



# CATALYST

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## The Fallacy of Willpower

JODY MICHAEL ASSOCIATES

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773-275-5566

It is well known that most people create “New Year’s Resolutions” on or about January 1st every year. According to James Prochaska, Ph.D., Psychologist and Director of Cancer Prevention Research at the University of Rhode Island, most people make the same resolutions three years in a row before they actually accomplish them. Significant change is usually not instant. There are a variety of factors and forces that can cause a person to create self change, as well as how quickly or slowly they change. There are internal forces, as well as external forces. People can change from a single thought, emotion, catharsis, event, idea, statement, experience or decision. Sometimes people change because they *want* to; sometimes they change because they *have* to.

There is a myth that most people believe, that all it takes is willpower. Many people believe that change or action is simply “mind over matter.” This is partly true, in the sense that once you have made the decision to change or act; there will be many difficulties to work through along the way. Sometimes getting through the tough times does require a tremendous amount of willpower or “true grit.” Sometimes you just have to “gut it out.” However, your greatest motivators are your commitment and passion for the result. Aside from what you inherit genetically, there are three main factors in motivation — values, enjoyment and empowerment (VEE). You will be moved by what you value, enjoy, and receive the greatest validation.

A recent study reported that when Americans were asked if they would they keep their current job if they won the lottery. A surprising 22% said they would. When business owners were asked if they would keep running their businesses, an amazing 47% said they would. This means that when a person is truly happy and satisfied with their work, they would keep doing it even if they didn’t need the money. Therefore, there must be more to work than simply willpower. Most people actually thrive on overcoming challenges and achieving something they feel is important.



## All About Us

### Jody Michael Associates

We are a Chicago-based coaching and consulting company passionate about facilitating individual, team and organizational change.

We apply cutting-edge, theoretical and practical coaching approaches to help individuals, teams, and organizations bring about significant personal and professional transformation.

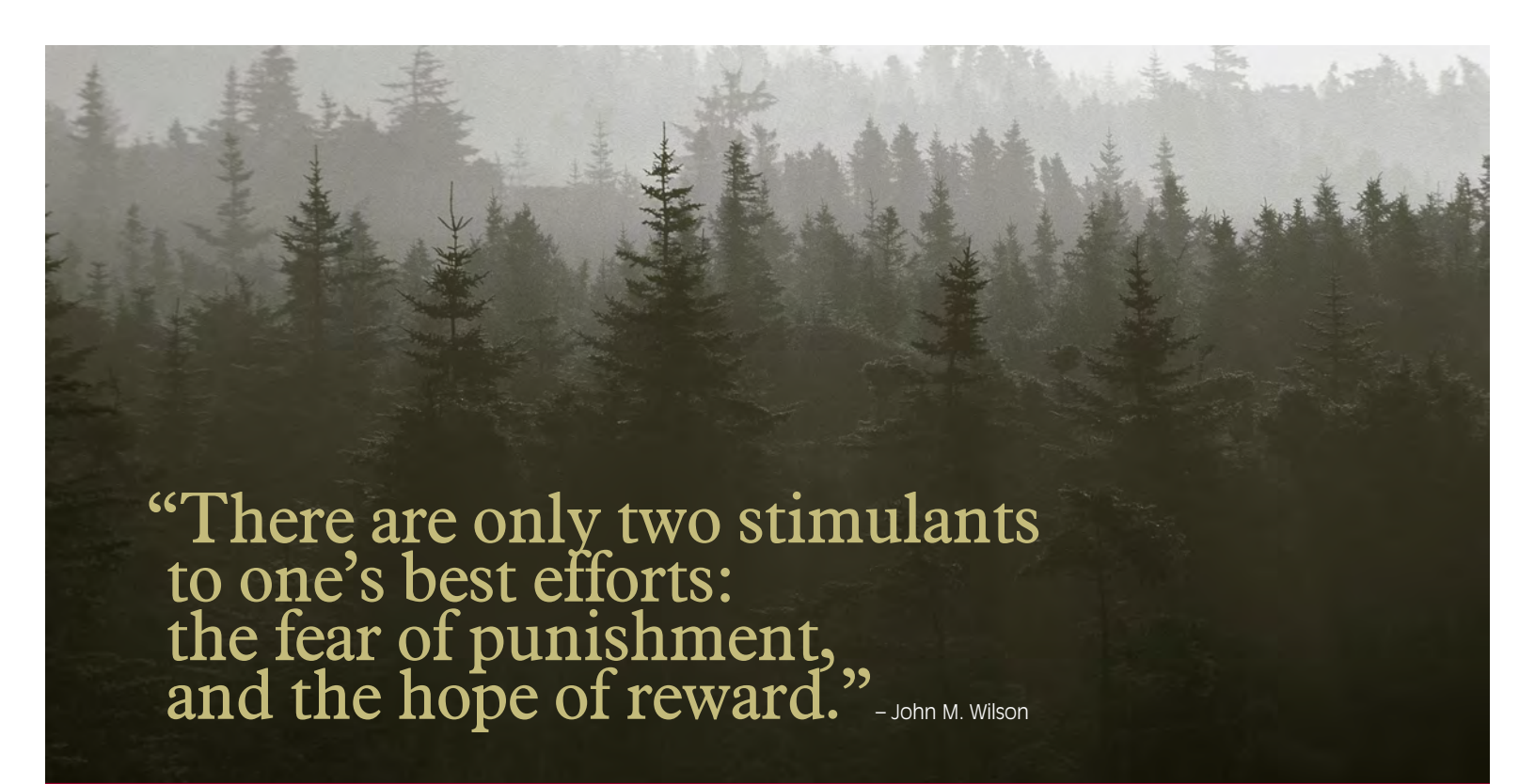
Our clients’ accomplishments often surpass their own initial aspirations. Their enthusiasm for the new capabilities and successes they now possess, contributes to our own success. In fact, **over 93% of our new clients are directly referred to us by satisfied, existing clients.** We have taken great pride in maintaining this metric for over fourteen years. Simply put, your success guarantees ours.

#### Individual offerings:

- Career coaching
- Executive coaching
- Life coaching
- Trader coaching
- Workshops

“Great dancers are not great because of their technique; they are great because of their passion.”

– Martha Graham



“There are only two stimulants to one’s best efforts: the fear of punishment, and the hope of reward.” – John M. Wilson

## Pain vs. Pleasure — Who Wins?

B.F. Skinner said, “People do what they do because of what happens to them when they do it.” What causes most people to change is either the fear of punishment or the hope of reward. When your desired outcome is great enough, you will be motivated to act. Therefore, your hopes and dreams must stir excitement inside you in order to give you that extra push. Freud’s “pleasure principle” states that people change to avoid pain and/or to seek pleasure. We are first motivated to be free of pain and discomfort. Then we are motivated for life improvement. The motivation for self-improvement and personal growth is to be happier, healthier and more satisfied.

Most people will not create significant change without pain or fear of pain. The event of loss or defeat can cause one to be highly motivated for change, or it can cause one to go down into depression and inertia. Hopefully you will choose the former. For most people, the fear of loss is much greater than the desire for gain. One need only look at the plethora of advertisements geared toward pain prevention to confirm this insight. The typical cycle of dieting manifests the force of the pain/pleasure principle. The diet begins as a result of the pain associated with being overweight: a person looks in the mirror and thinks, “I can’t stand how I look” or “I’m worried about my health.” Then the person begins the diet by gaining education about different diets, cutting out certain foods, etc. As changes are made, the person begins to lose

weight and as a result begins to feel better about his/her looks, to have more energy, and to feel healthier. The pleasure derived from this immediate success is very motivating, but soon the person notices that the weight loss is slowing down and he/she begins to feel discouraged. In addition, if the person encounters unrelated problems at work or in a relationship this can add stress and frustration. As the pleasure associated with the diet dwindles, and the diet proves to be powerless to affect the new sources of pain, the person loses motivation, binges, gains back a pound, decides the diet is too much work, and quits.

In attempting to make a change, it is helpful to determine whether you are typically more motivated by alleviating pain or pursuing pleasure. To help you determine this, ask yourself the question, “What does my work mean to me?” Did you reply, “It provides me with the money to have a great lifestyle?” If your answer to this is “yes,” you are probably more motivated by seeking pleasure. If you responded, “It keeps me from being poor and unable to pay my bills,” you are probably more motivated by avoiding pain. This is an important determination, as it may help you to devise a more effective strategy to overcome hurdles when you come to an impasse. If you are more motivated to avoid pain, in difficult times it may be more helpful to tell yourself something like, “I need to make sure I don’t go back to that place where I couldn’t pay my bills,” rather than, “I must keep moving forward so that I can pay for the children’s college education.”

## Corporate offerings:

- Executive coaching
- Leadership development
- Team building and team coaching
- Consulting: Accountability and Culture
- Workshops, training and development

## Jody Michael Bio

Jody Michael, M.A., L.C.S.W. is founder and president of Jody Michael Associates, a coaching consultancy that works one-on-one with individuals, teams and organizations to reach their goals.

She brings to her coaching practice over fifteen years of corporate leadership in the finance industry, successful entrepreneurial ventures, teaching credentials, an M.A. and PhD studies from the University of Chicago, and more than twelve years of practice applying clinical psychology principles to work-life, career, and business building issues.

To schedule an in-person office visit or an out-of-town phone consultation with Jody Michael, please call 773-275-5566.

## Quick Change vs. Gradual Change

People can change many aspects of themselves instantly and with relative ease, such as quitting drinking “cold turkey.” People can change just by making a decision with a snap of their fingers. There are many psychological modalities that purport their ability to help people make immediate changes in their lives. Eriksonian hypnosis and neurolinguistic programming (NLP) are two of the most common.

However, according to acclaimed change researcher James Prochaska, there are over 400 therapeutic modalities being used by psychotherapists today. According to his research, not one of the over 400 modalities is more successful at bringing about change than a determined individual working on his/her own. The key word here is **determined**.

The only problem with instantaneous changes is that many of them do not last. This is primarily due to the fact that we are “creatures of habit.” Although people can change in an instant, most people need long-term reinforcement or continuous support to keep the changes in place. However, many of these techniques can be incorporated into longer-term programs. Coaching, mentoring, sponsoring, or counseling have shown to be extremely valuable when it comes to long term change.

People are creatures of habit, and as a result, change is difficult. Change is usually a gradual process that consists of many small steps. Often, you are slowly working your way towards a goal without even realizing it. According to Prochaska’s research, people rarely make sudden, dramatic shifts from one behavior to another. Instead, he has found that most people pass through a series of well-defined stages:

- 1) Pre-contemplation
- 2) Contemplation
- 3) Preparation
- 4) Action
- 5) Maintenance/Support
- 6) Termination/Relapse

Prochaska explains that one may require several passes through these steps before succeeding. In fact, he equates the process of change to that of a “spiraling upward,” or of climbing the Leaning Tower of Pisa — first, you walk up, but as you approach the lower part of each floor, you begin to head down. A few steps later you resume your ascent. Give yourself permission to go slowly, make some stops and starts and detours along the way. Passion and motivation are not constant.

## How a Coach Can Help You

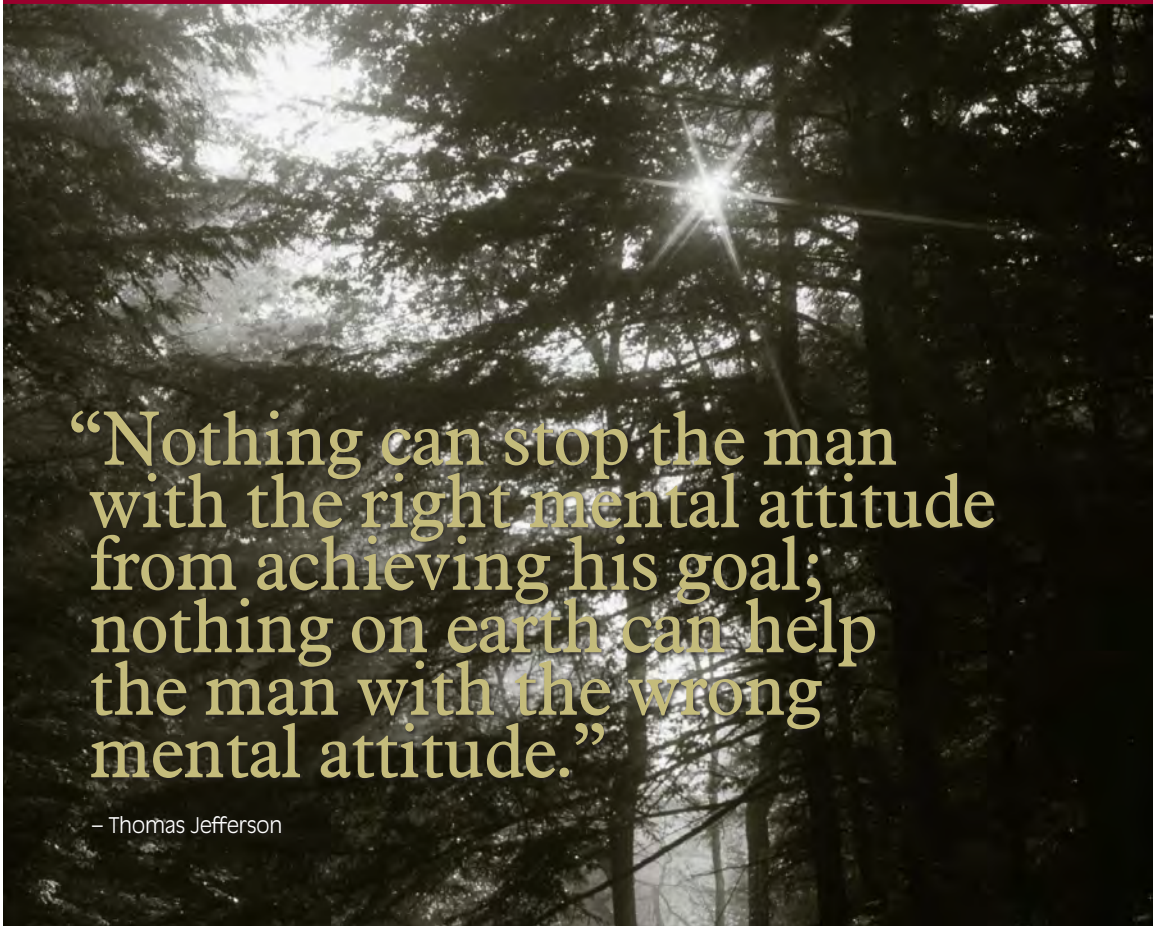
Whether your career is not quite where you’d like it to be, you’re a small business owner in search of new ideas, or you’re an executive reaching for the next rung, a coach can prove instrumental in helping you identify, accomplish, and achieve. Please refer to ‘Client Case Studies’ and read a few examples of how JMA coaches have helped their clients overcome obstacles and succeed.

## A Listening Exercise for Couples

Reciprocal listening is a powerful tool for couples who need to improve their communication. Couples who try this may become aware of how limited their communication has been in the past. They also learn an effective technique, which can increase the respect, trust, and intimacy of their relationship. This exercise may seem structured and perhaps contrived at first, but stay with it. The rewards can be immense.

The couple decides on a minor disagreement that they need to talk about. Each partner takes turns being either the speaker or the listener. The speaker has five minutes to speak without interruption. As speaker, talk about the problem as you see it. Present your argument briefly and stick to the point. Be sure to use “I statements” to present your views and don’t place the blame on your partner (that is, just talk about how you feel about the conflict without putting your partner in a defensive position). After five minutes your partner (the listener) will verbally summarize what he or she has heard. This allows the speaker to let the listener know if anything has been left out or if it has been misinterpreted. Keep going until the speaker feels that the point has been completely heard.

As the listener, pay close attention to what is being said and try to attune yourself to your partner’s needs. When you summarize what your partner has said, make sure you don’t disagree, argue, or criticize. Just repeat what you have heard.



“Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.”

– Thomas Jefferson

## The Power of Commitment

It may be more helpful to look at change as a commitment rather than as self discipline and willpower. For change to be lasting there needs to be a strong level of passion as well as **commitment**. Commitment is what transforms a promise, hope, dream or goal into reality. If you are serious about achieving your goals, dreams and desires, you must **commit** to them one hundred percent. How do you develop this kind of total commitment or "definiteness of purpose," as Napoleon Hill calls it? You must move past wishful thinking such as, "it would be nice if..." and "I would love it if..." and "my life would be great if..." You must move on to "mustful" thinking. If you cannot "muster" up a "must" attitude about your goal, it probably isn't a very passionate one. If there's no passion, what's the point? Keep it as a wish or fantasy if you'd like, but just be aware that it is just a wish and not a goal.

Many people fear commitment because they think it will restrict them or shut them in. We would like to have options. Here is the irony in commitment: commitment brings freedom! Commitment to your higher purpose brings you focus, purpose, power and freedom. You will become free of obligations and barriers that once got in your way. You will become free of self-sabotages. You will become free of binds, confusion and ambivalence. Making a commitment actually frees you up to be yourself and live more fully. You are much more likely to get the life of your dreams when you make and keep commitments!

## Questions to Ask Yourself Regarding Your Desire for Change

1. What three things am I most committed to in my life?
2. How are these commitments aligned with my values and higher purpose?
3. What one thing would I most like to change about myself this year?
4. How is this goal aligned with my values and higher purpose?
5. Who and how can I ask for support in my commitment?
6. What can I do today toward my commitment?

Whatever the reason, if you think you may be getting in your own way by having to do it your own way, this would be an important issue to examine in your coaching.

Now switch positions. The speaker becomes the listener and the listener, the speaker. Follow the same procedures until the new speaker feels satisfied that his or her position has been understood. It is important to avoid letting this exercise turn into an argument. Because this is such a powerful way of learning to listen and to communicate better, many people prefer to try it with a therapist present, at least for the first few attempts.

**“If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”**

– Henry David Thoreau

## Suggested Reading...

Canfield, Jack and Victor Hanson, Mark. (1995) *The aladdin factor*. Berkeley, CA.

Hill, Napoleon, (1960) *Think and grow rich*. New York: Doubleday.

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Waitley, Denis. (1997) *The new dynamics of goal setting*. New York: William Morrow.