

Review of the book "*Changing For Good*"  
Robert Douglas Neve  
Bellevue University

Why is this book so special? Qualities, Content, Perspective

Possibly the most influential and professional human services book known to man is *Changing For Good* by James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente. I chose this book because I wanted to read a book that was professionally written, written by current academic scholars, and above all useful for my current and future work as a therapist. I believe this book to be an important book essential to the education of any therapist in any specialty that hopes to see his clients change their lives for the better. No other book that I have read or expect to read has been more intrinsically self-satisfying, more clearly evidence based, and more inspired with respect to the research and concepts of the book. In physics, scientists search for a unified field theory, or one theory that integrates all other theories and fills in the gaps between them all. This book is the analogy to the unified field theory that physicists seek. This book unifies, integrates, encompasses, and explains all psychological theories of change in human behavior and bridges the gaps between them.

This book is first of all evidence based. The authors performed research using a large sample set of people who were actually successful in changing their own lives, termed by the authors "self-changers". Participants primarily were people who changed on their own without the help of counselors, therapists or medications. The research the authors conducted was original, creative, and inspired. The conclusions they drew and the way they organized their findings established a foundation used throughout the practice of addiction therapy. Their six stages of change were adopted as a standard by Medicare and Medicaid. The authors are all university professors holding Ph.D.s, Prochaska at the University of Rhode Island, Norcross at the University of Scranton, and DiClemente at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. They hold a clearly evidence based, positive and proactive perspective. The solid longitudinal basis of research, the longevity and wide ranging acceptance of their theories, the peer reviews, and endorsement by institutions and by governmental agencies that see their work as groundbreaking, useful and highly effective shows that this is a high quality scholarly book.

Summary of Book

The book reviews the science of human change. It defines the prerequisites, the initial conditions, the process, the timing, the stages, and the dynamic nature of change. In examining the common components of all major counseling theories and techniques with a view towards integrating them, the authors identified the principles and processes that each theory proposed for change. Their first major insight was that all therapies, though they stem from different theories, use different techniques, and all generally claim to be the best theory for effecting change in a client, the authors realized that different theories and approaches work with different effectiveness at different stages of change. For example, psycho-analysis may work effectively for a stage of change where consciousness raising is necessary (i.e. to get a client out of denial), but it is ineffective at a stage where modifying of one's environment is necessary for effective behavioral change (e.g. after the addict has started down the road to recovery, further self-analysis results in little change). Conversely, a behavioral modification (e.g. pouring the alcohol

down the drain) is completely ineffective if the client is still in the initial stages of denial, but it would be effective in the action stage of change (e.g. after having discovered a once hidden bottle, the alcoholic has had some sobriety, he calls his sponsor and talks with him as he pours the bottle down the drain).

The authors identify six stages of change and correlate the effectiveness of the most well known and widely used therapies to each stage of change. The stages are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. Precontemplation is the denial stage ("I don't have a problem and I don't need to change."). Contemplation is considering that I might have a problem ("Maybe I have a problem ... no, I don't think so."). Preparation is forethought and planning ("I have a problem, let's figure out how I'm going to change."). Action is the start of the change ("Hey, I quit that bad habit, and it's been 24 hours now."). Maintenance is continuing successful change and avoiding relapse ("Hey, I'm doing it!"). Termination is controversial and the authors admit that this stage may not necessarily be reached by all changers, but it is described as the stage in which the old habit has become so distasteful that it is no longer a problem, a struggle, or a danger. The authors describe in each section the therapies that are the most effective in each stage.

### Impact, Knowledge, Identity, and Practical Use

This book was a breath of fresh air for me. I had read and been taught ten or 15 different theories, even more techniques, and none of them really established the basis for when they would be most effective. This book integrated in my mind all the theories that I have learned, and gave me a scientific basis for knowing when to use each one based on identifying what stage of change the client is in. This book unified and solidified for me that all the theories are not necessarily contradictory, they all have a different perspective that is useful at different times and with different people, and that they all can work together to effect beneficial changes for our clients.

I have always been a pluralistic person. Before reading this book I felt pressured to adopt one particular theory, one particular method, and deny all the others. I felt obliged to reject theories that I favored less even though I felt they at times had merit. I found myself drifting towards a John Stuart Mill perspective that all men are independently controlled by their own free will at all times, and not by society, environment, training, precondition, or sentiment. My employment and NOVA Therapeutic Community and Douglas County Drug Court reinforced this perspective as the one and only truth. Yet I was captivated by Bronfenbrenner and embraced the effects environment at all levels has on a person's development of his behavior, thoughts, and beliefs. The class Social Policy and Social Change was especially poignant and irritating to me as a rugged individualist. I used to think blaming society for anything was wrong and B.F. Skinner and behavior modification were only useful for animals and the mental retarded. Yet the dissonance between individualism and social responsibility was turned to harmony by embracing Prochaska's enlightened validation of every perspective I have known. I realized that Freud, Adler, Jung, Rogers, Beck, Ellis, Pavlov, Skinner, and Bandura could all be right and effective at different times in the process of the client's change.

This book is one that I use on a daily basis. When writing chemical dependency evaluations, progress notes, discharge summaries, I always start by viewing the client's stage of change as defined by Prochaska, and gauging the client's progress by the elements this book uses to identify what stage of change the client is in with respect to each area of change that the client

is addressing. For example, a client may have stopped using methamphetamine 10 years ago and be in the termination stage of change for that addiction, but he may be drinking alcohol to excess and be in the precontemplation stage of change for alcoholism. In writing treatment plans, I examine what stage the client is in and I use the theory and techniques recommended by Prochaska for that stage to start effecting change in the client. This book is my foundation and basic guidebook for treating addictions.

### Next Three Books to Read

The three books I plan to read within the next year will help me to take my understanding of addiction and change to a deeper level, and give me more strength in motivating the client to wanting to change. I have found that I am very good at helping the client who already wants to change (i.e. in the planning stage or beyond), but I see that much of my work with clients is while they are in the precontemplation or contemplation stages. I will deepen my understanding of change by reading *Addiction and Change* (DiClemente, 2003). I will strengthen my motivational abilities by learning the rapport building and success programming books *Introduction to neuro-linguistic programming: The new psychology of personal excellence* (O'Connor and Seymour, 1990), and the two volume set *Roots of neuro-linguistic programming and Applications of neuro-linguistic programming* (Dilts 1976, 1981). The two volume set covers the scientific and theoretical basis for neuro-linguistic programming.

### Conclusion

The two greatest insights that I gained from this book are simply that (1) every theorist and therapist who comes up with an idea for a treatment that actually works, whether by accident or by intent, likely has contributed something useful to the field and (2) there is a most effective time or stage to use every theory to the benefit of the client. Far fetched and theory-less therapies such as Reiki, Rebirthing, and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) may have some basis in fact with a solid theoretical basis that is yet undiscovered, unnamed or undefined. Each therapy may be less effective at one stage and more effective at another. Because it does not work in one or all stages of change does not mean it is useless. A theory and technique can only be evaluated as effective or not if it is applied over the full spectrum of stages of change in which a client might find himself.

### References

- Prochaska, J. O., Norcross, J. C., DeClemente, C. C. (1994). *Changing for good: A revolutionary six-stage program for overcoming bad habits and moving your life positively forward*. New York: Avon Books.
- O'Connor, J., Seymour, J. (1990). *Introduction to neuro-linguistic programming: The new psychology of personal excellence*. London: Mandala.
- Dilts, R. (1976). *Roots of neuro-linguistic programming*. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.
- Dilts, R. (1981). *Applications of neuro-linguistic programming*. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.