



## Step 6: Generate and Celebrate Intermediate Success

Step 6 of the 7 Step Process of Personal Change directs you to generate and celebrate intermediate successes. (Wa-hoo — we're at the party stage!)

To earn the party, you'll need to identify your milestones – the intermediate steps that will lead to the completion of your change commitment. Then, instead of waiting until the end of the whole project, you can celebrate the successful completion of each milestone along the way.

For those of you who are wondering why you'd want to distract yourself from the big picture with a celebration before you put the finishing touches on your project (and for those of you who are always ready to celebrate and want evidence to convince others), here are Six Significant Reasons to Generate and Celebrate Intermediate Success.

**1. Intermediate success motivates and reinforces the actions you need to take.** A recent article in *Newsweek* highlighted the work of Dr. Barry Richmond of the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology in Japan. Dr. Richmond's research demonstrated that monkeys learning to perform a task have fewer errors when they know a reward is coming. Dr. Richmond and his colleagues recorded the electrical activity in the anterior cingulate region of their monkeys' brains. They discovered that the signal got stronger and stronger until the monkey was given the reward.

As Dr. Richmond says "If you're working toward a distant goal, you must keep working even if you don't like what you're doing. The anterior cingulate seems to help keep you on task.



*Rewards excite the brain!*

There is an increased expectancy that is built up for reaching the goal and getting a reward. As you get closer to the goal, you work harder." Richmond's research suggests that the activity in the anterior cingulate corresponds to the motivation you feel to complete a task.

The upshot of this is that knowing when you'll reward yourself will boost your motivation. If you make only vague promises to yourself about 'Someday I'll do something nice for myself,' your ability to stay motivated, particularly in the face of disappointment or resistance, is greatly reduced.

It's reasonable to suppose that the more you know about the reward – what it will be, when and how you'll get it – the more motivated you are to do what's necessary. The more specifically you plan the reward, including what you will do to earn it and what the reward will be, the more likely you are to complete the task. Of course, promising yourself a reward you really want is far more motivating than promising yourself something you're only mildly interested in.

**2. Intermediate success gives you proof that the sacrifice is worthwhile.** When you set a series of intermediate goals, your motivation over time is higher than it would be for the final goal alone. When you achieve one of your intermediate goals, your commitment is rewarded. You can see that your efforts are paying off. You get the additional satisfaction of proving you can do this – to yourself and to others. Achieving intermediate goals keeps your momentum going. It also keeps you engaged, interested and aware of the urgency of making the change. And since it reduces stress, celebration is good for your body and spirit.

**3. Intermediate success convinces the people you want as allies that the commitment is worth their faith and time.** Your allies want to see you make progress; they want to celebrate results with you. There is a vicarious thrill in seeing a friend succeed. I love to go to the Fine Arts Building at the Minnesota State Fair and point to the exhibits done by my students, clients and friends. It bestows an exciting kind of success and talent by association to be able to say “Hey I know the artist who did that!” Letting your allies know when you achieve a short term goal is rewarding for them because it is a recognition of how they have contributed to that success. People want to support you more and more as they see you accomplishing your milestones.



This is particularly true if you have a life partner who has a vested interest in how you use your time. If you’re spending less time with your family and friends to make time for your project, or if you’re asking your spouse or partner to invest your shared financial resources in supporting you in making this change, sharing the celebration of the results along the way with you will make that trade-off more palatable.

**4. Intermediate success can give you a return on your investment.** You’re investing your time, energy and money (buying supplies or services, lost time and earnings for the time you spend, etc.). Achieving an intermediate goal can give you:

- ⦿ Financial return from selling a portion of the project, getting grant money or securing investors.
- ⦿ Credibility return in the form of a publishing credit, winning an award or earning other public forms of recognition. Remember “Nothing succeeds like success.” Anytime you can say, “This has happened, I’ve had this success” it makes people want to help you more.
- ⦿ Feedback you can use to fine tune your vision and strategies.

**5. Intermediate success makes it difficult for critics to slow the change project.** These might be external critics or your own inner critic. When you can show the intermediate success you’ve already

achieved and your timetable for what happens next, the people in your life are less likely to criticize and more likely to give you the support you’re looking for. They’re going to get on board or at least stop throwing obstacles your way.

Recognizing how far you’ve come also goes a long way toward silencing your inner critic. When your inner critic says “You’ve been working on this for months (or years), aren’t you ever going to get done? Why don’t you just give up?”, you can silence that voice by pointing to your accomplishments to date. Celebrating those accomplishments along the way is an effective muzzle that keeps the inner critic from even starting to criticize.

**6. Intermediate success acknowledges the action taken as well as the outcomes.** If you only look at the final goal, it can seem so far away at times that you lose heart. Particularly on the days when your resistance is high and your spirits are low, reaching the final destination can feel overwhelming. That’s when you need to have a good short term success coming your way. You need to have something attainable on the horizon, something to look for to, to sustain your motivation. Anticipating your next success is like the feeling you get when planning a vacation. Intermediate success reminds you to enjoy the journey and to celebrate every step along the way.

In fact, the most appropriate time to celebrate is when it seems like you have nothing worthy of celebration. What can you celebrate when you run into obstacles and nothing is going right? Celebrate your persistence and commitment. When you can’t get to the milestone, sometimes you need to celebrate getting to the next stepping stone. Celebrate both outcomes and efforts.

For some changes, it might take months to get the outcome you want. You might have to make 50 calls, and get 49 “No thanks” to get the one “Yes.” It only takes one “Yes” to make it happen, but you have to go through the 49 “No’s” to get to the “Yes.” You need to earn each “No.” It’s not the result you wanted, but you took the risk

and the action to get the “No” that moves you closer to the “Yes.” And that is worthy of acknowledgment.

*Want more reasons to celebrate?  
Ready to move forward with a creative  
project and need help identifying  
milestones and target dates?  
Check out the Change Master class  
described on page 5.  
Or call 612-722-4139 to talk with  
Rosanne about coaching.*

Remember Thomas Edison was asked by a reporter, “Mr. Edison, you’ve had 999 failures. Aren’t you ready to admit you can’t make an electric lightbulb?” Edison replied, “I have not had 999 failures. I’ve discovered 999 ways not to make an electric lightbulb.” Then he went back to his lab and continued creating. If Edison hadn’t had that gift for celebrating the action as much as the outcome, we’d all be sitting around in the dark today.

You need to celebrate your action steps as much as Edison celebrated his. If you only celebrate the desired results, you will get discouraged and find it much harder to maintain your energy and commitment.

Celebration is as much about the effort you make as it about the results. There will be rejections, refusals, proposals that get turned down. When you feel the least like celebrating, is when you need it most. When you’re discouraged, you need to have some small thing to appreciate.



*Celebrate action as much as outcomes!*

As an added bonus, if you have been letting your allies know about your intermediate successes, then when you’re feeling discouraged, you can talk with one of them to get an objective perspective. “Yes, it must feel lousy to get turned down on that. Yes, it’s hard to run into so many obstacles. But remember you’ve already completed the first three stages. You’ve already come so far. Keep going.”

### What to Celebrate

To celebrate your milestones, you have to identify them. A milestone is a significant marker on the journey. Not every task is a milestone. A milestone might be a task that needs to be completed by a certain date (submit an application packet) or it might be a significant portion of the project (the first fifty pages). Some milestones are obvious stages (finishing cutting the material to fit the pattern). Some are more arbitrary because you need to break up a long stage that doesn’t have clear beginning and ending points (work 20 hours).

Make a list of your milestones. Don’t worry about getting the list just right. Give it your best estimate. Just be sure you’re giving yourself enough

opportunities to celebrate. Earlier in the project, you might need to build your momentum by giving yourself more milestones to celebrate. You might need to add milestones to your list later. After all, this is new territory you’re exploring and you can’t foresee every step of the way.

Or you might find a shortcut and be able to eliminate some tasks and milestones. But don’t ever take a milestone off the list after you’ve accomplished it, even if after you’ve done it, it seems like it wasn’t a big deal after all. The fact that it was easier to accomplish than you anticipated is more reason to acknowledge and celebrate your progress, not less. If it’s easier, it’s because you’ve grown and expanded your comfort zone. Don’t discount your accomplishments after the fact.

### When to Celebrate

Some people thrive on deadlines. Personally, I find the “dead” part of the word off-putting to the subconscious mind if not the conscious mind. I much prefer the phrase “target date.” It’s more appealing, and let’s face it, probably more accurate. Miss a deadline at work and you **are** pretty much dead. But no one is going to fire you if it takes you longer to complete this creative change of yours than you first thought. A target date is something you aim for. It gives you focus and accountability. But it isn’t cast in stone. It can’t be.



Think about it this way: you can probably give a very accurate estimate of how long it takes you to ready for work in the morning. You do it everyday; you know how long it takes. But how long would it take to dress yourself in a foreign costume? How long would it take to dress a mannequin or a monkey? How long would take to shave or shower if you had your arm in a sling? It’s always much harder to estimate how long it will take to do something you’ve never done before.

That’s what this creative change project of yours is – something you’ve never done before. Even if your change project is to write (or paint or produce or perform) your fifth book (or fiftieth painting or your

fifteenth recital), this project is different from those you've done before. That's what's so appealing and engaging about creativity – it's new.

It's tricky determining target dates. You need to make your best estimate based on your experience with similar tasks and information from people who've done similar things. Many of us who see ourselves as creative are fairly comfortable answering "It depends" to the question of how long each part of the project will take. My experience is that the more comfortable you are with "It depends," the more you need to push yourself to set target dates. Sure it's a guess, but remember the old adage, "The amount of time it takes to accomplish a task shrinks or expands to accommodate the amount of time scheduled." In other words, if your target dates are too generous or if you don't set any at all, it could take forever to get this project done. And that's no fun. Give yourself a reasonable amount of time, but challenge yourself too.

You will probably need to adjust some of your target dates. After all, they're estimates based on incomplete information. You'll get to some milestones sooner than you thought, which is even more reason to celebrate. Some milestones will need more time. Whenever you extend a target date, check in with at least one of your allies to keep yourself accountable. Invite that ally to question and push you a bit to see if there is some hidden resistance at work. If there is, take appropriate action. If not, adjust your target date with a clear conscience and renewed commitment. Keep in mind that adjusting the target date for one milestone may affect the target dates for subsequent milestones.

Add a target date to every milestone on your list.

## How to Celebrate

By now, it should be clear that celebrating your success is as important as achieving it. Don't give in to the temptation to postpone the celebration. Commit yourself to celebrating your success! Book the room, buy the tickets, make the appointment in advance. It's just as important to follow through on this action as any other. Match the size of the reward to the degree of challenge in the milestone. Big milestones warrant



big rewards; smaller milestones can be celebrated with smaller rewards.

It's helpful to make a list of possible ways to celebrate. Here's a partial list to get you started:  
**Go out for dinner.** Toast your success with friends.  
**Have friends over.** Picnic. Create your own award.  
**Make a certificate, trophy or ribbon.** Go to a Bed and Breakfast. Watch a really good movie. Go to the first matinee on a weekday. Party. Buy yourself something special. Take the day off. Go someplace special and interesting. Go shopping. Give yourself small food treats (i.e. one small cookie for every three phone calls you make). Make an appointment for a massage. Indulge in your favorite holiday routine when it isn't an official holiday. Spend time on yourself. Spend time with special people. Go to the beach. Read a favorite book.



Many celebrations are planned and can take an hour or more. But some are spontaneous and can happen in five minutes or less. You can call a friend to share the accomplishment and acknowledge your effort. You can post a gold star on a progress chart. At the very least, make a loud whoop, a "Wa-hoo!" noise. As my friend Julie points out, you simply can't help but feel great after a good, resounding "Wa-hoo!"

The important thing is to find out what works for you and use it. Your intention is significant. The same activity could be a celebration or an escape, deviation or distraction. It all depends on why you're doing it and how you feel about it. You'll know.

Add a reward to every milestone on your list.

## Milestone Charts and Maps

Transfer your list of milestones to the Milestone Chart on the next page, listing the milestones in chronological order by target date. Post it in your workspace so you can see it at a glance. Seeing your Milestone Chart often should stimulate your anterior cingulate and keep you raring to go. Add the completion dates and dates you actually rewarded yourself as you progress.

In the [Become a Change Master](#) class, we create Milestone Maps by giving each milestone a picture related to a central image or theme. When the



# Milestone Chart



Milestone	Target Date	Date Completed	Celebration	Date Celebrated
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milestone is completed, the picture is filled in. It's like a child's sticker book or an Advent Calendar. For example, Laura S., one of my coaching clients, is writing a novel that has references to flowers throughout. So the natural place to set her Milestone Map is a garden. When she completes a milestone, like finishing a draft of a chapter, she adds a picture of a flower to her map. The more progress she makes, the more beautiful and appealing her Milestone Map becomes.

Because these Milestone Maps incorporate images, they appeal to a different part of the brain. Creating a image based milestone map to accompany a word-heavy milestone list will mean you're using all parts of your brain. When your whole brain is engaged, you're more creative. If you'd like information about creating the Milestone Map, call me at 612-722-4139 or send me an email at [Rosanne@RosanneBane.com](mailto:Rosanne@RosanneBane.com).

## Looking for Reasons to Celebrate? Become a Change Master!

We will apply the 7 Step Process of Personal Change to give you the tools, skills and support you need to:

- ⊙ Stop procrastinating and start living the life you want
- ⊙ Remove obstacles and take action to make your dreams reality
- ⊙ Discover where and why you're resistant to moving on and how to move through the resistance to achieve your goals
- ⊙ Develop habits that support your creativity and your personal and professional development
- ⊙ Honor your promises to yourself and live with integrity, authenticity and power!

Tuition is self-determined based on what value you receive from the class. Online registration at [www.RosanneBane.com](http://www.RosanneBane.com) or call 612-722-4139.

**Tuesdays, Feb 25 thru April 15, 6:45 to 8:45 pm**

## Want to Write Your Way to Success? Sign up for these Loft Classes!

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**Classes start in March 2003. For more info or to register: call 612-379-8999 or visit [www.loft.org](http://www.loft.org).**



*When you or your organization needs motivation and information to move out of resistance and through the change, check out Rosanne's coaching and speaking services at [www.RosanneBane.com](http://www.RosanneBane.com). Or call Rosanne at 612-722-4139!*