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## CREATING CHANGE WORKSHEETS

This set of worksheets is a deep dive into the change process. From identifying useful goals, to working with the neural network of habit and the change process, to getting through blocks, this is a powerful toolkit for changing any aspect of your life, large or small. It includes the following:

- **Getting Clear on Your Goals**  
Covers the difference between a goal you can meet and a goal that is impossible and will just lead to frustration. This worksheet creates an internal shift that enables the change process to begin.
- **Creating Personal Change**  
Identifies where you want to go and what it will look like when you get there. This worksheet is about finding the parts of a neural network that holds up a mindset and choosing the mindset you want.
- **Accessing Motivation**  
Identifies why you are not reaching your goals. Motivation is an important key to success, and accessing personal motivation is an art form.
- **Creating Change Action Plan**  
Guides a step-by-step process of moving forward in a way that will help you be effective in the ways that are most important to you.
- **Resolving a Dilemma Using Two Chairs**  
Guides a classic therapy technique from Gestalt therapy. This handout provides magical tools for identifying and working through the inevitable blocks that present themselves when we try to change something.



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## GETTING CLEAR ON YOUR GOALS

Getting clear on your goals and framing your desires and aspirations for yourself and your relationship in a form you can actually make headway with is crucial. Then begins the process of change. There are several steps you can take that will help you achieve the necessary clarity so you can actually make change happen and start to notice some results.

1. Make a list of goals you have for yourself. These might start with, “I want to . . .” or something similar. Really consider how you want to show up in your life and your relationship and what you want to create for yourself. Examples include, “I want to be more creative,” “I want to feel more emotionally balanced,” “I want to feel grounded and patient in discussions with my partner,” “I want to be more vulnerable and less guarded in tough discussions,” etc.
2. Make a list of desires you have for your partner. These might start with, “I would like it if my partner would. . .” or something similar. It is important to distinguish between things you want to change in yourself (question 1) and things you would like your partner to change (question 2). Examples of desires you have for change in your partner might include the following: “I want my partner to listen to me when I’m upset,” “I want my partner to admit how they hurt me and apologize,” “I want my partner to feel more empowered and happy,” etc.

Now let’s revisit your first list. For each item on your list of things you would like to create in your life, write down any ideas you have about what might be blocking you. For instance, if you wrote, “I want to be more creative,” you might write down such things as the following:



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- One block to being more creative is poor time management.
- I also tend to minimize the importance of creative pursuits and don't prioritize them.

Still considering the first list, generate some action steps for each item, based on what you learned from the list of blocks. Using the example of being more creative, what you write down might be as follows:

- I could be more creative in how I go about some mundane tasks.
- I could spend 15 minutes less on social media and use that time to do something that feels creative.

Now let's revisit your list of desires for your partner. Since you can't actually make your partner do these things (or any things), you will have to think about this list differently from the list of goals for yourself.

First, consider each item on the list and decide if there is something about it you want to tell your partner. This might be telling them that something is important to you, or it might be telling them you are hoping they will do a particular thing. Put a mark by any of the things on this list that you would like to communicate with your partner about. Communicating about these things is an important step and ideally should be done without blaming or making them feel bad; you just want to let them know what is important to you and why, and what you are hoping they will do in your future together.

Next, you will have to figure out what you might be doing, or not doing, that is making it difficult for your partner to give you what you want with regard to the things on this list.



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We all have the ability to make it difficult for other people to give us what we want; similarly, we also have the ability to make it easier. For each item on your list of things you would like your partner to do, write down a sublist of things you do, have done, or don't do that make it harder for your partner to accommodate your wishes with regard to those things. For instance, if you put something like, "I would like my partner to own how he has hurt me," you would ask yourself, "What have I done or said that makes it hard for him to own how he has hurt me?" Some possible examples might be as follows:

- I lose my temper or break down crying when we talk about hard things, which makes it hard for my partner to hold up well in those conversations.
- I feel resentful but haven't communicated that to him in a direct and calm way that describes my feelings without shaming or blaming him.
- I haven't really taken the time to think about what would facilitate a repair, so I haven't really made a concrete request that he could respond to.

Now, consider some positive steps you could take that might make it easier for your partner to do what you would like them to do. Look at my examples from earlier and notice how they point to some slight pivots that would probably make a difference in the outcome. In the first example, I might decide to manage my emotions so I don't break down crying. In the second, I might give some thought to how to describe my own emotions without shaming or blaming my partner for them. In the third example, I might think about what a good repair would feel like and have a specific discussion about why that would feel important to me, and ask how my partner would feel about doing those things.



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If you have no ideas about what you could do that might make a difference to your partner in some of these areas, your action step would be to ask them. For instance, “I really wish you would clean up the kitchen after you cook. I wonder if there is anything I could do that would help you feel willing or able to do that?” Of course, your partner might not have any interest in doing it, but if they do have at least a little interest in the project and can give you some feedback, it will be very helpful for making progress in that area.

Now that you have worked your way through these exercises, you may have identified a lot of possible goals for yourself. It won't help if you get flooded, and it won't help to divide your attention in too many ways, because then you won't have the amount of focus you need to actually create change.

### **Making the Rubber Meet the Road**

Look at your lists and see if you notice any themes. For instance, you might see a theme that has to do with managing your emotions in a variety of circumstances. Or you might see a theme that has to do with sharing things about your thoughts, feelings, or desires with your partner more openly or without blame. Or you might notice that you haven't communicated many of your desires to your partner, in which case just doing that may be a sufficient first step. If there are any themes, write them down.

Select one thing or theme that you plan to focus on first. This should be something that, when it shifts, will make a big difference in your life and, ideally, also your relationship. Write down the one thing you will focus on first and commit to it.



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Write at least one positive statement, a mission statement that includes the goal the reason the goal is important to you, and the benefit you will experience when the shift is complete: “I commit to focusing on . . .” or “This is important to me because . . . and when I have achieved this change, it will have been so worth the effort because . . .”

My mission statement is:

Keep that statement of commitment front and center while you are working on it so you don't forget. To keep it on your radar, you could put Post-its throughout your house, tell an accountability partner or other friend, make it into a mantra, or write it on your arm.



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## **CREATING PERSONAL CHANGE**

Thoughts, actions, and emotions are closely linked. Thoughts create emotions. Emotions lead to meaning-making or thinking about the meaning of the emotions. Actions can spring from thoughts and feelings but also result in thoughts and feelings. Shifting one of these factors will shift the rest. If you want to create change in your life, putting a thought together with an action and then feeling a feeling is the way to go. Or you could feel the feeling you aspire to experience, and then it will be easier to choose an action and think thoughts that go with the positive emotion. Whichever way you go, all three parts are important and intertwined with one another.

This worksheet is designed to increase awareness of which thoughts, emotions, and actions are linked for you and what outcome they support. Getting clear on an outcome you want (a goal) and then stretching to identify the thoughts, actions, and emotions that support that outcome is a very powerful step. I use this format frequently on a whiteboard in my therapy room and learned it from Vann Joines, Ph.D. It also makes a powerful self-help project.



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<b>CREATING PERSONAL CHANGE</b>	
One change I would like to make in myself, that will make a big difference in my life is:	
Currently, regarding this issue, the feelings I experience are:	When the change is complete, the feelings I will experience are:
Currently, the thoughts I think that bring these feelings are:	Things I would rather think include:
Include thoughts about yourself, others, and your destiny	
Things I do when I think these thoughts and feel these feelings are:	Actions that go with the new thoughts and feelings are:
I will have to give up:	I will gain:
If I really wanted to sabotage the project, I would:	
Developed by Bill Holoway, M.D. and revised by Vann Joines, Ph.D.	



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## ACCESSING MOTIVATION

Finding motivation involves being able to see how the change you are considering making would benefit you. Let's imagine you would like to become able to manage automatic emotional responses so you can respond to your partner calmly and without defensiveness or anger. How will your life be better when you have figured out how to do this? Imagine yourself, in a tough conversation, being an empathetic, openhearted, calm, curious listener and participant. How does this benefit you? If this sounds like a selfish perspective, it is, but in the best possible way. This is about *your* stake in the situation. Yes, it would probably also benefit your partner and your relationship, but finding your own motivation, *separate from any benefit to anyone else*, is crucial to success with any change you might want to make. The more difficult the change, the more in touch with your own motivation you will need to be.

First, envision the rewards you might reap if you were able to do the thing you are considering. Using the example of managing your automatic emotional responses, make a list of every benefit you can think of, small and large. How would it benefit *you* to stay calm enough to fully understand your partner's perspective on something you disagree about?

Now, consider your list. Refine it. If there are things on the list that are benefits to your partner, see if you can figure out a way that those things also benefit you directly. It is fine for there to be benefits to others, but when the rubber meets the road, you're the one who's going to be facing the challenge, so make sure you are clear in your mind about why it is important to you.

Look over your list of motivations for change. Can you distill or refine the list into an

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image or a single word or short phrase that symbolizes why this is important to you? Maybe the things on your list conjure up a fictional figure or a word that describes how you feel when you embody the traits you are cultivating. You will need to be able to call up your motivation when you need it or your automatic responses will take over in a split second. In that split second, it will help if you have a mantra, an image, or an emblem that can remind you to take a deep breath and respond in the way you planned.

- My word, phrase, or image is \_\_\_\_\_.
- My plan for keeping my word, phrase, or image at the top of my awareness at all times is \_\_\_\_\_.



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## CREATING A CHANGE ACTION PLAN

To make a change in your life, you will need concrete goals that are about you (see the “Getting Clear on Your Goals” worksheet in this appendix), as well as clarity regarding the thoughts, feelings, and actions that you are now engaging in and those that better match the goal you aspire to (see the “Creating Personal Change” worksheet, also in this appendix). Once you have done that foundational work, you are ready to make the rubber meet the road with a concrete action plan consisting of what I would describe as a series of experiments.

Your first action-based experiment might be to change a habitual thought that isn't serving you into one that serves you better. Or it might be engaging in a regular mindfulness practice of intentionally shifting toward such emotions as appreciation, love, and gratitude. It might be doing a particular action over and over again to build a new habit while also creating a shift in thoughts and feelings. My point is that your experiment requires you to do something different, but it might be a thought experiment, a feeling experiment, or a purely action-based experiment. It might also be an experiment that has an action, accompanied by an intentional shift of emotion or thought. For instance, imagine you have decided to run an experiment that involves listening when your partner is talking and, instead of interrupting or responding defensively, to get curious and ask some good questions. It will be easier to do that if you are aware of the thoughts you think when your partner starts talking that often result in you interrupting and defending yourself. With that self-awareness, you can coach yourself to think different thoughts when your partner is talking, which will set you up to have more success managing the automatic response of interrupting.

Once you have identified your experiment, write it down in detail. If your experiment is to not interrupt, make sure to write down what you will do instead so you have positive action steps. That might be, “Instead of interrupting, I will take three deep breaths and remember that I want to know what my partner thinks. I will ask at least one follow-up question to what my partner is saying.”



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Don't overcomplicate this; keep it to just one concise experiment so you can really focus on it and succeed.

Now, write down why this is important to you and how your life will be improved when you have mastered this skill (refer to your mission statement in the "Getting Clear on Your Goals" worksheet or, for a deeper dive, use the "Accessing Motivation" worksheet). This might be something like, "It is important to me to listen well and get curious because I want to know what my partner thinks on deeper levels than we usually discuss, so I can understand my partner more fully. I think knowing my partner better will lead to me loving and respecting them more fully, which would be wonderful and will lead to me feeling more energetic and positive about myself, my life, and my relationship."

My first experiment is to \_\_\_\_\_.

This is important to me because \_\_\_\_\_.

My life will be better in the following ways when I'm good at this: \_\_\_\_\_.

The next challenge is to keep your attention on this project so you can succeed. Remember, repetition and consistency are key. This action plan must become a daily practice that involves honoring your desire and motivation to change. With your attention on the project, you can give yourself good support and self-coaching for the effort.



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Some experiments require total focus for weeks. Others evolve more quickly and can be tweaked every day depending on circumstance. The most important thing is to keep your goal on your radar, and stay focused on one primary goal at a time so you don't become confused or overwhelmed.

Every morning when you start your day, ask yourself (either on paper or in your mind), "What am I going to do today that will move that goal forward and why?" This might look exactly like it did on the first day you did it or it might evolve a little throughout time.

Each day's action step should feel completely manageable. Be realistic: if it's the busiest day of the year, don't put down something that will take an hour; instead, put down something that will take less than a minute. You must create manageable action steps if you want to succeed at change. Every day is different, so assess your day. What feels manageable today? Might it even feel fun?

Now, be a good coach for yourself and imagine the entire sequence, including your success and positive emotions. Get the goal clear in your mind, and picture yourself doing the action step that day. Imagine feeling empowered, happy, effective, or any other positive emotion during and after the action. Get clear about what amazing benefits will come of your effort, and feel the gratitude and appreciation for those amazing benefits. This is you, being a positive, motivating coach for yourself. If you can make the entire process fun, that's even better.

Review each night, perhaps right before you fall asleep or in a notebook where you track your intentions, follow-through, and gratitude each day. Did you meet your goal? What went well? Give yourself positive feedback for doing what you intended to do: "I am a total rock star! I decided to send a loving text at lunchtime, and I did it! This is me taking charge of change in my life, and I'm proud of myself for it!"



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If you fell short of what you had hoped to do, compliment yourself for what you were able to do and acknowledge a desire to improve the next day. Be specific about what you plan to do differently and why it is important to you. Remember to be a cheerful, uplifting, inspiring coach, not a punitive, punishing one.

If it is proving to be challenging to follow through on your action plans, you might tweak them to feel more manageable. Or you might work on increasing how fun it is, add more positive feedback from your inner coach, or add a reward of some sort. I often write myself a pep-talk note for the following morning in a journal beside my bed. Then I read it when I wake up. This might be something like, “You’ve totally *got this* for today! Here’s why this is fun and important, and I know you can do it. Also, right after you do it, you get to go buy yourself your favorite coffee drink, or go for a walk in your favorite place, or *both!*” The important part is to lift your mood and start off with a strong vote of confidence, a positive attitude, and an expectation of success combined with fun. Another helpful support if you are encountering blocks to success is the exercise “Resolving a Dilemma Using Two Chairs,” in this appendix, which will help you sort out what is going on that might be blocking your progress.



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## RESOLVING A DILEMMA USING TWO CHAIRS

A dilemma is a situation in which you have choices but don't yet know which direction to go. One part of you wants to do (fill in the blank), and another part of you isn't so sure that's a good idea. Everyone has a dilemma from time to time. In fact, when you're stewing about a problem and feeling stuck, you might try asking yourself what your dilemma is. This can help you get to something less tangled. Are there internal parts of you that want different things? Are you having an internal dialogue or battle between those viewpoints? If so, you can get a deeper understanding of what is going on for you by using this exercise, which is an extremely useful and effective way to work with any two-part dilemma. You can do it with the help of a therapist or coach, or you can do it as a self-help exercise. This exercise has its roots in Gestalt therapy.

The following are some examples of dilemmas you might use the two-chairs technique to resolve:

- One part of me wants to stay in this relationship, and another part wants to leave.
- One part of me wants to agree to what my partner wants, and another part of me doesn't.
- One part of me wants to open the relationship, and another part is not so sure.
- A part of me wants to follow through on my agreement with my partner, but another part of me wants to do my own thing.
- One part of me thinks it would be a good idea to come out to my mother, and another part of me thinks that is not such a good idea.
- One part of me wants to buy a house, and another part is not quite ready.
- One part of me wants to have another baby, and another part is not so sure.



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You get the idea. The point of the exercise is to allow yourself to give voice to both sides of your internal dilemma, listening fully to what each part of you has to say. Usually, this is done by setting up two chairs. One chair represents the part of you that holds position A, and the other represents the part of you that holds position B. Any two chairs will do. Set them up facing one another. State your dilemma in terms of, “One part of me (this) and another part of me (that).” Choose which you want to start with, and sit in one of the chairs. Take a deep breath, and allow yourself to get fully in touch with the emotions and thoughts of this viewpoint. When you’re in touch with that part, fully express that part of yourself, and *only that part* of yourself. When you feel the other part wanting to interrupt, just tell it to wait a minute and it will get its turn. Why do you, from this part of you, want what you want? Why does it feel important? What is at stake? What does it mean to you? When you feel like you’ve expressed that part fully, switch chairs.

Now take a breath, and get in touch with the alternate opinion within yourself. This is the part that wanted to butt in a few minutes ago. In this chair, you might start by saying, “I disagree. From my perspective, you missed a few important points . . .” Let the other part know what this part of you thinks, feels, and wants. Why does this issue feel so important to this part of you? What is at stake?

When this part has said its piece, switch chairs again. Before you start talking, make sure you are in touch with the thoughts and feelings of the first part again. Look right at the other chair, and talk to it. What did that other part miss? Help the other part see this through your eyes when you are sitting in this part of yourself.



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Continue moving back and forth, staying in each perspective for long enough to carry the conversation a little deeper than before. Don't just switch at the first impulse to do so, or you'll end up with a somewhat superficial argument between two dueling parts, and you won't make much progress.

When things start to wind down, take a minute to take stock. It might help to respond to these points:

- Restate the dilemma. Sometimes moving between chairs reveals that the dilemma is exactly what you thought it was, and other times it turns out that it is a little different than you originally thought. "A part of me thinks \_\_\_\_\_ , and another part of me thinks \_\_\_\_\_."
- Sometimes things become confusing because a third viewpoint arises. Give it its own chair, and see what emerges.
  - Sometimes, a third (or fourth!) part is a subset of one of the other parts. In that case, they might reintegrate as you continue moving between chairs exploring your dilemma.
  - Sometimes they actually belong to a tangential dilemma. In that case, let them know you are focusing on just one dilemma at a time. They will get their turn next time.
  - Other times, a third part is entirely different. For instance, sometimes a really critical, semi-self-abusive part may emerge. If a scolding, shaming, or punitive side appears, you will need to figure out a way to deal with the critical part, so you can take a deep breath and start to feel some freedom of choice again. That might be a project you can undertake on your own if you are good at assessing and making changes in your life in the direction of self-love and self-care. Otherwise, a therapist can certainly help you with this project.



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- Can you identify a part that aspires to grow, change, or stretch in a positive way and another part that is frightened, cautious, or reluctant to make that change, or rebellious, pissed off, and resentful about considering making a change?
  - If so, the next step is to facilitate a conversation between those two parts. From your aspirational part, ask the worried, rebellious, or resentful part about its feelings and concerns until you are quite clear what that part is protecting you from. What kind of negative outcome is it trying to prevent by getting in the aspirational part's way?
  - From the aspirational part, thank the protective part for doing its job of protection. The protective part came about some time ago, possibly when you were very young, for the purpose of preventing something bad from happening. Thank goodness it has been on board, helping you out all this time. Don't make the mistake of suggesting that this part has to go. You would never have made it this far without all the protective parts you have. Thank them and honor them. Then make some decisions about how they are needed today, on a case-by-case basis, with the understanding that now you have adult resources and capabilities.
  - Assess whether there is still a clear and present danger, or if the perception of danger is being blown out of proportion. Most protective parts (but not all) are acting on old information, based on past experiences in which we were much less powerful or much more dependent than we usually are as adults.
  - If your adult self is not in real danger, see if you can come up with a short-term experiment the aspirational part could run to explore the territory. This experiment would allow you to investigate whether you, as a whole adult person, might have some effective strategies for keeping yourself safe, so that the protective part can take a step back and relax for a minute.



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- When you start to see a possible action-based experiment emerging, frame it as such, and use your two chairs to explore how both parts could agree to collaborate to run that experiment. To succeed, you will have to honor both parts, meet their needs, address their concerns, and follow through on any agreement you make to reassess after a period of time. For example, let's say you're working with a dilemma about whether to stay in a relationship or leave. One experiment might be to speak up in your relationship—for a month, just to try it—about things that are important to you that you didn't used to speak up about. You would have to figure out how to handle your discomfort and any fears you have about consequences so your protective part can relax enough to allow the experiment, but if your other option is to leave, it makes sense to try this or another meaningful experiment first.

Any time you feel confused or uncertain about a course of action, or it turns out that you didn't follow through on something in the way you hoped or thought you would, or you are ambivalent about making an agreement with a partner, it is worth delving into what internal dilemma might be right under the surface. This exercise is often used by therapists but can just as easily be done at home. If you think you might get into some challenging material and want a therapist for support, do it for the first few times in a therapy room. But if you feel pretty confident you will be able to manage whatever comes up, go ahead and try it on your own.

Variations:

- You can do this exercise without moving between chairs by referring to something like, “On one hand . . . and on the other hand.”
- You can do this quietly (and without chairs) using a journal. Write the different viewpoints on separate pages or with different colored ink, but don't skip on getting in touch with the feelings of the parts of the dilemma.



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- Play with it, and see if other variations emerge and feel useful to you.