



Changeology

5 Steps to Realizing Your Goals and Resolutions

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Is there a scientific formula you can follow to change your life?

Change is hard. But not if you know the 5-step formula that works whether you're trying to stop smoking or start recycling. Dr. John C. Norcross, an internationally recognized expert, has studied how people make transformative, permanent changes in their lives. Over the past 30 years, he and his research team have helped thousands of people overcome dozens of behavioral ailments. Now his cutting-edge, scientific approach to personal improvement is being made available in this indispensable guide.

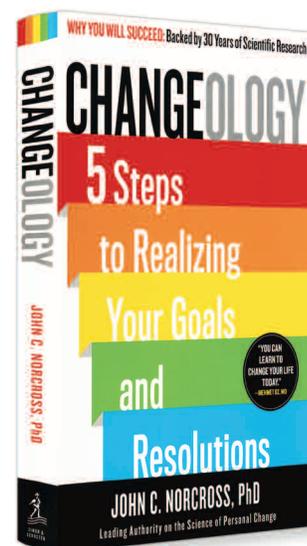
Changeology encompasses the entire change process, and you will be guided through all five steps of a proven system that you can use to change on your own or customize to your own life.

Unlike 95 percent of self-help books, the *Changeology* plan has a documented track record of success. Whether you want to quit overeating or drinking or end depression, debt and relationship distress, Dr. Norcross gives you the tools you need to change what you want within 90 days.

Whatever your goal or resolution, you can use *Changeology* to achieve a life filled with better health and greater happiness.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to define your goals and get started in a new direction.
- How to pump up your motivation and prepare for self-change.
- How to prevent relapses into old patterns.
- How to master the skills that will help you sustain change.
- How *Changeology* differs from other self-help methods.



by John C. Norcross, PhD

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: CHANGEOLGY

by John C. Norcross, PhD

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Introduction: Changeology What It Is and What It Can Do for You

Whether you're hoping to stop smoking or gambling, commit to exercising more, eliminate fast food and bike to work, or learn a new skill that will earn you a promotion, Changeology is a scientific program that can dramatically increase your chance of success.

Changeology personalizes your journey in two important ways: First, it guides you step by step and tells you exactly what to do and when to do it; and second, you'll be able to maximize the instructions with the help of an interactive website (www.changeology.com).

Behavioral research indicates that it takes 90 days to prepare for change, build a new behavior, become competent in the face of high risk triggers, and move past the likelihood of relapse. Brain research also suggests that it takes a few months of practicing a new behavior to create permanent change.

More than 75 percent of people maintain a goal for a week, but then they gradually slip back into the old behavior. However, research shows that almost all of the people who maintain a new behavior for three months make the change permanent; the probability of relapse after that is modest.

Our aim is to get you to your goal and keep you there; that will require a 90-day commitment on your part. It's time for you to become your own behavioral expert, your own changeologist. ●

PART I: THE REAL SCIENCE OF CHANGE

How Self-Changers Succeed: The Science

We have a love-hate relationship with the idea of changing our behavior. Change is desired and dreaded, venerated and vilified. No wonder we are so confused about it.

What sort of changes do we crave (and simultaneously resist)? Four clusters characterize the vast majority of people's ambitions:

- **Bad habits.** Specific actions that become stitched into daily life. Examples include excessive consumption of tobacco, food, alcohol and even money. These are behavioral excesses — too much of a good thing.
- **New goals.** You may desire to acquire or improve upon your skills, be it learning to run long distance, assert yourself or play the guitar. These are behavioral improvements — too little of what you seek.
- **Relationships.** You may be trying to enhance a romantic partnership, deepen your friendships, reverse troubles with your in-laws or maintain better relations with your co-workers.
- **Life satisfaction.** You make statements such as “I want to be a better person” or “I hope to deepen my spirituality.” Or you set slightly more detailed goals such as wanting to be more generous, kinder and less selfish.

The process of change is amazingly similar across diverse goals and problems. People progress through the



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identical stages — what I will call the 5 steps — for each of the 50-plus problems now researched. And they use the same fundamental strategies to speed their progress through those stages. The particular goals are different, but the journey to the goal is the same.

Let's take a look at each of the main stages of change so you can understand how we'll turn these into the five steps:

- **Contemplation.** This is the stage in which people are aware that a problem exists and are seriously thinking about overcoming it but have not yet made a commitment to take action. They are mulling it over, weighing the pros and cons. People can remain stuck in the contemplation stage for long periods.

- **Preparation.** Good intentions and small movements. Individuals are intending to take action in the next month and are taking “baby steps” toward change.

- **Action.** Individuals modify their behavior and environment in order to overcome their problems and reach their new goals. Action requires a considerable commitment of time and energy. You are in this stage if you have successfully changed in behavior for one day up to a couple of months.

- **Maintenance.** People work to prevent a relapse to their old ways and consolidate the gains attained during action. Stabilizing behavior change and avoiding relapse are the hallmarks of maintenance.

The 5 Steps

Each stage reflects not only a period of time but also a set of tasks that must be completed if you are to move to the next stage, the next step.

Change, like any meaningful endeavor, proceeds sequentially through steps. The journey begins with the contemplation stage of specifying realistic goals, getting ready or getting *psyched*. The planning stage is all about *prepping*. How exactly will I do this thing? At some point you will jump from preparing and planning to *perspiring*, the work of implementing the new, desired behavior. Getting there is wonderful, but we need to keep you there, which entails *persevering* through slips and, finally, *persisting* over time.

To simplify the path, we'll refer to the 5 steps as:

- **Psych:** Get ready/contemplation
- **Prep:** Plan before leaping/preparation
- **Perspire:** Take action/action
- **Persevere:** Manage slips/maintenance
- **Persist:** Maintain change/maintenance

The 5 steps determine who successfully changes and who does not — regardless of other factors involved,

including a strong desire to change. People can get derailed at any step. Some never get psyched enough to move to the next step; some get psyched but don't prepare; others prepare but don't execute; and still others burn out before they can persevere and persist.

Focus on goals where you're farther along in the 5 steps. Make any goals that seriously affect your health and wellness a priority. Concentrate on those goals for which you have the most energy and desire to change today. ●

How You Will Succeed: The Keys

How does all this change fit into 90 days? Here's the general timeline across the 5 steps.

| TIMELINE FOR DOING THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME | | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Step: | 1. Psych | 2. Prep | 3. Perspire | 4. Persevere | 5. Persist |
| Stage: | Contemplation | Preparation | Action | Maintenance | Maintenance |
| 90 Days: | 1 to 7-14 | 7-14 to 21 | 7-14 to 60 | 60-90 | 75+ onward |

The first week or two is rightfully devoted to increasing your motivation, identifying resistance and psyching yourself up for the momentous change ahead. Another week or two is spent in preparation. Of course, these will be tailored to your situation. Adapt the timeline, but do commit to 90 days — a month getting ready and then two months staying at it and avoiding the relapse. That's what thousands of successful changers have taught us over the years.

The Change Catalysts

In instigating behavior change, catalysts are research-supported strategies that get us to the next step. They include such activities as tracking your progress, committing to a goal, raising awareness about yourself and the problem, rewarding your improvement, securing support from other people, rearranging your physical environment and so on.

The key to success resides in matching your efforts to your step. It's technically called step (or stage) matching. Step matching involves following certain research-proven catalysts while you're in a particular step. Integrating the change catalysts and the steps systematically directs you to success.

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Do the right thing but at the wrong time in your journey and failure ensues, a phenomenon called mismatching.

Many people subscribe to a series of self-defeating myths that undermine their efforts to change. Let's demolish them:

- **Myth No. 1: People can't change on their own.** More than three-quarters of people who change their behavioral problems have done so on their own, without professional treatment. People are changing on their own all the time without treatment.

- **Myth No. 2: Most goals and resolutions are trivial.** People fulfill impressive ambitions all the time, including losing weight, stopping smoking, improving relationships, achieving financial security and increasing exercise. These are not trivial.

- **Myth No. 3: Change requires only willpower.** Your willpower or commitment contributes to your success. However, it's only one ingredient in the recipe. Our research shows that resolvers who rely on willpower to the virtual exclusion of the other valuable catalysts actually fail at a higher rate than everyone else.

- **Myth No. 4: It's all in my genes.** Genes exert powerful influences, but they don't determine our destiny. The brain-behavior interaction goes both ways: Your behavior impacts your biology and influences the expression of those genes.

- **Myth No. 5: I can't change; I've tried before.** This myth comes wrapped up in a lot of emotion: resignation, anger, apathy, fear. The consequences of not trying again are grave and the real possibility of success using Changeology is so much higher.

You need to abandon the "I can't change" myth and wholeheartedly believe that you possess the power to grow in fundamental ways. ●

PART II: BECOMING A CHANGEOLOGIST IN 90 DAYS

Step 1: Psych: Getting Ready

Weeks 1 and 2: Outline your goal and define the new you. Start counting and measuring the behavior you will modify. Think about the consequences of your problem and imagine a new life without it. Harness the awareness and emotions that will propel you into action.

One of the colossal mistakes people make when trying to change is overestimating the value of motivation while underestimating learnable skills. Here you'll learn how to acquire both commitment and skills.

You need to choose and define your goals in a way that will enhance your probability of success. Here are five proven methods:

- **It's all about you.** Select a behavior you genuinely want to change. This needs to be about you. Make sure you're doing this for no one other than yourself.

- **It should be measurable.** We refer to this as operationalizing a goal in a way that you can measure by counting or graphing. Tracking your progress increases your progress.

- **It has to be real.** A guaranteed recipe for failure is to select an unrealistic, unattainable goal. Distinguish between realistic, short-term goals and long-term fantasies. Ensure that your general goal is real.

- **It has to be under your control.** You don't have the power to bring about world peace and end global warming. You can control many of your own behaviors that are under your thumb.

- **It should be positive.** Goals expressed positively typically prove more successful than goals expressed negatively. Even if you want to terminate a problem, specify your goal as a healthy alternative behavior. Psychologically, it's easier to build in a new behavior than to root out a problematic one.

Step 1 Catalysts

Here are the four catalysts that embody your first step:

- **Tracking your progress.** Tracking the progress of your goal works for at least three reasons. First, it keeps your eye on the ball. Second, it provides useful feedback, alerting you when you veer off course and telling you to adjust. Third, it is highly rewarding. We incorporate tracking progress into every step. You can track your progress through a variety of methods, including a graph, a diary or journal, calendar notes, or a daily record on your computer or cellphone.

- **Raising your awareness.** This entails becoming more conscious of the causes of, consequences of and cures for your problems. It helps to ask yourself: What led to my particular problem, and what maintains it now? What are the consequences, both desirable and undesirable, of my current behavior? What are the cures, the paths to my goal? Seek out information from unbiased sources. Request feedback from loved ones about the costs and consequences of your problem. If you seek more in-depth information, get a professional opinion from a psychologist, physician, nutritionist or clergyperson.

- **Arousing emotions.** People rarely change because of logic or facts. People change when their emotions compel them to confront facts. Harness your emotions

and redirect them in support of your change. The key is to stir up emotions in ways that propel you forward. Think about a threat, a fear, that is related to what you want to change. Let that fear linger, and let the pain fuel you. Expose yourself to other people who are experiencing similar fear-based struggles. Focus on the painful long-term consequences instead of the short-term comfy rewards of the behavior.

- **Committing.** Committing entails more than the mysterious, ineffable “willpower.” Committing actually encompasses a set of identifiable skills that you can develop and practice. Declare your goal or resolution by saying it to yourself and perhaps one other person: I am getting ready for change. Post your pros and cons for change and remind yourself of your dual motivations in the morning or at bedtime. Create one or two short reminders that encapsulate your commitment. Find a person or two, dead or alive, who manifests what you seek in commitment and to whom you can turn for inspiration.

It is never — repeat, never — a good idea to rush through Psych in order to get to the later steps. Rash action without genuine preparation and commitment is doomed. ●

Step 2: Prep: Planning Before Leaping

Weeks 2 and 3: Build your commitment and then make your goal public. Pick your start day and identify people who will support you. Take a few small initial steps — and prepare for liftoff!

This step describes what you need to do before jumping completely into action. Most people get so antsy and eager that they jump before they are prepared. They sabotage themselves by a lack of preparation and planning.

Defining Your Goals

Begin with your goal in mind. It’s difficult to reach the destination when you don’t even know where it is. Vague goals beget vague efforts. Based on the new science and proven methods of setting goals, we’ll get **SMART:** express goals in specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-specific terms:

- **Specific:** Tell me exactly where you will be in 90 days using positive terms.
- **Measurable:** Give an unambiguous definition that can be read, repeated and measured by others.
- **Attainable:** Better to try to “lose and keep off 15 pounds in 90 days” than a health-compromising and

nearly impossible 50 pounds.

- **Relevant:** To you, of course, but also in terms of your life priorities.
- **Time-specific:** Specify the time frame, which in this book is typically the next 90 days.

Identify what triggers the problem and what maintains it. What are the environmental, interpersonal and mood triggers for your smoking, poor parenting, low esteem, drinking or arguments? Your answers will expose key clues to your behavior pattern.

Consequences occur after the problem and are usually contingent on it. The short-term consequences of our behaviors can often be very rewarding — yummy, soothing, releasing, sedating and so on. But the long-term consequences can be painful and destructive; sadly, we tend far more to the immediate than the delayed consequences.

Here’s how to sleuth out your triggers and consequences. On a daily basis, track four features of the behavior that you’d like to change:

1. Time of day
2. Triggers: both the situation (where you were, what you were doing, who you were with) and your feelings (sad, happy, stressed, relaxed, bored, lonely)
3. Behavior: the magnitude or amount of the problem behavior (the number of drinks, the amount of money, the number of arguments)
4. Consequences: the short-term results of the problem behavior as well as the longer-term impact on your feelings and others’ reactions

Helping relationships or social support can be a vigorous predictor of behavioral success. We work better by working together. Identify people around you — family, friends, co-workers, schoolmates and neighbors — who will support your self-change. One or two solid people will do, but three or four might be ideal.

Consider their availability, shared interests and ability to support. You want the support of those most able to help, not simply those who are most convenient or close to you. You might want members of your team to be relatively new to your life, independent of your ordinary routine. Consider joining an online support group. Getting your change team in place early creates a small victory and improves your level of competence in this endeavor — your self-efficacy — before your start day.

Committing

We know from studies that people’s mere desire to change does not predict success, but their level of com-

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mitment does. Here is how we use commitment as we prep in the second step:

- **Make narrow choices.** Simplify your path, prioritize your goals and decide which methods you will use to achieve them. In self-change, less can be more.
- **Rest.** Prepare for the major operation, whether you think of it as surgical or a war operation, by resting. Like a runner before the race, don't run the day before; save your willpower muscles for the event itself.
- **Say it loud and proud.** We're looking for a public commitment to your goal. It's time to share your resolution with others.
- **Remember your goal.** Remind yourself about your commitment. Post not only the goal but also the baby steps toward that goal.
- **Propel the virtuous cycle.** Start changing your behavior, and as a result your motivation will improve. Success fuels motivation; motivation fuels success. If you wait for inspiration, you're ignoring half of the virtuous cycle.
- **Take baby steps.** Prime the pump before leaping into action by taking small steps. You have already taken several baby steps. Small steps add up quickly.
- **Practice before you need it.** Identify the healthy alternative behavior and begin practicing it. Acquire some comfort and confidence in performing it before you leap into the fire.

Finalizing the Action Plan

Select a start or "go" date. Research highlights the value of beginning within a week of completing your plan. Pick a start day with fewer than usual pressures. Don't forget to tell your team when you intend to start.

Start strong and fast. Begin when you, your change team and your skills are in full force so that you secure success at the outset.

What's the mantra, slogan or image that will inspire you? Now's the time to generate it — or him/her. Here's one of my favorites from Ralph Waldo Emerson: The world is all gates, all opportunities. ●

Step 3: Perspire: Taking Action

Weeks 2 to 8: Walk the talk — take action! Develop healthy alternatives to the problem, and build new behaviors. Reward yourself for a job well done. Cultivate your environment and support team to keep moving forward.

Step 3 is all about the fury of action, and it takes place at least two weeks — and perhaps up to 30 days — into

the 90 days of change. In this step, we're aiming to act, to stay forward, to lean into the winds of change. Successful action requires four catalyzing strategies: rewarding, countering, controlling your environment and helping relationships.

Rewarding

Since time immemorial, rewards have been used to modify and strengthen certain behaviors. We will use rewarding to strengthen your goal behavior in a systematic, intentional way. A reward consists of any consequence that increases the frequency or strength of the target behavior.

It should come as no surprise that what rewards one person, say, chocolate or a movie, will be a punishment for another person. Personal preferences must come into play here. The secret is to identify what rewards can modify your behavior and to create a reinforcement plan that you'll stick with for a couple of months. For example, you can reinforce yourself for reaching target behaviors and reward each baby step. Deliver the reward immediately and every time. Decades of research have revealed that to achieve the best performance, you should give yourself the reinforcer immediately after the desired response. Use many rewards of many types for maximum effectiveness.

Minimize punishing yourself, both in your daily behavior and in your thoughts. Rewards are more effective in the long run. Use more carrot and less stick.

Countering

Do the healthy opposite of the problem behavior. You must engage in a healthy opposite, not simply know that you should do it. The eight most common countering methods are:

- **Diversion.** Keeping busy, enjoying life, engaging in fun activities, and cultivating friends and hobbies.
- **Exercise.** A well-known and potent anti-anxiety remedy.
- **Relaxation.** Meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, prayer and massage.
- **Assertion.** Say no to unwelcome offers and yes to healthy needs.
- **Healthy thoughts.** One's interpretations of an event may be more important than the event itself. Our beliefs, not the activating event, largely establish our feelings.
- **Exposure.** Directly confront dreaded situations.
- **Imagery.** Visualize yourself succeeding and thriving. Successful resolvers visualize the rewards of success,

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while unsuccessful resolvers visualize the penalties of failure.

- **Acceptance:** Uncontrollable problems are things we should accept, whereas controllable behaviors are those we can change.

Controlling Your Environment

We routinely underestimate the power of our environment to shape our behavior. That's been the key lesson of social psychology in the past 50 years:

- **Think people, places and things.** You have the ability to modify your contact with people, places and things.
- **Sniff out the detractors and the facilitators.** Remind yourself what detracts from and what facilitates your change.
- **Select, but also create.** If you don't see the appropriate environmental options around you, create the environment you need.
- **Bring new things in.** Add things to your home and work environment that remind you to keep on track.
- **Take temptations out.** Avoid high-risk situations and people that rekindle a problem. Build literal barriers between temptations and yourself.

Helping Relationships Again

Scores of research studies have demonstrated the impressive contributions of social support to your health and happiness. Helping relationships improve our health and buffer us against the ravages of life. Find an experienced coach if you don't have one on your team already.

The change team you've already assembled will now be called upon for support, assistance and an occasional challenge. Here's how to tailor your change team:

- **Listen and support.** Active listening and genuine support are the backbone of successful treatment. You can receive empathy and affirmation from all sorts of people.
- **Chat frequently.** Keep in regular contact with your change team — several times a week, at a minimum.
- **Express what you need.** Your change team cannot read your mind. Be specific.
- **Keep it positive.** Ask your friends to stay positive about your change. Remind them that sarcasm, guilt and embarrassment are not helpful forms of support.
- **Put me in, Coach.** Ask for tips or skills of the day. Experiment to find what works best for you.

- **Return the favor.** Ask your friends about their feelings, focus on their experiences and balance the conversation.
- **Buddy up.** Accept as many co-changers and training partners as your schedule can accommodate.
- **Race to the top.** Friendly competition can spur people to greater heights.
- **Enlarge the team.** Include online support groups, work friends, neighbors and others you did not identify in the Prep step.
- **Invite challenges.** You'll probably profit from the occasional loving correction.

Please help your team members help you. ●

Step 4: Persevere: Managing Slips

Weeks 8 to 12: Learn to say no and develop a plan for getting back on track after a slip. Avoid high-risk triggers, resist the urge and keep a positive outlook. Slips need not become falls.

As you work to realize your goals and resolutions, expect to slip — probably multiple times. If you understand and prepare for mistakes, however, they don't need to ruin your self-change effort.

To persevere means to continue toward a goal in spite of discouragement or opposition. For our purposes, to persevere is to continue toward your goal despite your urges to stop, cravings to regress and slips on the road to success. To persevere the strategies entail:

- **Avoiding high-risk triggers.** A slip is typically preceded by a trigger, a high-risk situation that increases the chance that you'll return to your old ways. Triggers can be practically anything that has historically been associated with the problem. Identify your triggers. Ask yourself where, what, when and who.
- **Practicing saying no.** Practice in advance for probable high-risk situations. Envision yourself in a scenario where temptations reign supreme. Begin in your imagination by saying no confidently and immediately. "No thanks, I don't want to bicker." "No, I'm quitting." Then practice with a member of your change team before saying it in a real situation.
- **Resisting the initial urge.** Smokers will crave a puff, overspenders will feel the need to buy, overeaters will plead for just a bite.
- **Responding constructively after a slip.** It helps to understand relapse as a process, a systematic chain of psychological events. How you respond to the slip —

not the slip itself — determines which choice you will make.

- **Preparing for the next time you slip.** You'll want a plan that incorporates lessons learned and prepares you better. Identify what you were thinking, what you were doing, what you were feeling and whom you were with when you slipped. Turn those triggers around and do the healthy opposites.

Achieving your goal, resolution or transformation in 90 days is a big project. It requires more than one person. Now is the time to further mobilize the change team you created during the Prep step. Research shows that the amount of help you receive from important people in your life predicts success a month into action. In the long run, support becomes crucial. ●

Step 5: Persist: Maintaining Change

Week 12 and beyond: Keep using the strategies that maintain the new you. Have backup plans for those inevitable slips. Remind yourself that you can do this! Sustain self-change over the long haul.

The previous step, Persevere, was about overcoming obstacles and lapses; this step, Persist, is about maintaining change over time. You need to master both in order to permanently establish your new behavior.

Persistence requires the mastery of a series of skills and a fundamental shift in thinking; lasting change is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash. And the challenge is to persist for not just 90 days but for a lifetime.

- **Maintaining new behavior.** Maintenance is more than preventing relapse. When you think of persisting with your change, think of it as moving forward, as continually improving, as giving yourself an ongoing gift. The cornerstone of persistence is that it doesn't feel like dreary work anymore, it feels like healthy fun.

- **Boosting your self-efficacy permanently:** Think of self-efficacy as a house, one that can be built by hard work and success or destroyed by the lack of same. Success begets more success; success also begets more self-efficacy, which enables you to persist for 90 days and beyond.

- **Understanding the spiral of change:** As you've learned, relapse is the rule rather than the exception. The vast majority of people will follow the model three to six times before they reach the promised land of Persist for good. Self-changers typically cycle through the steps several times. The spiral demonstrates that

people do not revolve endlessly in circles, nor do they progress all the way back to where they began. The route to behavior change is not a straight, linear line; it's a spiral path upward.

- **Distinguish between self-changes that end and those that require a lifetime of perseverance.** Do self-changers terminate the problem, reach their goals and exit the path? You can terminate the problem and exit the spiral if three conditions are met during Persist: your temptation to regress or relapse across triggers is very low, your self-efficacy to maintain is high across situations, and you have established a healthy lifestyle that precludes the old problem behavior.

There is a tight link between celebrating your growth and perpetuating that growth. Whoop it up, feel rightfully proud, spread the cheer and encouragement. You can pay it forward to others and yourself. ●

Epilogue: The Adaptation of Changeology

If there is one overarching theme here, it's that we can change. We can adapt to life even when we're not 100 percent confident in that change from the get-go. Self-change is possible, prevalent and learnable! Even for involuntary and societal transformations not of our own making.

I wholeheartedly believe that the changes we seek and societal levels must start with each one of us.

Confucius said, "To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right."

My ardent hope is that I have given you plenty of direction and skills to begin to make a tremendous difference in your life.

Be the change you wish to see in the world — and bring that self-change into the world. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Changeology*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.** Duhigg reveals the edge of scientific discoveries that explain why habits exist and how they can be changed.
2. ***The Upside of Irrationality* by Dan Ariely.** Focusing on our behaviors at work and in relationships, Ariely offers insights about what really motivates us and how unwise actions can become long-term habit.
3. ***Team Turnarounds* by Daniel Leidl and Joe Frontiera.** Frontiera and Leidl share how the fine art of the turnaround really works, from how to inspire the team to the actual tools for change.