

Making change: Fall is a good time to find a new you

Written by Julie Desmond
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By Julie Desmond
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Back to school. This is when shorts turn into jeans, sweatshirts turn into ski jackets and thoughts turn to making the life changes we've been putting off all summer. Making significant, real change is never easy, but the payoff can be incredible and well worth the effort.

Start making change now by committing to the change you've been kicking around. Create a reminder and put it where you will see it often throughout the day. A word, picture or symbol is enough to keep you mindful. Put it in the bathroom (you can write on the mirror with soap or eyeliner), in your car, or tattoo it to your belly. Anywhere you go pretty regularly is a good place to post your commitment. My latest commitment is to ride my bike every day. I put the bike in the front hall, instead of out in the shed, and although it's in the way, it's hard to forget that promise to myself.

Making changes means some days will be harder than others. Don't go it alone. Select support systems that make sense based on what you want to see happen. If you plan to give something up, it is usually helpful to tell absolutely everyone. You will be reluctant to light up if everyone around you knows you want to quit smoking. You won't want to get "caught" breaking your commitment.

On the other hand, if you are committing to do something – ride your bike, for example – at first, tell no one. Just start doing your new thing. As people notice, they will offer their support and encouragement, but a commitment to DO something has to come first from your own inner drive. No one can start it for you.

Real change means changing old habits. Years ago, my friend Kayze was a competitive dancer, often traveling to Chicago for contests. As we crawled along the Kennedy Expressway recently, she remarked, "Whenever I am in Chicago, I feel like I should be dancing." Chicago, for Kayze, is a trigger. She is so used to behaving in a certain way in that place that it pulls her in, even long after her dancing days are over.

Triggers are the main obstacle between commitment and success. Try to uncover the triggers attached to past behavior that pull you away from your commitment. If you know that being around certain people or walking a specific route will trigger old behaviors, you can quickly help yourself by actively avoiding those people and those places. Establish new habits that push you toward your goal.

To make real life change, you might have to leave people behind; perhaps even family. When people see that you're serious they can choose either to let you go or they'll come along for the

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new ride. Keep your commitment, eliminate old triggers, develop new habits and reach out for support. You can do this, starting now.

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