

Intentional Changes

Intentional Changes

A Fresh Approach to Helping People Change

Allen Tough

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Foreword

I don't know which is more interesting—this book or its author.

Allen Tough is a deceptive man, but not intentionally. On several occasions when I have alluded to him as an explorer and adventurer in ideas, this comment has caused surprise and doubt: he seems so quiet. Until people think about it, they do not guess how far he has traveled, how many ideas and fields of inquiry and therapies and religions he has searched. He seems so aloof, so untouched by all the ferment and conflict of ideas. But he has been there and has experienced most of the tumult in thinking and feeling, while his own life proceeds steadily because he has made the decisions that govern it and carried them out.

While no poet, Allen does have the knack that some explorers have of talking about what has happened simply enough so that the rest of us can understand. Thus, he and Cyril Houle were the first to produce a clear image of the self-directed learner. Allen's language about the concept of self-directed learning has been so simple that some observers say, "The emperor has no clothes," not realizing that the most profound ideas in education may not appear in sophisticated dress or spew out of a computer. The whole world of education has not yet caught up with that basic concept, that learning is a part of all of us, but the circular waves from this single idea are growing and extending.

Learning is a fundamental concept and is always involved in some kind of change. Some people fear change, and many people talk about changes as if all were inevitable, and always to be desired. Of course, they are not: people need to fight as fiercely against some changes as on behalf of others. There can be choices with changes.

These days it is customary to repeat that millions of people in developing countries have precious little choice, pressed down and molded as they are by a crippling cycle of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and often of political tyranny. When social forces are so devastating, where is there room for intentional change? Even in North America, the individual seems so impotent in the face of problems like pollution, armed aggression, the rape of natural resources: it seems that these forces cause all important changes rather than the intention of an individual.

It is precisely at a time when such views are omnipresent and lead to such pessimism and inertia that Allen Tough has chosen to look at people choosing to change. The questions are large and foundational because, whether we like it or not, we are all involved.

What does he find? At first, we may be somewhat disappointed. There are no revelations or vaunted claims. He follows his data carefully and, therefore, reports changes in insight or behavior, one step at a time—not by great transforming leaps. But he is aware that children learn to balance and walk before they can run or vault or plunge or soar. Or travel in packs. The tidings are about the ordinary, daily activities of people like us when they determine to change and what supports or inhibits that decision. In the process, vague but unmistakable outlines of a picture are beginning to form, of some changes that may be possible, how they may be blocked or assisted, and the role of the chief actor: *the person who chooses to change*.

Allen Tough is an individual who, for twenty years, has been persistent in working a “mother lode,” literally a priceless vein of information because it opens up some treasures for education, therapy, and political development. He has been a solitary figure, but has also worked well with colleagues and students (and all of his students soon become colleagues) and his work reflects their shared insights.

This book does not provide a complete picture or scenario. How could it? It lacks examination of the fascinating changes associated with the violence of revolutions. The changes reported, while significant, are not of the depth or profundity referred to in the phrase

“paradigm shift.” But that may come. Allen has found a question worth probing and a means of better understanding and reporting on human behavior. He has begun to explore in a different dimension than most psychologists or novelists what it means to change. He brings back news, and there will be more to come from fellow explorers.

J. Roby Kidd
Ontario Institute for Studies
in Education, Toronto

Preface

This book focuses on the total array of intentional changes that people achieve in themselves and their lives. The early chapters describe the content and size and importance of these changes and then turn to the question of who chooses, plans, and implements them. This fresh picture of intentional changes is based on intensive interviews with 330 men and women. The rest of the book spells out various implications for professional practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. I have become convinced that we can all do much more to encourage and help intentional changes if we understand the person's natural process of change.

As far as I can discover, this is the first book to focus comprehensively and exclusively on the total range of intentional changes. A combination of manual and computer searches of *Psychological Abstracts*, *Sociological Abstracts*, *Social Science Index*, ERIC, and library card catalogs failed to turn up any similar book or paper.

This book fills a gap between two other sorts of books. On the one hand lie many psychology books dealing with maturation, psychological development through the life span, personality change, and learning. Most of these books dealing with human changes have fused together intentional and unintentional changes without distinguishing between the two. They examine various outcomes or

changes in the person regardless of the extent to which the person was seeking or striving for those changes. Their focus is quite legitimate and appropriate for their purposes, but I believe professional practitioners, policymakers, and researchers can also benefit from focusing specifically on those changes that are intentional.

On the other hand lie books that deal exclusively with intentional changes, but only within one area of life or through one method. There are, for example, numerous books available on intentional changes within the areas of job, parenting, physical health, marriage relationships, sex, emotions, and spiritual growth. There are many books, too, on one intentional change method or path, such as counseling, psychotherapy, education, medicine, encounter groups, meditation, religion, journal writing, behavior modification, travel, buying a house, winning a fortune, hypnosis, bioenergetics, Gestalt, dream interpretation, and running. Such books are important and useful, but they do not provide a comprehensive picture of the person's natural process in the entire range of intentional changes. This book is intended to fill that gap.

Intentional Changes is written for professionals, policymakers, and the academic community in several fields concerned with intentional changes: counseling and personal growth, lifelong learning for adults, psychology, the self-help movement, the women's movement, secondary and higher education, health, social work, humanistic and transpersonal psychology, personal transformation, psychotherapy, and religion. The book will not only give such readers a better understanding of a central phenomenon in their fields, but will also suggest several specific implications for improved practice and policy and for future research. The early chapters of the book may also be useful for lay readers who want to understand their own changes better, but they were not written with this purpose in mind.

In much of my earlier work I studied the adult's major learning efforts and "learning projects" (Tough, 1967, 1979). The present book widens that focus to include the entire range of intentional changes, regardless of whether they were achieved by a series of intentional learning episodes or in some other way. These various ways of achieving an intentional change are discussed in the section on "How the Person Implements the Change" in chapter 4. This book both confirms (because the findings exhibit a similar pattern) and enlarges the research on the adult's learning projects. For example, it demonstrates that men and women are remarkably suc-

cessful at choosing, planning, and implementing intentional changes, with most help being obtained from friends and family rather than from books or professionals.

My recent research did not focus on why people make changes, although much can be inferred from their choices. Penetrating insights into why adults choose to change will require much further study.

This book is based on interviews with 330 men and women. Of these 330 interviews, 180 were conducted during the process of developing the final interview schedule, or were conducted by graduate students as course projects. These 180 interviews contributed significantly to the ideas for this book, but their quantitative data have not been included.

The quantitative data have come from the other 150 interviews. In six of these interviews, however, no intentional change could be identified: these nonchangers are discussed in chapter 3. The 150 interviews were conducted face-to-face and took an average of one hour. They were conducted between 1977 and 1980 by current and recent graduate students in adult education who had received training in interviewing.

The 150 interviews took place in three locations in each of three countries. They were conducted in Canada (Toronto, semirural Ontario, and Nova Scotia), in the United States (Pittsburgh, rural Vermont, and Ames, Iowa), and in England (Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Leicestershire). Because I had to rely mostly on interviewers whom I knew rather than on an international survey research organization, the particular locations were largely determined by the cities in which the interviewers lived. In general, though, the nine locations provide a good variety and are unlikely to be biased overwhelmingly in one particular direction. Given the resources for about 150 interviews, I opted for spreading them over several populations and geographical areas instead of selecting a sample of 150 from a single narrow population. Within each location the interviewers tried to sample the adult population, age 25 and over, with as little bias as possible. Most of the interviewees were selected at random from the municipal voters' or assessment lists or from the telephone book. Some were selected by knocking on doors in various neighborhoods. We excluded persons living in nursing homes and other institutions, and persons who could not speak English well enough to be interviewed.

The 150 interviewees came from various walks of life and from

all age ranges between 25 and 85: 45% were between 25 and 39 years old, 43% were between 40 and 59, and 12% were 60 and over. Fifty-five percent were men, and 45% were women. The interviewers classified 28% as lower and working class, and 72% as middle and upper class. To record the highest educational qualification that the person had completed, we used the following categories (slightly adapted for the British interviews): less than grade 10 (19%), secondary school graduation (34%), one or two years of post-secondary education (18%), more advanced qualifications (29%). Data on race were collected only in the United States (73% were white) and in England (all were white).

Because of inevitable sampling errors and response errors, we cannot be certain whether similar results will be found in large-scale studies in other locations in the future. No doubt the numbers will change somewhat as future researchers survey other nations and other parts of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. I am confident, however, that the general picture will prove to be reasonably accurate for many populations, even though the particular figures will vary a little. As the interview data arrived in my mail from a great diversity of interviewers in widely scattered regions, I was struck by the remarkable consistency in the basic patterns from one sample to another.

All of the interviewees mentioned so far were at least 25 years old. In addition, one section of chapter 2 describes the changes achieved by approximately 100 children and adolescents.

I want to express my gratitude for the important contributions that several persons have made to this book. Most of the interviews were conducted by Heibatollah Baghi, David Blackwell, Stephen Brookfield, Bill Brown, Joan Caesar, Judith Calder, Jeanne Eddington, Connie Leean, Elizabeth McCombs, Henry McGrattan, Judy O'Brien, Harvey Roach, Deborah Stewart, Marie Strong, and Marsha Young. I am also grateful to their interviewees, who were so willing to give their time and their personal story.

Larry Orton, Barry Walker, and Margaret Brillinger performed various tasks at a high level during their graduate assistantships. David Blackwell provided useful ideas and encouragement. Schmucl Hirschfeld, along with his friend DEC-10, performed much of the data analysis. Isabelle Gibb used her interlibrary loan skills to obtain many of the books cited in the text. Elaine Posluns, Barry Walker, Schmucl Hirschfeld, and Joan Neehall reacted thoughtfully to early drafts. Pat Anagnostakos provided excellent

secretarial skills and typed the first draft. Julianna O'Brien cheerfully typed the second and third drafts. I am also grateful to various students and staff members at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education for their insights and support over the years.

In Jean Lesher I have been fortunate to find the ideal executive editor: insightful, enthusiastic, quick, and helpful.

The family caring and encouragement that have been so important to me during my five years of work on this book were provided by Elaine, Susan, and Paul. I also want to mention my mother and father; their recent experiences have taught me much about unintentional and intentional changes.