Patty’s thoughts how coaches can think about/use Prochaska’s “Stages of Change”/The Transtheoretical Model

James Prochaska’s model of Change describes a process of progress through stages. As a model it is widely studied and referenced and is good to know about. Wherever a client is, a good coach can “work with that.” It’s normal for people to hold several points of transition at once.

Stage 1: Precontemplation

In precontemplation, we haven’t yet decided to make a change. At this stage, a person is not ready, may be resistant, demoralized; underestimating the benefits of change. For example, you know exercise is healthy, but you aren’t quite convinced the benefits outweigh the trouble of getting started.

Coaching strategy: Put On Your Thinking Cap/Problem recognition: What's important enough to change?
- This isn't the time to "just do it." Instead, ask gently about what your client is noticing, imagining.
- Affirm the “pros” that the client comes up with.
  “What are you working on that you’re excited about and where would you like to be with your work in five years?”
- Keep an eye on your client’s reasons for wanting the change, weighing the benefits against the consequences of the status quo. Once your pros and cons begin to be even, your client is moving to the next stage.
- Normalize “recycling” and keep gently co-creating realistic goals. Discouragement can end a promising alliance.

Thoughts: There is no point; I’ve tried; I can’t; I don’t see how; don’t see the need; I won’t . . .
Feelings: Indifferent; surprised with feedback; defensive
Behaviors: Little recognition of the problem even in the face of tough consequences

Powerful Questions: What’s bringing this up for you? And why now? If you could do anything . . .? What if? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?

Stage 2: Contemplation

Now you’re seriously considering change, but you’re not ready to start yet. The pros and cons are even, and there’s probably ambivalence. You’re moving toward making a decision, maybe intending to take action in the coming months. Your next step is planning. If you keep sliding back to the contemplation stage, it’s probably because you flung yourself straight into action too soon. This is where a lot of us call on the services of a good coach.

Coaching strategy:
- Take an honest look: what’s really preventing your client from getting started?
- Get committed. Start removing some obstacles and gremlins.

Thoughts: Hmm. Maybe. I may.
Feelings: Undecided, uncertain, unsettled.
Behaviors: Debating, compromising, expanding-contracting.

Powerful Questions: How do you see the pro’s and con’s? How do both sides line up with your values? What would this require of you, your strengths and resources? What if? Who knows? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?
Stage 3: Preparation

In preparation, the balance between the cons and the pros begins to tip towards the pros. You're planning to take action soon.

Coaching strategy: Make a plan (back to our example . . .)
- Think through all the details: Will you walk or swim? Where and when will you exercise? What kind of clothing or equipment do you need?
- Draw up a contract with yourself. Set three goals: one for the next month, one for six months, and one for a year. Reward yourself for each goal accomplished. Set an initial goal you're sure to attain; early success will propel you onward.
- Develop a detailed contingency plan. Where will you walk if it rains? How will you exercise when you visit your in-laws? What will you do on days you're tired?
- Make a public commitment. Tell your coach, your friends and family. Ask for support, invite them to check in on how you're doing.

Thoughts: I need to make a move. It's time. I will. What could I do?
Feelings: Determined, willing, earnest.
Behaviors: Test-and-learn; open and seeking; making small changes.

Powerful Questions: How do you see your priorities and next steps? Who needs to be in your corner? How will you know when you're ready to take action? What needs to be tested so you can learn more? What obstacles do you see? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?

Stage 4: Action

Now it's time to "just do it."

Coaching strategy: Put your plan in motion—even if it is to test-and-learn.
- Make your environment conducive to exercise.
- Reward yourself for sticking to your plan.
- Think long-term. You're forming a lifelong habit here. No need to fret about a missed day; you have the next 50 years to make it up.
- You may spend six months of concentrated effort at this stage.

Thoughts: Why'd I wait so long? This is hard—and worth it. I am.
Feelings: Enthusiastic, reflective, active, energetic, optimistic.
Behaviors: Engaged, learning, practicing, accepting.

Powerful Questions: What needs to happen this week? What will you pay attention to? How will you know if this moves you in the right direction? What are you saying 'good-bye' to? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?

Stage 5: Maintenance

You've been exercising regularly for six months, and you've realized you can do this. The pros are obvious at every level.

Coaching strategy: Work out the kinks.
- Create a mental image of yourself exercising and think of it often. This "exercise identity" will help the habit stick.
- Learn from your mistakes, and figure out how to avoid them next time.
• Watch for the benefits to happen -- less huffing and puffing, more energy -- and relish them.

Thoughts: I don’t want to let this go! I want to keep working. I still am.
Feelings: Accomplished, steadfast, invigorated, optimistic.
Behaviors: Recognizes success AND speedbumps, building support, applying skills and decisions.

Powerful Questions: What are you noticing? What do you continually need to move out of your way? What do you love about this new-normal? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?

Stage 6: Termination/Continuation

You’ve done it! You’re steady with the new-normal. You’ve terminated your sedentary habits and replaced them with healthy ones. It’s the end of the inactive you.

Coaching strategy: Celebrate. And use your increased confidence to address the next frontier of growth or transition in creating the life you want.

Thoughts: I don’t want to let this go! I want to keep working.
Feelings: Accomplished, steadfast, invigorated, optimistic.
Behaviors: Recognizes success AND speedbumps, building support, applying skills and decisions.

Powerful Questions: What have you learned about how YOU create and sustain change? What are you contemplating now? What are you saying to yourself, and how are you saying it?

(And the cycle continues in both coach and client.)

Note to coaches: This is rarely a straight-line process. Normalize returns to earlier stages: “this is too hard, I’m worried this won’t work because . . .”. Just learn to recognize, accept, continue creating engagement and safety, and as always, use your coaching skills to work toward next steps—or revised ones. And remember, “imposed” change asks for compliance and has about a 25 percent success rate over time in bringing lasting transformational change.

James Prochaska. Changing for Good
Summary of his Transtheoretical Model: http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/transtheoretical.htm
Detailed overview: http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/TTM/detailedoverview.htm