

## **The 6 Steps To Change “Creating the Change you want for Yourself and Your Family” Families Dealing with Addictions**

Change is easier when you do it systematically and one step at a time. In this article we'll begin to explore the steps that you can use to create the change you'd like for yourself and for your family. Having been through the crisis cycle and felt the hurt, pain, and disappointment that goes along with having a teen addicted to drugs or alcohol leads to questions of your own efficacy as a parent and tests your resolve and wherewithal to create meaningful change for yourself and for your family. I hope that by having a step-by-step approach that you can lean on, and the support of a Life Coach or Counselor, that the path will be easier. Let us go through the steps one at a time.

### **Step 1 – Use Your Imagination**

“Your imagination is life’s preview of coming attractions”  
- Einstein

When we're stuck in the middle of a difficult situation in our lives it is often difficult to imagine how things will ever change. All we can think of is how the heck did I get here? What happened? Well, the first step to change actually begins with using our imagination. What I mean is that we have to have a picture of how we would like things to be, some kind of meaningful goal for to shoot for. It might seem at the time as though it's impossible but nevertheless go ahead, dream on!

Perhaps after years of struggling with a young person who is addicted to drugs or alcohol you have lost your hope of ever having a healthy happy child again or a happy loving family. Everything that's happened has stretched and stressed your family to the point where you are happy just to get through the day without a major catastrophe let alone have hugs and kisses at the end of the day.

Well, there is hope, and HOPE begins with daring to have a picture in your head, a goal, that you can strive toward. Once you have the goal, once you can imagine a different tomorrow, you can begin to take some steps to reach that goal. It is no different than any other goal. Set your sights, get to work, and with the help of a coach or a therapist, make a plan.

What got you to this point was a set of beliefs about how the world operates. Those beliefs led to specific behaviors that you hoped would get you the results you wanted. Unfortunately, those results, though consistent with your beliefs, may not have been the ones you intended or would have wished for. I may want to have a wonderful relationship with my son or daughter but believe that in order to have that relationship they need to think or behave exactly like I think they should. If they do, then it would indicate that they're on the same page and understand what I want from them. If they don't, I may conversely believe that they're obviously being difficult and trying to push my buttons. In order to get their attention and in order to ensure that they live what I believe to be

appropriate productive lives, I may push, punish, and persevere in my attempts to get them to see that my way is the right way. What does that get us? Anger, distance, and probably anything but the behavior I wanted.

So, what is your goal? Use your imagination! How would you like your family to be? What feelings do you want to experience in relationship with members of your family that you're not experiencing now?

## **Step 2 - Know Thyself**

*“Only through our connectedness to others can we really know and enhance the self. And only through working on the self can we begin to enhance our connectedness to others.”*

■ *Harriet Goldhor Lerner*

Change. It all begins with us. The more we know about ourselves, the better able we are to understand what makes us tick or presses our buttons (to use a couple of clichés) the better able we are to make choices that can lead to feeling different and to having deeper more satisfying and productive relationships with others.

We all learn to be who we are in life very early. Our behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and responses to the world are shaped by our experiences as infants and, by the time we reach adolescence or adulthood, we're no longer aware of what shaped us we're only aware of whether or not our behaviors are leading to achieving our goals or a happy satisfying life.

The way we've come to be and the way that we respond to the world results in specific outcomes. In the laboratory of life it's pretty clear that, even though in our hearts and minds we may want one outcome, that our behavior patterns often lead to another and until we become aware of the disconnect between the two and begin to systematically change our operating systems nothing will change.

For example, if I grew up in a household in which my every move was criticized and evaluated I might grow up inhabited by an inner voice that plays the part of my parents and continues to judge and evaluate my behavior as an adult. I may also unwittingly allow this grouch of a voice to act out on those closest to me creating tension, anger, and frustration between that person and me.

I may be doing my honest best to have a loving caring family life but my ingrained pattern of judging and criticizing may be having quite another impact on my relationships. There's a conflict between my desire for love and caring and my tendency to be critical and I may not even be aware that it's going on inside my own head let alone spilling out into my relationships with others.

The Integral Model provides a map of both our inner and our outer territory and permits us to see the relationship between each of the quadrants (areas of our lives). It also provides us with a graphic representation of the interconnectedness between our

behaviors, our attitudes, the impact of our relationships, and how the world that we've created all coalesce to maintain what we're getting in the world. If, for example, the mean gremlin that I got from my family of origin (Quadrant III – My relationships and Culture), has led me to be judgmental about myself and others (Quadrant I - My Interior), and results in me being outwardly critical of even those whom I most love and care about (Quadrant II – My behavior), I may create an environment in which there's tension and unease and where no one feels safe from my critique (Quadrant IV – Environment). Understanding these interrelationships provides me with some choices and options about how to go about changing the flavor of each quadrant in a way that leads to the world I truly want.

The 4 Quadrants are a snapshot of yourself and your world. Get to know that snapshot and, having a picture of how you “do yourself” in the world, begin to create a different picture. Learn to make different choices in each of the quads and be the architect of a new life.

### **Step 3 – “Q” IT Up**

*What we see depends mainly on what we look for. --John Lubbock*

It's typically hard for us to notice our blind spots until we walk into a wall! In using the Quadrants we can begin to take stock of where we spend most of our time and what areas we are strong or weak in. Q-ing it up means taking a look at our roadmap and noticing where we are so that we can begin to plan how we're going to get where it is we'd like to be.

If we take a look at our inner territory in QI and find that we tend to be hard on ourselves and others we can begin to learn new strategies and practices to help reduce the stress caused by our nagging inner voice and the damage that we do when we turn that inner critic loose on others. We can learn to understand where this little gremlin came from and ways to create a new and different voice that is more supportive and helpful in relationships.

If we're not taking care of ourselves and constantly under a lot of stress due to our poor lifestyle choices and/or work life and environment, we can begin to create new habits and behaviors that support our wellness and make changes in how we schedule our time so that we are present and more available at home and in our relationships. This would involve taking a hard look at how we do ourselves in QII (behaviors) and QIV (environment).

Creating balance around the Quadrants leads to a certain synergy in which our blind spots are now open to the world and we're engaging with others and taking care of ourselves in a way that allows for more flexibility, peace, and openness to being with and understanding others.

For families that have been in crisis for any length of time it's fairly typical that the parents have given up some of the things that in the past have supported a healthier

lifestyle and less stressful home environment. Having a young person on drugs and alcohol and making poor choices increases the stress levels in parents and decreases the likelihood that they will go for that run, go out for a dinner together, attend a yoga class or any of the ways that couples maintain their health and wellness in a way that let's them meet the demands of a busy family life let alone one with a teenager in crisis.

Each of the Quadrants may be seen as areas for growth with specific skills that can be worked on and improved. In Quadrant I for example I might learn to be more effective dealing with my feeling by becoming familiar with the Emotional Intelligence literature. To develop more of sense of peace in my life I might take up a meditation practice (Quadrant II). In Quadrant III I can learn to be more effective in my relationships with others by learning to read body language and improving my communication skills using a program like Non Violent Communication. In Quadrant IV I can give myself more time and relaxation by reducing my connection to my Blackberry.

So, Where in the map do you tend to spend time? Do you feel effective in that domain in your life? What would you like to improve?

In Step 4 we'll begin to learn how to catch ourselves in the act (real time) of being ineffective and see what's going on that can give us clues as to how to be more effective in the future.

#### **Step 4 – CATCH YOURSELF IN THE ACT! :**

*"The important thing is this: To be able to at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we would become."*

*- Charles DuBois*

We all have an ideal self that we want to, or believe that we are projecting out into the world. We'd love to be seeing as caring, competent, understanding, efficient, and effective.... Each of us has our own list. Many times in our lives we embarrassing come to the realization that we're not all that we'd like to be. More often than not we come to these realizations in our relationships with others whether that be a child, a spouse, or a significant other. For example every parent wants to be the perfect parent. They want the best for their children and want to feel confident as a parent.

Unfortunately, there is no parenting school that everyone is required to attend and our learning as parents comes from our own experiences as children with our own parents who also never had a class. Much gets passed on from generation to generation including our skills at relating with others. As we have talked about previously, the learning we have assimilated is not always the best. Nevertheless, we still want the best; believe that we are doing the best, and are floored when we come to find that what we believe is not what is actually happening. Somehow the outcome we had hoped for has been replaced with a less than desirable one. When we come to these realizations it's often like getting hit over the head with a sledgehammer. Or, it is like the old show "Smile Your On Candid Camera" in which people are put in silly situations, do silly things as a result and

then come to realize that the whole world has been watching you make a fool out of yourself. Ouch!

This happens all too often when parents are trying to work with their teenagers about limits, responsibilities, and consequences. Parenting skills are put to the absolute test. You may try to have a conversation about a teen having come home 2 hours late on a school night or you may try to open up a conversation about your fear that your adolescent is experimenting with drugs. But, if your suspicions, fears, anxiety, or frustration leads to threats, or anger, or accusatory tones, it is likely that those conversations will lead to escalation and a complete breakdown in communication. Once again, this happens with the best of intentions and in all likelihood you're not even aware of what you are doing during the conversation. Here is where a purposeful, proactive Catching Yourself in the Act exercise can come in handy.

In this case I might ask you to do daily reflections on your interactions with your teens. I would ask that you notice what you are feeling in your body during those conversations, what you are thinking, and what the results of the interactions are. Then, after a period of time, I would also ask that you notice if there are any patterns in the kind of communications that you are having with your teen. Any new awareness? Once we have a sense of what your pattern looks like, and you have a chance to begin to "Catch Yourself", we can begin to work on what new patterns you would like to see and what behaviors you might need to learn to change that pattern. For example, you might need to learn listening skills or centering skills to help you remain calm during the conversations. **Catching Yourself**, is key to being able to begin to make new choices.

Once we begin to notice our patterns and the results of our unwanted behavior we can begin to literally change our minds and see situations with new eyes.

### **Step 5 – CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIORS & CHANGE YOUR MIND!**

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes. --- Marcel Proust

Now that you've had a chance to "Catch Yourself In the Act" you can begin to take a step back and see that the disconnects between your good intentions and the behavioral results of those intentions don't always match. Being able to do this is a HUGE step for now you are in a position to create a new set of behaviors AND change your thinking, attitudes, and expectations about what typically takes place in different situations and interactions with others. Now that you know that the patterns of behaviors between yourself and your teen or spouse have led to a particular set of perceptions and beliefs about their intentions and that they have developed their own about you, the opportunity arises to create new patterns that lead to new, more satisfying, and hopefully more productive outcomes.

This may take some work. For example understanding Emotional Intelligence and how our emotions can sometimes hijack us and lead to unintended behaviors you can learn to pull the switch on your emotions before the hijacking so that you remain present, clear, and relatively calm during your interactions. Learning and practicing to meditate or use

relaxation techniques can help you to see how our thought patterns can create scenarios based on our past learning and experiences that are influencing our behaviors today. Learning to use Non-Violent Communication techniques you can learn how to be less blaming and accusatory and talk more about your feelings and personal needs in a way that doesn't press the other persons buttons. You can practice all you learn with people that don't trigger you as much to get better at your skills. These are just a few examples of how you can learn, practice, and implement new behaviors that lead to different outcomes, attitudes and perceptions.

Coaching is especially helpful here, as you need someone to support and encourage you through these changes, and someone that can model the skills that you would like to learn. It is hard in the heat of the moment to remember what you have learned and practiced so having someone to brainstorm and problem solve with is important. Learning new behaviors takes practice and like any other skill takes repetition, support, and encouragement.

Remember, its all how you look at it! Like the story of the blind men who, all standing at different parts of an elephant, try to describe it, and cannot. They can only describe their experience from the part of the elephant that they are touching. Put all the perceptions together and you have an elephant! When we're interacting with others in our lives we only have our perceptions with which to judge what the situations that we find ourselves in really mean. Stepping back, understanding the need for more information, opening ourselves to new images of the other, and trying out new behaviors we can literally change our behaviors and then our minds.

Spend some time today reflecting on your interactions with people close to you. Think about what thoughts or ideas you have about those persons and how they might influence how you interact with them. Imagine how you might, despite your expectations, try on a new behavior and see what happens as a result.

### **Step 6 - BE THE CHANGE!**

*"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." -- Mahatma Gandhi*

Well, you have come a long way on our journey along the 6 Steps to Change. So far you have:

- "Used your Imagination" to create an image of a new and better tomorrow.
- Gotten to "Know Thyself" better by surveying the 4 quadrants of your life and deepening your understanding of how you do yourself in the world.
- "Q'd it Up" to get a better sense of which quadrants you may need to develop new skills in to create more balance in your life.
- "Caught Yourself in the Act" recognizing online the behaviors that trigger you and what old habits arise in those moments.
- Begun to "Change Your Behaviors and Change Your Mind" first by stepping back to see how your habitual patterns have led to specific outcomes and beliefs about

your interactions with others and then by seeing how, by trying new behaviors, you can create new outcomes and attitudes.

Now comes the final step to actually embody the change you've created in your life and in relationship to those that are important to you. You're on the road to fulfilling that dream of a happier and healthier family and a new you that can begin to enjoy life once again.

This is an exciting step but not an easy one. It'll take using the 4 Foundations of Change that I have talked about before. You'll need to be Committed to the hard work that lay ahead, you will need to have a fierce curiosity that enables you to seek to Understand what happened when there are breakdowns, you'll need to Communicate to others your intentions and your need for support to help see you through the inevitable potholes in the road that you will find along the way, and finally, you'll need compassion for yourself for the hard work that you are doing and for what it means to be human and fallible.

Real change takes time and it is important to celebrate small successes and to have people around that can cheer you on when you make progress and give you a hug and a pat on the back when things get hard. The important thing to always remember is that the Hope that you started this process with, and the new tomorrow that you have created in your imagination, are the sources of energy that will keep you going on your journey.

Remember, new thoughts and behaviors, new attitudes, a more balanced lifestyle, and exciting new outcomes to look forward to. Spend some time as you begin the journey deciding who will be your coaches and supporters. Seek out role models that you can look to as you try on new behaviors. And finally, don't be afraid to ask for help.