



## A Paradigm Shift

**By Stuart White**  
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Don't you just feel so under pressure at this time of year to make your list of New Years resolutions or New Year's disillusion, as I like to call them – because we never keep them, do we? Just like we never manage to complete everything on those 'to-do' lists we make every Monday morning and let's face it, New Years' resolutions are merely annual 'to-do' lists only more zealous. And the interesting thing is they don't differ too much from Jane Doe to Joe Soap. The favourites are Give Up Smoking, Start Gym, Give Up Alcohol, Start To Build Better Relationship, Give Up Your Job, Start A New One. It's all about giving up one thing so you can take up another. Makes you wonder why you ever started those bad things in the first place, doesn't it?. It also implies that you don't really like yourself very much, that you think you're a bad person when really all you are is human.

But why should New Year's resolutions always be about giving something up, or doing something difficult? This invariably leads to feelings of guilt over past behaviour followed by even more when you inevitably break the resolution to change. When the daily visits to the gym become once a week or less, when you finally give in and light another cigarette because it's your way of de-stressing and when you tear up that letter of resignation because you've decided better the devil you know.

New Year's resolutions shouldn't be about tangible goals like quitting smoking and regular excursions to the gym - they should be about getting your attitude right. And where does attitude and behaviour come from – it's all about your personal paradigm. In his book 'The 7 Habits' Stephen Covey refers to a paradigm as your mental map. Well one of them. Y'see we have many of these mental maps, constructs of how we view the world and it is from here that our attitude and behaviour transpire. And just as grammatical paradigms set out a systematic arrangement of the many ways a word or phrase is used, so too do our personal paradigms set out the many ways we put our skills and beliefs into practice to become who we are.

Paradigms are such wonderful things because we don't even know that we have them. We don't always acknowledge that they exist. We simply think that the way we see the world is the way that it is, yet if you want to make meaningful changes to your behaviour you have to accept and alter your paradigm - the way you view the world. Not external attitudes and behaviour but getting to the root of where those attitudes and behaviour comes from.

Simply put, to work on your paradigm you need to make significant shifts in your accepted concepts and core beliefs, to get what Stephen Covey calls the 'Aha' experience – that wonderful state of enlightenment where everything suddenly clicks' and fits together! The 'A-ha, now I know what you are talking about' moment of connection and understanding!

John Kenneth Galbraith coined the phrase "conventional wisdom" to describe our reluctance to explore other physical and philosophical possibilities. He said that we associate truth with convenience, that conventional wisdom if studied is nothing short of that which is simple, convenient, comforting and familiar – though not necessarily true. The only way to change your paradigm is to accept that there is an alternative truth to what you believe. That's damn difficult because we are so conditioned to see the world as we have experienced it or have been told.

We also work so hard looking for evidence to support and reinforce our world view that to dismiss conventional wisdom – as we know it – is to sail into uncharted waters and very unfamiliar territory and that takes courage - for all we know, the world really is square and we may be about to fall off the edge of it if we journey on. It's that old Philosophy101 conundrum which asks how we can be sure that we really do exist, the conventional response being that of Descartes 'I think, therefore I am', but how do you know that it's really you thinking and you're not a by-product of someone else's thoughts?

At HRMC we often test people's cognitive process ability. This means that to really understand the way people process information and solve problems you need to take away everything familiar - get back to basics if you will. It means taking away people's knowledge, skill and attitude (competencies) and measure how they process information in completely unfamiliar environments. It is done by means of playing an unfamiliar game where the rules differ from what is known or expected and you have to interpret using, not memory or experiences but your brain or natural aptitude. In effect it's measuring how people respond without the shackles and inhibitions of conventional wisdom.

To shift your paradigm, which ultimately will achieve meaningful transformation, you have to challenge core beliefs and conventional wisdom – that which is simple, convenient, comforting and familiar to you. It means letting go of the old models and replacing them with new, accurate ones, beginning with the concept of personal responsibility. To swap the feeling of 'I am where I am because of external forces and events beyond my control' to 'I am where I am because of the decisions and choices I have made'. That's a quantum leap in personal perspective, especially if you have spent a lifetime bemoaning your lot in life and blaming other people and unavoidable circumstances for where you are today. All of a sudden the paradigm has changed.

Sheryl Crow says that 'A Change Will Do you Good'. If you are serious about significant change, in Stephen Covey's language, this New Year you need to stop hacking away at the leaves and branches of attitude and behaviour and get to the root – your paradigm That's where New Year's resolutions and real life changes, meaningful ones at least, will come from. Resolve to embark on a journey of self-exploration this year instead of the usual annual guilt trip!

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