

**Dr. Ben Tyler**

# **THE LADDER**

Successful  
Change in  
Work and Life



## **What international colleagues are saying about Dr. Ben Tyler**

“Ben Tyler deeply cares about the challenges we face in becoming better leaders, in changing our lives and in making a real contribution. Ben’s unique talent is his ability to translate sound scientific research into inspirational, practical advice.”

*Dr. Stephen R. Covey*

“Ben Tyler doesn’t just inspire you to Dream, Dare, Do—he also teaches you skills and techniques that can turn your good intentions into reality.”

*Dr. Ken Blanchard*

“Ben Tyler is an inspiring trainer and writer in the field of human behavior and change. You will find his books and ideas extremely practical, very realistic and fun to read!”

*Dr. Marshall Goldsmith*



Dr. Ben Tyler

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Tyler Roland Press



*For Ingrid*

Tyler Roland Press BV, Soest

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# Table of Contents

1. The whole story in a few minutes.....	11
2. Why change is so important.....	19
3. Why changing behavior is so difficult.....	31
4. The Ladder: 3 steps towards change.....	45
5. The top step: setting a goal.....	57
6. The middle step: defining behavior.....	71
7. The bottom step: organizing support.....	85
8. The Ladder in practice.....	101
A checklist for behavior change (with over 80 tips).....	119
Sources.....	141
Acknowledgments.....	154
About Ben Tyler.....	156



# 1

## The whole story in a few minutes

- The Ladder in a nutshell.
- Top tips for succesful change!
- Change starts with yourself... but have you ever wondered why?

No foreword. No lengthy intro. I'll just tell you the essence of my story in a few minutes.

Change plays a crucial role in today's society. And no wonder. Change is often necessary and desirable.

Companies that want to stay on top of their markets need to innovate continuously. And anyone wanting to make a career move will have to take some kind of action. To resolve many social problems – from the cost of healthcare to the workload in education – we have to work on change too. And if you want to improve your own personal relationship, you'll need to get to work.

But outstanding plans and good intentions won't do the trick in any of these situations. Having a brilliant plan that you don't execute is just as useful as having no plan at all.

If you want to change, you'll have to take action. If you want to change, you'll have to demonstrate new and different behavior. Behavior that's different from the actions you took that got you into the situation you want to leave behind.

The core of virtually all change is behavior change. We want our leaders to display different behavior. And we want to see different behavior from employees, from citizens, from customers, from

educators. More friendly behavior, more customer-focused behavior, more creative behavior, more healthy behavior. New behavior that leads to new and better results.

A brilliant plan you don't execute is just as useful as no plan at all

But that's easier said and written than done. Change isn't easy. It's hard to give up old habits and replace them with new behavior.

It's hard to change if our social environment stays the same and doesn't see the need for change. It's hard to change if we don't really believe we *can* change.

Which brings us to the core question in this book: *how do you do it? How do you achieve new behavior – and therefore successful change?*

### Three steps of a ladder

I've designed a simple and practical model to illustrate this. Imagine a ladder with three steps...

1) The top step is *the goal* you're chasing. In other words: the outcome, the result, the development you want to see.

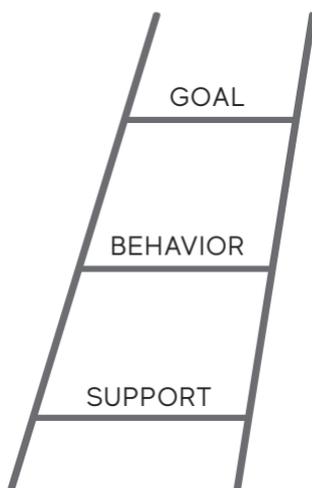
An example: At work, I want less stress and more fun.

2) The middle step is *the behavior* you need to get you closer to that goal. Behavior formulated in clear and concrete terms. In other words: behavior you can *demonstrate* and *imitate*.

An example: I start each working day by switching off my email and telephone. Then I work for half an hour on what I think is most important.

3) The bottom step is *the support* you need to help you to execute your intended behavior. Techniques that will help you start your new behavior and keep it going. This isn't just a 'nice to have', but an absolute necessity: without this step you simply can't be successful.

So many changes fail because the support isn't properly in place. An example: As a reminder, I write my intention on a sticky note on my desk, where I can see it all the time. Additionally, on a daily basis, I use my smartphone to keep track of whether I succeeded in keeping to my intention. And every Friday afternoon, I call a good friend and we discuss the previous week together, as well as the change I'm working on.



*A simple and practical model. The Ladder*

Thousands of books have been written about change. Often packed with the most impressive diagrams, models and action plans. For the past few years, I've been using the image of a ladder with three steps in my work. It's simple, effective – and it works! I've called this simple model of change *The Ladder*. Think of *The Ladder* as a general action plan where you can fill in the blanks yourself. If you get this right, changing will become a lot easier.

### Three tips

But what do I mean when I say, ‘filling in the blanks right’? Well, that’s what the rest of this book will explain – with a wide range of practical insights and tips on the psychology of change.

And I’ll give away a few of the very best tips here and now! These are three of my favorite insights based on years of study and research in the field of change – one for each step of The Ladder. So, here we go: a *goal tip*, a *behavior tip* and a *support tip*.

#### **A goal tip**

Formulate your *goal* in terms of personal development and not in terms of the performance you want to achieve.

In other words, don’t say to yourself: “At the end of this year I want an 80% score for my annual evaluation,” but say: “Throughout the coming year I want to develop into a more inspiring leader.”

Learning goals are often more effective than performance goals. This applies particularly to change. They help you, for example, to see the mistakes you make on your journey not as ‘failing’ but as ‘learning’, not as a step back but as a step forward.

An example: a soccer player who *has* to perform and who shoots the ball over the goal will respond by panicking. A sportsman who is given the freedom to learn will remain calm and will think: next time I’ll need to shoot a little bit lower.

#### **A behavior tip**

Always start with *behavior* that you’re absolutely sure you will be able to execute. Try starting with ‘tiny little baby steps’.

Let’s say your goal is to experience less stress in the mornings. You might then decide to get up an hour earlier than normal. But you can also decide to take small steps and get up a minute earlier every day for two months until you reach those sixty minutes a day.

These kinds of small, simple behavioral intentions will at least help you get started. And they’ll increase the chance that you’ll keep on going long enough for your new behavior to become a habit.

***A support tip***

One of the most powerful *support techniques* is ‘self-monitoring of behavior’. This means tracking at least once a day whether you’re actually executing on your intention – after you’ve formulated a concrete and feasible behavioral intention of course! Ask yourself the question: did I do today what I intended to do? Note your answer down on paper or in your smartphone.

Working with The Ladder is simple. First you *plan* your change from top to bottom. Specify your *goal*, translate that into *behavior* and organize *support*.

And second: *Try out* your plan ‘from bottom to top’ to see if it works. Organize your *support* techniques, try out your new *behavior*, and work towards your *goal*. On the way, see how it goes and adapt if necessary.

That’s the story of The Ladder in a nutshell.

**The content of this book**

What can you expect from this book? Step by step, you will learn what makes change so important and yet so difficult. That’s what I’ll cover in chapters 2 and 3. And you’ll find out how you can use The Ladder in practice – in your work and outside. That’s what I’ll cover in chapters 4 through 8.

At the back of this book you’ll find a handbook: a list of 82 practical tips from behavioral science. This list is uber handy if you want to get working on The Ladder – either for yourself or within an organization – and you’re looking for inspiration for working with the three steps – goal, behavior, support. In other words: filling in your action plan the right way.

The aim of this book is to help you – either at work or at home, or

both – tackle changes that you want to make happen and that you consider important – in a structured and effective way.

### **Start with yourself...**

Many examples in the book apply to individuals who want to work on change in their work. But you can also use the ideas from this book for teams, families, organizations, communities or other groups of people.

Trying things out for yourself gives you an honest view of change

But my advice to you – based on my own personal experience – is to first try out the ideas outlined in this book on yourself. Why?

Because this will help you avoid thinking up goals for others that aren't really feasible. Or behavior that simply isn't feasible. Or support that will never work in practice. Trying something out for yourself first helps you develop an honest, realistic view of change. This way, you will become better and better at helping others in this area.

### **Summary**

Imagine change as a ladder with three steps:

- The top step is the *goal* you want to achieve
- The middle step is the concrete *behavior* that's required to reach that goal.
- And the bottom step is the *support* you need to execute the behavior.

### **Question**

*What change are you considering?*

*Reading this book with a concrete goal in mind will make it a much more pleasurable and effective experience.*

*It will be even more effective if you start keeping your own 'change logbook'. This is where you write down the ideas and insights that appeal to you and start applying important tips to the change you're considering.*



# 2

## Why change is so important

- Change: why would you?
- A 'small' change we've been working on for 170 years
- The weakest link is... our own behavior

For a behavioral scientist, it's fun to be the final speaker rounding off a conference or congress. I'll often ask the audience these two questions:

- 1) Who heard something today which made them think: I just *have* to do something with this?
- 2) And who of you thinks they will actually go and do it?

Almost everyone raises their hand for question 1. For question 2, at least half the people lower it again.

A lot of people know from experience that you can be inspired by a wonderful story, but that the chances of actually *doing* something with it are quite small. I hate to say it, but the step from inspiration to frustration is often a very small one.

But don't think I'm telling you this because I'm so much better than you in changing my behavior. I'm not a natural talent in this either, even though I've studied it in depth!

Let me share a personal example with you: I first read about a phenomenon called autobiographical listening in 1993.

Autobiographical listening is the annoying tendency some people have of taking over a conversation based on their own perspective. You know the type – people who interrupt you with sentences like: “Oh, that happened to me the other day too...” Or “Let me tell you what works for me.”

The reason I know I read this in 1993 was because I recently held the book containing insights on autobiographical listening in my very own hands. On the first page of the book, my younger self had written the date. And he had also double underlined the part about autobiographical listening and added the comment: “Work on this!” The really annoying thing about it was that – 25 years later – I couldn’t remember anything about it! I realized that I hadn’t acted on it and that I was still often – way too often – listening to other people based on my own perspective.

So what was I to do? In the end, I just decided to start all over again. Less autobiographical, and more empathetic listening. Attempt number two.

So change isn’t that easy at all. But if you think implementing a change with a 25-year delay is something extraordinary, wait till you read about an even more unlikely tale later on in this book. But first: why in the world would you want to change if changing is so problematic?

### **Change: why would you?**

We’ve all heard the expression: not every change is an improvement, but for every improvement a change is necessary.

Dissatisfaction is often the trigger for wanting to change. A couple of examples:

- You feel as though you’re overwhelmed. At work, you’re constantly putting out fires and don’t ever reach the end of your to do-list.
- As a manager, you want to inspire your employees. Help them really enjoy their work. But you feel you’re not really succeeding.
- You try to keep an eye on your health, but every month the scales tell you you’ve gained a bit more weight .
- You’re an entrepreneur and every week it’s costing you more and more energy finding new clients.

- At home, family arguments are becoming more frequent every month.

Sad but true: In many cases, the desire to change has its roots in dissatisfaction with the current situation.

In the commercial sector, change is typically driven by the fear of being left behind. Compared with the competition and technological developments.

The desire to change is often rooted in dissatisfaction

According to business school professor *Rita McGrath*, stability in the commercial sector is definitively a thing of the past.

In the past, companies developed long-term strategies to build a lasting advantage. They had unique, well-known branded products that nobody could copy. This type of company still exists... Think of Ikea, Unilever, General Electric. But there aren't that many of them, and comparatively few people work there.

According to McGrath, we have to realize that today, everything is temporary. We have to change continuously. Every competitive advantage, of an organization or an individual professional, is temporary in nature. She calls them *transient advantages*.

The logical consequence of McGrath's analysis is that the most important processes within organizations will be innovation, development, learning and change.

As I said before, the desire to change often arises from a situation of dissatisfaction or fear.

And in many cases, we often feel a sense of urgency – it's now or never. For example, you're given the opportunity to advance in your work. But that opportunity is temporary and likely to disappear if you don't act quickly. And there are plenty more candidates standing in line behind you.

A strong desire to change is essential to get things started, but it's not enough. Often, we know we have to change, and we want to change, but we still don't. The following story is a prime example of this.

### **Washing hands: more than 170 years of struggle**

This story starts in Vienna in 1846. The Hungarian doctor *Ignaz Semmelweis* has just started a new job on the 'first maternity ward' of the *Algemeines Krankenhaus* in Vienna.

There are two maternity wards in this hospital, and Semmelweis soon discovers that the difference between his ward and the other is dramatic.

On his ward, one in ten young mothers on average die of 'childbed fever'. In some months, this figure even rises to 30 percent. On the second ward, the mortality rate is much lower, four percent on average.

Semmelweis decides to take a methodical approach. Trying various possible solutions, he keeps track of the statistics.

In 1847 he experiments with handwashing for the first time. He suspects that the students who perform autopsies in the mortuary and then go on to lend a hand at his maternity ward are carriers of 'poisonous particles' (via their hands). The students only work on Semmelweis' ward, and not on the other maternity ward.

So Semmelweis instructs all personnel to wash their hands in a chlorine solution before visiting his ward. The results are astounding. Within a few weeks the mortality rate falls dramatically from more than 18 percent to less than two percent. A few months later it's down to an unbelievable 0.2 percent.

Although the figures prove that Semmelweis was right, and he tries all kinds of ways to spread the knowledge widely, handwashing only gets adopted by a few doctors. What is even more surprising: the

notion that doctors and nurses are responsible for spreading the diseases in the hospital is laughed off by many colleagues.

Just 15 years later, the French chemist and biologist Louis Pasteur discovers that many diseases are caused by micro-organisms that aren't visible to the naked eye. Step by step, doctors acknowledge that it's a good idea to wash your hands before and after patient contact, and guidelines are drawn up.

Today, 170 years on, every doctor and nurse is aware of how and when she or he has to wash their hands. It's common knowledge. But the key question is: do the members of staff in an average hospital in the Netherlands manage to comply with the norms on hand hygiene that the medical profession itself has defined?

I'm pretty sure you can guess the answer to that one: No!

In 2012, doctoral student *Vicki Erasmus*, coincidentally attached to the university of the same name, the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, published a study of hand hygiene in 24 Dutch hospitals. The results were clear. On average, the norms regarding handwashing were followed in just 20 percent of all cases.

OK, I can hear you thinking: that's just one study. But another doctoral student, *Anita Huis* of Radboud University, Nijmegen, published a study in 2013 on the same subject. She investigated 67 wards in three Dutch hospitals and came up with the same figures: in only 20 percent of the cases did the members of staff stick to the protocol. So in 80 percent of cases they do not!

The consequences are alarming. In the Netherlands alone, some 100,000 patients a year get an infection in hospital. And in a large number of these cases, the low standard of hand hygiene is to blame. So what are the results of all these infections? High costs, a lot of suffering, and an estimated thousand unnecessary deaths a year.

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That's more than the annual number of people killed in road traffic in the Netherlands!

In the Netherlands alone, some 100,000 patients a year get an infection in a hospital

One of the most striking facts is that even though doctors, nurses and other experts in the health sector are aware of this, and consider it scandalous, there is no sign of improvement. (Should you

think that this is a typically Dutch problem, then I'm afraid I must disappoint you. The problem is one of worldwide proportions.)

So let's recap. If you work in a hospital or other care institute, you can (and of course you will want to) avoid infections and prevent unnecessary suffering. One way you can do this is by sticking to the rules relating to handwashing.

And even then, it doesn't work. Why not? Because all kinds of obstacles work against our attempts to change. I'll cover these obstacles – many of which we often have little control over – in chapter 3.

The big problem with change – knowing but not doing – plays a role in multiple areas in our lives. You want to lose weight, but you can't resist the temptation to open up a bag of crisps in the evening. You want to listen to the stories your children are dying to tell but when you get home from work the first thing you do is check the new messages on your smartphone. Change is not that easy. And think of it: most of the changes we try to implement are actually much more complex and much less important than washing your hands in a hospital!

So what I ask myself is: how high, on average, is our rate of success when it comes to change? If you were to measure it really accurately? Higher or lower than 20 percent?

**Behavior is the weak link**

Whether we're concerned with fairly simple intentions in our private lives or with large-scale plans in organizations, everyone knows that changing behavior is difficult. Behavior change is the number one bottleneck, the weak link when it comes to change.

Change expert *John Kotter* wrote about change in organizations: "The central issue is never strategy, structure, culture, or systems. The core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people."

Yes, maybe the major goal within an organization is changing the culture. But it always starts with changes in behavior. Typically changes by management first, and then by the staff. At least that's the idea. Often, it just doesn't work.

Weird don't you think? Because we *are* capable of change. And what's more: a lot of changes happen automatically.

If our direct environment changes, we typically adapt our thinking and behavior automatically. For example, if you move from a small village to a metropolis, as I did, you adapt all kinds of things in the way you talk, how you ride a bike, and habits, like saying hello to everyone you meet when you walk down the street. You don't have to think about these changes. They just happen almost without you realizing it.

And the changes are even more extreme when you first start living together with your partner or when you get married, or when you have children. As a result of the changes in your physical and social environments, you develop multiple new behavior patterns. I know, sometimes it's a difficult process, but ultimately everyone adapts to the new situation.

By contrast, changing your behavior while your environment remains the same is something else entirely. Behavior researchers observe that in such a situation, we are only capable of realizing just

one relevant change in behavior at a time. And that can easily take several months to a year.

Let's take a simple example: when a manager wants to learn to listen to his employees better (show interest, build on what's being said, summarize, understand what the other person means), it will take months before the employees even notice the change in his behavior. That is, if the manager succeeds in changing his behavior in the first place!

A fine example of this is a study by *Janka Stoker*. She gained her doctorate following a study in changes in leadership at two Dutch organizations: *Postbank* and *Hoogovens*.

The managers at these companies were convinced that they were interacting with their employees in an increasingly innovative, coaching way. They thought they were asking their employees more questions, expressing genuine attention, allowing them a lot of room for their own initiative. But the study showed that in practice, the staff did not notice any changes at all. The managers were apparently engaged with the change in their minds, but were unable to adequately translate this into behavior that made any impression on their employees.

Experienced change managers acknowledge that it's often easier to implement a large-scale change in the structure or name of a company (*Postbank* is now called *ING Bank*; *Hoogovens* was first taken over by *Corus* and then by *Tata Steel*), than to change people's day-to-day behavior.

### **What is this thing we call behavior?**

If behavior is the weak link in most change processes, then it makes sense to learn more about how it works. You'll find a lot of knowledge and expertise in this book when it comes to behavior and behavior change. And to get you in the mood, here are a few teasers.

First and foremost: *What is behavior?* The most common definition is: all actions and reactions of a person in relation to their

environment. This can also include 'non-visible' behavior, such as thinking and feeling. But I'll focus on behavior that's tangible and observable. Because this is the kind of behavior we need if we want to achieve concrete changes. In society, in our work, in our lives. And that's what this book is all about.

Behavior is  
everything you  
can demonstrate  
and imitate

You can also put it very simply: in this book, behavior is considered to be everything you can *demonstrate* and *imitate*. Such a rule of thumb is handy because we often refer to something as behavior but what we're really talking about is the results of behavior, or intentions. Take a look at this list. In your opinion, what is behavior and what isn't?

1. Taking a pill twice a day.
2. Feeling happy about yourself.
3. Intending to go to the gym.
4. Starting every conversation with a question.

You probably got it right... Numbers 1 and 4 are behavior. Number 2 is a result of behavior, or a goal you're aiming for. And number 3 is the intention to do something.

### **And what are these things we call habits?**

Behavior occurs in all shapes and sizes. There's behavior you only perform once. For example, marrying the love of your life. And there's behavior you perform regularly but not constantly. Like cleaning up your administration. And then there's behavior you display frequently, mostly without really thinking about it. This is what we call habitual behavior.

*Habitual behavior* plays a key role in many change processes. Most of us are aware of the fact that if we display different behavior

just once, this will usually not be enough to achieve permanent improvements. To really change, we have to aim at creating new behavior that we can *maintain*. And that's where new habits come into play.

What is a *habit*? A habit is an action or a series of actions that you repeat in specific situations without thinking consciously about it – and which therefore occurs almost effortlessly. A preferred path becomes hardwired into your brain as a result of repetition and the reward it receives.

A simple example of a habit: in our culture, we've all learned that if someone moves their hand in your direction, you take it in your own hand, shake it up and down a couple of times, and then let go. And we even get some pleasure from doing it! Behavioral scientists say: an outstretched hand acts as a 'trigger' or an 'antecedent' for us, automatically resulting in a short sequence of actions being initiated, namely the shaking of hands. The assistance the other person gives in this process of handshaking, and the good feeling accompanying it, form the 'consequence', the 'reinforcer', or in plain language: the reward.

Here's another example: imagine that you're really way too busy at work at the moment. It's driving you mad and you decide to quit your job and look for something completely different. Quitting your job will not usually be the hard part. And you might possibly manage to find a new one if you try your best. But making sure you don't fall into the same trap of taking on too much work in your new job is a different dimension altogether.

You will need to learn not to sign up for every fun assignment that comes your way. Your old habitual behavior. You will have to learn to set clear priorities: learn how to distinguish between what is important and what is urgent; and to say no to colleagues more

often. In other words, you will need to learn a new set of habits that will help you remain mentally healthy in an environment where there's always something that needs to be done (and certainly for someone like you!).

So if you're honest with yourself, you can just as easily skip the phase of looking for a new job and start developing new habits straight away – in your current job!

### **A preference for pleasure**

Habits – both good and bad – are often things you acquire without thinking about them. Habits are formed because specific behavior 'works' in a certain situation. You get to the office, switch your computer on (like so many of your colleagues), open up your inbox and start answering your mails. And all the while, you have the feeling that you're busy. By opening the mails, your curiosity is satisfied, which gives you a good feeling. And typing an answer and clicking on 'Send' gives you the feeling that you've achieved something. Yes! Another good feeling.

Interesting fact: the reward system in our brain responds especially to convenience, gain, pleasure and other 'success experiences'. In fact, neurologists believe that the reward system is triggered even by the very expectation of success. The only problem is that this system is not interested in the longer term. Not at all. The only thing that counts for the system is that an experience is pleasurable *now*. Now. Here. For me.

If an action produces pleasure or a success experience, we will do it more often – typically without being conscious of it. And this in turn will make it even easier to do.

The opposite is also true: if an action produces discomfort or pain, we will avoid it in the future and it will never become something we do without consciously thinking about it first.

Convenience – ease – is an extremely important factor in behavior

change. And it's a topic I'll be discussing throughout this book.

But first let's go on to chapter 3 to see how our behavior works and why it's so difficult to change behavior.

**Summary**

- Why do we want to change? Often as a result of dissatisfaction with the current situation.
- The weak link for virtually every change we want to implement is our own behavior.
- Demonstrating new behavior once is typically not enough: it's all about developing new habits.

**Question**

*Can you name one good habit that you would like to develop?*

# 3

## Why changing behavior is so difficult

- What 85 studies in behavior change teach us
- Why do we do what we do? In other words: the three 'drivers' of human behavior
- The biggest obstacles for change

It's not a very nice thing to say, but we in western society are literally killing ourselves through our own behavior. Bad habits are the main cause of our most serious health problems, such as cancer, heart disease, strokes and diabetes. This is acknowledged by researchers all over the world.

As many as 40 percent of people in our society are estimated to die prematurely through irresponsible behavior such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, not getting enough exercise, eating too much, eating unhealthy food, and not relaxing enough.

So it's not surprising that a lot of research has been done in the last ten years within the healthcare sector into behavior change. Wouldn't it be great if we could gain more control and understanding about this?

All that research into behavior change was given a huge impulse in 2008. That was the year British health psychologists *Charles Abraham* and *Susan Michie* introduced their first taxonomy (a systematic overview) of dozens of behavior change techniques.

I have to admit, this sounds rather administrative and boring, but take my word for it: this is one big party for researchers! Based on this overview, we can now finally compare all kinds of studies in the field of behavior.

Why is this so important? In the past, researchers often had their own specific names for the change techniques in their experiments. But using this taxonomy, we can now say: Hey, actually, this German study uses change technique number 12 combined with technique number 35. Just like that Canadian study a year later. And in that Australian study, they only used technique 35. Let's see what the differences in results were...

So now we can finally combine knowledge from different studies. And that means we see clearer patterns in what works for behavior change and what doesn't.

### **What Thomas Webb found**

Using the taxonomy of Abraham and Michie, researcher Thomas Webb and his colleagues compared 85 studies into behavioral interventions performed via internet. Examples include a website that gives people customized advice on exercise and tips on how to get started. A total of 43,000 people took part in all the studies.

What did the researchers find out?

1. The most important conclusion: if you do your 'scientific homework' you'll get better results. In other words: change interventions that are based on a scientific theory are consistently more effective than interventions that are based only on gut feeling, intuition or personal experiences. So we will have to find out more about the behavioral sciences before we try to change all kinds of things. Luckily that's exactly what we're going to do...
2. Another important conclusion: interventions that use many techniques for behavior change are more effective than interventions that use only one or a few techniques.  
If you want to see a change in people's behavior, you can for example modify something in their immediate environment to

make it easier for them to display new behavior. You could also demonstrate the desired behavior. Rewarding desired behavior also works. But if you combine a number of these techniques, you'll achieve even better results. The simple rule is: more techniques, more effect. So, not: *less is more*. But: *more is more*.

So why do so many changes in companies and within governments fail? One key reason is: we don't stick to the simple rules that Webb and his colleagues found in their research.

We don't do our homework and we often use far too few techniques to make behavior change possible.

We see a problem, quickly come up with an approach and get to work without thinking things through. And the intervention in work environments usually comes down to a 'tell-and-sell' approach: managers who tell their personnel what they have to do – as enthusiastically as possible. The result is often disappointing.

So, what then? Time to do some homework.

In the next chapter, I'll introduce The Ladder and a range of tips for change. But first let's see how our behavior works. Why do we do what we do?

### **How behavior works...**

Almost every one of us has their own theory about why people do what they do. You can see that, for example, in discussions on the internet. You'll see all kinds of ideas about how we can fight crime, what you need to do to stop smoking, or how you can get your national soccer team to play better.

Almost every one of us has their own theory about why people do what they do

By far the most popular theory about how behavior works is 'motivation'. This comes down to: people do things because they

‘want to’. Start smoking, quit smoking, driving too fast, keeping to the rules, being an entrepreneur, working for a pay-check: you do it because you want to.

And to be perfectly honest: motivation is important (and also quite complex). But there are more factors that determine behavior and that you need to know about if you want to change something.

### **The three ‘drivers’ of human behavior**

According to behavioral scientists, there are three important drivers for behavior:

- 1) capacity;
- 2) motivation;
- 3) environment.

In simple language:

- 1) you have *to be able* to perform a specific action;
- 2) you have *to want to do it*;
- 3) your environment has to offer you the *opportunity* to do it.

Another important factor: if you want to change something, you mustn’t focus on just one of these three factors, you have to consider the whole picture.

I’ll come back to this later. First a bit more information on each driver.

#### **Capacity**

People need a) *physical capacities* and b) *psychological capacities* to be able to perform certain behavior.

Here’s an example: to become a good basketball player, it helps if you’re tall and you train a lot. To be able to resolve problems related to physics, it’s useful to have a high IQ and a knowledge of formulas.

#### **Motivation**

To perform specific behavior, the motivation, the inner drive to do

something, must be bigger than the motivation to not to perform this or any other behavior.

A simple example: it's evening and you'd like a cup of coffee. But you also want to go to sleep. You think: maybe a cup of green tea would be the smart thing to do, because the caffeine in my coffee will keep me awake. And you go for the tea option.

I'm deliberately using words such as: like, want to and going for. Because that's how we generally talk about motivation.

It could be a case of a) *controlled motivation*, which is about our convictions, making plans, and consciously weighing up various options. It could also be a case of b) *automatic motivation*, where our desires, needs and recurring thought patterns drive our behavior – often unconsciously.

### ***Environment***

The a) *physical environment* and b) *social environment* stimulate or limit our possibilities to display specific behavior.

An example: in a closed office or workspace you can often get more work done. But if your colleagues are constantly walking in and out, you won't get the job done.

### **The relationship between capacity, motivation and environment**

The three drivers don't just influence our behavior, they also influence each other. And our behavior in turn influences the drivers. The arrows in the diagram show this, but you will also recognize this in practice.

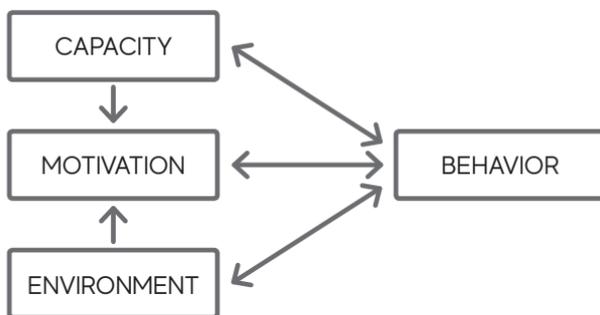
**Capacity** influences our behavior directly. But capacity also influences our motivation.

A simple example: when we know that we're not good at running, this will influence our motivation to take part in a running race.

But behavior also influences our capacity. By running more often, we become better at it.

**Motivation** influences behavior. But our behavior also influences our motivation. If we try something and we succeed, this success experience will increase our motivation for this behavior. If we run a little more often, and we notice that we're getting fitter and can run faster, we'll maybe want to take part in a race.

**Environment** influences motivation. If the weather's nice and you see people out running, you might want to run more. But your environment also has a direct influence on behavior. Having the time and the right sports clothes and shoes makes it easier to go for a run now and then. Our behavior then changes the environment. If we go running, that can stimulate other people to do that too.



*The three drivers of behavior: capacity, motivation and environment*

### **What is the bottleneck?**

If you want to understand or change the behavior of an individual or a group, it's important to not just look at *either* the capacity, *or* the motivation *or* the environment. You have to look at capacity *and* motivation *and* environment.

Then go and look for the *bottleneck*. What is holding people back? Is that their capacities, is it their motivation, is it their environment?

An example: in a nursing home, the personnel want to give more individual attention to the residents but the time pressure they're experiencing makes that impossible.

As their manager, you can try to motivate the care givers but this will only lead to frustration. You just can't ignore it: you will have to do something about the 'environmental factor' of time pressure. Or accept that this change won't happen.

Look for the bottleneck. What is holding people back?

Now, as we're in the nursing home anyway... Let's get back to the topic of washing hands. What role might capacity, motivation and environment play here?

Capacity and motivation are not the bottleneck in this case. The problem isn't the fact that doctors and nurses don't know when and how to wash their hands, or that they just don't want to do it.

Research has shown that the problem with hand hygiene is primarily the environment: a work environment where all kinds of tasks are screaming for attention so that people often forget to wash their hands and sometimes deliberately don't do it because they see it as an obstacle preventing them from doing more important work.

Research also shows that if only a few people stick to the rules – the social environment factor – the desired behavior automatically decreases even more.

### **Three obstacles to change**

OK. So where do we stand now? We know that change has a lot to do with new behavior. Especially learning new habitual behavior. And we all know that this isn't easy. But what are the obstacles that are holding us back? Why is it so hard?

In this section, I'll specify the three biggest obstacles to changing our behavior.

### ■ Obstacle 1: automatic behavior often wins

A first major obstacle to behavior change is our brain's preference for habits, for automatic behavior that already works.

I explained earlier the role that *capacity* plays in forming our behavior. This obstacle is closely linked to this. Sometimes, for a change to happen, you need to develop a new skill. And sometimes this happens quickly, and other times very slowly.

When you're confronted with a new problem and someone explains how you can solve it, it can happen quickly. You install a new app on your phone and via a short film, you learn how to use it. Simple. But when you have developed a whole range of habitual behaviors over the years to deal with all the regular situations you come across, and you want to replace existing habits with new ones, it becomes more difficult.

Just imagine, you're a team leader and you've been managing your team in the same way for a long time. You give clear instructions and if nobody makes a mistake, nobody has any problems with you. For years, your team hasn't been really dissatisfied, but they're not really pleased with you either.

So when you eventually decide that you'd rather be an inspiring leader rather than an authoritarian one, that won't be so simple. You will need to replace your habits – the tasks you perform on a daily basis without thinking – with new and better behavior. For example, you will have to learn to ask your team members more open questions.

In such situations, our brain responds with two kinds of processes that conflict with each other. On the one hand, we make conscious plans. But on the other hand, our brain is especially focused on repeating behavior that 'works' and that doesn't cost too much energy.

Psychologists say: our brain is looking for ‘cognitive ease’, it’s focused on achieving what’s necessary with a minimum of effort.

By rewarding new behavior and repeating it often, you can form new habits. But research shows that even developing very simple, new habits that you’ve chosen yourself and which are intended to replace existing patterns – such as eating some fruit at lunchtime or performing a few physical exercises before breakfast – costs us more than two months on average. And more complex behavior takes even longer.

The brain is especially focused on repeating behavior that ‘works’ and that doesn’t cost too much energy

Replacing old behavior patterns with new ones (we often say: ‘unlearning’ old behavior and learning new behavior) is certainly possible. But we underestimate how difficult it is and how much time it takes. Because our brain prefers habits that work. And this is an obstacle to developing new capacities.

### ■ Obstacle 2: our dislike of loss

A second key obstacle to behavior change is the strong tendency we have of avoiding pain, discomfort and loss.

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the influence of *motivation* on our behavior. This obstacle is closely linked to this.

Our brain responds much more strongly to discomfort, pain and loss than to comfort, pleasure and gain. We recognize painful events more quickly and we remember them for longer.

Interesting fact: behavioral economists have proven that losing a sum of money has between two and two and a half times more impact on us than *winning* that exact same amount. And we’re just talking about money here and not about personal possessions

or social assets such as status and friendship. In these cases, the difference between the experience of gain and loss is even bigger. Behavioral researchers say: people don't mind change as such, but they hate it if change leads to a loss.

Some psychologists believe that avoiding loss is the primary task for the brain. And in particular, avoiding loss for ourselves, here and now, weighs most heavily. Our brain always focuses automatically more on 'me - here - now' than on 'others - there - later'. Because this is essential to be able to survive.

The well-known psychologist *Roy Baumeister* says it like this: "*Bad is stronger than good...*

Survival requires urgent attention to possible bad outcomes, but it is less urgent with regard to good ones... In our view, this difference may be one of the most basic and far-reaching psychological principles that exist."

Avoiding loss is  
the primary task of  
our brain

In short: motivation is the inner drive we experience to achieve a goal or to display specific behavior. In many cases, our obsession with avoiding pain and loss limits our motivation to learn, and to experiment, as well as many other forms of change. "Making mistakes is OK", is something you often hear at a management conference for example. But deep in our brain there is a primeval, scared voice that warns: "Making mistakes is just wrong. Don't do it!"

### ■ Obstacle 3: our relationship with the environment

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the enormous influence of the *environment* on our behavior.

The third key obstacle to behavior change is closely linked to this. If the physical and social environments don't change, neither will we.

Throughout the day, we respond by automatically – and often unconsciously – to all kinds of physical and social stimuli that we observe in our immediate environment.

A few examples: if people around us nod their heads in a friendly manner, we continue talking for longer; if we are given a bigger meal or a larger plate, we will eat more.

As I've said, this usually happens unconsciously. But even when you consciously want something, this is often due to the situation you're in. It's only when the fuel tank of your car is almost empty that you think about looking for a gas station. In fact: when the fuel gauge starts blinking red, it's very hard not to want to fill up.

We adapt to our environment automatically and often unconsciously. For example, anyone who switches from one workspace to another is barely aware of the number of new routines he develops.

It's not surprising then that one of the surest ways of changing behavior is to change the environment.

But this will often lead to all kinds of objections. For example, if you want to change the layout of the office to encourage a healthy lifestyle, by introducing standing desks for instance, you will first have to discuss this with your colleagues.

According to Nobel prize winner and behavioral economist *Richard Thaler*, we will need to accept that to achieve changes in our behavior, we will almost always have to change something in our environment. "This is one of the basics in life. Behavior is – to a large extent – determined by the environment."

The trick is to design our work and living environments in such a way that it becomes as easy as possible to display the desired behavior.

One of the basics in life: behavior is largely driven by the environment

**Is change possible at all?**

Listing all the restrictions to change is enough to make you depressed.

We may have all sorts of wonderful plans, but to sum it up very briefly, we're actually fully automatic loss avoiders that are especially driven by the environment. So you might well think: stop thinking and talking about behavior change because it doesn't make any difference at all.

But you can also take a slightly more optimistic view: a realistic view about what's possible and what's not possible may well be the starting point for successful change.

Thaler, the behavioral economist I mentioned earlier, believes that more control of your behavior starts with acknowledging your limitations. He says: "Let's be realistic, we are not perfect, we are not rational, we have little willpower. We often need help to do the right thing."

That's what the next chapter is about, where I'll introduce The Ladder.

**Summary**

- Science helps: it has been proven that possessing more knowledge about change leads to more success.
- Our behavior is driven by three factors: capacity, motivation and environment.
- Three obstacles to change: our automatisms; our tendency to avoid pain; our physical and social environments.

**Question**

*What interesting behavior did you notice recently? For example, at work, in the news, or about yourself..*

*What roles do you think capacity, motivation and environment played?*



# 4

## The Ladder: 3 steps towards change

- Change is complex, so keep your approach simple
- The three steps of The Ladder: goal, behavior, support
- How does it work? Plan 'downwards' and try 'upwards'.

*John Kotter* – I mentioned him earlier – is a professor at the Harvard Business School and perhaps the most well-known expert in change management in the world. A few years ago, I spoke to him as part of my preparation for a seminar. It was our third meeting and I was a little nervous. Because Kotter is the type of person who gets easily irritated. And before you know it, you're the cause of his irritation.

Despite that, we had a nice conversation. We discovered that we had an irritation in common: the over-complex models that a lot of consultants use for change in organizations.

Kotter went wild: "It's crazy. Nineteen steps, with all kinds of substeps and attention points. It's so complex that you need the consultant himself to help you make sense of it all. Which is likely the intention. If someone puts this kind of thing in a PowerPoint presentation, it's usually just to prove that they're smarter than the rest. *The smartest guy in the room.*"

Kotter's experience is that every change process is difficult *and* works differently. And that's exactly why it makes no sense whatsoever to develop a model or theory in which you try to include all that complexity. "If it's about something that's so complicated and diverse

as change, a set of simple rules and principles is more useful. Keep it simple and use your own common sense to continually apply these simple principles to the situations you encounter.”

Sometimes, someone with more knowledge and experience than you will say out loud what you secretly already knew for a while. That’s always an exceptionally fine feeling. Thank you, Mr. Kotter.

### **A simple but smart model**

The Ladder is my attempt to create such a simple model for change. A set of simple principles combined with common sense that you can apply to various situations.

The Ladder is primarily a tool to help you formulate a clear, easily understood plan of change in three steps.

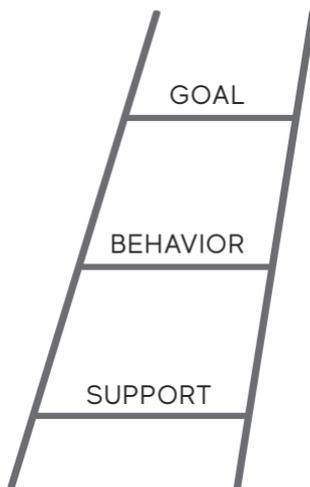
There is a great need for this. In many organizations, the plans for change or development are too thick, too vague and too complex. And a lot of people who want to change something in their private lives don’t have a plan at all. A vague intention at the most.

I also use The Ladder to structure knowledge about change based on a behavioral sciences approach in a logical and practical way.

The model presents key insights and tips from research in a sequence that fits in with our natural way of making plans: first set a goal and then figure out how you’re going to achieve it.

The Ladder has three steps (officially they’re called rungs, but hardly anyone uses that term) that stand for three steps that occur in every change:

- 1) defining your *goal*;
- 2) describing the desired *behavior*;
- 3) organizing *support*.



*The Ladder: a tool to help you formulate a plan for change in three steps*

The links between the three are fairly obvious. If you want to achieve a new *goal*, or new results, then you have to change your *behavior*. If you want to change your behavior, this doesn't happen automatically, you have to organize some *support*.

### **The three steps**

First, I'll explain these three steps in detail, and then in the next three chapters I'll share my favorite tips from behavioral science research with you.

#### **■ The first step: goal**

The top step of The Ladder is 'the goal'. Every change has a final goal: a new situation or result you're aiming for.

The goal is what makes all the effort to change ultimately worth it. In fact: almost every change starts with the desire to achieve a specific goal. Dreaming of something different, something new, something better.

- In companies, this will be, for example: more innovation, better leadership, more profit, a bigger relevance for society.
- In the personal situation, we can think of: feeling fitter, a better relationship, less money worries, learning a new language.
- And in society as a whole, this will be about things like: safer traffic, less CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, affordable healthcare, better education.

Most people who start a change process are aware of the result they want to achieve. Maybe the final goal could be phrased a bit more precisely, but an image of a desired result will always be present.

### ***How many change goals? One at a time!***

In a company, and in your daily work too, it's fine to try to achieve more than one goal at a time. As long as the goals can be achieved through *routine behavior*. So go ahead and formulate commercial goals for your solo enterprise *and* goals in the field of health *and* goals for the course you want to study on the side, as long as you can achieve these goals through behavior you're *already* performing. Fine.

But... If you want to change something, if you want to do something that requires *new* behavior, stick to just one goal. That's difficult enough as it is.

And if you do have more than one goal, then be sure to prioritize them. In most cases, you'll find that you will ultimately only have time for priority number one.

## ■ The second step: behavior

The middle, central step of The Ladder is 'behavior'. To achieve new, different and better results, you will often need new, different and better behavior.

Sometimes it's the behavior of a single individual. Sometimes it's the behavior of several people. Sometimes it's about a one-off action. But usually it will require permanent new behavior. New habits to achieve new, lasting results.

Think about it for a moment: even though a change starts with a few big initial steps – starting up your own company for example – you will still have to work on developing new habits if you want to become – and stay – a successful entrepreneur.

Behavioral intentions are often formulated in terms that are too vague and too free and easy

Learning to change your habits is essential – but it's also very often the weakest link when it comes to change.

### *Too vague and 'free and easy'*

A lot of people who start on a change don't have a clear idea of the behavior that's needed to reach their goal. And often, behavioral intentions are formulated in terms that are too vague and too free and easy. A few common, vague behavioral intentions:

- We want more attention for the human side of work.
- I want to spend less time on my smartphone.
- We are going to eat less, and exercise more.

Formulating behavior in clearly defined terms isn't easy and isn't always socially acceptable. People often find it easier to formulate and accept advice with no obligations attached than sharply defined

instructions. In general, you can keep people happy with vaguely expressed ideas.

Often, for example in a company, it's useful to get people to formulate their own behavioral intentions. This will generally stimulate the motivation they feel when thinking about this intent.

But in my experience, many people dislike it when I persist in asking searching questions: "But what are you going to do in concrete terms to achieve that?" Until the point comes when they have finally formulated their intention as concretely as possible.

When you want to change, there will always be a moment when you have to express things concretely: who is going to do what to achieve the change? And how often, for how long, how intensively? Where, when and with whom?

For a change to be successful, it's essential that the desired behavior is absolutely clear for the people who have to execute it.

My own rule of thumb is as simple as it is strict: you have to be able to *demonstrate* and *imitate* the desirable behavior.

### ***Key behavior***

I'll repeat it again: behavior change is difficult, and we can typically only succeed in working on one behavior change at a time – at the most.

So choose behavior that has as much impact as possible on the chosen goal, and which – if at all possible – has no negative side-effects, only positive ones. We call this *key behavior*.

An example: as a manager, you want to make use of the creativity of all your personnel. The key behavior that you choose to achieve this might be to demonstrate your curiosity by asking open questions in one-on-one discussions in meetings. As well as leading to more creativity, this results in better mutual relationships, and colleagues may even start imitating this behavior.

Behavioral scientists will sometimes make an exception to the rule

of working on just one behavior change at a time. Sometimes, a new supportive action is required for the key behavior you have formulated.

Imagine that from now on, you as a manager decided you want to hold periodic personal conversations with all your personnel; then you'll have to delegate other tasks on your calendar. Sounds pretty logical doesn't it?

### ■ The third step: support

The lowest rung on The Ladder is called 'support'. This includes all the techniques you can implement to support the new, desired behavior. Without support, behavior change is doomed to fail.

Anyone with a bit of life experience knows that an attractive goal and good intentions will often only have a brief and slight effect on our behavior.

Which is why, when it comes to change that we consider to be really important, we have to go a step further and also need to encourage the behavior to actually happen. You need support.

Measures, techniques, stimuli, interventions that help us to actually demonstrate the desired behavior.

Support is often the weak link when it comes to changes

Support techniques occur in all shapes and sizes. Here are just a few examples (more will follow later):

- A big whiteboard on the office wall showing the steps we have already taken towards achieving our goal, on a day-to-day basis.
- A course where we can practice conducting better conversations with our children and dealing with difficult situations in raising them.
- Traffic signs, roads becoming narrow, and speed bumps that all help you slow down when driving through a residential area – without you having to think too much about it.

Of the three steps of The Ladder, *support* is the one that people pay the least attention to in practice. Support is often the weak link when it comes to changes, certainly in personal situations. And that's only logical. Because if the goal hasn't been formulated clearly, and the desired behavior has only been described in vague terms, it's impossible to implement well-targeted support.

On top of that, people often have no idea which techniques they can use to support the desired behavior.

In fact, many professional influencers, such as managers and administrators, often don't get any further than climbing onto their soapbox and saying what has to happen. And they do that in the vaguest terms imaginable. Almost every week, I hear managers saying things like: "Let's all make an extra effort in the next few months to put our customers first."

Sometimes followed by well-intentioned encouragement such as: "Really help each other as colleagues to achieve this."

And that's it.

### ***One goal, one behavior, three support techniques.***

The study I mentioned in chapter 3 proved it already, but I've experienced it personally in experiments in the field in all kinds of companies: using just one support technique isn't enough.

A simple rule of thumb I use is: one - one - three. If you want to change something, set one goal, choose one behavior and use *at least* three different support techniques. In the handbook at the end of this book you will find a whole series of support techniques.

### **A few 'hidden' benefits**

The Ladder is a simple model. It's so easy, a child can understand it and remember it. And that's precisely my intention. Because nobody will ever use a model they don't understand and can't remember.

In practice, I've discovered that working with The Ladder has a few 'hidden' benefits...

The simple structure helps you understand how you can realize a change step by step.

I'll say it again: first specify the *goal* you want in the end. Then describe the *behavior* that's required for that goal. And finally, specify the support you will need for this behavior. If these three elements don't fit together logically, you'll usually notice it at once.

The model also helps you to organize all three steps clearly and concretely before you start working on a change. This is definitely not a luxury, especially if you're working with other people.

Additionally, the Ladder model helps you think about your change carefully and step by step by 'planning downwards' and 'trying upwards'.

What do I mean by this? Well, first you make your plan, from top to bottom: you specify your goal, translate it into concrete behavior and establish the support you need.

And then you try it out to see if it works, from bottom to top: you arrange your support, initiate the behavior and check to see if this is bringing you closer to your goal.

This last part is by definition a learning process. And while you're doing it, you check whether the required behavior is actually happening. Is the goal already in view? If not, perhaps I'll have to adapt my support approach. Or do I need to choose a slightly different behavior?

Another hidden benefit... In this book, I write mostly about change. But if you have the task of managing – in a company, in a volunteer organization, at a school, or even in a family – you will regularly encounter the steps and insights I've described.

In fact, leadership is all about the steps that form the core of this book: setting a new goal, formulating the desired behavior – preferably together with your colleagues – and organizing and

providing the support to really get started. So you can also apply The Ladder to leadership.

And the same applies for self-management or personal leadership. You set a learning goal, you determine what you have to do to achieve it, and you take the measures required to get you there.

### Coming up soon... tips!

In the next three chapters, I'll give you three tips for each of the steps of The Ladder. I've chosen these tips based on my study of behavioral science publications, my own research and my practical

experience in working with managers and professionals from all kinds of organizations.

Leadership also revolves around goal, behavior and support

Along the way, one of the things I've learned is that tips about change

have to be really simple. If something is hard to remember and hard to put into practice, it will get drowned in the chaos of the day.

As well as these three tips for each step – you could say my personal favorites – you will find a list of supplementary tips on behavior change in the handbook at the back of the book. All based on research. All applicable in practice. And again, I've arranged the list according to the principles of The Ladder: goal, behavior, support.

### Summary

- Change requires: a clear *goal*, concrete *behavior* and effective *support* techniques.
- Plan downwards: from goal, to behavior, to support. Try it out from bottom to top: from support, to behavior, to goal.
- Choose one goal, one behavior, and at least three support techniques..

**Question**

*Do you recognize the three steps of The Ladder – goal, behavior, support – in other plans you make?*

*And how could you apply these three steps to the change you are currently considering?*



# 5

## The top step: setting a goal

- The power of Monopoly, Scrabble and 30 Seconds
- Why do people need goals anyway?
- Three tips for formulating effective goals

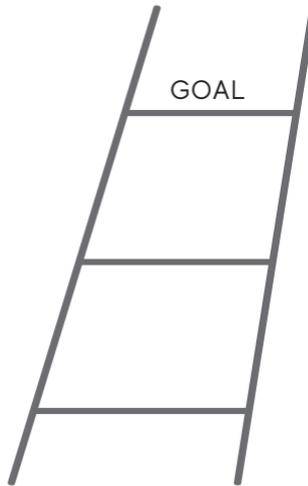
In our family we enjoy playing games. Monopoly, Scrabble, 30 Seconds, you name it. And if we play a game, we play to win. We make a lot of noise and argue constantly. For a few hours, our home is a war zone.

But once the game is over, we put all the stuff back into the cupboard and call a truce. Nobody blames anyone for anything that might have happened during the game (well, hardly ever). And we go back to doing other things.

Why am I telling you this? Because it tells us something about the almost magical power that goals have.

During a game, you focus on a goal that somebody specified at some point by means of a few rules. Like: “Make sure you have the most streets and hotels.” Or: “Score the most points by creating long words.” All your energy and creativity is focused on that goal for the whole game.

Goals are motivation magnets, if you like. They show us the way, they trigger actions, they help us see if we’re making any progress. All reasons to take goals deadly serious. And not just during a games session.



*The Ladder: the top step: the goal*

### **Why is the goal so important?**

People can't live without dreams and goals. We need a reason to get up in the morning.

Management researchers know that goals are essential for our motivation. According to one of the founders of research into goals, *Edwin Locke*, goals have several positive effects:

- Goals show us the way: they focus our attention and effort on tasks that are goal-directed.
- Goals give us energy: ambitious goals lead to more effort than goals that are too easy to reach.
- Goals increase our powers of perseverance: we can stick at tasks for longer if we have a clear, ambitious and realistic goal to aim for.
- Goals stimulate our creativity: if we are faced with a goal, we look for ways to achieve it.

Additionally, organization psychologist *Fred Luthans* showed that working with clear goals leads to more hope, self-confidence, resilience and optimism. And that in turn leads to better performances, less absenteeism and less cynicism in organizations.

Goals are especially important when you want to change something. A goal offers you guidance in times of uncertainty.

Whether you're changing on your own or with a group of people, along the way you will meet all kinds of emotions, opinions, and ideas. By setting a clear goal, you will be better able to assess which of these are relevant.

### **Goals and the drivers of our behavior**

Let's recap. In chapter 3 I wrote about *capacity*, *motivation* and *environment*, the three drivers of behavior.

Determining the goal of a change has a huge impact on these three factors. Goals stimulate the *motivation*. They ensure that we become enthusiastic about taking on some tasks and not others. On the other hand: goals that you believe demand *capacities* that you don't possess, or goals you think are unrealistic in your *environment*, act as demotivators.

I am constantly hearing managers announcing ambitions that immediately lead to employees thinking: we'll never be able to do that. Or: that just won't happen in our company.

This just undermines the whole process. As a leader, you should first find out the capacities that your employees *do* possess and the possibilities the environment *does* offer. Additionally, at the same time as outlining your ambitions, you could explain how you're going to develop the capacities together and how you intend to adapt the environment – for example, machines, rules and the staff numbers – so that the new ambitious goals can be achieved.

### Three tips

To put it bluntly: establishing your goal is often the starting point of a change. It's important, and all kinds of insights and ideas exist about how to formulate goals in an effective way. Here are three of my favorite tips.

#### ■ TIP 1: If possible, don't choose a performance goal but choose a learning goal

Almost every entrepreneur that's successful today had to radically adapt the plan they first started out with. Entrepreneurship is not a question of: making a plan and scoring. It's more a question of: making a plan, trying, making mistakes, trying, making mistakes, learning a lot, and then hopefully scoring.

This is a crucial insight. And not just for novice entrepreneurs. For all forms of change and innovation, it's essential to realize that almost everything revolves around learning. That's why it's important to set goals that take this into account.

### *Different effects*

Behavioral scientists have been researching the difference between performance goals and learning goals for a few decades now.

A few examples of performance goals and learning goals:

- A performance goal can be: we want a market share of 10 percent.
- A learning goal can be: we want to discover at least five ways to increase our market share. Or: in the coming three months we are going to find out what we need to achieve a bigger market share.
- Performance goal: I want my team evaluation to be at least 8 out of 10.
- Learning goal: the coming year, I will try various ways to increase my evaluation score. Or: this year I want to develop in all kinds of ways to become a more inspirational leader.

Learning goals are about developing new capacities. For example: before the end of the month, I want to learn two new ways to win new clients.

Performance goals are about showing what you're capable of. For example: before the end of the month I will win ten new clients for my company.

Performance goals work best if you're already capable of doing something. Learning goals work better when you have to develop a new skill, as is often the case with changes.

For example, at the end of the 1990s, the American business economist *Don Vandewalle* conducted research among salesmen who had to launch a new product. For this typical 'performance population', learning goals proved ultimately to lead to the best results.

Every goal creates  
and organizes its  
own world

Psychologist *Arjan van Dam* also conducted research into learning goals. He says that it's good to ask yourself what you ultimately want to achieve. For example, a successful one-man business or an upward career move. But immediately after that, you have to ask yourself the question: what do I want to learn? What knowledge do I want to obtain to be able to do this and which skills do I want to develop? These points taken together will form your learning goal.

### ***Different worlds***

So how you formulate goals matters a lot. The psychologists *Elaine Elliot* and *Carol Dweck*, two of the founders of the research into goal orientation, state: "Each goal, in a sense, creates and organizes its own world – each evoking different thoughts and emotions and calling forth different behaviors."

If you set a learning goal for yourself rather than a performance goal, you will be able to tackle changes more effectively.

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Below I'll outline the most important differences between performance goals and learning goals, as found in research:

- Performance goals make us want to show what we already know. Or make us want to avoid people discovering what we can't do. Learning goals lead to us developing our capacities.
- People on average spend more time and effort in trying to achieve a learning goal than a performance goal.
- In the case of a learning goal, we don't experience mistakes as a step backwards, but as a step forward in the process.
- With a learning goal, you will value feedback from others more, and you will request feedback more quickly.
- Learning goals are more closely related to daily practice. Often, it's not about succeeding or failing, but about becoming a little better in your work, in maintaining relations, and in other things that make life worth living.
- And – an eyeopener for a lot of people – in many cases, a learning goal leads to better performance than a performance goal! Especially when new and complex tasks are involved.

Of course you can think of all kinds of situations where performance goals work just fine. When you don't have to learn anything new to achieve a result in your company, but can just increase your effort a little, then it's easy to say: I'm going to score 10 percent more this month.

But if you think you won't achieve it just by working a little harder – that the goal is really about learning new things, about innovation and substantial improvements – then working with learning goals will be more effective.

### ■ TIP 2: Formulate a clear 'why' for your goal

Behavioral scientists believe that people are more motivated for goals and tasks when they understand *why* they are working on

them. A clearly defined ‘why’ will make your goal more powerful.

Such a ‘why’ can take different forms.

It’s motivating when your change goal is related to values you consider important. Such as: defending the weak, a better environment, employment for all. In other words: a ‘higher goal’.

Additionally, you may be faced with a present-day problem that needs to be solved immediately. This leads to a feeling of urgency.

An example: you work in a hotel and you notice that the number of unoccupied rooms is increasing. You realize that if nothing is done about it, the hotel will have to close.

### ***A ‘higher goal’***

Studies into satisfaction, commitment, motivation and performance at work show that the mission or goal of an organization is important. People enjoy the feeling that they’re part of something bigger than themselves.

A clear ‘why’ in a company motivates people, as long as they also share the values the company considers to be important. Values that employees often mention in this context are: freedom; honesty; responsibility; not just working for yourself but also for the community as a whole.

A clearly defined ‘why’ will make your goal more powerful

The writer *Aaron Hurst* is the founder of a platform that helps employers and employees make abstract concepts like ‘a higher goal’, ‘meaningfulness’ or ‘the why’ more practical and actionable.

Together with *LinkedIn*, Hurst conducted research in forty countries. 26,000 people indicated what their primary drive was concerning work: money, status or purpose?

Everybody considered purpose to be important. For 37 percent it was even the primary driver at work. In general, this group of people

has more pleasure in their work, is more loyal to their employer and performs better.

A practical point: when you formulate a change goal, and this goal has a logical relation with a 'higher goal', it's important to emphasize this clearly for yourself and others.

For example, making the processes and products of your company more environment-friendly. Or putting your knowledge and expertise to use for the benefit of weaker groups in society. Or striving for better employment conditions for colleagues in developing countries.

During a change process, a lot of people will ask themselves: why are we doing this? A clearly defined why, linked to a 'higher goal' will give you a motivating answer to that question.

On the other hand: when you formulate a change goal and there is no logical link to a 'higher goal', it's no use trying to invent one at all costs. Particularly if you're a manager in a company. Employees will quickly get the feeling that this is not authentic.

### ***A feeling of urgency***

Change experts call this a *burning platform*. The feeling that something has to happen *now*. The term became common after the disaster on the *Piper Alpha* oil platform. The platform off the coast of Scotland caught fire on 6 July 1988 following a gas explosion. In a TV program, one of the survivors, *Andy Mochan*, described how the fire forced him to jump 30 meters in the dark, into the ice-cold sea, without knowing whether there was help on the way. It was a choice between being burned alive or – literally – taking a leap in the dark.

A feeling of urgency is often a prerequisite to start moving. It's only when the pain of not changing is greater than the pain of changing that action results.

A feeling of urgency is also strongest when the people who need to take action experience this personally. It's not enough for the

management of the company to be the only ones with this feeling, for example.

A practical point: when you're thinking of a change, don't just focus on the benefits of the change, but focus attention on the downside of the status quo as well. What will go wrong if you don't change? And if you want to change together with others, sell the problem before selling the solution. Let people experience the problem first and get them to look for possible solutions.

Don't just focus on the benefits of the change, but look at the downside of the status quo as well.

But I have to warn you. If the feeling of urgency is extremely powerful, and we don't see any possibilities to change the situation, we will flee rather than fight. Urgency is like coffee. One cup makes you more alert and you will perform better. Five cups result in so much restlessness that you don't get anything done. Situations where the urgency levels are too high will often result in a state of panic.

### ***You have to feel a why***

Whether it's about a 'higher goal' or a *feeling of urgency*, the best motivational effect occurs when we personally experience the need for a change.

When it comes to a 'higher goal', I've experienced this personally. In the last few years, I've been doing volunteer work for aid organizations. Talking with the managers of these organizations is usually enough to get me motivated to work on such a project. But the impact was much bigger when I was able to personally come into contact with the target groups that were receiving the aid. The first time you visit a refugee camp or a slum, is something you

will never forget. You just feel it: something has got to happen, I have to do my best for these people.

*John Kotter*, who I've mentioned before, says that a feeling of urgency is also about seeing and experiencing things for yourself. He calls this *see - feel - change*. And this has a bigger effect than the approach you often see in companies: *analyze - think - change*. It's not analysis and reflection that results in the desire to change, but personally seeing and feeling real problems that lead to the will to take action. An example: I was at a meeting where clients were talking with each other about complaints they had about products. The meeting was supervised by a moderator. The manufacturers of these products were also in the audience and were only allowed to listen. A lot of them were visibly shocked at the stories they heard. They really felt it was time to change.

■ **TIP 3: If you have more than one goal, make a clearly defined priority list**

Whether it's at work, at school or at home, people flourish when they have clarity. We ask questions such as: what is expected of me at this moment? What is the most important thing to do right now? Which choice is the best in this situation?

To make choices in a complex world, clear goals are needed. The best is one goal at a time. And if there are more goals involved, you need to know: which goal is the most important, and what comes after that? What are the priorities?

This applies in normal work situations, and it applies even more when we want to change something.

***If possible: one goal***

At the start of this century, a popular myth was that women could multitask and men couldn't. But recent brain and behavior research has shown convincingly that neither men nor women are good

at dividing attention across two or more tasks at the same time. Multitasking, say researchers, leads, amongst other things, to less focused and slower working, as well as more mistakes.

What's usually possible is combining habitual behavior – behavior that we can execute unconsciously and automatically – with a chat or something else. Most people can eat a sandwich and walk down the street at the same time without causing a disaster. But conducting a serious telephone conversation in the car and choosing the right exit at a complex road traffic interchange? I've lost count of the number of times I've headed south when I wanted to go north, or vice versa.

By contrast, working on one goal at a time produces huge gains. The researchers *Judith Olson* and *Gary Olson* (yes, they're a couple) experimented in several companies with so-called *war rooms*, office spaces where one team at a time worked on one project at a time. The results? Much higher productivity: twice as high as in a normal office environment. And a much shorter throughput time per project: up to a third of the regular time.

Multitasking leads to slower working and more mistakes

When it comes to change, it's all about working on a new goal and mastering new behavior. That's what we need to focus all our attention on. So choose one goal at a time, if at all possible. If you have to work on more than one goal, take each one at a time.

### ***Do as Disney does***

Several years ago, I conducted research into a big telecom company. To become familiar with the day-to-day work, I spent a number of workdays accompanying different engineers during their work. I came into contact with private individuals and companies, I observed, helped where I could, and talked with my hosts extensively on the road in the van.

I also asked the engineers what their most important goals were in their work. Everyone agreed that two goals were the most important: maximum customer satisfaction and maximum invoicing. Both were equally important.

When I asked whether these two goals ever conflicted with each other, they laughed: “Definitely, all the time!”

In practice, I observed that the engineers took their own decisions, and ‘customer satisfaction’ was often used as an argument to invoice lower amounts. It goes without saying that a lot of clients were very happy with this and thanked the engineers warmly.

But there are alternatives. Everyone who starts working at a Disney park gets an intensive two-day training course in which the following order of priorities is key:

- 1) safety;
- 2) courtesy;
- 3) show;
- 4) efficiency.

The actual content isn’t that important, more the clarity. Four powerful words in a clear sequence that help you make your choices in your work. After these two days, everyone understands: if I’m sweeping the streets and I see a child climbing onto a trashcan, I have to stop work immediately and focus on the safety of that child.

It’s a simple lesson: do as Disney does. If you want to change something and you have to work on several goals, make a short numbered list with clear, distinctive priorities. Priorities that help you make clear choices in your behavior.

Those were my tips on setting goals. In the next chapter, we climb a step down The Ladder, to the tips on selecting and describing behavior.

**Summary**

- If possible, don't choose a performance goal but choose a learning goal.
- Formulate a clear 'why' for your goal. Why is the goal important, why do you want to work on it now?
- If you have more than one goal, make a clearly defined priority list.

**Question**

*What learning goal can you think of for the change you are considering?*



# 6

## The middle step: defining behavior

- “Amazing how many people never think about this”
- How do you create good behavioral intentions? Three tips!
- Uber important: choose behavior that you enjoy

*Icek Ajzen* – a giant in the world of change psychology – is a wise, calm, friendly and modest man. But when I interviewed him a couple of years ago about his profession, he was very outspoken. For example, Ajzen believes that a lot of people who make decisions in commerce and for the government don’t have the knowledge or the critical capacity to think clearly about change. And this is the main reason that a high percentage of interventions fail.

According to Ajzen, things often go wrong with one of the most crucial points: “If you want to change something, you first have to define the behavior you want to see.

That’s the most important step in the process, and it’s astonishing how many people never think about this.”

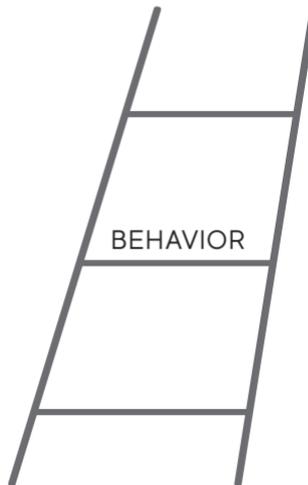
And he had to learn this himself too.

He told me how, years ago, for a study he was conducting, he had to recruit alcoholics for a treatment program.

Ajzen: “We gave this talk that basically said that if they continued to drink, all kinds of terrible things would happen to them. Their mental health would deteriorate, their relationships would deteriorate, and so on. But we got a boomerang effect. Fewer people signed up than without the message.”

Ajzen and his team thought about what they were doing wrong and found that they were focusing on the wrong behavior: “The message

was about quitting drinking. But the behavior that we actually wanted to see, was signing up for the treatment program. Two different things. So we developed a new message. One that said: if you don't sign up for the treatment program, all kinds of terrible things will happen to you. And then the number of participants increased."



*The Ladder: the middle step, the behavior*

### **Why is the behavior so important?**

Whether you're a policymaker who is fighting obesity, or a manager striving for more satisfaction among your employees... For the majority of goals, behavior change is necessary. Of others. Of ourselves.

Behavior change is the core. Without behavior change, 'strategy' and 'policy' will remain merely words on paper.

It's very hard to overestimate the importance of the behavior factor in change. It's the tomato in the tomato soup; *Angus Young's* guitar in AC/DC; the Flux Capacitor in *Doc Brown's* DeLorean.

Without attention for behavior and behavior change, every book about management, personal leadership or social change is useless.

If behavior change is the core, the trick is to select key behavior, as I mentioned earlier. Behavior that is realistic, that brings us closer to our goal and preferably also produces a few positive side-effects. An example: if you want to feel more physically fit, going running will provide several benefits. You don't need any specific skills, you can do it wherever you are, and you'll become fitter fast. On top of that, a lot of people seem to feel mentally healthier if they do it on a regular basis. And while you're running, you can even listen to inspiring podcasts.

Once you've found your key behavior, you'll need to define it very precisely. My personal mantra: it's not good until you can demonstrate it and imitate it.

### **Behavioral intentions and the drivers of our behavior**

As you no doubt recall: *capacity*, *motivation* and *environment* are the drivers of our behavior. Choosing the desired behavior strongly depends on – you've guessed it – these three factors.

Concrete behavioral intentions stimulate our *motivation*. Just like goals, they focus our attention, energy and creativity on a specific task.

Of course it's logical that we feel more motivated about one behavior than another – as a result of our experiences and expectations.

Another important factor: a behavioral intention that doesn't match your *capacities* or that's not feasible in your *environment* is a demotivating factor.

When you formulate a behavioral intention, it's essential to take into

account capacity, motivation and environment. So, as a check, ask yourself the following three simple questions for each behavioral intention:

- Is this really possible, do I have the capacity for it?
- Do I really want this, am I motivated to do it?
- Will it succeed here, in my environment?

Every change revolves around determining the desired behavior. Based on the research available and on my own experiences, here are three tips to help you do this as effectively as possible.

### ■ TIP 1: Choose behavior that you enjoy

If we see someone achieving an important goal, we often think: wow, what determination, what willpower, and what perseverance! These are wonderful character traits we would all like to have.

The instant pleasure experience from what we are doing is crucial

But research shows us a different picture: the true reason that people persist in specific behavior is often due to the enjoyment the behavior gives them.

Enjoyment works. The instant pleasure experience from what we are doing is crucial for achieving our goals. *Ayelet Fishbach* and *Kaitlin Woolley* are two dedicated researchers in the field of motivation. They conducted research into, amongst other things, people who concerned themselves with healthy food, exercise and studying.

All the participants in their research said that they considered the long-term goal of their activity to be the most important. But when the researchers looked at what people actually did, it turned out that only the short-term pleasure counted.

The people who ultimately persevered with healthy living and who

spent a lot of time on their studies were not the people who attached most importance to the long-term goal, but the people who simply enjoyed the activity itself.

Fun has more positive effects, as shown by research by *Barbara Fredrickson*. When you experience negative emotions, for example in your daily work, you will less easily see opportunities and you become more cautious. Positive emotions have the opposite effect. You see more opportunities and you're prepared to experiment more.

This is how we grow. We broaden our behavior repertoire, get to know more people, and we might even become more successful in our work.

Fun is essential. And there are two ways you can apply this idea to your advantage:

1. Choose behavior that you currently enjoy doing.
2. Choose behavior that you can turn into something enjoyable.

### ***Looking for enjoyable behavior***

If you start looking for behavior that's enjoyable, you will probably come up with what psychologists today call 'strengths'.

Strengths are activities 1) that you're good at and 2) that give you energy.

It's easy to find out what your strengths are. For example, you can track how you score on these two criteria for a week. You could also ask your friends or colleagues about the occasions they notice that you're in your element.

Within an organization, one way of identifying what the 'strengths' are – what the employees are good at and what they get energy from – is *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*. This approach was developed by business researcher *David Cooperrider* and is ideally suited for change in organizations. *AI* works by actively looking

for positive ‘deviations’. The question you ask when looking at an organization is: what works well here? Where and when are expectations more than met? The trick is to identify and reinforce the behavior that lies at the core of these successes – of both managers and employees.

While doing research, I discovered that making use of strengths and effective behavior in companies works particularly well when you allow employees to make their own individual choices. In this case, it was a sales team where some members were very good at enthusiastically convincing customers, and other members were good at listening patiently and advising. It seems obvious that groups that are so different will not so easily be able to copy each other’s behavior, or even want to.

The question is: what does work well here?

So, as a manager, don’t focus on a ‘one size fits all’ *best practice*, but let each employee formulate their own personal behavioral intention. Feel free to give all kinds of tips and examples of behavior that works well, but leave the choice to the person who has to execute it.

### ***Making behavior fun***

If you don’t enjoy the behavior that’s required to reach your goal, you can try to make it enjoyable.

The best way to do this is to link the behavior to instant rewards. Fun music while you’re exercising. Working with fine colleagues. Constantly reminding yourself of that all-important goal. And regularly monitoring how far you’ve come to meeting your goal.

An interesting alternative: some organizations make use of *gamification*. They apply techniques from computer games to work. A good example of this is the online game *Foldit*. American molecular biologists used this a few years ago to analyze

the structure of a complex protein related to AIDS. They put the game on the internet and encouraged people to play it and to think along with them. The participants could earn points and exchange ideas in groups, just like in many popular online games.

The result was incredible: within ten days, 46,000 fanatical gamers solved a problem that researchers had been working on for 15 years!

■ **TIP 2: Formulate the desired behavior as concretely and clearly as possible**

Icek Ajzen was very clear about this: if we want to change something, we have to clearly describe the behavior that we need to reach our goal. According to him, this is the most important step in every change process.

So the question is: what are you going to do in concrete terms to achieve your goal? What does that look like in reality? Can you demonstrate it? Can someone imitate it?

In the behavioral science literature, this step is often called *action planning*. You describe: who precisely has to do what to implement this change? And how often exactly? For how long, how frequently? Where, when and with whom?

In the lectures and seminars I give on this topic, almost everyone finds this the hardest part of a change plan. This is partly because your plan becomes more and more binding the more concretely you describe the new, desired behavior. You push yourself into a corner.

Another reason everyone finds this part so hard is that many behavioral intentions often sound rather 'simple' and even trivial. Which is quite logical when you think about it. This step is all about translating more or less grand goals into more solid, concrete and sometimes even everyday actions.

So you translate a goal that sounds as powerful as ‘no more waste’ as: “For decisions that will cost more than EUR 20,000, I will first consult colleagues from at least two other departments. Not by telephone or email but face to face.”

And ‘a healthy balance’ becomes: “I will clear my desk every day at 17.00, shut down my computer after making an action list for the following morning, and spend the evening with my loved ones.”

### ***The difference between winning and losing***

The world of sport is full of extreme examples proving that you won’t make any progress without translating your goals into concrete behavior. In sport, the difference between winning and losing is often made by formulating the right, concrete behavior. A few years ago, top Dutch athlete *Dafne Schippers* wanted to become a better 100 meter runner. Video analyses of her races showed that she was lifting her leg a little too much at the start of her race. This meant that she touched the ground a fraction later than the other sprinters. Which led to her being slightly slower in getting

up to top speed than the rest. Over a distance of 100 meters, you can lose the race through your first step. So this became a crucial element of Schippers’ training program.

Translating goals into behavior is difficult, but the gains are enormous

Translating goals into behavior is difficult but the gains are enormous. Research by, amongst others, *John Norcross* shows that the chances of realizing a goal are more than ten times bigger when we have translated it into concrete behavior.

### ***Defining behavior together***

Many of the examples I mention are about changes that you as an individual can implement. But if you want to change something in an organization, or in a neighborhood, mutual influencing in all kinds of forms often plays a role. There is a network of mutually

linked behavior.

In the case of such a change, it's wise for all parties involved to identify and analyze together how the behaviors of different groups or individuals interact.

Let's take another look at the handwashing example from chapter 2. In a hospital, you will find different kinds of groups at work: managers, doctors, nurses, maintenance staff. And they all play a role in stimulating the washing of hands. Managers have to create an environment where washing hands is made easy. Doctors and nurses have to pull up their sleeves and wash their hands. And maintenance staff have to make sure, for example, that the soap dispensers are constantly filled.

In such a situation, when you want to achieve a lasting improvement, several people need to start performing different behaviors. A few options...

- Every week, managers can observe how people wash their hands (or not) together with an employee 'in the field'. They particularly note whether the work environment makes it easy enough to follow the handwashing protocol. They observe, among other things, the work pressure, and the availability and accessibility of the soap dispensers.
- Doctors and nurses can agree on the following: whenever we see a colleague not washing their hands (usually without thinking), we will immediately draw their attention to it. Team leaders can set a good example here by always drawing colleagues' attention to it when they fail to wash their hands.
- Maintenance staff can guarantee that when an empty dispenser is reported, they will refill it within five minutes.

### ***Implementation intentions***

A special method of formulating your behavior – and one that's also very effective – is formulating a so-called *implementation*

*intention*. This term was introduced by researcher *Peter Gollwitzer*. He discovered that the chances of actually performing a behavioral intention increase sharply when we describe beforehand how and in which situation we intend to implement that behavior.

A 'normal' behavioral intention might be: from now on, every day I will start a conversation with a colleague I don't know yet.

The implementation intention version would be: *If* I go to eat in the canteen, *then* I will sit next to someone I don't know and start up a conversation.

Gollwitzer's study shows that the second formulation increases the chance that you will actually perform the desired behavior by two to three times. Not a bad outcome.

Implementation intentions are also often called 'if-then' statements, or 'if-then' intentions.

By formulating such an if-then statement, you're doing something really smart. You're linking concrete behavior to a visible element of the environment.

You don't have to remind yourself about the intention, the situation or the environment will do that for you (there's that 'the environment as driver of behavior' again). You walk into the canteen and immediately think: OK, start up a conversation.

Linking an 'if-then' intention to an existing habit works well too. If you want to exercise more, you can for example use the following intention: when I go to the bathroom, I will choose the one on the top floor and take the stairs.

Research shows: implementation intentions help to break down old patterns, make it easier to perform new intentions, and they help us persist with behavior change.

### **Reminder: go for good habits**

To finish, I want to really emphasize one specific point. If at all

possible, formulate behavior that you can always continue doing rather than for just a brief period. Good habits always beat one-off initiatives.

Habits are like rivers. They carry on flowing and eventually transform the whole landscape. Habits form human lives, organizations, societies. Effective new habits are the secret of the most successful, lasting changes. Go for good habits.

Habits form human lives, organizations, societies

### ■ TIP 3: Think 'simple': make the first steps as easy as possible

Good teachers know how important success experiences are for pupils. Which is why they'll almost always start with an assignment that their pupils will easily be able to complete successfully. Small steps to ensure that pupils carry on are better than steps that are too big and that result in pupils losing interest.

The lesson: make the first steps of the journey towards a change as simple as possible. If necessary, formulate ridiculously small baby steps. Because the important thing is to make a start.

Everyone who intends to perform specific behavior, or gets a request from someone else to display specific behavior, automatically assesses their response to the question: would I be able to do that? Psychologists call this 'self-efficacy' or 'self-perceived competence'. When it comes to a behavioral intention, it's essential that you think: that's no problem. I can do that.

The trick to achieving this is not to thump your fists on your chest in front of the mirror while saying: Yes you can! But by simply choosing something that you know from experience: I can do that. It's important that the first step is so simple that you think: oh that's easy.

An example: instead of thinking up yet another all-or-nothing intention – like: I'm going to start running, at least 10 kilometers

every week – you just say to yourself: every Saturday morning I will put on my running clothes as soon as the alarm goes off. That’s all. Even if you then just crawl back into bed. With your running gear on!

Another example: instead of deciding to get up an hour earlier from now on, set the alarm for just five minutes earlier than normal.

The thinking behind this is: if you’re lying in your bed in your running clothes, you’ll think: I might as well go for a short run. And if the alarm goes off five minutes early for a whole week and you hardly notice the difference from the week before, you’ll think: another five minutes earlier won’t hurt.

Psychologists call this *shaping*. Working towards the behavior you actually want to see, step by step.

If you want to make it even simpler, you can also decide to test it out first with ridiculously tiny baby steps. Try it for a week to see if it works, and if necessary, make your intention smaller or simpler.

Finally, a small warning... You might get the idea that you will never achieve big changes this way. Which is why I want to emphasize again: it’s all about the beginning of a change. The important thing is that you get started. And after that, you can extend the behavior step by step.

These were my tips to help you formulate behavior effectively. Now we’ll go to the bottom step of The Ladder and look at tips connected with support.

### **Summary**

- Choose behavior that you enjoy, this has proven to be effective.
- Formulate the desired behavior as concretely and clearly as possible.

- Think 'simple': make the first steps as easy as possible.

**Question**

*What concrete, simple behavior can you think of for the change you are considering?*



# 7

## The bottom step: organizing support

- “The best idea ever in psychology”
- The three most effective support techniques!
- How do you stop yourself from reverting to your old habits?

When entrepreneur *Michael Bloomberg* became mayor of New York in 2002, one of his first interventions was to set up a so-called *bullpen*. This was a big open space with about fifty identical, modest-sized desks.

From now on, this was where the highest administrators of the city and their assistants were going to sit, all visible and audible for each other. Bloomberg himself sat right in the middle.

This new approach – breaking with a 190-year tradition of impressive offices with closed doors – was borrowed straight from Bloomberg’s own company, where as founder and director he always sat among his employees.

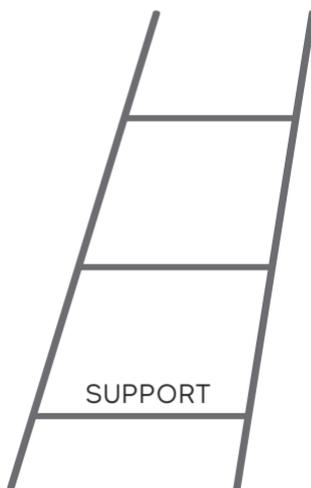
In his experience, re-designing the work environment was a simple way to change people’s behavior. With his bullpen, he achieved – literally – more transparency and more mutual collaboration.

Another important point of attention for Bloomberg was reducing the amount of smoking in the city. The smoking habits of New Yorkers were continually measured, the tax on cigarettes was hugely increased, and smoking in offices and in cafes and restaurants was forbidden. Later, smoking outside, including in parks, was also made illegal. Additionally, he introduced a range of prevention and quitting programs. Bloomberg’s policy was considered worldwide

as one of the most successful interventions in the field of smoking cessation. The percentage of people smoking in the city in the 12 years that he was mayor fell from 22 to 14 percent.

As mayor, Bloomberg worked in an exceptionally structured fashion. He formulated clear goals, knew which behavior was required to achieve those goals, and he looked for *evidence-based* techniques to stimulate that desired behavior.

However, implementing such a structured approach was no guarantee for applause all round. Bloomberg's opponents consistently compared him to an interfering nanny, and he was given the nickname of Nanny Bloomberg.



*The Ladder: the bottom step: the support*

**Why is support so important?**

In the previous chapters, you read that carefully formulating goals and desired behavior increases the chances that people will actually demonstrate that behavior.

This third part of The Ladder – the *support* – is all about making use of support techniques to stimulate the desired behavior.

Implementing such techniques is certainly no luxury. Often, a lot of effort is required to replace existing behavior with new behavior, and for a change to succeed. Writing down an intention for yourself, putting up a few posters, a motivational speech at the start of a change trajectory – these will unfortunately only have a short-term effect.

Although I like referring to scientific research, I also look at it with a critical eye. A lot of the research that is conducted in laboratory situations fails to survive the confrontation with the messy reality.

In a controlled experiment, a subtle stimulus – a specific odor in a room, a small financial reward, an actor that does something unusual – can have a substantial effect. But in a busy work- or family environment, the average intervention gets drowned by all the noise that's already there.

That's why it's so important to make use of several powerful techniques to support change.

Chapter 3 described why change is so difficult. Change is often a fight with your own habits, against the tendency to avoid a loss, and against all kinds of environmental factors that keep the current, undesirable behavior nicely in position.

Support techniques help you break through this. Techniques such as changing your environment, preparing moments of truth, and monitoring your own behavior are your weapons in the battle for change.

Another difficult but important point that we all too often overlook:

a lot of support techniques themselves also demand new behavior. From yourself or from someone else. An example: you can ask a friend to coach you and give you feedback. And that really helps. But... of course you will have to ask that friend first. And your friend will then also have to actually do it. These are two behaviors and therefore two weak links in the change process.

My advice: always look first for support techniques that are not dependent on your own efforts or that of others. So first try to see if – just like Bloomberg – you can implement changes in the physical environment.

### **Support techniques and the drivers of our behavior**

In chapter 3 I described the three drivers of our behavior: *capacity* (*can I do this?*), *motivation* (*do I want to do this?*) and *environment* (*will it work here?*), essential factors that guide our behavior. Using the support techniques described in this chapter, you will be able to influence these factors and change your behavior.

Some support techniques are especially focused on increasing our *capacity*, our physical and psychological possibilities.

An online training for example. Or a young employee who helps older colleagues become familiar with the latest information technology.

Additionally, there are all kinds of techniques to support our *motivation*, to make us want to exhibit the desired behavior more.

In this context, examples include keeping track of our behavior, and expressing our progress visually. But compliments and material rewards will also work.

Finally, there are support techniques that especially stimulate the desired behavior via the *environment*.

For example, interventions in the *physical environment* such as placing reminders on the work floor. This is what the Dutch

supermarket chain Jumbo does for example with its ‘7 certainties’. Everywhere in the shop, employees are reminded of the most important promises that Jumbo makes to its customers. Like short lines at the cash desk.

Additionally, you can work via the *social environment*. By sharing your good intentions with your friends, colleagues or housemates, you mobilize help. They can pull you through, especially at those moments when you’re finding it difficult.

To be honest: it rarely works as neatly in practice as I’m describing it now. Someone who gives a training course on the work floor doesn’t just change the *capacity*, this also has a *motivating* function as well as being a change in your *social environment*. On top of that: you may find someone to be a good trainer, but there might not be a click between you. And that could give you a plus for *capacity* but a minus for *motivation*.

Keep in mind: one support technique will not be enough

In the handbook at the back of this book, I’ve listed a huge number of support tips. To choose the most effective tips, it helps to first estimate where the most important bottleneck is.

- Is capacity the problem, will you need to develop new skills?
- If the motivation is lacking, do you want it enough?
- Or is it especially the environment that offers too little opportunity for the desired behavior?

Also keep in mind: one support technique is not enough. If possible, use three or more techniques. One goal, one behavior and at least three support techniques.

A lot of research has been done into which support techniques are generally effective in changing behavior. Based on this research and on my own experience, here are my three favorite tips.

■ **TIP 1: Make sure the direct environment makes the desired behavior ‘easy’**

In this book, I repeat this point often because we tend to underestimate it: our behavior is largely determined by the direct environment in which we function.

So make sure that the environment in which you want to display the new, desired behavior makes this as easy as possible. Easy is the magic word here.

Behavior economist *Richard Thaler* puts it beautifully: “Nobody believes that he can get up at seven o’clock in the morning without any help. So you set the alarm clock. That’s how you should deal with other intentions as well.”

Thaler and many of his colleagues advocate little pushes from the environment – so-called *nudges* – that will move us in the right direction.

Thaler himself prefers simple, practical solutions. “One of my favorite nudges is the text you see in London painted on the road at almost every pedestrian crossing: *look right*. This text has saved me from being run over by a double-decker bus many times.”

### ***Things and people***

Behavioral scientists make a distinction between things and people. Or to put it even better: they make a distinction between the physical and social environments in which we function.

Let me first give you a couple of examples of making use of the physical environment to help produce a change.

- If you want to eat less candy, make sure that you don’t have any candy or snacks in the home. Or keep them somewhere or in such a way that you really have to make an effort to get to them.
- If you want more calm in your calendar, reserve blocks of time for working undisturbed several weeks in advance.
- If you want people to fill in their tax form truthfully, it helps if

you already fill in the information you have about them in the form you send them.

If it's about making use of the social environment to implement a change, think about this for example...

- If you want to get colleagues to discuss important decisions more often and more quickly, put them as close together as physically possible. Research shows that physical distance, even in this age of emailing and texting, is the most powerful predictor of mutual contact.
- If you want to exercise more often, join a sports club. If you go running or biking in a group for example, you will typically run or bike more often and further than if you did that on your own. Or make a regular appointment with a couple of friends. Preferably friends that are a little bit better than you in a specific sport.
- If you want to grow in your leadership, form a peer-to-peer coaching group with a few managers within the company where you work. Have breakfast together on Mondays and tell each other what you want to improve in your leadership the coming week. Plan a regular phone-in meeting every Thursday morning, while you're on your way to work and tell each other in one minute how the week has been going up till now.

In other words: make sure that the direct environment, the environment that you see and hear during your activities, makes the desired behavior as easy as possible. And it doesn't matter whether you're trying to change your own behavior or someone else's.

### ***Driving forces and restraining forces***

Psychologist and Nobel prize winner *Daniel Kahneman* recently talked about what he considered *the best idea ever* in psychology. It was the concept thought up by *Kurt Lewin*, the well-known researcher, about how you change behavior.

Lewin believed that demonstrating desired behavior or not is largely determined by two kinds of forces. These forces play a role in both the physical and social environments in every situation: driving forces and restraining forces. The behavior that we ultimately demonstrate, according to Lewin, is a state of equilibrium between these two forces.

The best way  
is to reduce the  
restraining forces

Let's say you want to go running three times a week. A driving force in the environment might then be: information about how healthy it is to run regularly. A restraining force

can be: too many other obligations. Kahneman: "Lewin's insight was that if you want to achieve change in behavior, there's a good way to do it and a bad way to do it. The good way to do it is by reducing the restraining forces, not by increasing the driving forces." So if you want to go running, reading more about how healthy running is won't help you, but reducing the number of obligations you have will.

According to Lewin, we often choose the wrong method. We start pushing. We try to increase the driving forces, often by means of communication. In a company where a change is about to be introduced, the CEO will give a presentation explaining what has to happen and why. But Lewin's theory says that this will typically result in an increase in restraining forces. Not very handy.

According to Lewin – and Kahneman – when it comes to a change within a group, a company or society, we shouldn't ask ourselves: how do I get them to do it? But rather: why aren't they doing it already?: Kahneman: "You ask yourself: what can I do that will make it easier for that person to perform the desired behavior?" Often, this will have something to do with removing obstacles in the physical or social environment.

### *Learning from our mistakes?*

I've seen it happen so many times. In a lot of companies, employees are asked to exhibit new and different behavior. Only to discover that there are no opportunities to actually put it into practice. There are just too many restraining forces in the environment that don't get any attention.

An example: the partner of a big law firm asked its employees to 'occasionally' spend some time on 'learning from our mistakes.' That would be good for everyone and for the culture of the firm.

It sounds great, such a request, but there are all kinds of pitfalls involved. First, the desired behavior needs to be described much more clearly. What do they mean by 'occasionally'? And how much time do they need to spend? With whom? And how exactly? How do you do this in such a way that it actually leads to benefits and not simply gossip and intrigue?

Additionally, in this company, employees were only allowed to book hours in the timesheet system for work they did for external or internal customers. Even though you set a relevant goal and formulate clear behavior, such obstacles in the work environment ultimately result in the behavior and the goal not being achieved.

So what is the minimum you have to do in such a situation? Adapt the timesheet system. Add an extra registration option, for example 'learning together', and reward people who frequently put in enough hours in this activity. Make it possible, make it easy.

### ■ TIP 2: Prepare yourself for moments of truth

Every change will produce difficult moments. Moments when your change threatens to fail. Moments when your new behavior is difficult to stick to and you threaten to fall back into your old habits. Temporarily or even permanently. In other words: moments of truth.

The trick is to identify these moments beforehand and to think up a way to carry on nonetheless. In the literature, this is called *barrier identification* and *problem solving*. Research shows that this is an effective way to increase the chances of your change succeeding.

One example of this is how big restaurant and hotel chains train their personnel. At companies like Starbucks and Marriot, employees continually practice dealing with clients that are stressed, disappointed or simply unfriendly.

Offering friendly service when clients are nice isn't that hard. But when a customer behaves terribly, it's not that easy to remain polite and helpful. Before you realize it, you're blaming the other person and the whole issue escalates. At such moments of truth, you have to suppress your 'natural' behavior and keep looking for solutions in a friendly manner.

In stressful situations,  
many managers  
undermine themselves

What I've noticed is: if you ask them, most people can easily point out the difficult, complex, annoying situations that will arise during a change. But in many cases, they don't want to think about them too much. "We'll cross that bridge when

we come to it", is what I often hear.

But the problem is that when the moment of truth is there, and you're not prepared for it, you will almost always fall back into your old habits.

### ***Defensive behavior***

A huge amount of research has been done into how managers behave during change processes. It's striking that most managers very well know what's expected of them, but in stressful situations they still do things with which they undermine both themselves and the change process.

An example: a session has been organized where employees can express their opinion on the change plans. As a manager, you know what you should do: don't talk too much, ask a lot of questions, listen, and – most importantly – take the comments and feelings of the employees seriously. The desired behavior couldn't be clearer.

But what actually happens? After the meeting has been going on for a while, an employee you don't really like stands up to speak. He accuses you of designing the whole change plan just to keep your own job. He says that management is only concerned with trying to please the shareholders. On top of that, you're not at all interested in the opinions of the employees, he says.

You can't restrain yourself any longer and you make a personal comment. And that works very nicely. The employee stops talking and sits down.

It's only after the meeting that you realize you made a big mistake. That the stress of the moment caused you to do exactly what you didn't want to do.

Management researcher *Chris Argyris* calls this kind of behavior *defensive routines*. The pressure of the moment makes us go into defensive mode. Our automatic reaction is to avoid pain and loss for ourselves, here and now. And that's how we undermine the change we want to achieve together in the long term.

So what should you have done? The answer: prior to the meeting, you shouldn't have just specified the desired behavior for yourself. You should also have listed the difficult moments you could expect, and prepared yourself for them.

A tip that can help you prepare for those difficult moments is the one I mentioned in chapter 6: formulate an implementation intention – an 'if-then' plan.

This way, you can map out all kinds of expected moments of truth according to a fixed formula: if X happens, then I'll do Y.

### ***Unforeseen moments of truth***

But changes are all about doing new things. This often also means accepting new, unexpected setbacks. Unforeseen moments of truth. To prepare for these, formulate the following 'if-then' intention: if an unexpected setback occurs, I will take a short break and reflect on my goals.

Don't react at once but count calmly to ten before saying anything. Take a short break and remind yourself: what is the goal of the change I'm working towards?

Taking a short break and reflecting on your goals will often work just as well as creating a much more detailed 'if-then' plan.

### **■ TIP 3: Self-monitoring of behavior**

One of the simplest and most effective techniques when trying to change is self-monitoring of behavior.

This means tracking and noting down your behavior, at least once a day. The form you choose and how often you do it depends partly on the behavior you want to change. So try it out and adapt it when necessary.

Important: this technique does *not* mean that you record the *results* you have achieved, in other words, the output or product. You record the *behavior* you exhibited: the input, your investment.

Why behavior and not results? Because all changes start with behavior and the results come later.

By recording your behavior, you can see if you're on the right track or if you have to modify your behavior, or formulate even smaller steps.

You can practice self-monitoring in different ways. In the form of a list, in a diary or a special change logbook, on your computer in a spreadsheet, or on your smartphone. There are even apps available to help you.

But in all cases, the question's the same: did I do what I intended to do today ?

There's also a special version of self-monitoring. With this version, you don't record your behavior, but every day you give yourself a rating based on the question: did I do my best today to put my intention into practice?

So now you focus on the *efforts* you made today to stick to your intention.

If a change is not going smoothly, perhaps even at the start, this method will still give you the feeling that you're on the right track and keep you motivated to work on the change.

Step by step, you are creating a default path in your brain

### ***The importance of progress***

Self-monitoring has a motivational effect. When, for example, at the end of the day you realize that you forgot to practice your desired behavior, it will make sure you're more alert the next day. And when you can note down that something worked today, you experience a small success. A pleasurable feeling of progress, well done!

Step by step, you're creating a default path in your brain, a new habit that's bringing you closer to the desired goals.

A few years ago I interviewed researcher *Teresa Amabile* of the Harvard Business School. According to her, making progress is by far the strongest motivational factor in our work. To put it more precisely: progress in the direction of a goal we consider important. Amabile calls this *small wins* that keep us going. And as I've said: self-monitoring contributes to experiencing this progress.

Managers have a special responsibility in this context. Every day, they have to maintain two lists. They have to monitor their own

behavior, *and* they have to keep track of whether their employees were able to make some progress.

The most important task for managers in this area is eliminating confusion, obstacles and bottlenecks to exhibiting the desired behavior.

### ***Vary at regular intervals***

I've been keeping a list for years now. This list doesn't contain just the occasional new desired behavior, but also a number of actions that I will never succeed in doing automatically. For example, when it comes to exercise and nutrition.

I update my list every morning. I look back on the previous day and write down what went well and what didn't. And at the same time, I look ahead to the coming day in the same way.

Another important thing: I adapt my list and my method of self-monitoring regularly. Because after a while, a kind of familiarity and indifference starts to creep in. Oh no. Not that list again! That's the sign for me to switch from an app on my phone for example, to a good old-fashioned list on paper. Or vice versa. And to study the behaviors on the list again and update them if necessary.

That's all for now about the tips in the field of support techniques. Maybe now, after reading about The Ladder, you've decided you want to give it a try. Good! I'll be glad to help you on your way. So in the next chapter, I'll describe various examples of how The Ladder works in practice.

### **Summary**

- Make sure that the social and physical environments make it 'easy' to exhibit the desired behavior.
- Prepare thoroughly for the moments of truth, the

moments when it becomes difficult to carry on.

- Self-monitoring of behavior helps you to get going and carry on working on change.

**Question**

*What concrete support techniques could work to help you achieve the change you are considering?*



# 8

## The Ladder in practice

- Working with The Ladder: it's that simple
- Personal change, changes in organizations and change in society
- How 20 seconds can change your life...

At the end of the last century, just after I had started as a solo entrepreneur, I was working on an assignment at the head office of a major bank. I was learning a lot but it was also very confusing. I had learned from a range of entrepreneurs for example that you had to keep your strategy as simple as possible. A single sheet of A4 and a few clearly defined choices, and off you go.

But while I was working at the bank, I had to deal with all kinds of consultants from well-known major agencies. They developed strategies too, but they were a lot more complex and detailed than mine. One of the agencies produced a plan for an internet strategy consisting of more than 300 PowerPoint slides!

And they had also produced an attachment in which a 'few' things were explained in more detail: 1,100 pages! Everyone was impressed. Myself included. One thing though: not a single suggestion on all those pages was ever actually implemented!

Today – a little older and a little wiser – I've gone back to my good old sheets of A4. Why? I mentioned it at the beginning of the book: having a plan that you don't execute is just as worthless as having no plan at all.

Especially if it's about doing new things, change and development,

then my advice is: make a compact plan and get to work. Try, experiment, learn and adapt. That's how you'll discover what really works.

This last chapter consists of a number of practical pieces of advice about getting started on The Ladder. For personal development as well as for changes in organizations and in society.

### **Working with The Ladder**

Working with The Ladder isn't that complicated. That's what I've tried to make clear to you throughout this book.

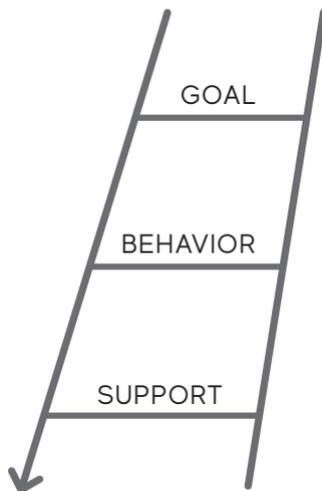
First you *plan* your change 'from top to bottom'. You specify your *goal*, translate that into *behavior* and choose your method of *support*. This book can help you do that. And the handbook at the back of this book acts as a useful checklist. It contains dozens of tips for defining your goal, behavior and support.

And then you just get on with it. You *try* 'from bottom to top' to see if it works. You make sure that your *support* techniques are in place, then you try your new, desired *behavior* and work towards your *goal*. On the way, you see how it goes and adapt if necessary.

What you're actually doing is making smart use of behavioral research. When you plan, you make use of all kinds of *evidence-based* insights and techniques. And when you try things out, you perform your own research: you take a critical look at whether what you have planned actually works.

### **Plans: from top to bottom**

In chapters 5, 6 and 7 we looked in detail at the way you work downwards based on your goal, towards behavior and then support. My most important advice to you is: work in a structured manner. Follow the model, consult your handbook and use your common sense. Another couple of tips.



*The Ladder: plan from top to bottom*

1) On choosing your *goal*: if you have any influence on the goals you're going to work on, don't let yourself be pushed into choosing goals that don't personally appeal to you. Going down The Ladder is then a test of your motivation. If you don't feel like analyzing your behavior or organizing your support, consider this as a useful signal. Apparently, the goal isn't important enough for you.

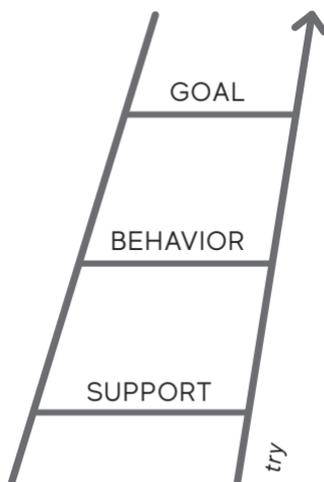
2) On choosing your *behavior*: first analyze various possible behaviors. For example, study your own *best practices* and those of others. And then make your choice. Be sure to always check the cause-effect relations in your plan. Is it plausible that the behavior you have chosen will result in the goal you want?

3) On organizing *support*: be creative. You can approach many issues concerning behavior change systematically. But when it comes to organizing your support, you'll need a lot of creativity. For example,

when you're considering making changes to the environment. Use the handbook in this book, study the examples of others, look at various options and ask yourself critical questions about each idea: what is the feasibility and impact of the desired behavior?

### **Try: from bottom to top**

Once you've made your plan, including your goal, behavior and support, it's time for action. You're going to try out your plan. The handbook contains various instructions for climbing The Ladder from bottom to top. Here are a few important tips you should take into account.



*The Ladder: try from bottom to top*

1) Be constantly aware that change is all about learning. It's not about trying to prove that you've designed the ideal plan, with the attitude of: look at me, I'm doing it right first time. That's completely unimportant. It's about finding an approach that works for you and

that brings you closer to your goal. That's the yardstick.

What you're doing, in fact, is continually going through the 'empirical cycle'. You have an idea about how you're going to approach a change, you make a start and you see if it works. It's an ongoing experiment.

2) To experiment well, you need a few rules. I'll mention a couple here – you'll find more in the handbook.

- Plan evaluation moments beforehand: don't evaluate continually but set dates before you start experimenting. Based on the info you get, decide whether to continue on your chosen path.
- Define criteria prior to the evaluation: which results will you be satisfied with? When is your change good and when isn't it?
- Adapt as you go along using your common sense and use the Ladder model to help you. How? If you're constantly failing to put the desired *behavior* into practice, take a long hard look at your *support*. Is it strong enough? Or is the *behavior* perhaps a little too ambitious? And if you're exhibiting the *behavior*, but you're not getting any closer to your *goal*, ask yourself: did I choose the right *behavior*? Or – also a possibility – is the *goal* perhaps too ambitious?

You won't resolve  
deep-rooted problems  
with a one-hour  
meeting

3) Realize that some problems will always be there. Some problems you're working on will change while you're dealing with them. Other problems are so complex that we simply never get to see the whole picture.

They call them 'wicked problems'. Problems that you can't resolve with a one-hour meeting and a little logical thinking. A wicked problem that a lot of people have trouble dealing with is: how can I live a worthy/fulfilling life?

**Three examples:**

To inspire you, I'll give you three short examples of how to make plans according to the Ladder model. The three examples are:

- 1) how to stop constantly putting out fires;
- 2) inspirational leadership;
- 3) working on your health.

**■ Example 1: how to stop constantly putting out fires**

A lot of people suffer from pressure at work and the feeling that they're constantly putting out fires. How can you, as an individual, use The Ladder to do something about this? A couple of suggestions:

***Goal***

First you have to know what your goal is. Do you want to do the same amount of work, only smarter and faster? Or do you want to reduce the amount of work? Or are you looking for a better balance between work that *must* be done and that costs a lot of energy, and work that you *want* to do and that gives you energy?

- A learning goal could be: in the next three months, I want to try out different ways to achieve a healthier balance between work that must be done and work I enjoy doing.
- Why? Because I want to keep doing enjoyable, useful and wonderful work for years to come. For others and for myself.

***Behavior***

Together with a colleague, you take a critical look at your current situation. All kinds of things could be better. Too often, you say yes to tasks that are not relevant for your goals. And some of the tasks you're required to do don't align with your strengths. You decide to start your learning path by saying no more often to work that doesn't contribute to your own goals.

- Your desired behavior is: if someone asks you to take on a task, you first check if it's in line with your priorities. If it isn't, you

say no in a friendly but firm way.

### **Support**

You browse the handbook at the back of this book, looking for techniques that could work for you. You choose these four options:

- You place a list of your personal work priorities on your desk. As a reminder of your intention, but also because you can then decide quickly whether you're going to say yes or no to a request.
- You draw up an overview with five moments of truth. Moments when you know you will find it hard to keep to your intention. You think up different ways to say no in these cases and you practice them.
- You ask your colleague if he will continue to support you. He promises to ask you every Monday about how your change is going.
- On your telephone, you keep track every day on whether you succeeded in keeping to your intention.

### ■ **Example 2: developing inspirational leadership**

A lot of managers want to make a real, positive contribution. How can you use The Ladder to help you achieve this? A couple of ideas.

### **Goal**

For a while now, you have been feeling the need to develop your skills as manager. A relevant question is: why? Do you want to give your career a boost? Is it about getting more commitment from your team? Or do you want more innovation and creativity?

Do team members dare to say and do things that deviate from the norm?

- A learning goal could be: this year, I want to learn to stimulate the creativity in my team in all kinds of ways.
- Why? As a company, we have to deal with strong competition

and we need the ideas of all our employees if we want to continue performing well.

### ***Behavior***

You decide to take a course in the field of inspirational leadership, with 'psychological safety' as the main theme. The main question here is: do team members dare to say and try things that deviate from the norm without feeling uncomfortable? As a leader, you're in the best position to influence this.

- You take your first step based on the course material: in meetings, you start every agenda item with a question; you make sure that everyone gets an equal amount of speaking time; and you show your appreciation for each contribution.

### ***Support***

You browse the handbook at the back of this book, looking for techniques that match your personality. You choose these four options:

- At the next meeting, you tell your team what you want to do from now on, and why. You ask for their cooperation and assistance in this.
- In the file you use for meetings, you stick a Post-It with the words: 1) start with a question; 2) give everyone equal speaking time; 3) show your appreciation.
- You have known one of the team members for a long time. You ask her if she can give you some feedback after every meeting. What could have gone better, what went well?
- You buy a notepad and make this your change logbook. Every day, you write down, amongst other things, whether you have kept to your behavior intentions.

### **■ Example 3: feeling fitter and healthier**

A lot of people eat too much and exercise too little. And we often

don't take enough time to relax. How can you, as an individual, use The Ladder to improve your lifestyle? A couple of possibilities.

### **Goal**

First you specify what your goal is. Do you want to lose weight? Do you want to run the New York marathon? Or do you want to feel fitter?

- Your learning goal could be: in the coming year I want to develop a healthy lifestyle, step by step. Today I would give my lifestyle a score of 5 out of 10. In a year's time, I want to give myself a 7.
- Why? You choose a motto that you read recently: nobody can choose how old they will get, but you can choose *how* you get old.

### **Behavior**

You visit your family doctor and ask for advice. You also read a few articles in the science supplement of your newspaper. On the internet you study a couple of themes in more detail. You decide to experiment with three things, step by step:

- Desired behavior 1: first you work on healthy sleeping habits. You go to bed every evening at the same time, you switch your telephone off and read a few pages of a relaxing book.
- Desired behavior 2: after two months, you add some exercise. You start by going for a 20-minute walk every evening after your evening meal. At a later stage, you can decide if you want to walk for longer.
- Desired behavior 3: two months later, you experiment with your eating habits. You make use of a simple tip from your doctor: don't decide during dinner how much you're going to eat, but decide an hour beforehand. You monitor this to see if it works. And: you make sure that vegetables are the main ingredient for every evening meal.

### *Support*

You study the handbook at the back of this book and choose four techniques that appeal to you:

- You buy a new pillow to help you sleep better. And you set aside money for a pair of walking shoes.
- You download an app to your phone that reminds you every day of your new 'habits' and that helps you monitor whether you're actually carrying out your intentions every day.
- You make a list of moments when you know it will be difficult to stick to your intention. For every moment of truth, you think up a way that will help you follow through.
- You make an agreement with a good friend to call every Friday evening and talk for ten minutes. To look back on the previous week and anticipate the coming week.

### **The Ladder in various environments**

You can apply the Ladder model at the personal level, but you can also use it for changes in small and large groups. For example, as a manager or a social worker.

A number of tips for using The Ladder for:

- 1) personal leadership;
- 2) change management;
- 3) social change.

### **■ 1. The Ladder and personal leadership**

If you want to apply The Ladder to yourself, to your personal or professional life, you're focusing on personal leadership: the art of planning and guiding your own development.

That's not a hobby or a luxury. And definitely not in today's work environment. The world is changing rapidly. The knowledge and skills you brought with you after graduating are no longer good enough to enable you to do your work successfully and enjoy it

until you retire. You will need to continue to develop. Many of the tips from the previous chapter are related to personal development and change. Here are three areas of attention for using the Ladder model and this book.

Personal leadership  
is not a hobby  
or a luxury

***a) Be critical about your own thought process***

I've mentioned this a few times already: our brain has a clear preference for convenience. You can use this fact to stimulate new behavior. But this tendency for convenience can also be a pitfall when you're making plans for change.

Be aware of the fact that we all – automatically – feel a preference for goals, behaviors and support techniques that we are familiar with and that come easy to us. So ask critical questions of yourself during the process: am I willing to choose an approach that feels less familiar, that costs more energy, but that could be more effective?

***b) Consider various options***

Take your time when choosing your goal, your behavior and your support techniques, but consider various options before making your choice. How do you do that? Discuss your intention with different people. Write your ideas down and read them again in different situations and states of mind. And ask yourself: what if I had to do this in a totally different way? And look specifically for contradiction: ask other people to take a critical look at your plan. Are there any obvious errors of logic in it? Have you overlooked something completely?

***c) Don't wait until you know for sure***

Yes, it's important to make a good plan. But don't overdo it. Spend a few days on it and then get on with it. Remember: The Ladder is a learning model. You make a plan and then you just try it to see if it works. The goal is not: right in one go. The goal is: discover what works.

Some people are insecure and demand all kinds of guarantees beforehand: is this really going to succeed? How do I know for sure this will work? The Ladder offers you the following guarantee: you will learn, you will discover all kinds of things about your goals, about your behavior and about which support techniques work for you. And you will be making progress.

## ■ 2. The Ladder and change management

Changes in an organization can come in all shapes and sizes. Improving customer focus, a new way of managing, a smarter innovation process...

On one occasion you will be working on a plan with a team for a few days. On another occasion you'll have an hour on your own to prepare for a meeting. In both cases, the Ladder model will help you look at change in a structured way.

Three practical tips specifically for using The Ladder in a corporate environment:

### ***a) Keep to this sequence: first who, then what***

If you're going to change together, walk up and down all the steps of The Ladder together.

Equal say in thinking up a change definitely works. As long as you, as management, are transparent about the process. Specify clearly, for example, what you're going to do with the ideas your employees come up with. Or define clear criteria – for example in the area of finance – and promise: all ideas that meet these criteria will be discussed.

The majority of change experts are in agreement about the sequence. First make sure you have the right people round the table, and then start thinking about the content of the change. If it isn't possible to allow everyone to have a say, choose people who are trusted by their colleagues.

Yes, I know: working on a plan on your own goes much faster. But

I guarantee that you will lose that time when you start trying to implement.

***b) Learn together, with everybody***

A few years ago, I was talking to a manager during a workshop. He told me: “I’ve got a problem. We ran pilots in four departments. That cost us time and effort. But we found something that works. And now we want to roll this solution out throughout the rest of the organization. But we notice that things aren’t running smoothly at all.”

Stop rolling out.  
Just do pilots.

My question and advice to him was:

“If those pilots, those experiments, helped you to achieve changes together, why don’t you carry on with them? Stop rolling out. Just do pilots.”

Experimenting together is effective. You learn, you correct, you adapt. People are typically more satisfied with plans that they have helped to form themselves.

***c) Ensure a custom fit***

Far too often, we want to treat people the same even though they’re very different from each other. We demand that they achieve the same *goals* and exhibit the same *behavior*, and we offer them the same *support*.

One of the most important lessons I learned from my own research is that this just isn’t effective. So what is? Here are my three tips:

- Specify personal goals together with the personnel.
- Allow employees to choose their own behavior during a change.

Request behavior:

- ... that they themselves have positive experiences with.
- ... that leads to positive results in the short term not only for the company but also for themselves.
- ... that doesn’t compete with their other important tasks.

- As a manager, think of customized support you could give to each individual in the team.

### ■ 3. The Ladder and social change

Social change can relate to countless topics... Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, getting tax forms filled in correctly, reducing tobacco and alcohol use.

Massive, complex problems. But what they have in common is that they revolve around behavior change.

Working back step by step from a social *goal* to desired *behavior* – often of various target groups – and then to *support* measures, is also a practical approach for policymakers and Board members. Three important tips for applying The Ladder to social issues.

#### *a) First experiment on a small scale*

As a government, you can ‘support’ desired behavior of citizens in different ways. For example, through rules, financial incentives, communication, and the design of public spaces.

Before you let loose new measures on citizens, it helps to first do a few small-scale experiments. Not large-scale experiments with subsidies and commissions, but small ones. Just as a start-up company experiments with different versions of its product with small groups of customers, governments can also test policy and see what works in situations in the field.

Start with some mini-experiments, with a simulation among your employees or try a test with students. This gives you a chance to test your assumptions in the field of human behavior before you start investing serious money.

#### *b) Take into account the power of loss*

During an interview I had with *Daniel Kahneman*, he stated that every policy measure produces winners and losers. And because the motivating power of loss is bigger than that of winning, the losers

will always fight harder to get their way than those who stand to win.

Kahneman stated: “This asymmetry is what makes large-scale change so difficult. And by definition also more expensive and time-consuming than most policymakers expect. Because, one way or another, you have to compensate the losers.”

My conclusion: policymakers and social workers who do not consider the power of ‘loss aversion’ risk ultimately becoming the biggest losers.

### ***c) Be open***

I’ve already mentioned the use of ‘nudges’. Those little pushes that – often without us being aware of it – push us into the desired direction.

Governments make increasing use of *nudging*, for example to get citizens to pay their taxes more quickly or to get students to borrow less.

Not everyone is happy with this approach. Some people experience this form of influencing as manipulative, because they take advantage of subconscious mechanisms.

In their defense, you can say: everyone is constantly being influenced by the way choices are presented. For example, in the supermarket we reach more quickly for products that are presented at eye level. And that’s true. But the government isn’t a supermarket. Which is why, if you’re a policymaker, it’s always better to explain to the public why you’re taking specific measures.

### **Finally**

Every major change starts with a small initial action. For example, trying out a tip from this book on yourself. Or discussing the Ladder model with friends or colleagues.

But for an initial action, you often need some guts. That’s what this last – personal – story is about.

Our youngest daughter Bernice recently moved from primary school

to high school this summer. Exciting times. On the introductory day, dozens of children and just as many adults were standing around, looking rather uneasy.

Suddenly, Bernice walked up to another girl a few meters away from us and started a conversation. I assumed they'd met before somewhere and I was glad for her. At least she knew one person there.

But when I picked Bernice up a few hours later, she told me she'd never met the girl before. "So you just went up to someone you thought might be nice?" I said. "That's quite a brave thing to do." "Yes. I thought: Let's do what they said in that film we saw recently. You remember the one: *We Bought a Zoo*."

Sometimes you just  
need twenty seconds  
of insane courage

Then it came back to me. It was a film with *Matt Damon*, who – you've guessed it – buys a zoo.

In the process, he gives his son some important advice: "*You know,*

*sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.*"

Apparently, this lesson had made a big impression on our daughter. And now it made a big impression on me.

Just take a deep breath and be incredibly courageous for twenty seconds.

That can make the difference between an unpleasant first day at your new school or a really good one.

Or the difference between reading a book and deciding to do something with it.

The difference between a dream and successful change.

**Summary**

- Plan: from goal, to behavior, to support. Don't spend too much time on it, and just get started. Try: from support, to behavior, to goal.
- Be aware that change is all about learning. No-one will get it right in one go.
- The first step is hard, but you will be making the difference between continuing to dream and actually changing.

**Question**

*What would be a small, concrete step to making a start with the change you consider to be important for you? Where will you invest your 20 seconds of courage?*



# A CHECKLIST FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE

This checklist contains 82 tips from the science of behavior change. Tips that will increase the chance of a change succeeding.

The tips have been chosen based on behavior research and structured according to the principles of The Ladder. First you will get tips on specifying your *goal*, then tips on describing *behavior*, followed by tips dealing with *support*. Finally, there are some tips for *planning* and *trying out* a change.

You can apply the tips to individual behavior change, but also on changes in small or larger groups.



## 1. Setting your goal

The top step of The Ladder is the *goal*. Every planned change has a goal: a new situation or result that you consider important to strive for.

Below you will find practical tips from behavioral research to help you with:

- a) preparing to choose a goal;
- b) thinking up goals;
- c) selecting and defining your goal.

### ■ A. Preparing to choose a goal

These tips will help you work on specifying your goal in the most effective way.

Tip 1: If possible, let people **themselves choose** and formulate their goals. A goal that's related to what they consider important and that they think they can achieve.

Tip 2: **Involve others** in the thinking process about your goals. This leads to more diverse insights and therefore often to better decisions.

Tip 3: **Use research**: check to see if there is research available that can inspire you. Research that shows which goals can be effective in your situation.

Tip 4: **Good experiences**: choose goals that have proven to be useful in the past in similar situations. Or choose a way of thinking up and selecting goals – alone or together – that has worked well in the past.

## ■ B. Thinking up goals

These tips will help you think up a goal which will make a change in behavior – and therefore achieving your goal – easier.

Tip 1: Identify **in practice** the goals you're currently trying to achieve at work or in your private life, and see whether this is working. Avoid self-deception, such as: choosing the same goals as the previous year when they turned out not to be motivational ones.

Tip 2: Formulate the goal you're aiming for as much as possible in terms of development and not in terms of performance. In other words: **avoid a performance goal, but choose a learning goal.** You can find more information about this in chapter 5.

Tip 3: Think up a goal that's linked to a **higher goal**. You will be more strongly motivated for a goal when you know **why** the goal is important. You can find out more about this in chapter 5.

Tip 4: Ask yourself what is **urgent** at this moment. Look for a goal that can't wait any longer. You have an opportunity, or a threat, or a problem that's important *now*. You can find out more about this in chapter 5.

Tip 5: Ask yourself: will I regret it if I don't get started on this goal? Thinking beforehand about possible regret in the future – **anticipated regret** – can increase your motivation to achieve a goal.

Tip 6: Look for a good **balance between ambition and feasibility**. A more ambitious goal typically produces a higher degree of motivation as long as you're convinced that this goal is feasible.

### ■ C. Selecting and defining your goal

These tips will help you to choose and describe your goal in such a way that you increase the chances of a successful change.

Tip 1: Make a **list** of possible goals and make your selection based on the following **three criteria**:

- 1) the impact on higher goals;
- 2) the feasibility;
- 3) possible positive side-effects.

So choose a goal that: 1) brings your dreams or ideals closer; 2) can also actually be achieved; and 3) results in positive side-effects during the process.

Tip 2: Choose **one clearly defined goal**. In practice, this is complex enough to achieve.

Tip 3: **Eliminate competing goals**. Are there other, existing goals that will undermine you working on your goal? For example, because they lead in another direction or because they make use of the same limited resources, such as time, energy or money? If possible, eliminate the other goal.

Tip 4: Is there still more than one goal? Draw up a clear **priority list**. Rank your goals in order of importance.

You can find out more about this tip in chapter 5.

Tip 5: Check: is this goal linked to the **three drivers of human behavior**? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I believe that I possess the knowledge and skills to work on this goal? (capacity)
- Do I really want to work on this goal? (motivation)
- Do I also have the opportunity to work on this goal? (environment)

Tip 6: Formulate your goal in **clear, specific and visual terms**. If you succeed, what will the result look like? If the goals are learning goals: what can you do better, different than what you're doing now?

Tip 7: **Write your goal down**. Also write down why it's important for you. Also note other interesting points concerning your goal that arose while you were developing it.

Tip 8: **Share the goal** you have chosen with others, if possible, face to face. This increases the motivation to work on it.

## 2. Defining your behavior

The middle step of The Ladder is *behavior*. To achieve new, better results, you will often need new, better behavior.

Below you will find practical tips from behavioral research to help you with:

- a) preparing to choose the behavior;
- b) thinking up new behavior;
- c) selecting and defining the desired behavior.

### ■ A. Preparing to choose the behavior

These tips will help you find the most effective way to find and describe the behavior that will bring the goal closer.

Tip 1: If you're working on a change in a group, if possible, let people **themselves choose and formulate** their behavior in relation to the goal. This increases the chance that the behavior will match their capacities, motivation and environment.

Tip 2: Don't formulate desired behavior on your own but **involve others** in the process. More diverse insights often lead to better decisions.

Tip 3: **Make use of research**: look for research that can inspire you, that shows you which behavior works; which behavior brings you closer to your goals.

Tip 4: **Good experiences**: look at behavior that has proven useful in the past in similar situations. For yourself or for other people.

## ■ B. Thinking up new behavior

These tips will help you think up new behavior for actually achieving your goal.

Tip 1: Identify **in practice** which behavior is currently being exhibited in relation to the chosen goal. Observe, and if necessary, ask others to observe, to avoid making choices that are based on assumptions rather than facts.

Tip 2: **Identify your strengths.** Strengths are activities you're good at (capacity) and that give you energy (motivation). When the desired behavior is based on strengths, this increases the chance that a change will succeed.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 3: **Formulate** the desired behavior **in positive terms.** Say what you *will* be doing (and not what you *won't* be doing). In other words, no intentions such as: I'm quitting behavior X. But an intention more like: *if* I feel like doing behavior X, *then* I'll do behavior Y instead.

If, for example, you want to spend less time on your smartphone, formulate an attractive alternative.

For example: if I have to wait, I will read a few pages of the book I brought with me.

Tip 4: Try not to choose behavior that you will likely only exhibit once or a few times, but think of a behavior that you will always be able to sustain. Think up **positive new habits** that – if you're working on personal change for example – will ensure that in the long term you will become more of the person you want to be.

Tip 5: If possible, choose **behavior you enjoy doing.** Experiencing positive emotions while carrying out a task ensures that you will start

and stick with it. Experiencing negative emotions while carrying out a task ensures the opposite: procrastination and quitting.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 6: If you want to replace old behavior with new behavior, then find out: **what does the old behavior give me?** What is the immediate reward for the current unwanted behavior? Ask yourself: can you get the same reward with the new, desired behavior? Can you avoid a loss? Try to arrange for extra positive stimuli that will encourage the new behavior.

Tip 7: Make use of so-called '**if-then**' intentions. For example: *If* I have to go one or two floors up, *then* I will always take the stairs. With these kinds of intentions you're linking your behavior to existing habits or to concrete situations. This way, you increase the chance that you will actually exhibit the behavior.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 8: Don't start out too ambitious in formulating your behavioral intentions, but think 'simple'. **Make the first steps as easy as possible.** This will lead to quick success experiences, and will increase the chance that you will stick with it. After that, you can extend the behavior step by step.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 9: If you think that the first step is just a bit too big for yourself or for the people who have to execute the behavior, don't hesitate to formulate an **even smaller first step**. Why? If the desired behavior refuses to get going, your change will end even before it has started.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

### ■ C. Selecting and defining the desired behavior

These tips will help you choose and describe the desired behavior in such a way that you increase the chances of a successful change.

Tip 1: Make a **list** of possible behaviors and choose them based on the following **three criteria**:

- 1) the impact on your goal;
- 2) the feasibility of the behavior;
- 3) possible positive side-effects.

An extra criterion could be: is the behavior easy to observe and measure? Because this makes it much simpler to apply all kinds of support techniques such as monitoring progress.

Tip 2: Choose preferably **one behavior**. Or choose two closely linked behaviors. For example: I want to go running every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 6.30. And that's why I want to go to bed at 11.00 in the evening on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Tip 3: Eliminate **competing goals**. Are there other, existing intentions that are interfering with your plans? Then, if possible, eliminate the other goal.

Tip 4: Check: is the chosen behavior linked to the **three drivers of human behavior**? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I believe I can do this? (capacity)
- Do I really want to do this? (motivation)
- Do I also have the opportunity to do this? (environment)

Tip 5: Describe the desired behavior **very clearly**: who has to do what, where, when and with whom? Formulate the behavior in the form of a clearly defined instruction for the people who have to execute it. Even if you are the person involved. You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 6: If you use numbers in formulating your goal, choose a **low-high-goal** if you can. In other words, don't say: I'm going to do this six times a week, but: I'm going to do this five to seven times a week. This is more motivating for a lot of people.

Tip 7: **Write down the desired behavior.** Also describe explicitly the relation between your behavior and the chosen goal. How is this behavior going to bring you closer to your goal? Also note other important points that arose while you were thinking up the behavior.

Tip 8: **Share the formulated behavior** with other people, if possible, face to face. This will increase the motivation to get to work on it.

### 3. Organizing your support

The bottom step of The Ladder is *support*. This is about techniques that help you put new desired behavior into practice. Without support, behavior change is doomed to fail.

Below you will find practical tips from behavior research to help you with:

- a) preparing to choose the support;
- b) thinking up your support approach;
- c) selecting and defining your support approach.

#### ■ A. Preparing to choose the support

These tips will help you work on choosing support techniques in the most effective way.

Tip 1: If you're working on a change in a group, if possible, let people **themselves choose** their support techniques. Techniques that they think they will need to change their behavior.

Tip 2: **Involve others** in the thinking process about support. This leads to more diverse insights and therefore often to better choices.

Tip 3: **Use research**: use support techniques – like the techniques in this list – that have been proven to work in different circumstances.

Tip 4: **Good experiences**: look at support techniques that you had positive experiences with in the past.

#### ■ B. Thinking up your support approach

Below is a list of practical tips and concrete behavior change techniques that you can use in combination to stimulate the desired behavior.

Tip 1: Identify **in practice**, both in your professional life and your private life, what you're currently doing in the field of support. Which techniques are you using already and are they working in your situation?

Tip 2: Base your thinking on the **three drivers of human behavior**. What is your own **capacity** or that of the other people involved? And what about the **motivation** and the **environment**? What are the biggest obstacles to behavior change at the moment? What's stopping you or them from changing? And what could you do about it?

Tip 3: Make the desired behavior **as easy as possible** by adapting the **social and physical environments**. Eliminate as much as possible the restraining forces, the barriers for the desired behavior. You can find out more about this in chapter 7.

Tip 4: Remind yourself or the people you're working with of the desired behavior through triggers in the immediate environment. For example, add visible **reminders** to the environment, like posters or symbols that refer to your goal or the desired behavior.

Tip 5: Make sure that the **behavior instructions** are **clearly formulated**. For example, prominently placed rules, a checklist or protocols.

An example: a lot of emergency rooms in hospitals have the ATLS protocol on the wall. The abbreviation stands for *Advanced Trauma Life Support*, a protocol that helps physicians make the correct decisions under high pressure.

Tip 6: Find a **good example**, someone who demonstrates the desired behavior. Preferably in the immediate environment, or if that's not possible, via video or in another visual way. The behavior of people who are like us can result in imitation and often increases our belief in our abilities.

Tip 7: Make sure you get **immediate rewards** for desired behavior, or otherwise for the efforts you make in exhibiting this behavior. When our brain associates new behavior with a pleasurable feeling – for example as a result of a compliment – our tendency to exhibit this behavior increases. In psychology, this mechanism is called *positive reinforcement*.

It's important that you get the reward immediately after exhibiting the behavior that earned it. But you don't have to do this constantly. Research shows that 'partial reinforcement' – rewarding occasionally – has a stronger effect than rewarding every time.

A practical example: in a group, you can agree to regularly encourage and compliment each other when someone exhibits new desired behavior, and begin doing this yourself.

Tip 8: Link more **positive emotions** to the desired behavior. If people enjoy exhibiting the desired behavior, this will be a powerful stimulus to persist.

You can find out more about this in chapter 6.

Tip 9: Arrange for **support from the social environment**. Ask friends, colleagues or family members to help you in performing the new behavior. Practically and/or by encouraging you.

Tip 10: Arrange to get **feedback**. Make sure that your environment lets you know whether you're exhibiting the desired behavior, and if appropriate, how good you are at it.

This can happen in a neutral/factual way, for example, by looking at a video film of yourself. But you can also get feedback based on a clearly formulated norm. For example, the electronic traffic signs that display a green smiley if you keep to the maximum speed limit. Or the coach who tells you what you did well in the presentation you gave and what could have gone better.

Tip 11: Think realistically about the difficult moments that will arise in the future during the change process: the **moments of truth**. And then think of ways to continue despite the difficulties. *If* problem X occurs, *then* I'll go for solution Y.

You can find out more about this in chapter 7.

Tip 12: **Take a short break and think about your goals**: if you're finding it hard to exhibit the desired behavior in a certain situation, stop briefly and remind yourself about the 'why' of your behavior and your goal.

You can find out more about this in chapter 7.

Tip 13: **Practice the new behavior**, for example with friends or colleagues, before you start applying it 'for real'. If, for example, you want to say 'no' more often to requests at work, practice these kinds of discussions a few times first.

Tip 14: Make use of **self-monitoring of behavior**. Keep track of whether you have performed the desired behavior today – either on paper, on your computer or on your smartphone.

You can find out more about this technique in chapter 7.

Tip 15: Make sure that people who have to change are aware of the **progress towards the goal** that's being made. Small steps forward motivate people, so make sure they get noticed.

You can find out more about this support technique in chapter 7.

### ■ C. Selecting and defining your support approach

These tips will help you choose and define your support techniques in such a way that you increase the chances of a successful change.

Tip 1: Think up a **large number of practical applications** of the support techniques I've mentioned. How do you see yourself using

these in your own situation? **Then choose** three or more applications based on the **following criteria**:

- 1) the impact on the desired behavior;
- 2) the feasibility;
- 3) the possible positive side-effects.

Ask yourself: 1) will this support technique really stimulate the desired behavior?; 2) will I really be able to get this application working?; and 3) will this application also result in positive side-effects? Like giving compliments for exhibiting the desired behavior could lead to better relations.

**Tip 2: Choose three or more support techniques.** Use different techniques at the same time to stimulate the desired behavior. If you don't, you run the risk that your intervention will get lost in the everyday noise, and you'll be swayed by the issues of the day.

**Tip 3: Eliminate competing influences.** Look for triggers in the immediate environment that are barriers to the desired behavior or that even trigger the wrong behavior. Eliminate these competing triggers as much as possible.

**Tip 4: Check:** are the support techniques I have chosen linked to the **three drivers of human behavior**? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I really arrange this support? (capacity)
- Do I really want to do this? (motivation)
- Do I also have the opportunity to do this? (environment)

**Tip 5: Make a clear support plan.** Who will be responsible for arranging different elements of the plan for example? Where, when and with whom?

**Tip 6: Write down your support plan.** Also describe explicitly the relation between the support techniques and the desired behavior

and the chosen goal. Also note other important points that arose while you were thinking up the support approach.

Tip 7: **Share the support approach** you have chosen with other people, if possible, face to face. This will increase the motivation to work on it.

Tip 8: **Vary** the different support techniques regularly. Because after a while, a certain familiarization creeps in and the stimuli become less effective.

## 4. Planning and trying

If you start working with The Ladder, you'll first *plan* your change 'from top to bottom.' You specify your *goal*, translate that into *behavior* and choose your method of *support*.

Then you get started: You *try it out* 'from bottom to top' to see if it really works. You make sure that your *support* techniques are in place, then you try out your new, desired *behavior* and work towards your *goal*. On the way, you see how it goes and adapt if necessary. Many of the above tips in this handbook are about *planning* a change. The extra tips that follow are also about planning and about *trying*.

### ■ Tips for planning a change

Tip 1: **Always work back step by step** from the goal, to the behavior, to the support. First go down The Ladder and then back up again.

Tip 2: If you're working with a group of people in preparation for a change, agree clearly beforehand **how you're going to make a plan together**. What's the procedure for this? How far for example does the principle of having equal say extend? Research shows that people consider it important that collaborating on a change plan is done fairly and transparently.

Tip 3: If you're working with a small group of people on a change plan for a large group of people, make sure that the small group consists of people who are trusted by the larger group. **Trust** in the people that are planning a change leads to more motivation for the change.

Tip 4: Be alert to commonly made **errors in thinking**. Psychologists distinguish dozens of so-called *biases* and *heuristics*: intuitive shortcuts and errors in thinking. This way, for example, eye-catching stories – man bites dog – gain more attention than 'boring'

hard data. Additionally, we sometimes have the tendency to stick too strongly to our own ideas.

A critical question can help: did I take into account conflicting opinions when making this plan?

Tip 5: Check the **cause-effect relations** in your plan. Is it plausible that the behavior you have chosen will result in the goal you want? And is it to be expected that the support techniques you have chosen will lead to the desired behavior?

Tip 6: Check: does the overall plan have a good **balance between impact and feasibility**? Explore also: what are the possible side-effects of the planned change, and are they positive?

Tip 7: Keep your plan **clear and simple**. Choose a single goal, a single behavior, and three or more support techniques. Be aware that a lot of plans for change are unclear, are wrongly interpreted in practice, and are badly followed.

Tip 8: Plan beforehand **how you will evaluate** during the try-out phase of executing your change. How will you know whether you're on the right track? When, with whom, based on which criteria, what do you expect to see at that specific moment? State clearly beforehand – as is the case in scientific research – what you wish to observe at a specific point in time.

### ■ Tips for trying out a change

Tip 1: Be aware that during the execution, in trying out a change, that change is **always a learning process**. It's not about proving that you're right and that your plan works. It's about finding a method that works – preferably as quickly and as simply as possible. Also communicate this clearly to the people that are involved with the change. Use words like: try, experiment and learn.

Tip 2: If you're working on a change with several people, invest sufficient time and energy **in communicating about the plan**. Remind people constantly and in clear terms of the *goal* you're working on, what the desired *behavior* is and the *support* that's being used.

Tip 3: **Stick closely to the plan**. Ensure that all *support* techniques are actually used. Check that the desired *behavior* is correctly executed. And regularly check whether all the people involved understand the *goal* of the change.

Tip 4: Keep your cool: **only evaluate at the agreed times**. This will help you avoid constant discussion and feelings of doubt during the try-out phase of a change.

Tip 5: During the try-out phase, be alert to commonly made **errors in thinking**. For example, people automatically tend to continue on the path that was chosen. Even when this turns out not to be the best choice. It's important to continue to look critically at your own thinking.

Tip 6: Evaluate **as factually as possible**. Before you start to evaluate, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Have we followed the plan precisely?
- 2) Were there any disruptive factors that we did not foresee?
- 3) And – very important – what 'hard data' do we have about the support, the behavior and the results that we have achieved up till now?

Tip 7: **Use The Ladder** when you evaluate and adjust. If the desired *behavior* does not materialize, take a critical look at the *support*. Is it strong enough? Or was the desired *behavior* perhaps a little too ambitious?

And if the *behavior* does materialize, but you're not getting any closer to your goal, ask yourself: did we choose the right behavior? Or is our *goal* perhaps too ambitious? Adapt the plan if necessary, or review the whole planning process again.

Tip 8: There are many problems that will always be there. Sometimes you'll succeed in achieving new effective habits that you can maintain without too much effort within a few months. But in many cases, you'll have to continue supporting the new behavior. Or adapt it. And in other cases, your behavior change will succeed, but you will be faced with a deep-rooted problem that cannot be easily resolved, which keeps recurring in a new form. Be aware that The Ladder isn't intended as a one-off. It's a model that you can run through **time and time again**.



## SOURCES

This part lists the sources of the most important insights contained in *The Ladder*. Really practical when you want to check something or go into a specific area in more detail.

I'll begin with the thinkers that have inspired me in the most general sense, after that I'll talk about how I came to conceive the ladder model and about the origin of the 'three drivers of behavior'. Finally, for each chapter, I'll mention the most important insights and the relevant sources.

### ■ GENERAL

At the start of this book, I specified the important thinkers that have inspired me the most. I'll list them here again:

- Susan Michie, author of, amongst other titles, *The behaviour change wheel* (Michie, S., Atkins, L., West, R. (2014). *The behaviour change wheel: a guide to designing interventions*. London: Silverback Publishing.).
- Daniel Kahneman, author of, amongst other titles, *Thinking fast and slow* (Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Allen Lane.).
- John Kotter, author of, amongst other titles, *Leading change* (Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.).
- Roy Baumeister, known for, amongst other things, his research on the power of negative emotions (Baumeister, R.F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C. & Vohs, K.D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 323-370.).
- Richard Thaler, author of, amongst other titles, *Nudge* (Thaler, R.H. & Sunstein, C.R. (2008). *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.).
- Icek Ajzen, known for, amongst other things, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, I. (1991). *The theory of planned*

behavior. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50, 179-211.).

A few publications helped me enormously to rank the most important behavioral insights for The Ladder.

- Michie, S., Atkins, L., West, R. (2014). *The behaviour change wheel: a guide to designing interventions*. London: Silverback Publishing.
- Nowack, K. (2017). Facilitating successful behavior change: beyond goal setting to goal flourishing. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69, 153-171.
- Sullman, M. (2017). *Young driver safety: a review of behaviour change techniques for future interventions*. London: RAC Foundation.

I also learned a huge amount during my PhD research, especially through the observation work, performing field experiments and evaluating the various studies with the participants after completion. For more information, read my dissertation (Tiggelaar, B. (2010). *The Core of the Matter. Haalbaarheid en effectiviteit van gedragsgerichte dual system-interventies bij verandering in organisaties (Feasibility and effectiveness of behavior-oriented dual system interventions for change in organizations)*. Soest: Tyler Roland Press.). It is also available online from the Vrije Universiteit (<https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/the-core-of-the-matter-haalbaarheid-en-effectiviteit-van-gedragsg>).

## ■ THE LADDER

The image of the ladder with three steps – goal, behavior, support – has evolved over the years through the work I have done.

Part of that work consists of studying all kinds of behavior research, while another part includes presenting lectures, seminars and training courses for a wide range of groups who wish to learn more about leadership and change. I have developed this model step by

step through the interaction between studying and teaching. My inspiration for the ladder model – particularly the element concerning planning backwards starting from the goal and then trying out the plan – was gained from the Precede-Proceed model of Green & Kreuter (Green, L.W. & Kreuter, M.W. (1991). *Health Promotion Planning: an Educational and Environmental Approach*. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company.) and from the Intervention Mapping framework of Bartholomew and colleagues (Bartholomew, L.K., Parcel, G.S., Kok, G., & Gottlieb, N.H. (2001). *Intervention mapping: designing theory and evidence-based health promotion programs*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.).

### ■ THE THREE DRIVERS OF BEHAVIOR

The three drivers of behavior play a key role from chapter 3 onwards. They are based on the COM-B model of behavior (amongst others, Michie, S., van Stralen, M.M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: a new method for characterizing and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*: 6, 42.). A short summary...

- C stands for Capability in this model. People need a) physical capacities and b) psychological capacities to be able to exhibit behavior. In my book, I use the word Capacity for this component. Other behavioral scientists use 'skills', 'being able to', or other terms.
- O stands for Opportunity. The a) physical environment and b) social environment encourage or inhibit our opportunities to demonstrate specific behavior. I have chosen the word Environment for this component of the model. Other researchers also choose terms such as 'opportunity', 'context' or 'situation'.
- M stands for Motivation. In order to display specific behavior, the motivation, the inner drive to do something, must be greater than the motivation not to display this behavior or to perform other behavior. It may be a case of a) controlled motivation, where it's about our convictions, making plans and the conscious weighing up of different options. It may also be a

case of b) automatic motivation, whereby – often unconsciously – desires, needs and recurring thought patterns drive our behavior. I use the word Motivation for this component. Other authors also use terms such as ‘will’ or ‘intention’. Instead of ‘controlled’ motivation, expressions such as ‘reasoned’ or ‘reflective’ motivation are often used. And as well as ‘automatic’ motivation, the term ‘reflexive’ motivation is also used (not to be confused with the above-mentioned ‘reflective’ motivation).

- B stands for Behavior: Behavior concerns the actions and reactions of a person in relation to their environment. Although non-observable behavior also counts as behavior, I focus in my book on observable behavior, through which we can achieve tangible changes.

Michie and colleagues are not the first and only ones to specify the interaction between capacity, motivation and environment. We also find these three factors in, amongst others, the Triade model of Theo Poiesz, the Behavior Model of B.J. Fogg and in the AMO framework of Eileen Appelbaum and colleagues.

## ■ CHAPTER 1

The sources related to learning goals are specified in chapter 5.

The sources concerning starting with simple steps are specified in chapter 6.

The sources regarding self-monitoring are indicated in chapter 7.

## ■ CHAPTER 2

The Semmelweis story is based on, amongst other things, information from the Encyclopedia Britannica and the website Past Medical History (<https://www.pastmedicalhistory.co.uk/>).

The recent figures on hand washing in hospitals in the Netherlands are from the dissertation by Vicki Erasmus (Erasmus, V. (2012). Compliance to Hand Hygiene Guidelines in Hospital Care: A stepwise behavioural approach, dissertation. Erasmus University Rotterdam.) and the dissertation by Anita Huis (Huis, A.M.P. (2013).

Helping hands. Strategies to improve hand hygiene compliance in hospital care, dissertation. Radboud Universiteit).

The quotation by John Kotter is taken from *The heart of change* (Kotter, J. P., & Cohen, D. S. (2002). *The heart of change: Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.).

The PhD research by Janka Stoker: Stoker, J.I. (1998). *Leidinggeven aan zelfstandige taakgroepen, proefschrift (Managing independent task groups, dissertation)*, Universiteit Twente

The section on reward systems in our brain is based on information from the Dutch Brain Foundation (Hersenstichting) (<https://www.hersenstichting.nl/>).

### ■ CHAPTER 3

The first taxonomy by Abraham and Michie was published in 2008 (Abraham, C. & Michie, S. (2008). A taxonomy of behavior change techniques used in interventions. *Health Psychology*, 27, 379-387.).

A more recent version appeared in 2013 (Michie, S., Richardson, M., Johnston, M., Abraham, C., Francis, J., Hardeman, W., Eccles, M.P., Cane, J. & Wood, C.E. (2013). The behavior change technique taxonomy (v1) of 93 hierarchically clustered techniques: building an international consensus for the reporting of behavior change interventions. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 46, 81-95.).

The study by Thomas Webb dates from 2010 (Webb, T.L., Joseph, J., Yardley, L., Michie, S. (2010). Using the internet to promote health behavior change: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the impact of theoretical basis, use of behavior change techniques, and mode of delivery on efficacy. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. 12, 1.).

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As previously noted, the three drivers of behavior are based on the COM-B model of behavior.

Obstacle 1, whereby I state that automatic behavior is dominant and that our brain strives for cognitive ease, is based on the work of Kahneman.

The study that showed that a simple change in behavior takes two months was performed by Phillipa Lally and colleagues (Lally, P., Van Jaarsveld, C.H.M., Potts, H.W.W. & Wardle, J. (2010). How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40, 998-1009.).

Obstacle 2, concerning our dislike of loss, is, amongst others, based on the previously mentioned works of Baumeister and of Kahneman.

Obstacle 3, regarding our relationship with our environment, is based on, amongst other things, the work of Thaler and of Kahneman. The quotation by Thaler is from an interview he gave for a podcast, *Masters in Business* ([https://www.bloomberg.com/podcasts/masters\\_in\\_business](https://www.bloomberg.com/podcasts/masters_in_business)).

#### ■ CHAPTER 4

The interview with John Kotter took place during the seminar *Veranderen in één dag* (Change in one day), on June 16, 2017.

The term ‘keystone habit’ was introduced by Charles Duhigg in his book *The power of habit* (Duhigg, C. (2012). *The power of habit. Why we do what we do in life and business*. New York: Random House.).

I base the rule of thumb one - one - three on my experiences during my PhD research and the recommendations from the above-mentioned article by Thomas Webb.

**■ CHAPTER 5**

The function of goals is based on statements made by Edwin Locke (Locke, E.A. & Latham, G.P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation. *American Psychologist*, 57, 705-717.) and Fred Luthans (Luthans, F. & Youssef, C. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: investing in people for competitive advantage. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33, 143-160.).

The most important sources I used for the section on development goals:

Elliott, E.S. & Dweck, C.S. (1988). Goals: an approach to motivation and achievement. *Journal of personality and social psychology*. 54. 5-12.

Vandewalle, D., Brown, S.P., Cron, W.L. & Slocum, J.W. (1998). The Influence of Goal Orientation and Self-Regulation Tactics on Sales Performance: A Longitudinal Field Test. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 84, 249-59.

Vandewalle, D. (2001). Goal orientation: Why wanting to look successful doesn't always lead to success. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30, 162-171.

Dweck, C.S. & Grant, H. (2008) Self-Theories, Goals, and Meaning. In: *Handbook of Motivation Science*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Dam, A. van (2009). *De kunst van het falen (The art of failing)*. Amsterdam: Ambo.

The most important sources I used for the section on formulating a clearly defined 'why' for your goal:

Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C.P. & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers and callings. People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 21-33.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). *Flourish. A new understanding of happiness and well-being*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Hurst, A. (2014). *The purpose economy. How your desire for*

impact, personal growth and community is changing the world.  
Boise: Elevate.

Schwartz, B. (2015). *Why we work*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

The study by Aaron Hurst and LinkedIn can be accessed here:  
<https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/talent-solutions/resources/pdfs/purpose-at-work-global-report.pdf>

The trio 'see – feel – change' is from Kotter's previously mentioned book *The heart of change*.

The most important sources I used for the section on the importance of a clearly defined priority list:

Lee, F. (2004). *If Disney ran your hospital. 9 1/2 things you would do differently*. Bozeman: Second River Healthcare.

Gallup (2017). *State of the global workplace*. New York: Gallup Press.

## ■ CHAPTER 6

I interviewed Icek Ajzen in 2013. A report of our interview appeared in *Management Team* magazine and is available online (<https://www.mt.nl/management/icek-ajzen-meer-kennis-leidt-niet-tot-beter-gedrag/78989>).

The key sources I used for the section on the importance of choosing behavior you enjoy:

Woolley, K., Fishbach, A. (2015). The experience matters more than you think: People value intrinsic incentives more inside than outside an activity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109, 968-982.

Woolley, K., & Fishbach, A. (2016). For the fun of it: harnessing immediate rewards to increase persistence in long-term goals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42, 952-966.

The principal basis I used for the section on the importance of formulating clearly defined desired behavior is anchored in the work of Peter Gollwitzer (including: Gollwitzer, P.M. & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 249-268.), and the previously mentioned interview with Icek Ajzen.

The story about Dafne Schippers was based on, amongst others, an article by Henk Stouwdam in NRC Handelsblad (<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/08/12/de-belangrijkste-seconde-uit-haar-leven-3703565-a1516110>).

The key sources I used for the section on the importance of formulating simple desired behavior:

Bandura, A. & Locke, E.A. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 87-99.

Bandura, A. (2004). Health promotion by social cognitive means. *Health Education & Behavior*, 31, 143-164.

## ■ CHAPTER 7

More information on Michael Bloomberg's mayoral style can be found for example in the article that James Bennet wrote for *The Atlantic* (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/11/the-bloomberg-way/309136/>). Bloomberg's anti-smoking policy and its results have been published by, amongst others, Rhodes-Bratton and colleagues (Rhodes-Bratton, B., Fingerhut, L., Demmer, R.T., Colgrove, J., Wang, Y.C. & Lovasi, G.S. (2018). Cataloging the Bloomberg era: New York City legislation relevant to cardiovascular risk factors. In: *Cities & Health*.)

The most important sources I used for the section about the impact

of the environment:

Nudge by Thaler & Sunstein (mentioned earlier).

Two interviews I conducted myself with Daniel Kahneman, during two editions of the seminar Psychologie in één dag (Psychology in one day) (November 29, 2016 and November 28, 2017).

A podcast on Freakonomics Radio including an interview with Daniel Kahneman on 25 October 2017. This can be read and listened to online via: <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/launch-behavior-change-revolution/>.

The most significant sources I used for the section on the importance of moments of truth:

Marlatt, G.A. & Gordon, J.R. (1985). Relapse prevention: a self-control strategy for the maintenance of behavior change. New York: Guilford Press.

Gollwitzer, P.M. (1999). Implementation intentions. Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54, 493-503.

The previously mentioned publication by Sullman.

A Dutch researcher who has studied the work of Chris Argyris in-depth as well as the way defensive routines block change is Arend Ardon (Ardon, A. (2009). Moving moments. Leadership and interventions in dynamically complex change processes, dissertation, Vrije Universiteit).

The central sources I used for the section on the importance of self-monitoring:

Michie, S., Abraham, C., Whittington, C., McAteer, J., & Gupta, S. (2009). Effective techniques in healthy eating and physical activity interventions: A meta-regression. *Health Psychology*, 28, 690-701.

Burke, L.E., Wang, J., Sevick, M.A. (2011). Self-monitoring in weight loss: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 111, 92-102.

The interview I conducted with Amabile in 2012 is available online at Management Team (<https://www.mt.nl/tiggelaar-ontmoet/tiggelaar-ontmoet-teresa-amabile-progressie-is-wat-telt/71487>). Additionally, her book on the importance of progress is well worth reading (Amabile, T.M. & Kramer, S.J. (2011). *The progress principle. Using small wins to ignite joy, engagement, and creativity at work.* Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press.).

## ■ CHAPTER 8

The ideas on psychological safety are from, amongst others: Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 2. Duhigg, C. (2016). What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team. In: *The New York Times Magazine*, Feb. 25, 2016.

The sequence of 'first who, then what' can be found in, amongst others, the previously mentioned book by John Kotter, *Leading change*, and in Jim Collins' book (Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap... and others don't.* New York, NY: HarperBusiness.).

The idea that you have to strive for customization originates from my PhD research, amongst other sources.

The interview with Daniel Kahneman that I mentioned here is the interview during the seminar *Psychology in one day* on November 28, 2017.

## ■ HANDBOOK FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE

The handbook is based on sources that I have previously mentioned. The most important of these are the publications by Michie, by Nowack and by Sullman, as well as my own PhD research.

What also proved to be very useful was the research conducted

by Ten Have and colleagues into myths and truths in the field of change management. (Ten Have, S., Ten Have, W., Huijsmans, A. & Otto, M. (2016). *Reconsidering change management. Applying evidence-based insights in change management practice*. New York: Routledge.).

### ■ FINAL WORD

If you wish to read more about the field of behavior and behavior change, I recommend the following books – I found them all to be both educational and inspiring.

Duhigg, C. (2012). *The power of habit. Why we do what we do in life and business*. New York: Random House.

Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset. The new psychology of success*. United States: Random House.

Heath, C. & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch. How to change things when change is hard*. London: Random House Business Books.

Hermsen, S. & Renes, J.R. (2016). *Draaiboek gedragsverandering (Scenario for behavior change)*. Amsterdam: Business Contact.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Allen Lane.

Thaler, R.H. & Sunstein, C.R. (2008). *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Vonk, R. (2014). *Je bent wat je doet. Van zelfkennis naar gedragsverandering (You are what you do. From self-knowledge to behavior change)*. Amsterdam: Maven Publishing.



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I would like to thank the following people.

Ingrid, the love of my life, who thinks along with me in everything I do. Maria, Isabelle, Emma and Bernice, our four wonderful daughters.

Erna, Elisabeth, Renske and Maria for all their help while writing this book. Marleen for editing and Marieke for proofreading. Tjarko and Eelke for their graphic work.

Also many thanks to all the students over the past years for their feedback on the earlier versions of *The Ladder*.

There is a famous story in the bible about Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. He explains his act as follows: “Whoever wants to be great must become a servant.”

I believe that it is our task to serve each other, to help each other. That applies to leaders, trainers, coaches, and also to people who write books. I truly hope this book will help you implement many positive changes.





## About Ben Tyler

Dr. Ben Tyler is a best-selling author, international speaker, and behavioral scientist.

He has been studying leadership, behavior, and change for more than thirty years.

Ben is regarded as one of the top speakers and trainers in his field.

He has written several bestsellers, writes a weekly column for the Dutch national newspaper NRC on work and management, and hosts a weekly radio show on the Dutch national radio station BNR.

He is a visiting professor at IE Business School, one of the top-ranking business schools in Europe (according to the Financial Times, The Economist, Forbes and Business Week).

He has also given guest lectures at, among others, Harvard University, Nijenrode Business University, Rotterdam School of Management, and Vlerick Business School.

Ben has a Master's degree in Communication studies from the University of Amsterdam. He earned his PhD in Economics and Business Studies at VU University Amsterdam, conducting field studies on behavioral change in organizations.

After this he studied at Harvard University and University College London.

Ben is married to Ingrid. Together, they have four daughters: Maria, Isabelle, Emma, and Bernice.

For more information, go to: [www.drben Tyler.com](http://www.drben Tyler.com)



**“Ben’s unique talent is his ability to translate sound scientific research into inspirational, practical advice.”**

Dr. Stephen R. Covey

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Anyone with a bit of life experience will know that real change – at work and at home – isn’t easy.

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