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# BRING JOY TO THE PROCESS OF CHANGE



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Kay Van Norman

## If you made New Year's resolutions, was one of them to experience more joy?

Chances are the desire for a more joyful life is at the core of most resolutions. What if instead of setting overly high expectations for specific changes, (complete with a high probability of failure), we consider how a focus on joy might help us reach desired goals? Taking time to consider what we are grateful for, what we appreciate about ourselves and what we'd like to experience in life can support the process of change.

BEHAVIOR-CHANGE RESEARCH DESCRIBES A RECOGNIZABLE FIVE-STAGE PATTERN TO CHANGING A BEHAVIOR, INCLUDING;

1. Pre-contemplation (not even thinking about changing a behavior).
2. Contemplation ("I probably should change this behavior").
3. Preparation ("I'm gathering information about making the change").
4. Action ("I'm taking steps to change").
5. Maintenance ("I've changed the behavior for the better").

Two of these stages — contemplation and preparation — largely feed the multi-billion-dollar infomercial industry hawking nutritional supplements, fitness equipment and so-called miracle, instant-life-enhancers as people dance between these two stages but find themselves unable to move into sustained action.

### Plans and Positive Health Habits

Why is it so difficult to move into action and maintenance, especially when trying to adopt a new healthy habit, even when we have the desire? Changing attitudes and expectations around aging and wellness is a critical first step — so is creating a vitality plan and making regular vitality deposits. But I think something else is working under the surface to derail positive change.

### Goals Versus 'Shoulds'

Often when we have a goal in mind — get stronger, lose 15 pounds, get more organized, clear out clutter — it becomes a chore on our long list of "shoulds." My friend, Chris, often says, "Stop 'shoulding' all over yourself." It always brings a laugh, but it also merits some thought.

When a goal sits in the "should" category, there's little chance you'll feel committed to the steps necessary to accomplish that goal. In fact, it's more likely to become demoralizing rather than motivating. For example, many people are in a perpetual state of "I should lose 15 pounds." Have you ever heard the phrase, "You wouldn't weigh as much if you got off your own back?" That's another one of Chris' favorite sayings!

I'm not advocating for giving up on self-improvement; but when self-improvement is so continuously difficult to accomplish that it mocks you at every turn, then perhaps it's time to step back and look at your persistent list of "shoulds."

## Free Writing for Insights

Consider writing each “should” at the top of a page — a separate page for each one. Then free write down why this item is on your list. (Free writing is the process of writing without stopping and without regard to the usual rules of writing.) Don’t spend time crafting the reasons. Instead, just write words and phrases that relate to why this item is on your list.

Next, free write about why you think it’s been so difficult to accomplish this particular goal. When you made attempts to achieve this goal, how long did the effort usually last? What stopped you in the past? What stopped you from just erasing it from your list? Again, this isn’t an essay so don’t try to make it pretty. Just write words and phrases that reveal motivations for this goal and barriers to making it happen.

### NOW FREE WRITE ABOUT:

1. How you would feel and what would change in your life if you accomplished this goal?
2. How you would feel and what would change in your life if you didn’t accomplish this goal?
3. How you would feel and what would change in your life if you simply erased it from your list completely?

This process can help you identify what things on your persistent self-improvement list are actually goals that you want to pursue and which ones simply landed there by default as a “should.”

## A Deliberate Shift

Consider whittling down your list to things that truly matter. Look at your free writing for clues and pay close attention to how you feel about a particular goal and specific actions that would take you towards that goal. Does it feel like a chore? Do the actions feel forced?

Change is often uncomfortable and certainly more difficult than just staying the same, so look for ways to bring joy to the process. Without a sense of joy and opportunities for fun along the path, goals can stall permanently. So, consider engaging a friend or family member to work together towards a goal, and figure out ways to turn the desired actions into a game.

For example, I made a pact with a friend who lives two states away to “virtually walk” toward each other. We picked a route and a place to meet in the middle, decided how many minutes of physical activity equaled how many miles of “walking” and then we agreed to text each other daily to share our progress. It was fun to connect regularly (even if to say “I ran into the ditch today – will do better tomorrow”). And it was motivating, because both of us wanted to do our part to meet in the middle.

## Position of Strength

Finally, take time to celebrate the things you love about yourself, right now — today — so you can start any type of change from a position of strength. Plan for joy and fun as you take small steps toward your goals. Life is far too short, and joy far too important, to squander on “shoulds.”

Visit the *Ignite Personal Vitality* and *Articles & Resources* tabs at [kayvannorman.com](http://kayvannorman.com) to download the *Vitality Portfolio® Starter Toolkit* and other free resources to support positive lifestyle changes.



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# EMBODY JOY TO HELP CULTIVATE IT FOR CHANGE

Bringing joy to the process of change can make it more enjoyable for yourself and others. But what exactly does joy mean to you? Take a few minutes to close your eyes, breath deeply and reflect on the joy in your life. Think about what has brought you joy at different stages of life, with others and by yourself.

1. Does gratitude for specific things in your life help you feel joy?

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2. Can you physically feel joy in your body when you recall a joyful memory? If so, where in your body do you feel it?

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3. What do your most joyful memories have in common?

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4. How can you actively cultivate more joy in your life based on your reflections?

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5. In what ways can you bring that sense of joy to pursuing your goals?

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