

‘ABC by ABC’©
Accelerating Behaviour Change by
Actualising Behaviour Commitment’

In 2004 I found myself looking to help a coaching colleague who wanted to make a behaviour change of acknowledging her new direction in coaching – and it was needed sharpish too. The phrase she wanted to use is buried in the annals of time – in other words *I have plainly and simply forgotten the reason.*

Now whilst it is recognised* by many psychologists, coaches and teachers that to change a habit it requires 21 days of conscious attention being placed on that change to make a solid concrete change in a habit, I realise that a sleep pattern can be negatively affected to the extent that it is negatively changed after only 3 days of bad sleeping. And then to get it back to something pertaining to ‘normal’ can take a fair few weeks.

So what I proposed, to my colleague, was that a new behaviour can be introduced positively by accelerating the proposed change on three levels: firstly speaking and saying that new change to yourself, secondly writing it down and seeing how it looks and dealing with responses received, and finally introducing it into conversation, in other words communicating it positively to others.

And, liking simple explanations and phrases, I came up with the phrase ‘ABC by ABC’ - ‘Accelerating Behaviour Change by Actualising Behaviour Commitment’ and all in 3 easy steps. And then I suggested she try it.

And so the 3 steps I offered her were:

- a) **say it aloud to yourself at least 7 times per day for 3 days** – anywhere, any place, any time – so you get the ‘feel of it’, notice how it resounds with you, notice its vibrations, do you have any discomfort or tail-enders coming up when you say it to yourself. Obviously if you have any discomfort or tail-enders, then deal with them appropriately;

- b) **set yourself the task of writing it down at least 7times per day for 3days** – include it on your signature lines on emails, put it on your notes or letters, on your compliment slips and business cards; then
- c) **introduce it deliberately into conversations with people at least 7times per day for 3days** – be they on the telephone/mobiles, face-to-face or whatever.

And what you have actually done is to introduce it over a period of 9days at least 63 times, ie

3days saying it to yourself 7times a day = 21,

3days writing it 7times a day = 21, and

3days including it in your conversations with others 7times a day = 21.

There's also a Feng Shui bias here if anyone has noticed. 3 is a lucky number in Feng Shui and what we are doing is introducing it over a series of 3 lots of 3 days (even more propitious). So we have:

firstly spoken it to oneself 21times,

written it down 21times and finally

spoken to others about 21times – and all WITHIN 9 DAYS.

And 9 days is a lot faster than waiting 21days where THAT 'changed behaviour' might have only be used once a day.

Besides 3 being prominent in Feng Shui, there is the 'Rule of THIRDS' which is used when designing a print ad, according to the author of 'Do-It-Yourself Advertising' David F Ramacitti.

1/3 = graphic elements ie drawing or photos

1/3 = your copy including your logo and

1/3 = white space.

Also, there's the advertising 'Rule of SEVEN' which attaches significance to the number three. This advertising axiom states that a prospect must notice your advertising message seven times before they'll respond. The corollary? Since people aren't always "tuned in" to the messages they're bombarded with. They tend to actually notice an advertising message once for every THREE times they see or hear it.

PLUS another illustration of the power of three, according to Morey Stetner in 'The Art of Winning Conversation' who wrote "Persuasive people have always known the power of a TRIO of ideas. Just look at these slogans:

The few, the proud, the Marines
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle".

Commands are also commonly given in three steps:

Lights! Camera! Action!

Ready! Aim! Fire!

On your mark! Get set! Go!

Putting complex goals in easy-to-remember sets of three helps managers do their jobs better too:

Employees of Dominoes pizza remember FFF = fast, friendly and free delivery

Over the last 3 years I have also used this technique, successfully, many times with my 1:1 coaching clients when we have come up with a negative stumbling block about them 'moving forwards' in either using a new specific job title "that's too presumptuous for me to use!" or a special name for their current project "I can't call it that, what would others think of me?" and have even used it to get the owner of a specific game feel comfortable using his new game's name.

So this 'ABC by ABC' can work on changing behaviour, introducing new behaviour, introducing a new title, or even getting used to using a new name.

*Researching into the '21 days to break a habit' idea whilst interesting has not brought any definite conclusions - except that everyone "takes it as established findings that it takes 21 days to change a behaviour..." or to put it another way "Experts agree that ..." or even "Research shows that ...". Is this not dissimilar to something that was said many years ago: "Real Yorkshire puddings are round and not square – because that's how my mum always cooked them!" – *in fact it was because she only had a round tin!*

Here are some of the 'findings' that have come to light during my research into this:

'Yeahs' for the 21days rule:

- 1) On an esoteric level, channelled materials from an entity known as 'Abraham', states that it takes about 21days practice in "thinking positive ways" before it starts to become 'natural' for us;
- 2) 21 days is the hot favourite number of days in many Hypnotherapy books and self-help hypno tapes
- 3) everyone "takes it as established findings that it takes 21 days to change a behaviour" or to put it another way "Experts agree that ..." or even "Research shows that ...".

'Nays' against the 21days rule:

- 1) NLP also teaches that something needs to be repeated about 21 times for it to become 'programmed'.
- 2) Did you know that it only takes a dog three times to repeat a new behaviour for it to be trained in that new behaviour? I know we are supposed to be more complex and intelligent than dogs however ...
- 3) If it takes 21days to form a habit, then why does it only take 3 consecutive bad nights' sleep to get into the habit of 'not sleeping properly'?