

# Lasting Change Requires Focus. Here's How to Get It

The following is adapted from [Chasing Cupcakes](#).

When it comes to creating change in your life, focus makes all the difference.

When you focus on the right things, change becomes easier. When you focus on the wrong things, it can feel like every day is an uphill climb.

It's important to note here that I'm not talking about *what* you're trying to change. If you want to improve your life by focusing on your health before you tackle your finances, more power to you. Whatever fire has gotten the biggest, deal with it first.

When it comes to focus, what matters is *how* you go about making change happen. That's where the wrong focus can slow or completely stop your progress.

I learned this lesson from the book *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by authors Chris McChesney and Sean Covey. In it, Chris and Sean use the concepts of lag and lead measures to help problem solvers figure out *where* to focus their efforts.

Let's dig into these concepts to see how they can help you create lasting change.

## A Focus on Lag Measures Doesn't Work

Let's start with lag measures. These are your outcomes: weight loss, less debt, more money in savings, or running a six-minute mile. In business, a lag measure might include hitting a revenue target or sales quota. Lag measures are the endpoint, and when pursuing goals, most people focus their efforts on those endpoints.

McChesney and Covey make a case for why focusing on lag measures, or endpoints, is a mistake. Instead, they explain why you should focus on lead measures.

Lead measures are the actions that predict and influence the endpoint. If the lag measure (endpoint) is weight loss, lead measures might include journaling, eating more vegetables, reducing processed foods, or creating new beliefs around food.

Lead measures are factors that are completely within your control. On the flip side, you have far less control over the endpoint than you do the factors that influence it.

Let's consider an example. A real estate agent might set a goal to sell more homes. Selling more homes is her lag measure; it's an endpoint.

Lead measures, actions, and behaviors that both predict and influence the goal might include things like calling more prospective clients, showing more homes to each buyer, or reaching out to people who have listed their home for sale by owner.

When an agent focuses on lead measures, which predict and influence their end goal, they create more progress than if they broadly focus on trying to sell more homes.

## Your Thoughts are the Ultimate Lead Measure

Since you can't influence the outcome, your energy should be invested in the attitudes and behaviors that predict and influence the goal you're trying to reach.

If your goal is weight loss, you can only control your choices and behaviors, like what you eat, how much you eat, and eliminating the excuses that get in the way.

In other words, control the controllables and let the outcome come to you.

That said, it's important to note that not all the factors that predict and influence your success are created equal. Some have a dramatic impact, while others have none.

No matter what you're trying to do, there is one lead measure that will always produce a dramatic result. It will keep you out of the ditch when you hit a dump in the road.

The ultimate lead measure is your thoughts. Optimizing your thoughts—how and what you think—is the lead measure with the highest return on investment.

You might think this sounds woo-woo and hippy-dippy, but it's not. Optimizing your thoughts is practical and effective because how you think drives how you act.

## A Perfect Time to Change Your Thoughts

Here's an example of changing your thoughts that's relatable for everyone.

You've finished dinner. You aren't hungry but you just want

a little something.

Dark chocolate with a spoonful of almond butter is totally better than cookies or ice cream. And, come on, it's so small, is it really going to make a difference?

Plus, you've been pretty good all day. You'll just finish off those dark chocolate squares. In fact, eating them tonight means they won't be here to tempt you tomorrow!

Via your thoughts, you've talked yourself into dessert. You've effectively convinced yourself. You made a case for it; you negotiated for it and came to the decision by way of your thoughts. Like I said: your thoughts drive your choices.

Different thoughts in the same situation can lead to a completely different choice. Consider this alternate way of thinking about the after-dinner dilemma:

*Dark chocolate would be so good, but I'm not hungry right now. Food always tastes better when I'm hungry, and I'm sure that moment will come soon. I'll wait until then.*

If you were to engage in that line of thinking after dinner, you probably won't eat dessert because you won't be hungry again before bed. Crisis averted.

### Combine Your Thoughts with Other Lead Measures

Focusing on lead measures sets you up for success, and the ultimate lead measure is your thoughts. Begin there, and to boost your chances even further, layer in some other practices and behaviors that push you closer and closer to your goal.

The good news is that, since you started with your thoughts, you'll be more likely to continue those behaviors even when it would be easier to stop doing them.

*For more advice on finding the right focus, you can find*

[Chasing Cupcakes on Amazon.](#)

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