

Slight tweaks, big changes

Nudge yourself along a pathway to change by taking small, very doable actions

I'm one of those people who don't like to throw anything away. I'll keep an acorn for years if someone gave it to me on a memorable afternoon! Then I'll feel guilty about all the stuff I'm hoarding and plough through everything, chucking it all out, only to feel major regret later. Then the cycle begins again.

We're very brave when it comes to making changes – we make promises to ourselves that we struggle to keep because we erroneously believe that change only occurs when we have big, sweeping behaviour makeovers. We tell ourselves: "I'm going to lose 10kg", "I'll stop watching TV and read a book a week", "I'm going to cut bread out of my diet", etc. Instead, we should be splitting these up into smaller, more manageable – and achievable! – actions like: "I'm going to lose 1kg a month and keep it off", "I'm going to watch one TV programme and read a few pages of a book every night" and "I'm going to limit my bread intake to two slices of low-GI a day".

Acting Against Type (AAT) in very small ways can have a profound effect on your ability to change, which is the thinking behind "nudge theory", a behavioural science breakthrough by Chicago, USA-based professor Richard Thaler. Kate Emmerson, the Quick Shift Deva and a life coach who specialises in helping people shift their behaviours, explains: "The science behind it is that everyone can do something, no matter how small. You can nudge

yourself along a pathway to where you want to go, one easy step at a time."

Emmerson recently experienced a perfect example of nudge theory at play. She began running every morning, and going one block further each day. But by day six she couldn't even contemplate running, so she decided to just go out for a casual stroll. "I let my body off the hook and started walking. Then, when I got to the spot where I'd normally start running, my body just naturally fell into it – I started running and I actually ran for longer than I ever had previously. The nudge for me was to just get out there and do it – think small and just show up. As proof of the nudge, this example is real, relevant and honest."

