



Articles by Kathie Hightower & Holly Scherer

## Changing Patterns

by Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer

I love the “fresh start” feel of the New Year. I have a new calendar and even treated myself to a brand new holder, this one a sporty bright red, a symbol of action for me.

I’ve been in a bit of a slump lately, a combination of many factors, from September 11 to disappearing contracts due to big budget cuts my clients face to a major computer challenge just as my website goes up to this annual down feeling as the grey skies period hits the northwest. Okay, so being a bit down is a natural reaction, but it’s not a good thing for someone who teaches people how to increase their energy, creativity and joy!

I’ve been here many times before. That’s one of the reasons I teach what I do. I don’t come to this topic area from my own natural high energy, optimism and action-taking habits. I know that many of my fellow seminar leaders do — they were born that way, full of energy, enthusiasm and optimism. I come to it from the opposite life.

I am a recovering pessimist, procrastinator and way-too-serious professional. I had to learn these life lessons myself first, the long hard way of research and testing, and I have to relearn the lessons regularly. I think this is a little like being a recovering alcoholic. The negative tendencies remain a part of your inner makeup forever; you just learn how to keep them at bay. And how to pull yourself back up when you fall off the wagon. It’s great to have the awareness and the tools.

This year I finally decided it’s time to change a pattern I’ve been contemplating changing for years. I intend to turn myself into a morning person.

Mind you, my hereditary makeup is that of a night person. My 81-year-old mother still stays up until midnite or later every night, reading and/or watching TV, and then sleeps in til 830 or 9. My sister made a career change from the 9-5 (well, more like 7 – 5) federal government world to do what she loves and to work on her body schedule. She is an emergency medicine veterinarian, working at night and sleeping during the day.

Oh, sure, I’ve been forced to do the morning thing in the past. In the Army I had to be up early, often as early as 0430 for weeks or months on end. In my fanatic running days, I got myself out of bed at 430 am to run (in the snow and ice, no less) in Chicago before I left for my job at 630, knowing that when I got home at 7 or 8 or later running would be out of the question.

But now that I have my own business, working out of my home, I have more flexibility. I work best during the afternoon, early evening and even late evening. And then I sleep in and start my day slowly. But I realize I’ve been sliding into fewer and fewer actual work hours, not getting things done as I need to.

And I keep getting “signs” that I should change this pattern. Of course, I’m a bit slow to act on them.

The first sign for me was when Henriette Klausner, author of *Writing On Both Sides of the Brain* and many other books, shared the fact that she was able to write her first book only by getting up and onto the computer (before a cup of coffee even) at 530 am before her kids got up. She mentioned that in 1988 at a speaker’s workshop held at her home in the Seattle area. See...I really am a bit of a procrastinator.

Then I met Ruth Kuehler this past year. This lively, active 86-year-old shared that she started rising at 4 am when her kids were little just to have one to two hours a day for herself. She continues to do that to this day!

And the straw that broke my inertia? My artist friend, Carrie Marie, just couldn’t seem to find time for her art, the lower-paying (for now) part of her creative work. We tried all kinds of tricks, all of which would work for a short while.

Visiting her recently, I was astounded by the seemingly sudden volume and quality of her art. Her new secret? “I get up, get a cup of coffee, and get into my studio at 530 at least three times a week. I usually don’t want to be there or know what I’m going to do, but as soon as I put my brush to paper I enter the flow. My coffee gets cold before I stop in time to switch over to the money-making graphic design work.”

Then I read a book on creativity as the author describes what it meant to him to force himself to become a morning person. The benefits and the increased volume of published writing.

All right, all right, already. I get it.

So...since I teach goal-achieving workshops among others, I know the tools. One of them is to announce your goal to the world — well, specifically to supportive people, not the naysayers of your life.

So, besides telling all my family and friends and my support group, I’m announcing it to you.

It’s like the couple who managed to succeed with the very challenging Body for Life program, as their progress was reported in *Modern Maturity* magazine. The success rate for people who take on that program is apparently very low, in the single digit percentages. I told my husband, “Well, that’s the way to do it — know you have to share your success — or failure — in a magazine read by thousands.” *Modern Maturity* has one of the highest subscription bases in the publishing industry.

Okay, so this ezine's subscription base isn't that high, but it's accountability nonetheless...especially to maintain my reputation in teaching my workshops on goal achieving. It's only January 8 as I write this, only eight days into this new year and new pattern, hardly a success story yet. But I have managed to get up at 6am every day so far, including New Years day, including today after arriving home at 1130pm after a Seattle workshop and long drive.

I have successfully changed patterns before...switching from drinking volumes of coffee and diet Coke to drinking my eight plus glasses of water a day...adding in the 3 fruits and 2 vegetables a day that are supposed to help me ward off cancer. Those are both truly well-ingrained new habits in my life and have been for eight years or more. I managed this past year to finally start the daily yoga practice I've been "wanting" to start since 1978! Hey, I've managed to stick to it all but about five days for a year now so it is a new habit. So I know it works.

Now, the morning person thing is the pattern I need to change; it may not be yours. (In fact, I know that many of my friends — especially the moms of infants and my military friends — would consider sleeping until 6 am sleeping IN — a delicious delight.) But we all have patterns that we could change for healthier, more productive ones. And you know which they are. Hey, I've known this was a needed change for YEARS. For you, it might be switching from mindless TV vegging every evening to consciously watching one or two great shows and using the other evenings for more family interaction or that class you keep "talking" about taking someday. It might be adding in daily exercise/movement of some amount! It might be switching from soda and coffee to water.

Here's what I'm doing on the morning person habit side that just might help you in changing whatever pattern you want to change.

1. I sat down on December 31<sup>st</sup> and wrote into every daily "to do" page of January the following:

Get up at 6am

Write or Walk first thing

(You've heard that doing something new for 21 days straight will make it a new habit. I don't trust that. I figure I better go for 30

2. I came up with a longer list of the steps to change this pattern along with a list of the projects I hope to take action on. I posted that list in my Daytimer for when I travel and posted it on my bathroom mirror to read twice a day. Hey, if you are like me and early periodontal disease scared you into spending the \$85 (for a toothbrush!), that two full minutes of brushing with your Soniccare twice a day gives you plenty of reading time.

Part of my list:

- Get up at 6 am every day including weekends (and that means getting to bed by 10!)
- Write or walk first thing, BEFORE you read the paper or open your email!

3. Tell everyone.

4. I have a small white board in my home office where I post my "themes" for each year. Last year it was "Business Practices" (hey, I did get my Visa account, a separate business charge card, new stationery and flyers, and my website is up!) So for this year it reads:

- Morning person (up at 6 am)
- Action! — especially in marketing & article queries
- Flow of friends, family, fun & work

I read that every day as it is right behind my telephone.

As the temptation to turn over after the alarm goes off becomes greater (if it does — so far I've been ready to be up amazingly) I might add other tricks. Maybe even my sister's college trick. She would set three alarm clocks, each one further away from the bed, so she had to get out of bed to turn them off. Whatever works!

For right now, I'm focusing on the benefits that have already shown up.

- I am getting a lot more done.
- I'm writing again, not putting it last when I have no energy left at the end of the day.
- I've had some truly magical mornings walking along the water. Today as I walked in heavy rain I was gifted with a full rainbow and minutes later a double rainbow!
- My husband and I had a magical morning Saturday when we got our kayaks in the water by 8am. Not only did we commune with numerous seals who'd pop up to look at us in curiosity, but we saw over 35 blue heron lined up on a rise. Minutes later they all took off at once headed in different directions. (We are still wondering if that was their morning meeting and peptalk and they were all heading to their assigned locations for the day.)
- I've had some great morning conversations with my husband that I would have missed out on in the past.
- I have more energy, all day, rather than being tired as I'd expected.
- Something has shifted for me. I'm taking action rather than adding things to a "to do" pile, I'm clearing clutter I've been meaning to clear for years, I even completely rearranged my office so that the work flow improved.

So...I don't know what patterns you might want to change, but I do think that changing patterns can take us out of the rut, the slump, the block. It shifts your energy flow. It's certainly worth a try. Hey, if you don't like it after 40 days you can go right back to your old habit. But something tells me that you won't.

Postscript: If adding exercise to your life is the pattern you want to change, do the above. And add in this commitment which is what got me to finally do a daily yoga practice. I made a commitment to at least ten minutes a day. (And allowed that that 10 minutes didn't even have to be consecutive.) It worked. Some days it really was only 10 minutes. Some days it was ten minutes throughout the day of short 1 – 2 minute stretches. Many days in fact. But that anti-procrastination trick really works. Most days that would slide into 20 minutes or longer. For the past few months the minimum seems to have become 20 minutes by default, often sliding into 40 or more.

And then I read an article by a counselor yesterday who thinks that 40 is the magic number. So to be on the safe side, I just added my daily items to the first ten days of my February Daytimer pages. I'll let you know in a future ezine if it's truly a habit!

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Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer present workshops and are writing a book titled *Follow Your Dream While You Follow the Military*<sup>TM</sup>. For information and/or to subscribe to their ezine, go to [www.jumpintolife.net/military.html](http://www.jumpintolife.net/military.html)