

Pattern-Breaking Experiments

Throughout this workbook, the emphasis has been on change and results. We've encouraged you to find evidence of your strengths and to open yourself to possibilities. You've learned how to observe and reframe some of your patterns of attention, action, and interaction. By now you know you have the power to change, not by fighting with your problems, but by realizing they are simply habitual patterns. Changing those patterns has followed naturally from becoming intimately aware of how they work.

In this final section we'll show you how to consciously enact a pattern, but with a small, creative, and often humorous twist. These are truly *experiments*, as in "To try, to know, perceive, or prove, by trial experience." If it works, do more of it; if it doesn't work, try something else! Doing anything different, however small, can promote significant change.

For example, Eileen longed for more meaning in her work, to feel she was valued and would leave a legacy. Earlier in her career she'd been able to tell how her contributions made a difference but, as her organization grew, she'd begun to feel more and more invisible. After closely observing her patterns, she saw how she waited for others to notice her work but didn't do much to attract their attention. She began to see how she kept herself invisible. Eileen noticed these specific aspects of her pattern:

- During her lunch hour she ate alone in her car for 30 minutes, then took a 30-minute walk away from the company buildings.
- She avoided meetings where attendance was optional. In her own staff meetings she sat at the side of the table and let her team members do most of the talking, giving minimal responses and quickly turning the conversation back to the other person.
- When it was time to go public with something new she'd developed, she'd "chicken out," telling herself it wasn't such a great idea anyway.

Eileen was depressed to see how she'd been sabotaging herself, but she didn't give up. Instead she decided to experiment with two of her patterns during the next week by making one small change:

- In her 30-minute walk after lunch, she changed her path. Instead of going away from company buildings, she walked through a cluster of buildings, thus boosting her visibility.

- At her weekly staff meeting she sat at the head of the table instead of along the side.

You may have trouble believing the power of such apparently simple experiments to break through someone's life-long patterns. But even a small symbolic change can shake up your worldview so much your old way of thinking no longer computes.

Furthermore, logic often doesn't work – if it did, we'd all have talked ourselves out of our problems long ago. Go for the right-brain experiment, keeping these points in mind:

- Be clear what you want to happen.
- After identifying the nature of a pattern, devise a way to experience it with one small difference.
- Once any part of a pattern is shaken up, other changes will occur spontaneously.

Eileen didn't radically change her patterns. All she did was take her daily walk on a different route and sit in staff meetings at a more prominent place at the table. But a few weeks later she spontaneously started a discussion group where she and her peers presented and explored areas of common interest that might lead to company innovations.

"I'm amazed I could do that," she said. It shows I can reshape the world around me to my vision. It was a very small reshaping in the big picture, but to me it feels audacious and bold."

In the following Practice section you'll experiment with changing a pattern's sequence, location, setting, timing, nonverbals and/or mode of communication; observing it so closely you could teach it to someone else; exaggerating the problem; and noticing what you want to continue.