



# Encouraging Transformational Change

By: Grace Trepte



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# Adv. Applied Neuroscience Behind 'A Christmas Carol'


## Quick Recap

### Unfamiliar with Charles Dickens' story?

This classic story revolves around a miserly fellow by the name of Ebenezer Scrooge, incredibly wealthy but with no generous spirit and hates Christmas. But his life transformation begins when his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley, comes to him in chains and explains Scrooges similar fate if he doesn't change his ways. He foretells of the coming of three ghosts: The Ghost of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet-to-Come. All on the eve of Christmas, each ghost gives Scrooge a view of himself from youth through present times, and the cold ending that awaits him as a prodding to change his ways. In the end, this ultimate transformation story turns Scrooge from miserable 'skinflint' into a generous person of good will.

### The Advanced Applied Neuroscience Replay

Through the lens of Mr. Scrooge, we understand that there are two essential types of change which take place in different systems of the brain. For example, downloading an accounting app to check money holdings requires the use of the Prefrontal Cortex, where knowledge and awareness live. However, this part of the brain won't turn Mr. Scrooge into a philanthropist. Therefore, we look at how transformational change operates in the emotion-bound Limbic Brain, which include memory and the ability to respond to perceived danger. As the three ghosts take Scrooge through his past and give insights into his present and future, Scrooge starts to draw new experience-based conclusions. These are written in his brain through the building of new neural pathways that store our habit routines. Once Scrooge has enough emotionally-activating experiences, he abandons his old miserly habits (e.g., the old neural pathways) in favor of generosity (e.g., the new neural pathway). This complex process of 'neuroplasticity' is what 'rewires' transformational change in the brain.





# Tools for Transformational Change

## Are you in a transformational change?

From an Advanced Applied Neuroscience point of view, we can only do one transformational change at a time. Here is how to read the signs in order to know if you are in one already...

External conditions make us exert a lot of energy and produce high levels of discomfort (resistance) for new change to stick.

### External Conditions

- Career Changes
  - Relocating
  - Changes in Family Structure
  - Financial Crisis
  - Health Crisis
  - Loved Ones in Change
- Generally: anything disruptive to basic needs

Internal conditions tell us that we are likely already in a transformational change.

### Internal Conditions

- Feel more tired and 'cranky' than usual
- Disorientation around what is happening
- Alternate clarity and fuzziness in understanding
- Unexpected memories or feelings
- Other routines are disrupted
- 'Glitchy' where you knew something but did the other thing anyway... (More mistakes inevitable)

Generally: anything emotionally energy intensive





# Recognizing Change

## 1. What kinds of external conditions might be adding too much resistance (discomfort) for a new change to stick?

**Note: If you experiencing any of the below conditions, seek support of a health professional.**

- **A serious lack of sleep**
- **A sudden drop in appetite**
- **Severe difficulty in concentrating**

### TIP:

If you have emotional space to welcome change, start small - feel the stretch but don't push it. You want to build confidence as you go along. It is better to have a full week of 2-minute breathing exercises than only two days of 10-minute meditations.

Remember that taking away a habit means you also need a new one to replace it. Watching too much TV late in the evening? Identify a different activity to do such as reading one chapter in an interesting book.

Recognize that you will need more rest and downtime than usual. Rewiring is like taking a huge update. Resist the urge to push it or speed it up which will actually slow you down.







# Building the Brain and Body

Change takes up a lot of energy in our brains and bodies. These are essential elements to help your brain build new electrical circuitry...

## Healthful Practices

- Decrease carbs, increase nutrition
- Enough hours of restful sleep
- Exercise and deep breathing
- Quieting the mind
- Being in calming places like nature
- Take charge of what you have control over!

Generally: anything that builds energy and encourages emotional integration

## TIP:

Focusing on healthy routines during times of change can greatly assist in your brain's needs to build new neural pathways and emotionally reintegrate.

Even simple practices like walking or taking quiet time are tremendously supportive in keeping your Limbic Brain from shorting out your 'emotional circuits' and helps your subconscious mind feel like you are in control.

The more you assert control over what you can do, especially with healthy routines, the more you actually activate neurotransmitter chemicals that help you feel that you are 'courageous', building strength during your trials, rather than feeling stressed and weakened by them.





# Building the Brain and Body

- 2.** What healthful choices have helped you through times of stress and change? What did you start or stop doing?
- 3.** What did you notice that helped you the most? What was not as helpful?
- 4.** Which practices would you be willing to try out?





# Building Readiness

Priming the change, such as when Jacob Marley explained to Scrooge, “You will be visited by three ghosts. Expect the first at one...” is a wonderful way to engage your Limbic Brain in a way that helps you feel more safe.

## Priming Expectations

- What can you know, in advance, that will help you?
- What do you need most and what can you ask for?
- What helps you prepare for events likely to show up next?
- How will you respond in certain scenarios?
- What do others need to know in advance?

Generally: anything that will help you see the road ahead, including obstacles, and priming yourself and others in advance

## TIP:

While not always possible for changes happening in life, introspection can help identify ways to ‘prime’ your mind:

- Do some research to find out what you can know about your situation.
- Acknowledge and ask for what you need.
- Identify what likelihood certain things will happen next.
- Decide how you will respond in certain scenarios. (Example: If ‘x’ topic comes up, I am going to: take a walk or leave early...)
- Tell others what might be helpful for them to know in advance.

By priming expectations, first, you’ll notice that change goes more smoothly for you and others.









# Building Resilience

It is our ability to endure difficult change and say,  
“Hey, I did that! I’m actually just fine. I’m a strong person,”  
...that builds resilience. It’s not the absence of a challenge!

## Resilience Practices

Reframe the experience from, “I almost didn’t make it!”  
To one of, “I came through it and I’m okay! I did it!”

Don’t replay the failures.  
Look for and affirm progress.

Generally: anytime you review, acknowledge, and encourage your  
progress, you build resilience

Affirming our successes, both big and small, gives our Limbic Brain the important experience of inner strength. So, if we don’t stop and acknowledge ourselves for the little things, we don’t build the courage and strength to continue on and face the bigger things.

Warning! - Minimizing our victories can actually lead to reversing our progress!

## TIP:

Everyday, think of at least one thing for which you want to be acknowledged.  
In the spirit of generosity, everyday think of at least one thing you want to  
acknowledge another for, too, so you build your resilience with others.





# Building Resilience

**8.** What progress do you notice is present in your life, no matter how big or small?

*Hint: Even catching yourself 'in the act' of something you want to stop doing - regardless of whether you did it anyway - is a sign of progress!*

**9.** What would you like to acknowledge yourself and/or others for today or in the last month?



# In Conclusion

Transformational change can be implemented in your personal life through small steps like giving yourself space to have more downtime. Likewise, your professional life can benefit from these neuroscience-informed tools by selecting the one that most appeals to you and testing it out.

As you move into the holidays and proceed into the new year, remember that anything is possible, as it was for Ebenezer Scrooge. Give your brain space to emotionally integrate by practicing your transformation tool of choice whenever you can. Then you are on the road to a successful new start!



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