

What Is Unconscious Change?

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How do you know when unconscious change has taken place?

And why does this matter to you?

I've written this guide to help you better understand unconscious change, which underlies the work I do.

Conscious approaches to change

To understand unconscious change, it's useful to contrast it with traditional or more conventional forms of changework.

(When I use the word changework, I'm speaking about any form of talk-based intervention, support, or coaching that can be used to work with everyday problems such as self-doubt, fear, and internal blocks.)

A more conventional approach to changework can typically involve:

- Analyzing the problem to try and better understand it.
- Building better strategies or ways to deal with the problem.
- Finding ways to manage or cope with a response when it shows up.
- Learning about the problem through general explanations of why people feel or respond the way they do.
- Help with knowing how to navigate or respond when certain reactions pop up.
- Finding more resourceful ways to deal with or respond to these reactions.

This is a more conscious approach to change: things you can deliberately put into practice in your life.

The issue with this approach is that the problem doesn't resolve.

A new response is built to counter the old response—more productive ways of behaving and thinking.

But this doesn't shift the source of the issue.

The idea is that when the issue you're dealing with shows up in the future, you'll have better ways to deal with it.

This relies on you being able to bring enough conscious awareness to these moments when an unconscious response takes place.

This can be challenging because sometimes you're not even aware of how you're responding until after the fact.

Or by the time you start to experience a response, it feels like it's already taken over.

An unconscious response (like fear, anxiety, overthinking) will feel involuntary: like there's not much you can do to combat it, make it go away, stop it in time, or deal with it once it takes over.

Recognizing unconscious change

When unconscious change takes place, there's nothing required to manage the change.

There's nothing that needs to be done in order to reinforce the change.

The way you think, feel, and act shifts in a way that feels natural.

Here's something to consider.

When you have an issue you'd like to overcome (e.g. self-doubt, fear, an internal block), this is what you're aware of—how it shows up in your life.

But there are also other layers to the problem that you're probably not aware of.

Something interesting can happen when unconscious change takes place.

Sometimes you forget what your problem was, or you forget certain aspects of the problem.

Not entirely.

It's more like the problem slips outside of your awareness until someone or something reminds you about it again.

Or it could be that it's difficult to remember how much of a problem it was because you no longer feel bad about it.

This happens because, put simply, when you feel bad and want to feel good, this creates a conflict.

But when you feel good and no longer bad, there's no real reason to keep thinking about how bad you used to feel.

Especially if you aren't able to access those old feelings in the same way anymore, if at all.

Changes in other areas of your life

Another thing that can happen when unconscious change takes place is that other areas of your life start to shift as well.

Meaning you work on one issue, but something shifts in another area of your life too.

For example, maybe you work on shifting the worry you experience around having to deal with conflict at work, and you notice that your sleep improves or that it's easier to assert your needs in your relationships.

It's not uncommon for a problem in one area of your life to be connected to problems in other areas because they share the same source.

What's behind one problem turns out to be what's behind another problem.

Here are some other characteristics of unconscious change.

1. It feels natural, not forced

Unconscious change is not something you need to push, force, or make happen.

There's no willpower required for it to take place.

With my work, there is a process.

But the change itself isn't something you 'do.'

This doesn't mean there's no work involved to get to the point where a shift takes place.

It means the shift itself doesn't require any effort.

However, the way I work does require you to:

- Be open.
- Be willing to explore.
- Engage with the process.
- Dig deeper into the issue you'd like to work on.

2. The change is felt/experienced

Sometimes it's even experienced before it's fully understood.

More clarity is often a sign that unconscious change has taken place.

But you don't have to experience clarity before a shift occurs.

For some people, unconscious change will feel more immediate and obvious.

For others, it may seem more gradual as things continue to integrate.

Whatever way it happens for you, it's usually felt.

Something shifts in your experience (how you're thinking, feeling, responding).

For some people, as I mentioned earlier, the changes feel so natural that it's not immediately obvious something has changed.

It becomes your new normal—your new baseline.

3. You notice that what you want changes

Your goals in life are sometimes related to what you're trying to move away from—problems or issues you had to deal with in the past.

When these old patterns shift, what you want becomes clearer.

You realize what it is you really want, what you'd truly like to move towards.

And that may not always be what you thought it was.

It can also be that new possibilities emerge.

If you feel more confident or more self-assured, you may now find yourself exploring possibilities and making decisions that you would never have considered in the past, when you felt blocked or held back.

4. Other people notice that you've changed

Sometimes other people may even notice you've changed.

It could be before you've even noticed it yourself.

Usually it's the people around you who know you best.

Especially when the shifts involve how you interacted with them in the past.

As the way you interact with others changes, you may also notice a difference in how they respond to you.

5. You're able to perceive things from a different perspective

Maybe the way you look at your past now is different, or you're able to perceive a challenging situation from a whole new perspective.

When unconscious change takes place, other ways of thinking become available.

You don't have to talk yourself into seeing things differently.

Your perspective can shift as the way you feel changes.

6. Your thinking and behaviour change

When the way you feel shifts, the way you think and behave tends to shift too.

This is not something you have to put into practice.

It follows automatically.

This doesn't discount the value of coaching or learning useful strategies.

This is about change that comes from within.

For example, imagine you have a tendency to always put other people first, and you feel bad when you put yourself first.

This work could be used to help you shift this underlying conflict so that you feel more comfortable putting yourself first, without feeling like you always have to put others first.

Coaching may be more useful if you'd like to learn how to communicate in a healthy way in your relationships.

Like learning to play the piano.

Learning to play the piano is a skill.

The more you put it into practice, the more unconscious (automatic) that skill becomes.

If you get worked up and anxious playing the piano and it disrupts your ability to practice and play, this would be in the realm of unconscious changework.

The focus is on clearing away what's preventing you from doing what it is you would like to do.

7. You're able to see things more objectively

When a problem loses its charge, it's often easier to see things more objectively, whether that's events from your past or situations in the present.

There's more flexibility in your thinking, where a problem may have seemed more black and white previously.

Maybe you're even able to see things that have always been right in front of you, but you've never acknowledged before.

Such as a skill or attribute you've never really given yourself credit for.

This can include the problem you worked on no longer feeling personal.

8. Your mind may seem quieter

You may notice less mental noise in certain areas of your life or find yourself spending less time anticipating things you used to worry about.

It can become easier to be present and engaged with what's happening around you.

9. Feeling more like yourself again

Something some of my clients have described is feeling more like themselves.

Like they get to be who they once were, or who they're now choosing to be, rather than feeling they have to be a certain way or keep responding as they did before.

The focus of this work

Unconscious change is not magic.

It happens all the time, often without us realizing how.

With this work, the intention is to help you make shifts that are gentle and unforced, and that can make a meaningful difference in your life.

The focus is on shifting how you naturally think, feel, and respond—without having to consciously manage or reinforce the change.

If you'd like to connect and discuss how this work could potentially benefit you, feel free to send a message to info@paulnorrish.online or visit paulnorrish.online to book a call directly.