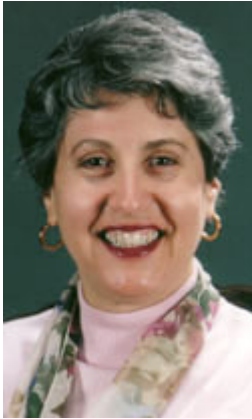


Making Change Easier: Three Simple and Powerful Ideas You Can Use Right Now



Carole Rehbock coaches individuals in career transition and organizations in the midst of change who are struggling with direction and purpose. She helps them gain clarity, overcome obstacles and move forward toward their goals. She inspires individuals and teams to fulfill their potential.

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By Carole Rehbock

Current world events have reminded many of us that ‘there’s no time like the present’ to go after what we want in life. We have a new sense of urgency around getting out of an unsatisfying situation and moving toward our goals, whether they involve a career change, a major life relationship, or a fine-tuning of life balance. The problem is: how do we figure out our true passion? How do we go about making it happen?

And, most importantly, what prevents us from going after what we want in life?

One of the false beliefs that prevent us from making changes is that we fear a change will disrupt our entire life. We often simply don’t realize that we can do some things differently that will have a lasting impact—without large, dramatic life changes. Examples include setting new boundaries on work hours in order to spend more time with family; taking time to renew when burnout looms; or learning new skills and talents to make higher impact contributions. As we make small changes and feel more aligned with our values, we start to feel better about ourselves and are usually more willing to try other new steps.

This article will provide you with three simple and powerful ideas designed to help you create profound change in your life that is gradual and meaningful, without the fear that usually comes along with it. The first idea is to begin making decisions that come from your *values*; this includes the little day to day choices that you make about your life. The second idea is to learn to avoid the quick fix and appreciate that the exploration process is as rewarding as the discovery; it’s the defining part of your journey and it’s a step that mustn’t be skipped in your rush to get to where you’re going. The third concept is simple: take small steps. Very small changes—almost imperceptible in some cases—can bring about profound shifts over time.

Idea #1: Make authentic choices; stand up and let your values count.

For some of us, our values are very clear, and we will be true and authentic for *major* issues that present in our lives. We’ll take risks to stand up for ourselves or others, align ourselves with our values, stand up for what we believe, or say “no” when “yes” is expected.

Sometimes, however, we are not as in touch with our values. It is only when we have gone along long enough, trying to please, that we become so dissatisfied we finally say that “we have had it” and assert ourselves.

The more we stay clear about our values and are consistent in honoring them, not only at a broad high level, but also with the small details, the more fulfillment or meaning we will have on a day-to-day basis. Look at your life; look

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at what fulfills you in your daily work, interactions and relationships. Assess your behavior: are you really saying what you want to say? Are you acting in accordance with your values? Or are you allowing survival or fear to dictate your responses?

Your day to day decisions are either consistent with, or contradict, your core values. To feel more authentic in your life, all you need to do is allow your moment to moment actions and decisions to follow what is true for you. This will enable you to contribute yourself fully to those around you (and at times to the world at large).

I was working with a high level manager—I'll call her Mary—who had taken a sabbatical from her corporate position to re-evaluate her career goals. She had developed a set of criteria based on her values; therefore, as she interviewed for jobs, she had an objective method to determine if there was a match. Mary was being interviewed and courted by two or three companies and finding pros and cons to each of them.

In each situation Mary found herself asking the hiring executives direct questions based upon her values. She wondered if she was selling herself short, because she was not saying what she thought they wanted to hear. Although she was interested in each position, none of them truly aligned with her values of teamwork, effective management, communication and contribution. Mary found herself telling one executive that his expectations to prove herself before being hired were not acceptable.

Mary was offered one position but really felt the environment was not a fit. As an alternative, she asked to start on a trial consulting contract. Within a month, she needed to tell the founder that she would not continue. Although he offered her financial incentives and made several commitments, she found the strength to decline them all. Mary continued to assess her values and found ways to budget her finances in order to have time to find the appropriate position. After a year of uncertainty, asserting her needs and being true to herself, she found the permanent position that seemed right for her.

Mary continues to be authentic and express her opinions, concerns and needs while contributing her strengths and skills. Being authentic did not prevent her from eventually obtaining a rewarding position. Although this realignment and commitment to living authentically has represented a profound change for her, there has been little external change: she still lives in the same home, and has the same friends and family. The internal change was significant, though, as she now moves through her day with the confidence instilled by a consistent alignment with her values.

Adding the dimension of values to your decision-making can apply to decisions large and small. If you don't believe in violence in the media, you can choose not to go to violent movies. If you want only to spend time with people that make you feel secure, you can simply turn down invitations from people who bring out your insecurity. If you really care about the environment, you can choose to bike

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to work one day a week, or eat less red meat. Small decisions made in accordance with your values can effect a profound change on your perceived quality of life.

Idea #2: Avoid the quick fix; exploration is its' own reward.

The most frequent mistake I see people make is that when they become dissatisfied with one or more areas of their life they want to know what is next, and they want to know right away. Since they're anxious for a conclusion, they make a decision without analysis—such as deciding to go to medical school after some brief thought. Then, the change seems big and unreachable, and the questions are vast: “where will I get the money, am I too old to start over again, is this realistic, what will my family and friends think?” Before they know it, they're already defeated. And they never really got started.

Let's explore this a bit more. When people contemplate changing careers, they often first want to know the *title* of what will be next. A computer analyst, for example, wants to know whether she will become a teacher, a writer, a chef, or an accountant. Rather than first choosing a career category or job title, the critical task is to explore *who you are*: your likes and dislikes, your passion, purpose, gifts, skills, lifestyle wants, and financial needs. Then you can start to get a picture of what you want that career to be. Once that is determined, you can begin to explore the types of careers that match what you have identified as desirable. You may even define or create an entirely new category.

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How can you go after what you do not know exists? The answer is patience. You must have patience to go on the journey, to explore, to gather information, and to take small steps. You will slowly find your way, and, over time, you will find and reach your destination.

One of my clients, 'Miguel', came to me very concerned about his current work situation. He was feeling stuck as to whether to stay with his present job or to leave. There were many positives about his situation and it aligned with many of his values, such as freedom and flexibility in his work schedule, excellent compensation and benefits, and a strong belief in the company's product.

When we first started working together Miguel kept trying to identify the job he should be going after. When he couldn't come up with a specific job title, he simply resigned himself to staying in his current position. We talked about a variety of ways for him to perform some self-reflection and to identify his values, purpose, strengths, and skills. We also evaluated what made him feel

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excited at work, and what conditions in his work environment were important to him; I encouraged him to focus on that, rather than the job title.

A few weeks passed with some exploring, although Miguel found it scary not to have a job or goal. His impatience increased and he would want to quickly reach a decision and 'move on.' Miguel was learning that exploration takes time and is often an uncomfortable process. He would question his decision to leave and soon he was just stuck in a mental loop: "I want to leave, but I don't know what is next—so I'll stay where I am and try to make it better." The longer this went on and the more confused he became, the more Miguel started to doubt himself; he would compare himself to others and see only his deficiencies. He continued to question whether or not it made sense to move forward.

However, Miguel had the tenacity to continue with coaching. I remained hopeful and reassured him that he would find his answer. As he experienced the exhausting effects of the 'see saw,' he became more involved in and committed to the exploration process. Many of the activities we did together, as well as some he did on his own, soon began to have a strong theme. Miguel recognized that he liked analytical work, problem solving, and project oriented work that had a specific end goal.

Soon it became clear that although his present job aligned with some of his values, his position was in sales, and did not match with other important personal career requirements. This was a profound discovery for Miguel; he immediately felt a sense of cathartic relief and felt that he could finally move forward with confidence. Eventually he landed a position as a business systems analyst.

Again, exploration led to a profound internal change for Miguel, yet very little changed externally. No-one saw any evidence of the deep decision he had just made. He had become 'unstuck.' He began to formulate a plan to research other careers, and possibly take some additional college courses. Eventually he found a new position about which he felt passionate and engaged. Miguel's exploration allowed him to find the 'right' job title and freed him from the idea that he had to start his search with a specific title in mind.

Idea #3: Take small steps: they're more powerful than you think.

Somehow, it is the bigger changes we seem to notice: people going on talk shows telling about their transformations, or memoirs written by people who have overcome tremendous personal obstacles such as coming out of abusive families, gaining control of addictions, dealing with physical challenges, and so on. We hear the 'rags to riches' stories, but for most of us, including the coaching clients I work with, profound changes are made over periods of time. These changes are not always as visible or dramatic, but they are certainly as powerful.

Let's say you do want to make a big change, such as establishing yourself in a new career, or finding a life partner, or starting a business. You may still start

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out with small incremental changes and then grow into larger changes as your life evolves. Some of the changes you may make are invisible to others and may not culminate in an event that people recognize—but all of a sudden, your friends will be asking what is new about you, whether you changed your hair or lost weight or the like. They may not be able to pinpoint the change, but they can and will sense something different about you. You may be more relaxed or more confident, your voice may be clearer and stronger, or you may be smiling more frequently.

One of my clients, ‘David’, had been struggling with life/work balance issues for a long time. He originally sought out my services as a coach when his company was going through major organizational changes and he was uncertain about his future. Early on in our working together it became clear to both of us that there were many opportunities for him at his current company: in fact, he would probably be promoted. David’s real concern was that he always felt that he could never catch up with all there was to do at work and at home, and never had time for himself. He was at an executive level and had difficulty delegating. He worked very long hours, and given continuous changes at work he constantly felt the need to prove how valuable he was to the company.

Over a series of coaching sessions we discussed many time management methods and tools to help David be more efficient. We analyzed how he could delegate more effectively, ways that he could be more organized, how to use his airplane travel time, and so on. Each of the tools he tried worked for a while and made some impact, but he did not really seem to be making great headway. He knew it would be better if he could find time to exercise, eat more healthily, and spend more time with his family—but his strong tendency was to allow work to consume his time.

With more detailed reflection, David realized that he loved the excitement of ‘putting out fires’ and problem solving on the job. As a result, his other work would pile up, especially paperwork and reports. He saw the tradeoff that he was making and didn’t like what he saw: his need to achieve and ‘save the day’ was costing him his health, and precious time with his family.

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David will never be perfect at it, but now there are times when his priorities are in balance and he leaves work at 5:00. He has taken off more than one afternoon to play golf or attend an event for one of his children. He has started to rely more on his staff and is delegating more responsibilities to them. He has been promoted twice and is more confident about his value to the organization. He has tools and technology to help him save time and he uses them as much as possible. Very slowly, and incrementally, David moved toward his desired direction. He still sometimes does allow work to overwhelm him, but he also

quickly recognizes when it is happening and begins to adjust, so that he gets back into balance sooner rather than later.

Now as David considers a new job offer outside of the company he evaluates it based on whether it will enhance or detract from his need for balance in his life. This is now his main criterion for career decisions—and one that was not even on his radar screen when we first started coaching! Clearly, the newfound commitment to balance represents a profound *and gradual* change for David, his employees and his family.

There's a life out there that's looking for you.

You now have an appreciation for the need to make authentic decisions that are based on your values. You are familiar with the fact that you need to explore in order to define the destination, rather than starting out with a preset notion about where you want to go. You have also learned how very small incremental steps can actually effect profound and lasting change in your life. You can use these three simple and powerful ideas to start making meaningful changes in your life—right now!

About Carole Rehbock

Carole Rehbock's coaching philosophy is to see the whole person—and thereby assist the individual in moving his or her entire life forward—in addition to helping achieve one or more immediate goals. Her clients tend to be people who have already achieved some success in life but who feel there's something else they want to accomplish. Carole's overall approach is based on training with several experts in the coaching field and is grounded in key concepts of adult development and human systems theories, which lead to deep and lasting change.

Prior to her work as a consultant and coach, Carole held a variety of management and training/organization development positions in the financial services field. She holds an M.B.A. in Human Resources Management, a B.A. in Education, and a Coaching Certification from the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara. She is also certified by the International Coach Federation.

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