

*Does Change  
have to be so*

**HARD?**

By Julie Donley, RN

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**Does Change have to be so H.A.R.D.?**

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
The power to change .....	2
In search of easy .....	4
Our journey from H.A.R.D. to EASY.....	6
<b>Chapter 1: Get acquainted with change.</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Change is constant .....	9
Personal triumphs .....	9
Change is H.A.R.D. ....	11
A 'whack' on the side of the head .....	13
Change by choice .....	14
Externally motivated to change .....	14
Internally motivated to change .....	15
Choose your incentive: pain or pleasure .....	16
The hardest thing to do .....	17
Are you ready for change? .....	18
<b>Chapter 2: Prepare for change</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Going on vacation .....	21
You are a master of change .....	22
What do you control? .....	23
Three phases of change .....	24
Reaching a tipping point.....	29
A moment of acceptance .....	30
Motivated to change .....	31
The person you were then .....	34
Give up your story .....	35
Let go of your past .....	37
Begin a new life...today .....	39
<b>Chapter 3: Release the grip of old HABITS...</b> .....	<b>41</b>
A habit is born .....	41
Have a cup of T.E.A .....	44
It begins with a thought .....	44

<b>Chapter 4: Let go of ATTACHMENTS</b> .....	<b>47</b>
This too shall pass .....	47
Addicted to your thoughts. ....	48
Welcome to your wall .....	49
The value of you .....	51
Create space .....	53
Emotions are messages .....	54
<b>Chapter 5: Face your RESISTANCE</b> .....	<b>57</b>
Meet your greatest enemy .....	57
Fear exposed .....	61
Fear is an idealized future .....	62
Name your fear .....	63
Struggle equals resistance. ....	64
Self-doubt and judgment kill dreams. ....	65
Procrastination is resistance in disguise .....	67
Escaping into fantasyland .....	68
The role of drama .....	69
<b>Chapter 6: Deal with DISCOURAGEMENT</b> .....	<b>71</b>
Welcome to the gap. ....	71
The problem with expectations .....	73
Temper tantrums. ....	74
The meaning of time. ....	76
I want it NOW! .....	77
Travel the gap .....	78
The long and winding road .....	80
<b>Strategy 1: Commit to change</b> .....	<b>81</b>
Commitment unlocks the door to success .....	81
Add value to your life .....	84
Leave your excuses at the door. ....	85
Choose what is of value to you .....	87
Why change now? .....	88

<b>Strategy 2: Envision a better future</b> . . . . .	<b>91</b>
An easier, softer way . . . . .	91
Non-smokers don't smoke . . . . .	93
Mental reconditioning . . . . .	94
Become a new you . . . . .	95
The Law of Attractiveness . . . . .	96
<b>Strategy 3: Develop the characteristics you need to succeed</b> . . . . .	<b>99</b>
Who do you want to become? . . . . .	99
Create a strategy for becoming a new you . . . . .	101
Develop character . . . . .	102
Update your self-image . . . . .	103
Develop confidence . . . . .	105
Build your dependability muscles . . . . .	106
Sabotaging your success . . . . .	109
A test of commitment . . . . .	110
How will your roles change? . . . . .	111
<b>Strategy 4: Create an environment to support the change</b> . . . . .	<b>115</b>
Get the right support systems in place . . . . .	115
Another brick in the wall . . . . .	117
People, places and things . . . . .	120
Misery loves company . . . . .	122
Extend your boundaries where needed . . . . .	123
Adopt a new community . . . . .	125
An essential element for success . . . . .	126
<b>Strategy 5: Take action</b> . . . . .	<b>129</b>
Without action, nothing changes . . . . .	129
The first step . . . . .	130
Take baby steps . . . . .	131
Small steps produce big results . . . . .	132
Take another step . . . . .	135
Avoidance behaviors . . . . .	136
Focus on what is right in front of you . . . . .	137
A return to trust . . . . .	138
The lessons we must learn . . . . .	140
Suspend your judgment . . . . .	141
Slow and steady wins the race . . . . .	142

<b>Strategy 6: Celebrate your success along the way</b> .....	<b>143</b>
Pat yourself on the back .....	143
A member of Club Human .....	145
Hearing the good stuff .....	146
Success comes in stages .....	147
Practice gratitude. ....	148
<b>Strategy 7: Laugh and enjoy the journey</b> .....	<b>151</b>
Lighten up .....	151
Laughter is great medicine. ....	152
Are you having fun yet? .....	153
Beware the laughter ‘wall’ .....	154
So what? .....	156
Live in the moment. ....	158
Control what you can; let go of everything else .....	159
‘Catch’ some happiness .....	160
<b>Strategy 8: Adopt empowering beliefs</b> .....	<b>163</b>
Beliefs create reality. ....	163
Choose empowering beliefs. ....	165
No you can’t! .....	167
What if you can? .....	169
Set an intention for success .....	170
Believe in you .....	171
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>173</b>
The strategies in practice .....	173
A new life begins .....	175
<b>Appendix: The strategies in review</b> .....	<b>177</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>180</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>181</b>
<b>About the author</b> .....	<b>182</b>



## INTRODUCTION

*“Hard or easy, it’s how you think about it”*

Change is hard. If it wasn’t, everyone would do it and no one would be unhappy or stressed. We would either be happy or change.

To embark upon and sustain a personal change where you actually become someone new is a challenge. It takes time, effort and persistence. Even when it is something you really want and are dedicated to achieving, it’s still hard. There are many unknown variables and whenever you step into unknown territory, fear creeps in because of a loss of control and feelings of powerlessness. No one likes to feel like they have no power.

You’re unhappy. You want something different in your life but you don’t do anything to change your situation. You think about it a lot but can’t seem to take the steps required to act.

Perhaps you want a divorce. Perhaps you have been alone for a long time and you decide you want to find a life partner. Perhaps you want to change careers. Or have a baby, go back to college, get out of debt, lose weight or quit smoking.

Why is it that sometimes we will do anything and everything it takes to get what we want while other times we get lost in the confusion of our thoughts and do nothing?

Why is it easier to accept unhappiness and a life of mediocrity leading to regret and depression than to do what we must to make a better life for ourselves? Why is it such a struggle? Why must it be so *hard*?

There are times, however, when something shifts inside you and you become willing to make a change in your life. It's as if a light switch was flicked on and you are ready to do whatever it takes. In these times, you tackle change vigorously without doubt or fear. You seem to be driven by an insatiable need to succeed.

*But what is that light switch and how can we turn it on so that we can proactively change things in our lives?*

Often, there are things we know are bad for us but we continue to do what we've always done. We don't change. What makes us ready and prepared to change our lives – to change ourselves? And how might we embrace the process so that we can make change easier?

### *The power to change...*

I have been working in psychiatric nursing for nearly twenty years and as a personal coach for nearly ten years. I have witnessed the power of transformation and the joy that people experience when they make a personal change – from addict into recovery; from being miserable at work to recognizing and maximizing their talents; from living in fear to being confident and self-assured; from totally overwhelmed and anxious to peaceful and enjoying balance in life. I am humbled at the personal development and growth that takes place when a spouse finally musters the courage to leave an empty (or abusive) marriage and begin a new life, moving away from what is known to making a life alone – perhaps for the first time. Or when a client learns self-acceptance and opens their heart finally allowing love to enter as they embrace a lifelong companion.

I believe that each of us has more personal power than we know how to use – and it scares us – that we have the power to change our lives for the better but we hide the best of ourselves behind a wall of fear, self-doubt and negative mental conditioning. In order to change, in order to make the impact we want to have in this lifetime, we must bring down that wall to release our power, start believing in ourselves and create powerful habits that allow us to be fully who we are.

I have always believed that we have the power to create our own happiness. My quest has been to discover those powers and learn how to use them to create a life that I love. Along the way, I have faced my share of hardships and challenges that have tested my resolve. I have had to learn to fight for life, love and happiness.

Often the most difficult and challenging moments of our lives are the best teachers. These obstacles and bumps in the road have helped me grow strong as I pushed forward in spite of them and learned to rise above my difficulties, conquer my fear and overcome self-doubts.

What I have learned is that the path to happiness is easier than we think it is; we are just not very skilled at it. And because we listen to others moan and groan we have few role models to demonstrate an “easier” way.

The path to happiness requires us to love, honor and respect ourselves in every way. The more we do this, the better we become and the happier our lives become. We are magnets of attraction. We attract things, people, situations and resources into our lives depending upon how we think, feel and act. So the more you respect yourself and act in ways that support you to be your best, the more you attract the things you want. And when you respect yourself, when you take actions that honor your highest self, you start to repel things you don't want like drama, problems and difficult people.

This concept describes the Law of Attraction, which I prefer to refer to as the “Law of Attractiveness.” Why? Because in order to attract what you want into your life – and repel the things you don't – you focus on becoming ‘attractive’ so you become a magnet for your goal. Being ‘attractive’ means that you possess and demonstrate the attributes and characteristics required for that goal to be yours. In other words, you must behave accordingly.

Although you have this tremendous capacity to change your life for the better, success does not happen by chance. You have the power to transform your life – if you are willing to do the work, if you are willing to morph and grow yourself and go the distance. Then, change is possible.

Yet, we sure do give ourselves a hard time, don't we?

Change is always so rewarding – even if you go into it kicking and screaming. Through the process of change, you grow stronger and more confident. Yes, there are things you may leave behind like people you like, places you frequent and things you enjoy; but the gains you make are worth it.

The problem is we become attached to things staying the same; but things don't stay the same. We just *wish* they would.

Holding onto the past does not serve us. There is something better waiting for us but we must grab the wheel of life with both hands and go for it. Life doesn't wait and there are no encores or repeat performances. It is the journey we take, the experiences we enjoy, the lessons we learn and the love we share along the way that matter most.

We must learn to let go and lighten up. We must learn to take charge, stop putting up with things that do not bring us happiness and joy and learn how to love ourselves. We need to embrace our own goodness and move through our resistance in order to make the changes necessary to enjoy a great life.

*It's time to get more comfortable with change.*

We are embarking upon a journey to understand change and to empower ourselves with the strategies and beliefs needed to accomplish even the biggest personal goals.

### *In search of easy...*

For the first twenty years of my adulthood, life was hard! I dealt with addiction, indebtedness, divorce, obesity, single parenthood, a grave illness, three layoffs – life was hard and I was tired of it.

One day I asked a simple question: Is it possible for life to be easy? I admit that I had no idea *how* life could be easy but, if it were possible, then I believed I could find a way. All I knew was *hard!* This was to be a new journey for me and there would be many changes in store.

When life is hard everything feels so heavy and burdensome. Nothing seems to be going well. It's as if your mind sees only the bad and, even when you do see the good, you feel suspicious, as if something must not be right if life is calm and easy.

Somewhere along the way, we may have learned that life is supposed to be difficult and challenging. There's *supposed* to be chaos and stress. If there's not, then something is wrong.

This is one reason people are so stressed and feel so overwhelmed. We believe that we need to do everything all at once and, in the chase for "success," we put pressure on ourselves and life is hard. As soon as we relax and things become calm, we pile more stuff on our plate to make it hard again. We're accustomed to life being challenging and busy. We are not comfortable with "easy."

Feelings of overwhelm are a barrier to successful personal change. As you evaluate all that needs to be accomplished in order to change, you become overwhelmed just thinking about it. And if you are already stressed and busy, you are not likely to embrace change. If you want to lose weight, for instance, how can you make adjustments to your life if you have no time to plan your meals or to work out? How often have we heard (or given) the excuse that there's just no time to work out or do more for our health?

If life is hard, then we cannot enjoy ourselves. We cannot find happiness through ‘busy’.

Feeling overwhelmed *de*-motivates you to change or, rather, motivates you to continue along your current path no matter how unhappy you may be. After all, change requires work.

But why does it have to be so hard? I mean, who says that life has to be this way? Whether something is hard or easy is our perception anyway, true? Isn't it possible that life could be easy and fun? I decided that it was worth it to find out and went in pursuit of ‘easy’.

First, I needed to recognize that I was used to seeing the world a certain way; in order to change, I had to envision ‘easy’, identify the characteristics of someone who embraces life as easy and then start living as if life were easy.

I had to confront the thoughts telling me “*You can't*” or that something was hard or that it should be a struggle and then ask myself what ‘easy’ would be like instead. It took a lot of attention and practice...

One challenge is dealing with *other* people's beliefs about how hard something is. When I started dating at age thirty-nine, people insisted that it would be hard, that all the “good ones” my age were taken. I decided to embrace the notion that it not only *could* be easy, but that it *would* be easy and that he would just walk into my life. And you know what? He did! It took time, mind you. Two years, to be exact, from the time I committed to finding a life partner to when we began dating. But I discovered along the way that there are many single people out there of all ages. It all depends upon what you believe. And you must be patient. Life has its own pace.

If change is hard, we will perceive it as a chore and we won't do the work. If we want to change, then we need for change to be easier – or at least, we need to think of it as being easy and believe it is possible.

For change to be easy (ok, *easier*), we must learn about and understand the process we go through when we embark upon a personal change. Then we'll know what to expect and how to cope with, prepare for and anticipate the obstacles we will inevitably face along the way.

In addition, we must learn strategies for making change easy. If we know these strategies and how to apply them, then we can create the changes we desire and it won't be so hard.

This book offers you a different way of approaching change. We are rethinking change, changing how change is done.

## *Our journey from H.A.R.D. to EASY...*

In this book I present you with eight strategies for embarking upon change so that it is not so difficult. First, we must come to understand change and why we resist it. We think change is hard; it does require effort and time for change to occur. However, the reasons we perceive change as being hard are just that, perceptions, opinions we create in our minds. Modify how we think and we alter what we identify as 'hard' to being 'not so hard'.

Initially, chapter 1 examines the motivations for change. You will be introduced to the four barriers to change: Habits, Attachments, Resistance and Discouragement. These are the reasons why change is hard and often the reasons you put up with mediocrity and unhappiness. You perceive that keeping things the same is less effort and more comfortable than making a change. Each of these barriers will be given its own chapter and subsequently, simple strategies are introduced to avoid tackling these obstacles directly but rather learning to navigate your mind so as to ally with it instead of doing battle against it. Once you understand what is really happening in your mind and how your thoughts keep you stuck, you can then use the strategies to take charge and make the changes you want.

This is the essence of our journey: to learn about the mind and how it works and then to learn strategies for making a change that uses the mind to support your success, rather than fight your efforts, so you experience less struggle and more control which increases your power to impact your world.

In chapter 2, we look at the change process and the importance of being prepared for change. If you are not yet ready for change, you will not take the actions required and you will make excuses for why you don't. This can be a huge source of frustration if you want to change but are just not yet ready mentally, emotionally or physically. You can, however, let yourself off the hook and instead, work on becoming ready and preparing yourself for the changes you wish to make. Change requires your commitment and if you are committed to the status quo unable to let go and take a stand for something new, you won't do the work and may beat yourself up about it. This is an internal battle not worth fighting.

Chapters 3 through 6 discuss in detail the four main barriers to successful change.

Chapter 3 reviews Habits and how your habits run your life. We learn about the brain and how neurological connections are formed to assist you in accomplishing tasks.

Chapter 4 looks at your Attachments. No matter how uncomfortable and unhappy you may be, the brain works hard to maintain the status quo.

In chapter 5 we discuss Resistance, better known as FEAR. Fear can get the better of you. Fear rears its ugly head and tells you “No!” in many ways. Resistance shows up in your behaviors but fear is a trick of the mind. This kind of fear is not the real fear that warns you of danger. Oh, no. This fear just wants to protect you and, under this pretense, it keeps you stuck.

Chapter 6 examines how expectations set you up for Discouragement and sabotages your success. You get tired. Success isn’t happening fast enough. This is yet another game your mind likes to play.

The next eight chapters are your strategies for success:

Strategy 1: Commit to change. Decide you want something different and commit to doing whatever it takes to create it. By committing to the creation of something new, you accept that the way you’ve been behaving will need to change. You go in search of and learn new ways of behaving and operating in life. You question how you do things now and, if they do not add value to your new life, then you easily let them go. You are committed to a new life.

Strategy 2: Envision success. Instead of doing battle with your habits, envision a future so compelling that it becomes a guiding light to show you the way. By concentrating on your vision and taking actions that move you toward creating that vision, you easily develop new habits and the old ones become extinct.

Strategy 3: Develop the characteristics you need to succeed. In your vision for change, you are a different person with different values and priorities. You are playing a different role in relation to this change and the people in your life. Identify these characteristics and begin to develop them so that you can become the new person you need to be in the new landscape you envision for your future.

Strategy 4: Create an environment to support the change. This means having the right support systems in place such as a community of people who believe in you and can keep you focused, who keep you out of your sabotaging thoughts and who offer new perspectives. It also includes creating a physical environment that is conducive to the change you wish to make.

Strategy 5: Take action. Without action, nothing changes.

Strategy 6: Celebrate your success along the way. When you give yourself recognition for the steps you are taking and the results you are achieving, you begin to gain confidence and momentum and it reinforces your commitment to your vision. In this way, you avoid feelings of discouragement.

Strategy 7: Laugh and enjoy the journey. As you laugh, you lighten up and learn to enjoy yourself. Happiness is a key element for success because if you are not able to enjoy yourself along the journey, how will you know happiness when you arrive at your destination? What is happiness but a state of mind? If this change is a chore, you won't do it; you won't follow through and you won't have any fun. Laughter is an essential element to tame your fear and motivate you to the finish line.

Strategy 8: Adopt empowering beliefs. Believe in the possibility of your change becoming reality; believe in yourself and the power you have to do the work; and set your intention for success. If you do not believe it is possible, if you do not believe that you can achieve success, you will not commit and you will not follow through; in fact, you won't even bother to get started. Whatever you believe is what you will create in reality.

In the concluding chapter, we pull it all together, give you food for thought and provide you with next steps.

My hope for you as you read this book is that you come to understand how your mind plays games with you. It doesn't mean to hold you back from experiencing the happiness you desire; that is an unintended result. By using these strategies, you feel comfortable embarking on change and feel empowered to take the actions needed to make your dreams come true. These strategies help you to become better at playing the game so you increase your odds of winning. You no longer do battle with your mind; rather you work with your mind to move you forward, become the person you wish to become, create the changes you wish to make and enjoy the journey.

May learning these strategies help you to navigate through the changes in your life so you experience the love, happiness and success you desire with less effort and stress.