



Fall in Love with Your Life

Small changes bring
big rewards.

by Kim Childs

Each January, the lure of a fresh new year inspires many of us to plan healthy lifestyle changes. By February, even modest goals may fall victim to a loss of motivation or the triumph of old habits.

If our latest resolutions are unrealistic (adding two hours of daily meditation to an overloaded life), too drastic (going from junk food to raw food in the middle of winter) or unsupported (vowing to think positively in a climate of naysayers), they may be doomed before they are uttered. According to the life coaches consulted by Natural Awakenings, the most effective life makeovers involve starting where we are, taking small steps, setting boundaries and reaching out for support on the journey. Here's what these experts advise when setting out to make lasting changes.

An Attitude of Gratitude

"The first thing is to look at what's already working," recommends Victoria Moran, a writer, speaker and spiritual life coach. "So often, we just say 'Ack—I want everything to be different,' but we all have lots of things that are working well now."

Moran, author of several books, including the forthcoming *Living a Charmed Life: Your Guide to Finding Magic in Every Moment and Meaning in Every Day*, counsels her clients to list 10 things for which they are grateful before they leave bed each morning.

"These don't have to be giant things," notes Moran, "but 'I'm grateful for this cat sleeping on my chest; grateful that the sun is shining; grateful that I made this terrific pot of chili and there's some left over.' Your day is now going to be built on the positive framework of all that you have going for you."

Moran also recommends taking quiet time in the morning for prayer, meditation or journaling before the day's agenda begins to tug and pull. A student of comparative religions, she observes that most spiritual traditions embrace a practice of going within to access higher wisdom. Tapping this inner guidance is essential to crafting an authentic life and staying centered in the midst of change.

"I recommend lighting a candle on your bedside table," Moran says, "so that when you come back from the bathroom and your brain is already saying 'You don't have time for this, you have all these things to do,' that little candle is just there, saying, 'Oh, come on, sit.'"

Honor the Body, One Day at a Time

Moran also stresses the importance of "taking care of the vehicle," when designing a life makeover. This means having a daily exercise and nutrition plan.

"Regardless of what you want in life, you have to get it in this physical body," she says. "And because the brain is part of the body, you're not going to have a very good shot at changing your attitude and thinking positive thoughts if those thoughts have to be filtered through a brain that is living on junk food and doesn't get enough oxygen because you don't exercise."

At the same time, Moran predicts failure for those who plan overambitious diet and exercise plans that don't allow for occasional off days. The prospect of cutting out sugar forever, for instance, may scare someone away from even cutting down. Moran, who successfully overcame her own food and weight issues decades ago, quotes the 12-Step slogan of "One day at a time," when counseling people who set out to change their lives.

"Even I cannot say that every day for the rest of my life I will meditate and exercise," she says. "I know that's not true. But for today, I can do that, and this is the only day I have."

Just Say No

Once we have begun to make positive changes, we may need to clean up the environment in which our old, self-destructive habits flourished. People pleasers, for example, may have to start saying no and set boundaries where none existed. Cheryl Richardson, a bestselling author, radio host and authority on life coaching, says that as people begin to practice better care for themselves, their relationships may change. In her new book, *The Art of Extreme Self-Care*, Richardson has a chapter entitled "Let Me Disappoint You."

"That chapter speaks to the reality that in order to live a high-quality life—a life that truly honors your self-care—you have to master the art of disappointing people, making them angry and hurting their feelings," she counsels. "That's just the truth."

Richardson says that women, in particular, try to avoid the discomfort that comes from displeasing others or letting them down. As a result, they can end up living for others, becoming resentful or even sick, and struggling with intimate relationships when resentments build. Richardson advises women to check in with themselves before responding to requests and to tell the truth, even if it's unpopular.

"Craft a response that is respectful, but direct," she says. "Become able to say to someone, 'I'm sorry, I'm not going to be able to baby-sit your children this weekend.' Not, 'I really wish I could, but I can't,' when the truth is, you really don't wish you could, and you don't want to."

Start Here and Now

Life makeovers also involve setting boundaries with ourselves, says Richardson, and taking an honest look at the areas of our lives that are messy, neglected or out of balance. She notes that a simple way to start is to clean up one place in our home, car or office that's



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cluttered, and enjoy the feeling of spaciousness that follows. More comprehensive changes may benefit from professional help, says Richardson, who hired a personal coach at the beginning of her own coaching career, with life-altering results.

“My home and my work environments became beautiful places to live and work in,” she recalls. “My finances improved dramatically. I eliminated my debt, I created an investment plan and I stopped giving away so much of my precious time and energy to people who didn’t appreciate it.”

Today, Richardson coaches people on how to create lifestyles and environments that honor their deepest need for things like joy, beauty, rest, creative expression and peace. She says the pursuit of bigger dreams and desires may take a back seat to meeting basic needs at first.

“If you’re struggling financially, you should be investing in your financial health,” says Richardson. “If your house looks like a bomb went off in it, you really should be focused on making your home environment more soul-nourishing. If your relationships are one-way streets and they’re not headed in your direction, you should focus on either telling the truth in your relationships or letting some toxic people go.”

Create a Circle of Support

When we start to practice these forms of self-care, our real dreams and desires become more apparent, Richardson says. The challenge is to stay on track, especially when family members or friends don’t understand or appreciate our new ways, and old habits slip back in. Without support and accountability, she observes, most people will fall short of long-lasting success.

To help her readers get and stay on course, Richardson encourages them to create free Life Makeover™ groups, based on the concepts and practices outlined in her books. Her website allows people to connect with others on the same path and to create support groups in their own communities, using guidelines found on the site. Richardson currently counts about 4,000 such Life Makeover groups around the world.

In Upton, Massachusetts, Jennifer Copley Downing created her own group eight years ago, when she felt a need for community and connection. Today, she has seven “sisters” in her life, who have shared challenges and triumphs around careers, relationships, health, parenting and elder care.

“Working in groups keeps you accountable and supported; you don’t feel like you are doing all this alone,” Copley Downing says. “Most important, you can know that you’re not losing your mind—that others have gone through similar things and think the same way.”

Little Assists from Lots of Friends

Bob Doyle took the group support idea to a new level when he created the free Boundless Living Challenge (BLC) on the Internet last summer. Doyle, who teaches an online program called “Wealth Beyond Reason,” was featured in the movie, *The Secret*. The film describes a universal Law of Attraction, wherein a person’s thoughts, emotions and expectations shape their life experiences. The film encourages viewers to envision the lives of their dreams. In Doyle’s ongoing BLC, thousands of people are doing this in a public forum.

“The idea was to give them an environment to basically state an intention in

Begin or end each day with a list of 10 things you appreciate and are grateful for. Write or speak them aloud, perhaps with a gratitude buddy.

a very visible way,” says Doyle. “And, in addition to having the tools and resources [on the website], they’ve got this community of people who are also up to some pretty powerful things in their lives—all different kinds of things—but all have a common goal, which is that they want to get unstuck and they want to accomplish something.”

People use blogs, photos and videos on the site to describe their desires and track their progress and challenges along the way. Fellow BLC members offer support, advice and encouragement as they share their own struggles and report victories in the areas of health, creativity, career, relationships and business pursuits. The process creates online friendships and communities of support for when the going gets rough. Similar social networking sites for posting desires and connecting with like-minded seekers include 43things.com and Intent.com.

Doyle participated in his own challenge program by stating a goal of performing live music. “What I discovered during the course of this challenge is that I had real stuff about looking stupid or making a mistake or not being perfect,” Doyle recalls, “and so it was about breaking through all of that and just going out there and expressing myself through musical performance, whether or not it was perfect, and being okay with that.”

Change One Thing, Change Everything

Doyle says that the breakthroughs that he made spilled into other areas of his life related to self-expression, a carryover effect common among participants who take risks and push beyond their comfort zones in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. Not everyone realizes their stated goal in the suggested 45-day time frame, says Doyle, but most people see progress.

“I was talking to someone the other day whose challenge is to write a book,” Doyle reports, “and I asked her if it had gotten done in the first 45 days. She said no, but it was nearly completed, and that it would have gotten nowhere if she had not taken the challenge.”

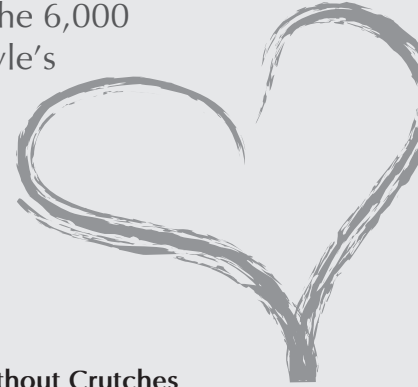
After completing their initial challenge, it’s not unusual for people to continue to post information and updates in order to stay connected to a community of kindred, encouraging spirits. Doyle himself has taken on another challenge and enlisted the help of coaches and friends to keep progressing in the work that he’s been living and teaching for years.

“Because it doesn’t matter how much you know intellectually about a particular thing,” says Doyle. “There’s always going to be somebody who sees you differently than you are able to see yourself.”

For more about Bob Doyle’s programs, visit WealthBeyondReason.com or BoundlessLiving.com. Information about Cheryl Richardson’s books, DVDs and radio program is posted at CherylRichardson.com. Find Victoria Moran’s books, blog and newsletter at VictoriaMoran.com.

Success Stories

Breakthroughs among the 6,000 participants in Bob Doyle’s first Boundless Living Challenge exemplify the triumphs possible for us all in the areas of health, creativity, career and more.



Paula Strauss – Walking Without Crutches

Paula’s focus was to walk without crutches after using them for seven years, following 12 different surgeries. She credits the encouragement and support of participants in the challenge for her ability to reclaim the use of her legs. After 45 days, she could consistently walk 40 steps without the use of crutches.

Wendi – From Couch Potato to Walking a Half Marathon

Wendi says that she wanted to get serious about her health and eating habits. She hired a trainer, made healthy changes to her diet, cut down her cigarette smoking by half, received acupuncture treatments and engaged in more self-care. In less than two months, she not only completed a walking half marathon, but also lost 22 pounds.

Gill Manly – On the Road to Becoming Debt Free

Gill was on the verge of bankruptcy and in danger of defaulting on her mortgage and losing her home. She was determined to change her circumstances and turn her life around. Aside from improving her financial situation, Gill’s long-time dream was to land a record deal. Gill has sung jazz tunes for years and believed she has what it takes to become a professional recording artist. Within weeks, she manifested a record deal with Linn Records, a UK company that’s home to Britain’s major jazz performers.

Jonathon Ruckman – Career Caught Wings

This New York-based actor had been auditioning for eight months without booking a single commercial, television or film role. He reports that because of the support of the online community he booked three movie roles in six weeks.

Jonathan also attracted a dinner meeting with a top New York agent who expressed interest in casting him in a multi-million dollar film project. Although Jonathon considered himself successful with the Law of Attraction, his career goals kept eluding him, until now.

Source: Stellar Communications

