to most favorite. That was a no-brainer. For their second task they alphabetized toys. What could be easier?

After each task, Hyrum paid the subjects ten dollars and invited them to have a look at the Change Anything Store. The store consisted of a countertop covered with inexpensive sweets and toys. The first thing the shoppers noticed was that prices were five to ten times what they would pay in a regular store. For example, a bag of Skittles was marked at eight dollars. Not only were the prices outrageous, but the kids *knew* they were outrageous.

So, here's the situation. The research subjects had big plans for their money. The only temptation they faced was the opportunity to buy sweets and toys at ridiculous prices. And here's what we wanted to know: Would their choices be affected by six different sources of influence? And if so, would the kids even notice it?

The answer to the first question – Could their spending actions be influenced at all? – was an unequivocal yes. The first fifteen kids in the study emerged from the lab with less than thirteen (of the possible forty) dollars in their pockets. A couple of the kids left with only the shirts on their backs and a handful of overpriced goodies.

One excited buyer spent his entire fortune on Silly String. His mother later reported that as they left, the boy stared sadly at the cans in his arms and lamented, "I'm so stupid! I could have had forty bucks! But now all I have is this dumb Silly String."

But not everyone spent lavishly. A second group of fifteen kids saved an average of thirty-four of their forty dollars. This group of subjects completed the same tasks in the same room with the same store

offering sweets and toys at the same prices, but they took home two-and-a-half times what the first group did! What happened? Were they genetically blessed with more willpower? Did they see the forces working against them and take steps to counteract them?

Let's pull back the curtain and see what was really going on. We'll start by exploring the spenders' thinking. One by one we asked them about their outlandish purchases. Each was quite aware of the retail value of their overpriced goods. They knew they had pretty much thrown their money away. *But they didn't recognize the forces that had caused them to spend so freely.* Instead, they fell into the willpower trap by blaming themselves. One child appeared baffled by his own actions, reporting, "I'm not sure what happened. I guess I must have really wanted this."

And it wasn't just the spenders who didn't know what had hit them. The savers were equally unaware of the forces that had propelled them to save. While the spenders took too much of the blame, the savers took too much of the credit. They figured they had shown more discipline because they were strong, motivated, and goal oriented.

Both groups were wrong.

### **SIX SOURCES OF INFLUENCE**

So what actually caused the profound differences in spending? The research team at the Change Anything Labs manipulated six different sources of influence to affect the subjects' behavior – the same sources of influence that operate on *you* twenty-four hours a day. With the first group (the spenders), six sources were used to promote spending. With the second group (the savers), the same sources were used to promote saving.

Here's how the six sources came into play. We've already talked about two of them – personal motivation and personal ability. Remember, we helped Kyler and others delay eating the marshmallow

by adding distraction and distancing tactics to their existing personal motivation. And we saw results that would be quite a payoff for a more robust change plan.

The next two sources of influence that routinely act on you are equally easy to spot. The people who surround you both motivate and enable your habits. For instance, you may not want to quit smoking, but your life partner does, and that weighs heavily on your mind. Or perhaps co-workers keep handing you cigarettes and asking you to join them at break time. These powerful social forces add two more sources to our model of influence: *social motive* and *social ability*.

Now for two rather subtle influences. If you remove human beings from the formula, the physical world that surrounds you still prods and enables you – for both good and evil. For instance, that refrigerator filled with soft drinks standing next to your exercise bike doesn't help you stick to your eating plan. The flashy ads on TV aren't exactly helping you stay on budget. The presence of a flatscreen TV in every room of your house positively distracts from your intention to finish your studies for a night class. But the ingenious new video game that requires you to jump around and swing a paddle has really helped with your exercise plan. You get the point. "Things" have an impact on what you do every day.

By combining these influences (we'll refer to them as *structural motivation* and *ability*) with personal and social forces, we have a full model of why you do what you do. These are the six hulking behemoths that either push *with* you or push *against* you.

### ***BACK TO THE LAB***

To see how these six sources actually work, let's return to the preteens who took part in the savings experiment. The researchers manipulated all six sources in the following ways.

**Source 1: Personal Motivation.** First, we tapped into the subjects' existing desires and wants. After rank ordering the sweets, the

spending subjects were invited to taste their favorite treat. Yum. By contrast, the saving subjects were asked to think about something they really wanted to buy with their forty dollars. *Change Tactic:* If you interrupt your impulses by connecting with your goals during crucial moments, you can greatly improve your chances of success.

**Source 2: Personal Ability.** We next worked on personal ability by teaching savers how to keep a running total of how much they saved or spent on a sheet of paper. The savers all did this easily. The spenders, however, were taught no such technique, so their sinking net worth got lost in the rush to buy now. *Change Tactic:* Changing persistent and resistant habits always involves learning new skills.

**Source 3: Social Motivation.** Next, we made use of social forces. As the experiment unfolded, the spenders were joined by three other kids (confederates of our research team) who spent like there was no tomorrow – and encouraged the research subjects to join them. The savers were also joined by three confederates – but while two spent freely, the third said that she was trying to save and encouraged subjects to do the same. *Change Tactic:* Bad habits are almost always a social disease – if those around us model and encourage them, we’ll almost always fall prey. Turn “accomplices” into “friends” and you can be two-thirds more likely to succeed.

**Source 4: Social Ability.** Next we used confederates to *enable* good or bad choices. The savers were reminded by their “friend” that the prices in this store were outrageous and that if they could simply wait ten minutes they’d be able to get more for less elsewhere. Spenders received no such information. *Change Tactic:* Changing deeply entrenched habits invariably requires help, information, and real support from others. Get a coach, and you’ll make change far more likely.

**Source 5: Structural Motivation.** Finally, we made use of *things*. Savers were paid in cold, hard cash. When they spent money, they had to fork over the real deal so they felt the loss at the very moment they made a purchase. Spenders, in contrast, were told their money was in an account. Their money was magically deducted from some abstract bucket. Thus, their spending felt painless – all gain, no pain – until they were in the car on the way home. *Change Tactic:* Directly link short term rewards and punishments to the new habits you're trying to form, and you're far more likely to stay on track.

**Source 6: Structural Ability.** For the final source of influence, spenders walked into a room surrounded by tantalizing pictures of sweets. Savers saw no such pictures in their room. *Change Tactic:* Small changes in your environment can have a surprising affect on your choices. For example, just add a few visual cues that help you focus on your goals, and your behavior will change rapidly.

### ***THE BOY WHO COULD SEE***

As this experiment so readily demonstrates, six sources of influence can and do profoundly affect behavior. When exposed to forces that both encouraged and enabled them to spend, the control group spent 68 percent of their earnings. (And remember, this spending frenzy happened within ten minutes of the subjects' solemnly declaring that they'd save most of their money.) When the same six sources were aimed at the savers – but this time encouraging and enabling them to save – they spent a mere 15 percent of their earnings.

But what would happen if someone caught a glimpse of what was going on behind the curtain? What if that person wasn't blind to the forces that the research team was aiming at him or her? It turns out that one boy was able to do just that. His name was Isaac, and he saved thirty dollars – pretty much like everyone else in the saving group. But here's the difference: Isaac wasn't in the saving group. He was in the

*spending* group. All six sources of influence were used to get him to spend his money – yet Isaac spent very little. Who was this kid, and what made him so invincible?

In order to figure out what made Isaac tick, we pored over the video evidence. We had recorded the whole experiment. In fact, you're welcome to watch Isaac in action at [ChangeAnything.com/exclusive](http://ChangeAnything.com/exclusive).

Without so much as a furrowed brow, Isaac used the six sources to his advantage. He controlled his motivation, used skills to enhance his ability, changed his social world, and manipulated his own physical environment. Here's how.

In the video, Isaac approached the store much more cautiously than did the other subjects in the *spending* group. While walking rather deliberately toward the place of temptation, Isaac told us later, he was thinking about the video game he intended to buy with his money after the experiment was over – trumping our team's attempt to influence him to spend now.

Next, Isaac employed a skill used by all savers – he calculated his bank balance in his head before making a buying decision. Nobody gave him a piece of paper, but it didn't matter to Isaac because he took advantage of his own personal ability by keeping a running total in his head.

You also can't help noting in the video that Isaac carefully distanced himself from the influence of the unhelpful accomplices. He looked slowly away and then stood apart. Isaac also stood at a much greater distance from the table than the other members of his research group – all of whom were drawn into the swirling vortex of retail doom.

As we continued our interview with Isaac, he summed up the premise of this book better than anyone had before. When asked how he saved so much money despite the fact that the researchers were doing everything in their power to get him to spend it, Isaac answered, in effect, "I could see what was happening, so I had to be careful."

So, exactly what does this experiment teach us? Overall, the six sources of influence had a huge impact on our subjects. When influenced to spend, they spent; when influenced to save, they saved. But not all subjects were equally affected. One young man saw what was happening and quite handily counteracted the effects. He wasn't blind, so he didn't stay outnumbered. And he didn't have to fail. He was in control of his choices because he was in control of the sources of influence that determined them. When asked why he had been successful, he didn't credit his moxie or stick-to-itiveness. In short, he escaped the willpower trap.

You gotta love Isaac. Better still, we all ought to *be* Isaac.

### ***THE SCIENCE OF PERSONAL SUCCESS***

In fact, that's the purpose of this book. We all need to learn how to intentionally do what people like Isaac do quite naturally. The difference between us and those who have succeeded at goals we struggle to achieve is not just willpower. It's that the achievers innately or consciously take steps to align these sources of influence in their favor. There is a science to personal success that allows us to be far more effective at creating the results we want than most of us even imagine.

Once we understand the forces that are acting on us, we no longer have to fall victim to them. We can knowingly design effective change plans. Our efforts won't have to feel so random and serendipitous. We can profoundly improve our ability to make changes in all areas of our life.

For example, we already saw how simply adding a little personal ability, helped 50 percent more kids succeed at delaying gratification in the marshmallow experiment. As you'll see later, changing a few "accomplices" in your life into true "friends" adds more than 60 percent to the odds of success. And it gets better. To date we have looked into the details of personal change efforts of more than five thousand Changers – people around the globe who are taking on

tough habits (in order to reduce their weight, advance a stalled career, shake an addiction, reverse a negative performance review, turn debt into wealth, and so forth). There are clear patterns for both success and failure in all of these attempts.

For example, in 2008 our Change Anything Labs published an important finding from this ongoing research in MIT's *Sloan Management Review*. Our discovery was the evidence that those who marshal the six sources of influence in their change plan are *ten times* more likely to succeed than those who don't.

Now, there's a finding that will get and keep your attention. A thousand percent? As impressive as that statistic sounds, there is a bleak side to this discovery. Those who remain blind and outnumbered have almost no chance of success. What we describe in this book will help you understand what keeps you stuck and will equip you to engage the best of social science research to catapult you forward.

This book will help you learn to get the science of personal success working for you. Along the way, not only will you learn sound theory, but you'll also meet some of the fascinating Changers who have made it work for them. For instance, Michael V. describes the influence strategies that enabled him to overcome decades of alcoholism and addiction. Melanie R. employs the same strategies to get her career out of performance-appraisal risk and onto the fast track. Patricia S. saves a failing marriage, and Michael E. loses weight and keeps it off for years. All succeed by using not one, two, or three, but six sources of influence – in combination. All have their eyes wide open. You don't hear them brag about their titanic will. You hear hard-earned insight about how they turned accomplices into friends, made use of the physical world, received training, and so forth. You'll hear how they escaped the willpower trap and created intentional change through deliberate application of solid science.

# Be the Scientist and the Subject

After reading the first chapter of this book, Tim F., a close friend of one of the authors, decided he'd apply the concepts to the challenge of losing weight. He realized that for years he had been sporadically using one or two weight-loss tactics (borrowed from any fad that promised easy and rapid success), but he had never put together a thoughtful plan. He most certainly hadn't used all six sources of influence – in combination. Tim also had never been able to lose weight and keep it off.

So this time Tim garnered advice from the strategy chapters that lie just ahead and applied an influence strategy to each of the six sources. For instance, to enhance his personal motivation, he worked hard to discover foods that were healthy – and that he also enjoyed eating. No more liver shakes and broccoli pudding. To improve his personal ability, he studied calorie counting. In his own words, “Without so much as consulting a chart, I can now tell you within ten calories how many I've eaten each day.”

“I also attacked my social network,” Tim continued. “My life partner was constantly filling our fridge with fatty foods and our cupboards

with sweets. Ironically, she was doing it for *me* – she didn't much care for those foods. So we talked and decided to surround ourselves with healthy food. I also asked her to celebrate with me each time I lost a pound. This helped keep me motivated."

After improving his social motive and ability, Tim turned his attention to his reward structure. At first he couldn't think what to do to make eating a healthy diet more financially attractive, but then he read about the strategy of setting aside money for an organization he pretty much loathed, and then sending money to that very institution every time he failed to meet a monthly goal. Yikes!

"That got my attention," Tim explained. "I couldn't stand the thought of helping out a cause I despise."

Finally, Tim made use of his physical environment. He hung up posters, tracked and posted his weight loss, had his computer send upbeat reminders to his cell phone, and moved snacks to the basement storage room – so they wouldn't be so handy.

It was a great plan. But it didn't work. Okay, actually Tim lost a few pounds. But within a month he gave up and put all the weight back on. Plus five pounds. "I know the Change Anything approach works," he told us shortly after his setback. "It's just *me* that's the problem."

Tim was back in the willpower trap.

## **THIS ISN'T EASY**

As you might suspect, when it comes to changing long-standing habits,

Tim isn't alone in his struggle. When it comes to creating lasting change, failure is the rule, not the exception. Just take a look at the statistics.

- Marriage counseling works for fewer than one in five couples who use it.

- A whopping eighty-five percent of us have had bosses who have tried – but failed – to get us to change in order to improve our performance.
- Ninety-eight percent of us fail at keeping resolutions to change our bad habits.
- Seventy percent of us who take out a loan to pay off credit cards end up with the same (if not a higher) debt load within two years.
- Only one in twenty dieters with a history of obesity is able to lose weight and keep it off for one or more years.

So, what is the solution to Tim's problem? Where did he go wrong? Most people fail to reach their personal goals because they're in the dark about what's influencing their behavior. But Tim *wasn't* blind and outnumbered. He put together what he thought was a decent plan. He looked at all six sources of influence and came up with a tactic or two for each. So why did he stumble like most everyone else?

To answer this, consider a recent and rather intriguing piece of research. A group of Stanford scholars examined the four most popular weight-loss programs in the United States to divine what works and what doesn't. Here's what they discovered.

1. All of the programs worked.
2. If people used them.
3. But people rarely used them.

That was Tim's problem. He had a plan – one that he liked quite a lot – but it worked for only a while. It didn't hold up to the test of time. So, what does it take to not only come up with a great change plan, but actually use it – forever?

## YOU NEED TO STUDY YOU

Our Changers give us the answer. When you study people who not only succeed in changing but maintain their success for years, you'll quickly discover two things:

1. They stumbled as much as they succeeded.
2. Their change plan was homegrown.

The Changers we studied discovered what worked for them through a scientific process of trial and error. They didn't get it right the first time. In truth, when people are struggling with tenacious habits, few ever do. Instead, they took two steps forward and one step back – and sometimes the reverse. But they had a skillful way of learning from their setbacks so that their plan evolved in a deliberate direction. They snipped a little here and added a little there. They tried a new technique, observed, learned, and tried again. Day by day, week by week, they moved forward until one day their plan addressed all of their unique challenges – and they succeeded. Tailoring your personal change plan will require the same kind of purposeful experimentation.

So let's see how this scientific trial-and-error tactic might work for you. Let's say that, like Tim, you're trying to lose weight. That means that if you're going to succeed, you'll need to burn more calories (move around more) than you consume (eat somewhat differently). These are the obvious behavior changes you'll need to make.

Of course, a thousand people will offer advice about how to burn more and consume less. They'll suggest diet books, gym memberships, coaching services, pills, iPhone apps, and rent-a-chefs. And this is exactly where the plan breaks down. The advice well intended colleagues eagerly impart may have been good for someone, somewhere, sometime, but it's unlikely to fit your peculiar needs.

Researchers can tell you all about the science of weight loss (for example, a calorie is the energy it takes to heat one gram of pure water one degree centigrade at sea level), but nobody is ever going to be able to tell you what you personally need to do in order to master that bundle of nasty little calories glued to your belly.

What you need to succeed is not merely the science of weight loss; you need help from the *social* science of weight loss. That includes the study of you, living your unique life, in your particular environment, given your personal quirks.

Of course, nobody out there is studying *you*. Nobody else *can* study you. Researchers can give you generic hints that serve the broad population, but this type of advice serves only a small percentage of people a small percentage of the time. You're going to have to become a social scientist, using yourself as the subject. It's the only method that will withstand the test of time.

## **THE SOCIAL SCIENCE OF PERSONAL CHANGE**

Good change scientists don't just thrash about trying every idea that makes the front cover of a popular magazine. Instead, they use a specialized form of scientific inquiry. Here's a quick overview of how Changers ensure that they stumble *forward* rather than *downward*.

First, examine when and where you currently give in to urges. This was Tim's first mistake. Rather than examining his unique challenges, he selected strategies that sounded new and interesting. Instead, he should have examined what we'll call his *crucial moments* – the times or circumstances in which his choices are the most consequential.

Tim was like the fellow who searched for his lost car keys under the streetlight near his car, not because he figured he dropped them there, but because he could see better under the light. Tim had selected convenient and cool-sounding influence methods, not relevant ones.

Once you've identified your specific vulnerabilities, create a personal change plan (or hypothesis). This plan consists of what you'll do to resist, remove, and even transform your urges during critical times.

Finally, implement the plan, observe the results, make changes in the plan (based on what worked and what didn't – resulting in a new plan), and repeat as needed until you've succeeded.

Let's see how this process works in practice, as demonstrated by A.J.W., one of our intrepid Changers. Now, let's be clear. A.J. doesn't consider herself a social scientist. She's a thirty-one-year-old nurse, mother, and wife. But she did begin taking an interest in examining her own behavior after a rather startling incident.

A.J. was a two-pack-a-day smoker. The executives at the hospital where she works as a critical-care nurse frown on employees who drop ash on the patients they're resuscitating. So at key times throughout the day when A.J. could sneak a private moment and head out to the designated smoking area, she fumbled for a cigarette.

A.J. decided to quit smoking one day when she was called to help resuscitate a patient on the eighth floor of her hospital. At the time of the call she was on the first floor. Following hospital procedure, she bypassed the elevator (medical emergencies wait for no one) and hit the stairs. By the time she reached the third floor she was gasping for breath. When she arrived at the fourth she collapsed in a heap. Fortunately, other team members arrived on the eighth floor and saved the patient. But while A.J. sat burning with shame and gasping for breath on the concrete slab, she decided it was time to change.

### ***SCIENTIFIC STRATEGY 1: IDENTIFY CRUCIAL MOMENTS***

As A.J. thought about her challenge, she quickly realized that not all of her life moments were created equal. Most of the time she was busy, on autopilot, and not tempted to smoke. Well, not *that* tempted. The

moments when she was simply dying for a smoke were actually fairly infrequent.

This is true for all of us and all of our bad habits. Not all of our life moments are equally challenging. For instance, few kids struggling with pornography addiction are tempted to indulge when their grandparents are in the room. Go figure. We don't lapse into lax work practices at the office when we know our work on a particular project is being used to evaluate whether we're fit for a promotion. We don't feel the urge to spend when we're balancing our bank account.

You get the point. When it comes to personal change, you don't have to be pushing yourself to the limit all the time. You need to focus on only a handful of moments when you're most at risk. We call these special circumstances crucial moments. These are the moments of truth that would lead to the results you want – if you could get yourself to enact the right behaviors.

A good way to look for crucial moments is to look for the conditions that create the greatest temptation for you. For example, you're tempted to ignore a customer request when it's out of the ordinary. You become cold and aloof with your life partner when you're under stress. You don't climb on the treadmill when you come down with a slight sniffle.

As you search for your own crucial moments, consider whether they come at certain *times*, in certain *places*, around certain *people*, or when you're in certain *physical* or *emotional* states. Different conditions affect different people differently. Only you can systematically search for the conditions of greatest importance to *your* change.

### **SCIENTIFIC STRATEGY 2: CREATE VITAL BEHAVIORS**

Once you've identified your crucial moments, your next task is to create the rules you'll follow when temptation pays you a visit. Research shows that if you establish rules in advance of facing a challenge, you

are far more likely to change your behavior when the crucial moment hits. Instead of facing each instance as a unique event calling for a new choice, you've already decided what you'll do – and you're far more likely to comply.

When it comes to personal change, you'll want to set specific rules (not vague guidelines) that guide you to act in ways that eventually lead to what you want. That's why we call these essential actions *vital behaviors*. A vital behavior is any high-leverage action that will lead to the result you want. Crucial moments tell you when you're at risk. Vital behaviors tell you what to do.

To see how vital behaviors fit into a change plan, consider a rather fascinating study done by Peter Gollwitzer with twenty-one recovering heroin addicts who were desperately trying not only to stay clean but also to get jobs. Now, let's be clear about the challenge the subjects were facing. For a longtime heroin addict, the first forty-eight hours of withdrawal lead to muscle pains, cramps, perspiration outbreaks, freezing sensations, and diarrhea.

So, how did Gollwitzer help addicts to withstand these horrible withdrawal symptoms *and* get jobs? The addicts were encouraged to create résumés as a step toward securing employment. Imagine that. Create a résumé while powerful urges scream in your head.

After receiving résumé-writing instruction, subjects were given seven hours to complete the task. Half of the subjects jumped right into the assignment. The other half did one simple thing before they began: They identified crucial moments they'd face in the next seven hours *and* the vital behaviors they would enact when the moments struck.

For example, "When I feel sick [crucial moment], I will go to the bathroom but then return immediately to the task [vital behavior]." The experimental subjects identified the physical state that could create a huge temptation for them and then planned the rule they'd follow to address it. The control subjects employed neither tactic.

The results from this groundbreaking study were remarkable. *None* of the first group of addicts succeeded at completing their résumés. But of those who prepared in advance for their crucial moments and vital behaviors, an astounding 80 percent succeeded.

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