

# The Watermelon Principle

How to get what you want

- *by changing what you like!*



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# What We Like



Do you like watermelon?

Consider for a moment. Watermelon is

- nutritious: a rich source of vitamin C, and high in antioxidant lycopenes;
- contains no fat, and is more than 90% water;
- inexpensive: usually around \$1 per kilo;
- tasty: it has its own distinctive flavour;
- ‘sociable’: a fruit people often eat together.

Clearly, it makes good sense to eat watermelon.

It also makes good sense to *like* watermelon: we shall be more likely to continue to eat it and enjoy its benefits.

But not everyone likes watermelon, of course.

This is generally explained in one of two ways:

(1) The preference for watermelon has a genetic basis;

or,

(2) The preference for watermelon has come about through experience.

If we cannot alter our genetic inheritance, perhaps there is a way we may shape our experience to develop a preference for watermelon, where there was none to begin with.

In this way, liking watermelon can become a conscious *choice*.

Can we really *choose* what we like?

# What We Want



Most of us know what we want.

It might be a new car, excellent health, or an exciting career.

And we're prepared to work hard to get what we want. We save for the car, watch what we eat, plan our career path.

There is great power in wanting something.

It compels us to action.

We look for actions that will most effectively give us what we want.

It often turns out, however, that the actions we believe will bring us what we want, are not ones we especially enjoy.

For example, we may accept that a particular diet will give us the level of health we desire.

But the diet itself is unappetising; we therefore choose not to follow it and the health we desire remains out of reach.

Sometimes the pull of what we want is sufficiently strong to override any misgivings we may have about the actions required.

So we begin to follow the diet anyway, and do our best to continue with it.

The lack of enjoyment of an activity, however, eventually tells: we can stick with it for only so long.

At some point, we decide we can't handle the diet anymore and give it up.

We may have travelled some distance towards our goal, but in the end fall short.

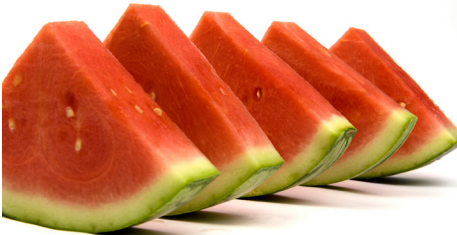
In time, the lure of what we want inspires us to take action once more and perhaps try an alternative activity. We try a new diet, but the results are the same.

We need to find a way to break the cycle and sustain the necessary actions until the goal is achieved.

How can we ensure we will continue with an activity?

One way is to *like* it.

# Congruency



If we enjoy the actions required to give us what we want, it's very likely we'll continue with those actions, and in time, reach our goal.

We'll even enjoy the journey of getting there.

When this is true, our likes and wants are aligned: they're *congruent*.

Once congruency is achieved, things seem to work like magic. Moving towards our goal feels effortless.

We enjoy the activity, and it brings us what we want. We are then free to turn our attentions to other things we want that are not supported by congruency.

If congruency is not present, how can it be achieved? How can we come to like things we don't like already?

# The Watermelon Principle



According to the Watermelon Principle, we must

choose to like

the things we need to do

in order to get what we want.

It may not feel like it, but our likes are not set in stone. They are not pre-ordained or conferred by fate.

What we like can change over time.

The clothes we wear, for example, will reflect both changes in fashion and our own sense of style.

What we enjoyed wearing last winter may now be passe, and we look for a different style to please us.

When our likes change, it is from learning something new, drawing a new conclusion, or having a new or different feeling about something.

In other words, some change in our *knowledge* or in our *experience*.

To achieve congruency, we must utilise our knowledge and steer our experiences in such a way that we come to like the actions which will bring us what we want.

# Knowledge



Knowledge drives the initial choice of activity to achieve the desired goal, and fuels the ongoing process. There are two elements to this:

(1) Evidence: there should be good reasons pointing to the activity leading to the achievement of the goal;

and

(2) Belief: you must be convinced that the activity will indeed lead to the goal.

The stronger the evidence, the more support to the belief. Choice of activity to achieve the goal is therefore crucial.

If you are at all doubtful about the activity, or are not convinced by the available evidence, choose another about which you are more certain.

# Experience



Having chosen an action that we believe with good reason will lead us to our goal, it is nevertheless our experience of the action that will largely determine whether or not we will continue with it.

Our objective is to shape the way we experience the activity so that we shall continue with it and, in time, reach our goal.

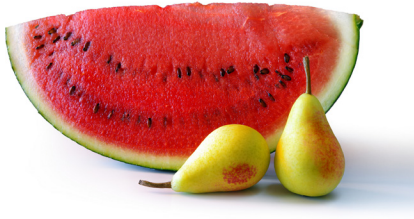
If we do not like it already, we must *learn* to like it.

We cannot do this from a book or by wishing it.

We can only learn to like an experience *through* experience.

For this, we turn to the process of conditioning.

# Conditioning



Conditioning is learning that is founded in experience.

We come to associate an action with particular feelings.

Praise, for example, is an instrument of conditioning in the hands of parents, teachers, and coaches.

It is used to reward desirable behaviours, bringing pleasure to the child or student and thereby increasing the likelihood that the praised behaviour will be repeated.

The positive feelings of the reward come to be associated with the activity, and, in time, liking for the activity may be induced - and congruency achieved.

## *Conditioning Parameters*

There are three parameters of conditioning that are critical to its effectiveness:

(1) Proximity: the activity and reward should be as close as practicable in both space and time. Delaying the experience of the reward will reduce its effectiveness.

(2) Consistency: the more consistent the association between the activity and the positive feelings from the reward, the stronger the association will become.

(3) Magnitude: the appeal of the reward must outweigh the strength of objection to the activity.

A highly pleasurable reward may be necessary near the beginning of the process in order to get things under way: this is called a *jumpstart* reward.

Jumpstart rewards are not sustainable in the long term and should be discontinued and reduced to more moderate magnitudes as soon as practicable.

Note that the reward should not be in conflict with the overall objective.

For example, for a goal of excellent fitness, a reward of a cream cake is probably unsuitable.

### *Objection Threshold*

The activity should be within the range of our achieving it, at least at some level.

For example, for someone who wishes to add celery to his or her diet but has an intense dislike of its taste, eating even a moderately sized pieces is likely to be prohibitive.

At some point, however, perhaps at the level of a tiny morsel, consumption of celery is likely to be tolerable, if only barely.

It is important that the activity is kept below the *objection threshold*: the point at which the activity is discontinued.

As the conditioning process unfolds, enjoyment of the activity will develop and the objection threshold will rise.

This accelerates progress towards fulfillment of the goal (See Fig 1).

Activity	Starting Point	With Conditioned Experience
Jog 5km		
Jog 2km		Intolerable
Jog 1km	Intolerable	Objectionable
Walk 1km	Objectionable	Not preferred
Walk around block	Not preferred	Acceptable
Walk to the gate	Acceptable	<i>Enjoyable!</i>

Fig 1. Conditioned Experience

Beyond the objection threshold, there is risk of *reversal*: the objection to the activity becomes stronger than the appeal of the reward.

In these circumstances, the pleasure of the reward declines.

We now have a framework of knowledge and experience we may use to begin to move towards congruency, and our goal.

A worked example is in order.

# Putting It Into Practice



Goal: excellent health.

Activity: consume three glasses of water each day.

Evidence: water is essential for healthy cells, helps to cleanse the body, is calorie-free.

Conditioning reward: slice of fresh pineapple.

### *Plan*

Determine the objection threshold and begin at a level comfortably below this. E.g. one glass per day.

Consume an acceptable quantity of water each morning prior to breakfast, followed immediately by the slice of fresh pineapple or favourite fruit.

When, *and only when*, liking for this is established, add second glass of water at lunchtime in the same way.

Once liking for two glasses of water has taken hold, add a third glass at dinner-time.

It may be necessary to increase water quantity in increments of less than a full glass.

Best results will be obtained if the process is unhurried. Only when positive feelings for the water are truly felt should be amount of water be increased.

Until this is developed, leave the level of water intake at a comfortable level below the objection threshold, and allow the threshold to gradually rise.

A jumpstart reward of pineapple slices may be necessary at the beginning of the process.

Many goals will require more than one action, and some will form part of a larger objective.

Excellent health, for example, will require a range of activities, one of which might be ‘Learn to swim’, perhaps a goal in itself.

On the other hand, complicated actions may be broken down into simpler, component actions. ‘Learn to swim’ may be divided into ‘Take a course in swimming lessons’, ‘Practise for half an hour each day’, and so on.

The process is the same.

Attend to each case in turn; there is no need to rush.

As you fold into your life enjoyable activities that also serve you, momentum towards your goal shall increase.

*Ancillary* knowledge can be helpful.

This is knowledge that is not necessary to directly support the activity in achieving the goal, but offers other reasons for it.

Swimming may be chosen in pursuing excellent health, for example; at the same time, it is a useful life skill.

There may be occasions when existing behaviours are in conflict with your goal.

For example, a high level of fast food consumption will be incompatible with a larger objective of excellent health.

Do not dwell on these.

As you move towards congruency with the actions you have chosen, the other incompatible behaviours will begin to fall away.

As consumption of healthy and nutritious food increases, for example, and becomes congruent with your desire for good health, fast food consumption will naturally decline.

# Long-Term Change



In a sense, those who already like watermelon have an evolutionary advantage over those who don't.

They obtain the benefits of watermelon with little apparent effort, since it is something they already enjoy.

It does not need to be this way.

We have a choice. What we like is, in the end, up to us.

This is true for *any* like, even the things we already like.

Most of us believe that it is through gaining or achieving what we want, that we will have the life we desire, and thereby find contentment.

But it is also in doing the things we like that we enjoy life along the way.

The Watermelon Principle offers a way to align what we enjoy with what we want.

In pursuing our goals we renew our sense of purpose in life.

Cultivating congruency in our actions reinforces this sense of purpose and keeps us on track.

As we come to like an activity, our sense of self changes.

What we want may also change.

The knowledge we bring to an activity affects our experience of it: our experience informs our knowledge.

Start small.

Take it slowly.

Stay positive.

Stick with it.

And take heart: know that in the process of seeking what we really want in life, we give ourselves our best chance of becoming the person we truly wish to be.

