

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



Hopefully you're enjoying a time of prosperity and happiness. But at some point, everyone experiences difficult times. Everyone deals with adversity, personally or professionally. Relationships, projects, finances, jobs, and health don't always go as we would like. What to do during adverse circumstances has to be one of the questions we most often ask ourselves or those we care about. Whether at home or work, we are often confronted with "How should I deal with this problem?" In fact, if it weren't for problems, many people wouldn't have a job. They wouldn't be needed.

Problems come in lots of forms of which many are straightforward to solve. They may require effort, time, money, or other resources, but the path to solving them is a well-known path. Workable solutions are available. What about the other kind of problems that aren't so easy to solve? Problems that don't go away by throwing more resources at them or ignoring them? What about people problems that require a change in attitude, thinking, or behaving?

The most difficult problems are often rooted in the need for someone to change. Someone needs to change their attitude to keep their job. A spouse needs to be more respectful or caring. A team needs to prioritize the team above themselves. A loved one needs to improve their diet or exercise. A leader needs to start pulling people instead of pushing them. Or someone needs to stop doing something they enjoy, start doing something they currently dislike, accept something, or stop accepting something. These problems are not as easy to solve.

Jobs are lost every day for one reason. Relationships end every day for the same reason. Organizations fail every day for the same reason. People die every day for the same reason. The reason – change is hard. If there is one challenge we all face at different points in our lives, it's the struggle with complacency and the need to change. We settle into a way of behaving or thinking that becomes a liability instead of an asset. We settle into habits and routines that start working against us instead of for us. We become complacent on matters that we shouldn't. We consciously, or subconsciously, accept things about us that we shouldn't.

Despite all the evidence and testimonials that prove people can change, not everyone does. Some don't change because they don't want to. Some buy in to the thinking that being happy comes from doing whatever you want. Some don't change because their traits have become a core part of their being. Other reasons include people don't know they need to change, they don't put in much effort, they lack motivation, or they don't get help. Clearly, just telling yourself or others to change is not sufficient. Even a doctor saying "you're going to die", a spouse saying "I'm going to leave", or a boss saying "you're going to lose your job" isn't enough.

If we expect to retain a relationship, sustain a quality life, advance in our career, or improve our business, we often need to stop or start doing something. If we want to be a better parent, spouse, boss, employee, colleague, or friend, we need to embrace a new way of thinking or doing. If we want to achieve a goal, whether financial, social, spiritual, mental, or physical, we need to change in some way. At some point, maintaining our health, relationships, jobs, employees, and clients requires that we do something different. As the famous management consultant Peter Drucker said, "If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old."

Consider your current goals, desires, and circumstances. Consider what you might do to improve your circumstances and achieve your goals. Yes, others around you are contributing to your circumstances, but focus on what you can control - you. Consider how you might get out of your comfort zone. You may not need to change in any significant way, but don't fall into the trap that many people do. They merely focus on others instead of themselves. Bosses think their employees are the problem. Spouses think their mates are the problem. Parents think their kids are the problem. The reality is that most everyone has some responsibility for their circumstances.



Coaching Change in Others and Yourself

Whether helping yourself or coaching someone else on the road to self-improvement, there is work ahead. Here are eight principles to keep in mind:

1. **Establish the need.** Change rarely begins before there is awareness of the need to change. Discover and assess what is contributing to any unwanted circumstances. Be open to the possibility that some of the problem is on you. Ask for and give feedback to increase self-awareness.
2. **Build the motivation.** People can be aware of the need to change, but if they aren't motivated, they won't change. Change requires incentives, drive, and purpose. Emphasize the impact and benefits of the better future ahead. Create buy-in and build enthusiasm.
3. **Believe it's possible.** People give up on themselves and others because they fundamentally don't believe they can change. For sure not everyone will change, but for sure they won't change if they don't think they can. Offer examples that make change believable.
4. **Take small steps.** Don't expect a substantial change all at once. Substantial change comes from the cumulative effect of many small changes. Create an individual development plan with incremental steps over weeks and months that achieves your desired outcome.
5. **Allocate time.** Change requires time and energy. Schedule time on your calendar to do whatever is needed. Doing research, practicing new habits, receiving feedback, attending classes, getting counseling, and providing coaching require time and effort.
6. **Set a date.** Consider the timing. Consider what needs to be done first. Set a start date that gives you sufficient time to prepare, acquire resources, shift your mindset, and set you up for success. But commit to a date sooner than later. Put it on your calendar and get started.
7. **Involve others.** Accept responsibility for changing, but don't do it alone. No one succeeds, or fails, all on their own. Seek wise counsel. Take advantage of any help or resources available from coaches, mentors, counselors, trainers, friends, family, and colleagues.
8. **Track progress and persist.** Keep a journal or scorecard to maintain accountability. There is nothing like tangible progress to sustain the motivation to change. When it gets difficult, don't give up. Do everything you reasonably can to maintain progress until the change becomes normal.

Some traits and circumstances are extremely difficult to change, but many are not. No matter what you are dealing with, you have choices. One, you can keep doing what you're doing and keep getting what you're getting. Two, you can give up, quit, cancel, get a divorce, get fired, or fire someone else. Or three, you can embrace the opportunity to learn, grow, and change. Choose option three. Accept the challenge to put these eight principles into practice.

If you've been pursuing a goal or change initiative, but achievement has been difficult, here is a self-assessment of these eight principles to gauge where you might need more attention: <https://alpinelink.com/quiz/influence-assessment/>.

For more information on these eight principles, read *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others*.

MIKE HAWKINS is award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others*, author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches, and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com). Mike is a seasoned executive coach, management consultant, author, speaker, and college lecturer. He is considered an industry thought leader on leadership, consultative selling, self-improvement, and business management.

For other articles on reaching your peak potential, visit <https://alpinelink.com/blog/>.