

# LITTLE CHANGES BIG RESULTS

ACHIEVING  
YOUR POTENTIAL  
IS A QUESTION  
OF ATTITUDE  
SAYS  
*ALLISTAIR McCAW*

Mention the word 'change' to someone near or at the top of their profession and it is interesting to see what response you get. As a performance specialist I have worked with numerous world-class athletes, top executives and even housewives and what I have discovered is that, no matter your position in the rankings, corporate world or family tree, your potential for improvement depends on your attitude towards change. If you want the same result, keep doing what you have always done.

I firmly believe that by changing your habits and environment you can live a healthier, more active and more productive life.

**“ If you want the same result, keep doing what you have always done. ”**

## DIET & ENVIRONMENT

Take your eating habits for a start. Getting rid of high-sugar, high-salt and high-fat processed foods and replacing them with healthier options will make you feel better in and about yourself. Even grab-and-go foods can be healthy but, especially when away from home, you will probably grab anything that is convenient and make an excuse that there wasn't a healthy option available. Sound familiar?

One of the first things I do with a new athlete is discuss their nutrition.



**“ Without a doubt, Natalie is the best female athlete I have ever worked with and I rate her as one of the best movers in the sports world. ”**

Some of them are educated in this department and know how to make smart choices, but many are not as clued up as you might think. Little changes, such as organising energy bars and drinks or post-exercise recovery drinks add up to bigger paybacks later.

Let's look at the place where you work out or train. It may be your gym or your tennis or squash club. Do you feel a rush of excitement and energy when you walk through the doors or do you find yourself just going through the motions day after day? If the latter is the case, then maybe it is time for a change.

What about those you train with: your group or even your coach? Do you have a connection with these people? Are they reliable and inspiring? More

importantly, do you see progress? Not only in your performance but as a person too?

One of my company's core values is continual striving towards personal and professional excellence. It is a great shame how many professional athletes have been stuck in a rut for years, seeing little or no progress or results. This can be due to their relationship with their coach or support team, or to their training location. I am a firm believer in creating a positive, energetic environment for training.

Now don't get me wrong; I am not saying that simply because you lost your last league match it is time to leave your coach! Some of the best player-coach relationships have been built in the tougher times, from getting through those together. What I am

saying is simply that too many people accept mediocrity and hold themselves back from making progress because of the fear of change.

**“ Too many people accept mediocrity and hold themselves back from making progress because of the fear of change. ”**

## PREVENTION & CURE

Unfortunately most people are ‘comfort zoners’ – people who stay within the boundaries of a familiar lifestyle and experience, reluctant to try new things and change their habits – who only make a change when they are at rock bottom or almost there.

This is why many people only undertake some kind of activity when they have been told they have a serious health-related condition, or why people only change the way they train after they have had injuries ...

As a performance trainer I have always put emphasis on analysing the sport and the athlete and detecting possible breakdown areas. I believe that this has been a critical factor in the successful combat of injuries to my clients over the last 15 years.

At Athletes’ Conditioning, one of the programme features is ‘pre-hab’ (in place of re-hab). Pre-hab involves assessing the muscle groups/joints in the body that are over-used in your chosen sport.



Photo: Tennis Press Marek Janikowski

Andre Agassi – all change

## CHANGE MENTALITY

When I think of well known people who have re-invented or changed themselves over the last few years, André Agassi comes to mind. Remember those crazy pink neon Nike shorts and the long, scraggy hair? André realised that he had to change his game and the way he trained if he wanted to stay on top.

What about Madonna? How many changes has she made over the years to stay in the music limelight? David Beckham and Oprah Winfrey are others who have re-invented themselves to stay ahead of their chosen fields.

A lot of people have the idea that professional athletes with chiselled, near-perfect bodies (or not) are different from the rest of us. Let me tell you, most of them are not. The majority of them have the same anxieties and challenges as you and I. However, they have made changes to get where they are. Again, it is up to the individual to take the necessary steps and change.

**“ Contrary to what many people think, the most dramatic results come from small, not big, changes. ”**

## CHANGE STEPS

When any of us want to change, no matter who we are, we cycle through a series of steps:

- 1 disinterest (pre-contemplation)
- 2 thinking about the possible importance of making a change (contemplation)
- 3 preparing to make a change by getting a plan together (preparation)
- 4 implementing the plan and making changes to environment and to habits (action).

And finally we reach a point at which there is no longer a need for change.

## STATUS QUO

There are many reasons we resist change. There is what might be called ‘agrophobia’ – the fear of upsetting or annoying others.

Then there is the fear of losing something that might have got you to where you are today. Believe it or not, experienced and gifted athletes who are at or near the top of their game are the most afraid of change – for this reason.

Someone who isn’t afraid of change is 2002 triple Commonwealth gold medallist Natalie Grinham. Natalie started with me in August 2006 and had soon won three of the four WISPA

tournaments she entered, narrowly losing the 2007 World Open final and rising to a career high of world no.2.

The point is: I didn’t change Natalie. Natalie has changed Natalie. Natalie made the decision to change the way she trained, her diet and her approach. I simply advised and guided her.

What I admire about Natalie is that she is not afraid of failure, and therefore embraces change. A true mark of a champion. Over time we were able to make small changes to optimise her performance.

Contrary to what many people think, the most dramatic results come from small, not big, changes.

## MIND GAME

Here is the good news: regardless of who we are, professional athlete or not, we all have the option to change. Today. Right now.

For me, success is seeing someone thinking in a different way, opening their mind to the possibility of change.

Change starts with you. The body you have now is a reflection of the discipline (or lack of it) you have exercised and the changes (or lack of them) you have made as an individual – just as the position you are in today, your job, your ranking or your place in society, is a result of the choices and changes you have made.

Enough procrastination. What changes are you going to make today to achieve personal excellence?



**ALLISTAIR McCAW**

is the founder of Athletes’ Conditioning, which specializes in athletic performance enhancement through sport-specific conditioning.

He has worked with various world class athletes including top-ten tennis players Jelena Dokic and Dinara Safina. In squash he has trained two of the world’s top female players, Nicol David and Natalie Grinham.

Allistair advises athletes at all levels and also contributes regular articles to Squashlife, Medicine & Tennis Journal and Australian Tennis Magazine.

Visit his homepage at [www.AthletesConditioning.com](http://www.AthletesConditioning.com)