

Phase I



Figuring Out What You Want and Why You Want It

Self-improvement requires a deep, full commitment. It's not enough to simply think about how nice it would be for your life to get better—you have to internalize the need for change. This starts with recognizing your personal internal motivators for change, and then establishing ownership of them. Commitment also requires that you're up for the challenge and feel mentally prepared, which you must be if you bought and started reading this book in the first place!

So, how on earth are you going to go about it? Just follow the simple steps provided in this book. With each milestone you accomplish, you'll be moving closer and closer to your exceptional life.

In this initial two-week phase, you'll determine why you want to change the way you're currently living and you'll envision how you'd ideally like to live in the (very near!) future.

Milestone 1, Week 1



The Burning Platform

Making a Case for Change

Rose, a 61-year-old divorcée, feels like she's lost her identity. She spent most of her adult life raising her two kids, supporting her husband in his career, and working for the same company. But her kids have graduated from college and have their own families in different cities now. She separated from her husband two years ago, so she's living on her own. And very soon, Rose will be retiring.

Without a job or a family to take care of, Rose has faced the realization that she doesn't know who she is or what she wants to do with her time. "For all those years, I put my own life on hold," she tells me. "I want to rediscover my identity. I haven't really been 'me' since college!" Rose feels that unless she formulates a life plan now, she'll be completely lost when her career comes to an end. She wants an Exceptional Living Plan to help her figure out her new life — what sort of volunteer work she should plan to do after retirement and how to meet new people, including interesting single men.

In a sense, Rose is lucky. There's no question that the transition period she's going through right now is stressful. But on the other hand, she clearly understands the need for developing a plan that will enable her to start leading her life on purpose. Between her recent divorce and her impending retirement, the reasons are clear: If she doesn't take action soon, she'll wind up living in the Crisis Zone. Rose has a strong *case for change*.

Change is a fact of life; there's no such thing as a static state of being. We must face two fundamental types of change—gradual and monumental. We all experience gradual change on a more or less routine basis. For the most part, we're okay with that. We view it as an expected phenomenon as we pass through the various stages of life. It's the monumental change that tends to generate real fear and anxiety.

Take a moment and think back to a time in your life when you made a conscious change in your life. What was the change? What was going on at the time? Did it involve dramatic changes in your lifestyle? Minor changes? Or was it somewhere in between? We all change in different ways, at different stages in our lives, and for different reasons. To better understand the role of change as you try to improve the quality of your life, think of a recent project or goal that you set out to achieve. Whether formally or informally, you most likely first sat down to assess the task. You might have asked yourself some of the following questions:

- What am I trying to accomplish?
- What resources will I need to complete the task?

- What changes to my lifestyle will I have to make?
- Do I have what it takes?
- Will it be worth it in the long run?

In other words, you were making a case for change for yourself. Once you had assessed your competency in completing the task and evaluated its worth, you determined to go forward.

Change is difficult for companies and for individuals. Most people are content with the safe and predictable status quo. Why change if you don't have to? It's like wearing our favorite shoes, sitting in our favorite chair, or eating the same breakfast meal each day. We like things to be predictable, snug, and comfortable. There's something safe and reassuring with what we already know. It feels good. So unless you understand that you could be happier, more productive, and better balanced in your life, you won't feel motivated to take action to do something about it. You've got to find a cause that really rallies you to kick-start the challenging yet rewarding process of self-improvement.

I call this catalyst for change your **Burning Platform**. It's as though you're standing on a 20-foot tall wooden platform that's on fire. You have to decide quickly whether you're going to try to put out the fire, call for help, or jump. Regardless of what you do, the fire makes you feel the urgent need to take action.

What's your Burning Platform? What is going to be your driving force for change? What's going to get you to make the kind of monumental changes in your habits

and daily patterns that are required to live an exceptional life? Are you in the Complacency Zone? the Crisis Zone? Maybe you've realized that your family is frustrated by your lengthy and frequent business trips, or that you're too busy to cultivate friendships, or that you're too tired to eat the heart-healthy diet your doctor has asked you to maintain, or that your work is not fulfilling your need to contribute to the world. Perhaps you are so overweight that you can no longer take the early-morning walks you used to love, or you're suffering from depression or anxiety, or you're just feeling stressed out. Whatever the reasons, let them serve as your motivation to change. Remind yourself that if you're not home more often, your marriage will eventually fall apart; if you don't find the energy to eat healthily, you could have a heart attack; if you don't make time for friends, you'll lose them. If you don't change today, Me, Inc. could go out of business. Now's your chance to act, to take control, and to start leading the exceptional life you've always wanted to lead.

Find your Burning Platform and feel its fire burning a hole in you. Embrace the desire to put that fire out no matter what it takes.

ACTIVITY: Cost of Inefficient Living (COIL)

Here's a tool from business that will help you build your Burning Platform, to make a case for change in your life: calculating your Cost of Inefficient Living (COIL).

Just like people, organizations need motivation to go through the difficult process of changing their businesses. CEOs frequently ask me to help them implement new initiatives intended to improve performance. I tell them they first need to identify their Burning Platform—the reason for change that makes them feel like they’ve *got* to do something or they’re going to burn up! Because unless everyone in the organization—from the CEO to the middle managers to the folks working in the stock room—understands the driving need for change, the initiative won’t succeed.

In order to light the fire for change, I like to determine the Cost of Poor Quality. I find that companies are rarely aware of how much waste they’re creating in terms of faulty products, dissatisfied customers, and unhappy employees. So I analyze the data—customer complaints, reject rates, cycle time, repairs, scrap, and so on—and determine what it’s costing them. I put a dollar amount on their unproductiveness. Trust me, this usually motivates managers to improve the way they’re doing business *fast*. Talk about a Burning Platform!

Similarly, I’ve discovered that in our personal lives, most of us just go through life without thinking about what our laziness, fear, boredom, or complacency are *really* costing us. Calculating our COIL encourages us to consider the losses we’re suffering as a consequence of inaction. It can be a real change driver.

Beck Weathers, a Dallas pathologist, nearly lost his life before realizing that he had to make a drastic change to focus on what was really important to him—his family. Beck was not only a dedicated professional in his career

but also an avid adventurer, a man who climbed mountains, went off to remote places, and lived life on the edge. Beck worked hard and long on the job, and when he took vacations, he used his time to go on one of his wild adventures. This lifestyle naturally gave him little time to spend with his wife and two children.

Beck's epiphany came on May 10, 1996. In an attempt to climb Mount Everest, Beck became separated from his party. Alone and nearly frozen to death (medically speaking, he was in a hypothermic coma), he deeply questioned the choices that he had made in his life. Beck actually saw his family as if they were standing in front of him. Realizing that he had not said "good-bye" and "I love you" filled him with overwhelming sadness. He realized at that moment that his family meant more to him than any adventure or professional achievement. Even though he lost both hands and most of his nose to frostbite, his will to survive and see his family again kept him alive to make it to safety.

Beck's experience was a blinding flash of light and motivator for change. In a sense, he was forced to calculate his COIL. He realized that his choice to devote all his time to his career and his climbing had almost cost him his family, as his wife was very close to divorcing him. This event changed his life, saved his marriage, and also strengthened his relationship with his children.

Beck, now a popular motivational speaker, was quoted in a newspaper article as saying, "The relentless pursuit of success and goals and ambition had dragged out of life what was most precious." Referring to his injuries, he went on to say, "I traded my hands and my face for my family


and I accept that bargain. In the end, all that matters is the people you hold in your heart and those who hold you in theirs.”

Think about an area of your life that you’ve been meaning to improve — your career, your physical health, your spiritual life, or your family relationships. Now go through the list below to determine your Cost of Inefficient Living. Write down your responses in the same notebook or save them in the same computer file as your answers to the Quality-of-Life Index, so that you can refer back to them later and see how much you’ve improved. Don’t worry about attaching dollar amounts in each category, as this would prove too complex an exercise. Instead, think of the overall qualitative toll your current lifestyle is taking in the following areas:

- Financial costs — actual wasted dollars. For example, say you ran out of gas because you forgot to fill your tank — again. How much did you have to pay to have your car towed or take a cab to and from the gas station?
- Opportunity costs (e.g., not meeting new people, being passed over for promotion).
- Lost-time costs (e.g., looking for items you can’t find, making people wait for you).
- Relationship costs (e.g., neglect, separation, estrangement, divorce).
- Emotional costs (e.g., depression, anxiety, anger, stress, fatigue).
- Physical costs (e.g., illness, missed work, headaches, stomach problems).

Let's say, for example, that the problem you want to solve is that you don't manage your finances carefully enough, and so you frequently bounce checks. The obvious financial cost is the \$25 bounced-check fee. But what about the costs in the other categories: the damage you do to the goodwill of the person who cashed your check; the time it takes you to rectify the problem; the annoyance you cause your partner? These are all part of your COIL.

COIL is like an iceberg: There are a few obvious, visible financial costs at the tip, but there are many more hidden costs lying just beneath the surface of the water. We often neglect these hidden costs completely, and yet hidden costs — like making a loved one angry — can prove to be the most deadly of all. That's why running through the entire checklist is so crucial: You experience the full impact of the whole iceberg. And this iceberg represents everything in your life that you need to change. You've found your Burning Platform. The fire is lit.



Before going on to the next chapter, review the following questions:

- Am I satisfied with the way I am currently living my life?
- Am I prepared to make changes in my life?
- Do I resist change, either incremental or monumental? Why?
- What is my Burning Platform?

- What's my COIL?
- Am I willing to start *actively managing* my life?

If you can answer these questions with insight and enthusiasm, then you're ready to begin.