

Re- framing Behavior

Sustainable change requires the right mental model

Almost everyone wants to change something. Perhaps it's a major change, like quitting smoking or shedding unhealthy pounds. Or it might be a smaller lifestyle decision, such as starting to take vitamins, selecting a new phone, or walking to work. Big or small, changing one's habits can require significant physical and mental effort.

Designers have traditionally focused their energies on physical objects, seeking to optimize their functionality, usability, and desirability. But helping people make needed changes in their lives requires more than physical objects.

People import mental models to new experiences, and if they are to change their habits, they must first change the attitudes on which they rest. Designing for sustainable change means finding the right mental model.

Designing around a mental model can help people overcome obstacles to successful, sustainable change. Reframing helps them envision their efforts in a new way, increasing the likelihood of success and building loyalty toward the products, services, interactions, and communications that show them the way.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life's Changes*

1.

From should to want

Allow people to reveal themselves selectively and provide ownership of their data.

2.

From steady state to dynamic

Life's ups and downs often derail people's best intentions. Prepare and support people through a dynamic journey toward their goals.

3.

From default to deliberate

Often the default mental model sabotages our efforts to change. Encourage people to reset their default.

4.

From outsourcing to ownership

It's easy to get demoralized on the route to significant change, which leads to passivity, inertia, and blame. Enable people to climb into the front seat and take control of their journey.



From me to us

Bill and Kathy have had a great life together, but for the last five years their attempts at sex always ended with Bill turning over and pretending to sleep and Kathy staring at the ceiling.

Eventually, Bill talked to his doctor and learned about erectile dysfunction. They had both believed that the little pill would be the silver bullet, but they weren't prepared to address the damage done to their relationship over so many years. Rather than solve the problem, the expectations raised by the promise of medical therapy exacerbated it.

In response, a major pharmaceutical company developed a starter kit that focuses on the couple's relationship rather than the man's medical condition. It includes materials to increase empathy and rekindle the romance.

What if we design tools that address the relationships in our lives that can inspire and sustain change? Can we design tools for the people around the individual who wants to change?

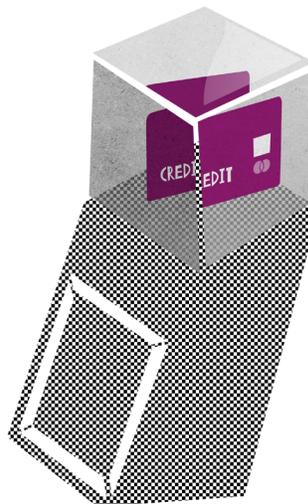
From should to want

A plus-size athlete, Jennifer doesn't fit the typical mold of a personal trainer, but this is fine with her clients. Jennifer trains many different types of people including those who are obese and whose goals may be as simple as walking around the block.

Over the years, Jennifer realized that focusing on diet and exercise is the wrong approach. Many of her clients swore off exercise after a humiliating experience during PE class, so she helps people change by tapping into "their innate desire to move."

By framing activity in terms of pleasure rather than exercise, Jennifer motivates her clients so that they can take on the challenge of shifting their habits. She measures her success by a lengthy list of referrals from her longstanding customers.

What if behavior change were described in terms of pleasure rather than pain? What if behavior change tools unleashed our innate desires and encouraged small, first steps?



From steady state to dynamic

Sean and Rachel had always expected that their financial life would steadily improve as they got older. As they fell deeper into debt, the mismatch between their expectations and the reality was adding significant stress to their relationship.

Rachel tried to "freeze their assets" by putting her credit card in a block of ice in the freezer, and the couple decided to put off getting married in order to save on insurance. Despite these desperate measures they fear they may never recover a feeling of financial stability.

If they could reframe their situation as expected bumps in the road to financial health, they would feel less guilt, less shame, and less tension in their relationship.

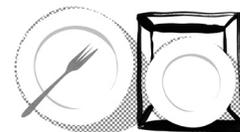
What kinds of tools might help people understand dynamic change as a fact of modern life? Can we design tools that help people view lean times as part of a life well lived?

Letters to an ex

Smoking cessation programs often encourage people to realize that success is not about willpower, but about breaking an emotionally dependent relationship. As part of changing the mental model of willpower, successful quitters wrote breakup letters to their cigarettes: "You made me feel like I couldn't do anything alone; you took my money; you made me feel great and then terrible about myself..." Framing change in terms of a negative relationship helped people understand the nature of their habit and prepared them for the difficult journey ahead.

The Small Plate Movement

The Small Plate Movement has found a simple way to decrease the amount of food people eat. The organization has found that plate size determines the amount of food people serve themselves. A two-inch difference in plate diameter—from 12 inch to 10 inch—results in 22 percent fewer calories served, yet doesn't seem to affect feelings of satisfaction. If a typical dinner has 800 calories, a smaller plate would lead to a weight loss of approximately 18 pounds per year for an average-size adult.



Empowering heart patients

Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, believes that patients who attribute exaggerated power to their doctors become passive in managing their own care. In a study of high-risk heart patients, Dr. Ornish required them to eat a vegetarian diet and do yoga, meditation, and exercise for three hours a week. After five years, 99 percent had stopped or reversed the progress of their heart disease. By teaching them to take control of their own health, Dr. Ornish helped them commit to lasting change.

The National Campaign

The National Campaign, a nonprofit organization with a mission to reduce unplanned pregnancy, found that women generally only consider long-term birth control in the context of an ongoing relationship. This leaves plenty of gaps in contraception use, so the National Campaign is launching a program to reframe contraception as the default mode for women until they are ready to have a child: "If you're not using contraception, you're trying to get pregnant."

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Life's Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.

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