



Small Changes, Big Impact:
Quick and Easy Actions That Will Change Your Life
...by Kathy Binner

Introduction

Our lives are largely the logical result of our habits. *By making small, intentional changes in your thoughts, words, and actions, the quality of your life can change dramatically.* Are you frustrated with your life and intimidated by the changes you might have to make?

There are many quick and easy things anyone can do to have a more fulfilling and successful life.

Small changes have many advantages:

1. **They're much less intimidating to implement.** If you've ever thought about completely changing your diet or adding any other huge commitment to your life, you know how challenging it can be to overcome the enormous mental hurdles that come along with your decision.
 - For example, many of us are dehydrated without even knowing it. How difficult is it to drink a glass of water each morning? That's the kind of change anyone can easily put into practice.
2. **Small changes slip under your radar.** Our brains are hardwired to resist change. After all, whatever we've been doing has kept us alive thus far.
 - *Small changes are less likely to trigger the brain's defense mechanisms.* Meditating for 1 minute won't stir up any anxiety, whereas a 2-hour session probably will.
3. **It's easy to keep getting better.** If you do 2 pushups a day this week, you can probably do 3 next week, and 4 the week after. If you kill yourself and can muster up 100 pushups per day this week, how many more can you really expect to do next week?
 - We're all addicted to progress. Starting small permits progress to be realized and enjoyed each week.
4. **Small changes require little time.** It can be difficult to find an extra hour each day, but anyone can find 5 minutes here and there.
 - *The less a new action disrupts your current routine, the more likely you are to keep it up.*

Small changes are effective, fun, and easy to make. It's unnecessary to take drastic steps to move your life in a positive direction.

Check out some tips to increase the likelihood of success:

1. **Be patient.** Small actions can result in enormous changes, but it can take time to reap the rewards. One push-up per day isn't likely to do much, but it does make it easier to do 2 pushups in the future. Once you're doing 10 or more, you'll likely start to see results.
 - Fortunately, it's much easier to be patient when you're doing so little. Frustration tends to set in more when you're working too hard.
2. **Start small.** *You'll know you're starting small enough when you you're able to complete the action without any mental resistance.* Add a little each week until you're performing at a level that's effective.
3. **Only add a few actions at a time.** It might be tempting to add 20 new things to your life, but that has the same disadvantages as adding a larger action. You'll probably feel overwhelmed and be unable to stick with it long enough to see any results.
4. **Consistency is the key.** Eating perfectly for a day will do nothing for your waistline. Eating pretty nutritiously for months will have a huge effect.
5. **Strive for progress, rather than perfection.** *Extraordinary results can come from ordinary actions.* The key is regular advancement. You'll enhance your results as you make small, positive changes. Perfection is unnecessary!

Adding quick and easy actions into your life can have incredible results. You'll progress easily with a minimal amount of time and effort. Patience is important in some cases, but you can do it.

“The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything... or nothing.”

- Nancy Astor

Health

Starting with the topic of health is no accident. *Every other aspect of your life becomes more challenging if your health isn't up to par.*

There are many easy actions anyone can take to enhance their health and vitality.

Increase your health by implementing these quick and easy habits:

1. **Floss your teeth.** Flossing is an essential habit that few of us actually do, but it only takes a minute or two. Flossing not only helps to preserve your teeth, but also your overall health. It's especially vital for the health of your cardiovascular system.
 - The bacteria found in your mouth and between your teeth can find its way into your bloodstream and cause all types of havoc.
 - Mouth bacteria can cause heart valve disease and the hardening of arteries. Removing these bacteria at least twice per day is important. It inhibits the formation of cavities that provide a route for bacteria to enter the bloodstream.
 - Mouth bacteria also cause systemic inflammation in the body, which is implicated in numerous ailments and diseases.
2. **Brush your teeth at least twice a day.** There's no need to dwell on this item because the benefits were just covered. Just keep in mind that it takes at least two full minutes to adequately brush your teeth.
 - Consider using a timer to keep yourself honest. Two minutes is longer than you think when you're waiting for it to pass.
3. **Drink a glass of water.** We all have to consume fluids each day. *Replacing whatever you're currently drinking with water is probably both healthy and less expensive.* Start off by drinking a glass of water. Later, add another glass, and then another glass.
 - Most of us consume at least a few beverages each day that are less than healthy. Soda, sugar-laden fruit juices, and beverages with too much caffeine are common culprits. These can detract from your overall health.
 - Water is used in nearly every process in the body. All the other stuff we add to water to give it flavor makes it less healthy.
4. **Eat a fiber-rich breakfast.** Eating breakfast is important. If it's a fiber-rich breakfast, it's even better. Fiber helps prevent several types of cancer, enhances bowel function, and stabilizes blood sugar. Fiber also helps keep you full. If you can keep your hunger at bay, it will help to limit unnecessary snacking.
5. **Move around for a few minutes every hour.** An excessive amount of time spent sitting each day is heavily correlated with increased risk of death from a variety of causes.

- ***Work efficiency studies show that most workers accomplish more work if they take a short break every 60 minutes.*** Get up and take a 5-10 minute walk each hour. You'll get more done, and your level of health will increase.

Anyone can add one or more of these actions to their day. Which one will you add first? Some of the simplest actions have the greatest benefits. Drink more water, move more, and take care of your teeth. What could be simpler than that?

Can you think of any other quick and easy actions that would positively impact your health?

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

- George Bernard Shaw

Fitness and Weight Control

The United States has one of the highest obesity rates in the world. We struggle to stay fit and keep our waists in-check. Being fit and trim also has a significant impact on your health.

Many of the tips already mentioned are also good for weight control. Drinking water, eating more fiber, and moving around more will all help to minimize any excess fat you might be carrying. But you can do even more!

Keep these tips in mind to enhance your level of fitness and lessen your body fat:

1. **Keep a pair of dumbbells by the TV.** Did you know that the average 60-minute television program has over 15 minutes of commercials? If you watch 2 hours of TV each day, that's over 30 minutes you could spend exercising, without even having to miss one second of your shows.
 - You don't have to limit yourself to using the dumbbells. Calisthenics, jumping rope, and using the treadmill are other ideas.
 - Ideally, you're already limiting your TV time. However, if you're watching television anyway, you might as well add in a little exercise.

2. **Have a piece of fruit or vegetable before each meal.** Most of us fail to eat enough fruit. *Starting each meal with a piece of fruit can help control your food intake.* A large serving of vegetables or a salad might be a more reasonable option for dinner. Most vegetables are also lower in calories than fruit.

3. **Replace one fattening food with something healthier.** It's easy to get bogged down with a super-strict diet. The issue is frequently one of compliance. But simple changes can have profound effects.
 - Replace one food with something lower in calories. Swap the potato chips for something healthy, like a small handful of nuts or a banana.

4. **Jump rope for 5 minutes each day.** Jumping rope is a piece of cake when you're 7-years old. It's a little more challenging when you're 45 and are unable to see your feet anymore. Start slowly.
 - It's a great exercise for cardiovascular fitness, both anaerobic and aerobic, depending on your speed. You can also boost your level of coordination.
 - As you get better, you can jump faster and start incorporating tricks into your jumping. Five minutes is enough of a workout if you're working hard.

You can dramatically increase your fitness levels and change your physique with regular, small actions. There really isn't any other way. It's unrealistic to think you can lose 10 pounds in a day or go from the couch to a marathon in a week. Have patience and you'll see results.

“Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life - think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.”

- Swami Vivekananda

Career

Getting ahead in your career is often about the little things, rather than being an over-achiever and putting in a 60-hour workweek. To some of us, a better job is a way to increase our income. Others want the additional challenge a higher-level position provides.

Small actions are a great way to change your employment situation.

Develop these habits and advance your career:

1. **Be on time. *Show up to work on time, and be prompt when attending appointments and meetings.*** A lack of punctuality is often viewed as a sign of disrespect. It also gives the appearance that you lack control over yourself and your time. Worst of all, others may assume that you don't care.
 - Strive to be 3-5 minutes early for meetings. Showing up too early can make it appear like you have too much time on your hands. It's also a waste of your time.
 - Many of us have morning routines which will only get us to work on time if everything goes perfectly. Your schedule is ruined if you run into a little traffic or need to stop for gas. *Create a routine that doesn't rely on perfection or good luck.*
2. **Be polite and respectful.** It's not uncommon for the custodian to have grown up with a high-level manager. One small comment can quickly put an end to any hopes of career advancement.
 - It can be challenging to treat everyone well, especially if you feel they're undeserving. *The habit of treating others with kindness and respect can help your career.*
3. **Avoid cursing.** In some work environments, cursing is acceptable under certain circumstances. What are those circumstances? That's a good question. But if you refrain from swearing altogether, you won't ever have to make the distinction.
4. **Review and update your resume monthly.** It isn't easy to look back and remember all the great things you've accomplished over the last 3 years. Spend 5 minutes each month and make the necessary updates to your resume.
 - When someone asks for your resume, you'll already have it ready to go. If someone asks about your experience, you'll already have it documented.

5. **Dress for the job you want. *It's pretty easy to pick out the hierarchy in most office environments by what people wear.*** Employees at a given level tend to dress similarly. The hourly employees might wear jeans. The next level wears khakis. One level up wears dress pants. Those at the top wear business suits.
 - If you dress like your boss, others will unconsciously start to view you in the same way. Many promotions are the result of the individual looking the part. Appearances do matter!

A more lucrative or meaningful career can add a new dimension to your life. ***Focus on taking the small actions that have the biggest effect.*** Working all hours of the day and night is rarely the answer.

“The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.”

- Vince Lombardi

Finances

It's common to run out of money before the end of the month. Many of us are chronically late paying our bills, which means we incur unnecessary late charge every month. Like your level of fitness, it takes time and consistency to see real positive changes in your financial situation.

Try these quick and easy actions to better your finances:

1. **Set up a day to pay your bills each week.** Choose any day you like, but sit down and pay your bills each week. If you're still mailing your bills instead of using online payment methods, ensure you're leaving enough time for your payment to arrive on time.
 - Late payments have a negative effect on your bank account and credit report.
2. **Keep track of every dollar you make and spend. *Spend 2 minutes each night and tally up all the money you made and spent that day.*** If you primarily use a debit card, it won't take any time at all.

- Actually seeing how much you've spent will minimize the surprises at the end of the month. You'll also be more aware of any questionable spending habits.
 - Compare your numbers to your monthly budget. Are you on track? What needs to be done to meet your monthly spending goals?
3. **Eliminate one perk you can do without.** Do you have an expensive coffee each morning on the way to work? Is enjoying an expensive bottle of wine each week your guilty pleasure? How many more cable channels can you possibly watch?
- Nearly everyone has an expense they can easily live without. *A \$4 coffee each day is nearly \$1,500 per year. That's \$60,000 over 40 years.*
 - Find a suitable substitute if necessary. Keeping with the coffee theme, you could prepare your coffee at home. Even an expensive espresso machine is less expensive in the long run.
4. **Set up automatic payroll deductions for savings and retirement.** If you wait until the end of the month to tuck away the money that's left, there's rarely anything left to allocate for any type of savings.
- Save your money before you even have access to it. You'll find a way to make the month work with whatever money is left over. *Start small, with whatever amount is comfortable for you – even if it's only \$5.* Then, attempt to save a little more over time.

Getting your finances under control makes everything else easier. *It's difficult to enjoy your life when you're struggling to pay your bills or worried about the future.* When your finances are solid, many other things become possible.

“That's been one of my mantras - focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

- Steve Jobs

Relationships

Relationships are another important component of life. It's great to have someone to share life's ups and downs. A failed relationship can be a cause of great distress, both emotional and financial. Have you ever had a relationship fail when you believed it could have been salvaged?

Give your relationships the attention they deserve. Fortunately, many of the common relationship woes can be minimized or eliminated with a few simple tasks.

Try these quick and easy actions and see your relationships thrive:

1. **Do one nice, unexpected thing for someone each day.** It might be brushing the snow off her car or giving him a hug in the morning. This tip can apply to your neighbors and work environment, too.
 - It can be challenging to come up with ideas on the fly. ***Take the time to make a list of things you can do for those who are important in your life.***
2. **Send a quick text each day to the important people in your life.** The logical target for this tip is your significant other, but you can include anyone you like. Text your children, siblings, parents, and close friends.
 - This is a great way to let someone know that you care and are thinking of them. And it only requires a few seconds!
 - Try to change it up and avoid sending the exact same text each day.
3. **Compliment others.** Alternate the recipient and the compliment. Most of us get pretty excited when someone pays us a compliment. It's a quick and simple way to make someone's day and enhance your relationship with them.
 - You'll be pleasantly surprised to find yourself on the receiving end of more compliments, too. You receive what you give!
4. **Have a short nightly chat.** For 5 minutes each night, turn off everything and just talk. The topic can be nearly any subject: work, your relationship, the kids, or general comments about life in general.
 - Making the time to talk to each other helps to ensure that potential obstacles are handled before they become a bigger issue.

5. **Be willing to apologize.** If you're at odds with your spouse or significant other, you're probably wrong 50% of the time. If you simply apologize, you'll be taking the correct course of action 50% of the time, but improving the situation 99% of the time.
 - Many of us are too proud to apologize, even when we know we're at fault. *Apologies make quick work of many silly disagreements.*

Relationships require daily attention and nurturing. What other quick and easy actions could you incorporate into your life? This is one area of life that many professionals tend to ignore. Avoid making the same mistake.

“People are remarkably bad at remembering long lists of goals. I learned this at a professional level when trying to get my high-performance coaching clients to stay on track, the longer their lists of to-dos and goals, the more overwhelmed and off-track they got. Clarity comes with simplicity.”

- Brendon Burchard

Spirituality

If you've ever accomplished something impressive and were left feeling dissatisfied, it's likely that your spiritual life could use a boost. In the United States, there is a great emphasis on achievement and monetary wealth. *Unfortunately, the US isn't near the top of the list when it comes to happiness and contentment.* Your own life doesn't have to mirror that fact.

Develop these easy habits to enjoy more meaning in your life:

1. **Pray each day.** If praying resonates with you, make a habit of praying each day. You can have a set prayer time, such as immediately upon waking in the morning, going to bed at night, or both. You can also take advantage of free moments throughout the day.
 - Incorporating prayer into your daily life can serve as a reminder to be thankful and help you avoid worrying about the smaller annoyances of life.
2. **Meditate each day.** *Many meditation experts recommend meditating one minute each hour.* This type of schedule helps to develop the meditation habit. It also makes it easier to maintain a meditative state all day long.

- As with praying, develop a schedule that fits into your life.
3. **Practice mindfulness.** When performing any task, try to focus 100% on whatever you're doing at that moment. Avoid thinking about the past or future. Give all your attention to the task at hand.
 - This requires no additional time in your day. You'll feel better, be more productive, and learn just how challenging it is to control your mind.
 - Many of our thoughts and feelings are habitual. *Mindfulness can help to remove poor mental habits and allow us to see life through fresh eyes.*
 - Start small with simple tasks, like brushing your teeth or drinking a glass of water. Can you stay focused for even 30 seconds? It's more challenging than you think!
 5. **Read from a spiritual or religious book each day.** A quick 5 minute reading session in the morning, at lunchtime, or in the evening can increase feelings of well-being.
 - Keep the book handy if possible. The opportunity to read it may suddenly present itself.
 4. **Keep a list of uplifting quotes with you.** You can jot them down in a small notebook or save them on your cell phone. *At regular intervals during the day, take 30 seconds and read a motivating quote.*
 - There are many websites with collections of quotes categorized by author and topic. How convenient!
 - Reading inspirational quotes is a wonderful way to keep your mood positive. If you're feeling a little down, a little pick-me-up is close at hand.
 5. **Start your day by making a list of everything that fills you with gratitude.** It can be easy to focus on the negative aspects of life. *Reminding yourself of all the good people and things in your life can change your focus and increase your level of happiness and contentment.*

Add to your spiritual life with these quick and easy actions and you'll develop a new perspective that positively impacts all other aspects of your life.

“I find that kid actors are great reminders of the simplicity of acting. As you get older, you can sometimes complicate things a little more. You can become too aware of, 'Okay, this is the scene emotionally. This is where we need to be. We've got the climax coming up.' You can start to analyze it too much.”

- Hugh Jackman

Personal Growth

After work, family, chores, and other responsibilities, there's often limited time to do all the things we'd like to do. Whether it's writing a novel or climbing the pyramids in Egypt, these types of activities rarely come to fruition without regular intention and effort.

Watch your personal growth explode with these actions:

1. **Make a short list.** You might consider this to be your “bucket list.” You can do just about anything in life, but it's difficult to do everything. No one can be an astronaut, Oscar winner, professional golfer, mountain climber, and concert pianist in one lifetime.
 - **Create a “bucket list” by jotting down all the most important things that you'd like to do.** Start by asking yourself which you would pick if you could only do one. Keep doing that until you have a list that will keep you busy for the rest of your life.
 - It's okay to change your list as your life and preferences change, but it's important to start somewhere.
2. **Review your goals each day. *Formulating goals is a great activity because it forces you to think about what you want.*** Reviewing goals is just as important. It keeps your mind focused on finding the pathway towards your goals.
 - A few minutes in the morning or evening are all it takes. Keep your goals fresh in your mind.
 - You'll no longer go weeks without remembering that you even had goals in the first place.

- One great trick is to re-write your goals each day. Then read them out loud and imagine reaching them. You'll have thought about them, read them, spoken them, heard them, and seen them. Engage all your senses!
3. **Limit the time you spend watching TV.** If your life is exciting and interesting enough, watching made up characters live imaginary lives will be boring by comparison. Use the extra time to achieve your goals and create an amazing life. This can be especially challenging.
- It's common to use the TV as a way to distract ourselves from life's challenges. Develop a habit of working on solutions rather than avoiding them.
 - ***Make a list of things you could be doing instead of watching television.*** Exercising, painting, writing, learning to play the guitar, and so on. Create a list of activities that excite you or will make your life more enjoyable.
4. **Learn one new thing each day.** It could be anything. Even if it's just knowing the capital of Moldova. You'll be able to claim that you know something today you didn't know yesterday.
- Think of subjects that interest you and investigate them. Do you understand how an air conditioner works? Do you know the various ways of marketing a movie script?
 - Consider your goals and learn more about those topics.
 - Learn a new word each day. ***The English language has over a million words, but the average person knows only about 25,000 of them.*** That's only 2.5%.
5. **Find someone to model.** There are so many individuals on this planet. There's bound to be someone that's already accomplished your desired goal.
- Why reinvent the wheel? Get advice and guidance from someone who has already walked your path and been successful.
 - Each day, ask yourself what your model would do. If you can, ask them directly.

It could be argued that the most important part of life is personal growth. ***Most of us rarely have the time or resources to discover our limits or to experience everything life has to offer.*** It only requires a few minutes each day to change this component of your life for the better.

“Simplicity, clarity, singleness: These are the attributes that give our lives power and vividness and joy as they are also the marks of great art. They seem to be the purpose of God for his whole creation.”

- Richard Holloway

Conclusion

Small, simple, quick actions can result in profound changes over time.

If you've ever struggled to make major changes in your life by making drastic changes in your behavior, you already know how challenging that can be. ***Consider giving smaller actions a chance.*** Your compliance will increase and you'll even enjoy the constant progress you'll undoubtedly make.

“Sometimes it's the smallest decisions that can change your life forever.”

- Keri Russell