Learning isn't done through memorization or new knowledge - it's in your actions every day. Here's how you might be standing in your own way.

Seven Obstacles
Keeping You from Change

By Stephanie Vozza

Face it: We're all just a bunch of old dogs trying to learn new tricks. Whether we're making resolutions, trying to gain new skills or vowing to kick bad habits, the trick isn't gathering the knowledge needed to make the change; it's putting the info into action.

"No one ever transformed their life from simply reading a book," says Chris Majer, founder and CEO of the Spokane, Wash.-based management consulting firm The Human Potential Project. "Change can only take place through practice, patience, and perseverance."

"Too often we believe if we gain enough information and understanding, we will do something different," says Majer. "But that just isn't true." Comfort is a formidable enemy.

Transformation requires another level--a capacity to act--but obstacles will get in the way. The good news is you can maneuver around them, says Majer, author of The Power to Transform: Passion, Power, and Purpose in Daily Life. Here are seven potential pitfalls to change and the mindset you'll need to plow through them:

1. Being Blind to Your Blindness

Blind spots are normal, natural, and common, says Majer, but they limit us. Instead, you must recalibrate the lens through which you view the world, actively seeking new knowledge, opinions, and insights to expand your capacity to move. "We can't see what we can't see if we aren't willing to listen," he says.

2. The Desire to Be Comfortable

Comfort is a formidable enemy, says Majer: "Our minds are deeply committed to being right, comfortable, and safe," he says. "Unfortunately, comfort and authentic learning are mutually exclusive." Simply put, you must be willing to get out of your comfort zone to transcend. **Get comfortable with the idea that change will be uncomfortable.**

3. Confusing Opinions with Learning

An opinion is not the same as a thought, says Majer: "Thinking is the process of generating an original idea or distinction," he says. "It requires energy and attention; having an opinion requires neither."

Assessing a situation can get in the way of learning. Instead of deciding whether or not you like the idea, Majer says ask yourself, where's the power in this for me?

4. The Desire for Instant Gratification

We live in a world where we want it all and we want it now, but authentic learning doesn't happen in an instant, says Majer. "If you want to really learn and change, then you need to get past the distractions and commit to build enduring practices," he says.

5. Thinking But Not Doing

The mind can understand, but it's the body that actually learns, says Majer. "Developing new skills takes practice in real time with real people with real impacts and personal risk," he says. In other words, practice - lots of it - makes perfect.

6. The Drive for Novelty

One of the greatest killers of change is the allure of the next big thing or the latest fad. You cannot be effective at creating change if you chase after every new idea, says Majer.

"Building authentic competence takes time," he says. "You must be willing to stick with one process if you are going to change."

7. The Belief that Change is Private

Authentic, sustained learning is a social process, says Majer; we learn best and most easily in a community of committed learners. Unfortunately, we also live in a world where we are paid to know, and not knowing is often considered a weakness. So, we buy books, take webinars, and listen to recordings in private, but the self-help style of change often comes with a delusion of progress.

"People learn best when they're learning from each other," he says. "Hire a coach or put yourself into a structured process. And know that learning takes time." ■

Stephanie Vozza writes about business, time management and really cool people for magazines, websites and companies.