

# Triple Paradox

## What is the Triple paradox?

The Triple Paradox, developed by Dr. David Burns, is a powerful motivational technique designed to help you explore your natural resistance to change.

When we want to change a habit (exercise more, procrastinate less, stop overeating, reduce screen time) we often also have *very good reasons* not to change. These reasons can create a sense of internal conflict, guilt, or demotivation.

The Triple Paradox helps you explore all three sides of this conflict:

1. **The advantages of staying the same.**
2. **The positive qualities or values revealed by staying the same.**
3. **The disadvantages of changing.**

By intentionally affirming the logic behind *not* changing, you remove shame, self-criticism, and hidden resistance. This can lead to:

- Emotional clarity
- Increased motivation
- A more honest understanding of your internal conflict
- The ability to make a truly free and informed choice

Paradoxically, by exploring reasons to *not* change, people often feel more motivated to *actually* change. Sometimes the Triple Paradox reveals that you're not ready to change and that's okay. Other times, it creates a sudden emotional shift that helps you take action right away.

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## Example: Exercise Motivation

Armando wanted to get in shape. He signed up for a gym membership at the start of the year, but by March he still hadn't gone once. He often told himself:

- “I’ll go tomorrow.”
- “I’m too tired.”
- “I have too much to do.”

In therapy, he shared that his specific goal was to exercise **three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) at 7am** before work.

To help him get unstuck, his therapist introduced the Triple Paradox. Together they explored the advantages of staying the same, the core values reflected in his current behavior, and the disadvantages of changing.

Here is what Armando wrote:

<b>Advantages of Staying the Same (Not exercising 3x/week at 7am)</b>	<b>Positive Qualities / Core Values Reflected</b>	<b>Disadvantages of Exercising (Changing the behavior)</b>
Get to relax instead of putting more effort into things  More time to spend with family  I get more sleep and feel alert for work	I care about rest and emotional balance  I prioritize family and self-care  I value productivity and being effective at my job	I don't like feeling sweaty or gross  I have to wake up earlier  It feels physically uncomfortable

After completing the table, the therapist asked:

**“Given all these advantages of staying the same... why would you want to change?”**

Armando paused, then said:

“I want to be healthy for my kids. I want to live a long life and be there for my grandkids one day.”

With clarity on *why* he wanted to change, the therapist introduced another tool (**Externalization of Resistance**) to help Armando challenge the obstacles listed in the table and strengthen his motivation.

Over time, Armando learned additional tools for building habits, followed through on his plan, and eventually exercised **three mornings a week** before work.

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# How You Can Use This Technique

The Triple Paradox is for anyone who wants to change a habit but feels stuck, conflicted, or unmotivated.

**Step 1:** Identify the habit or behavior you want to change

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**Step 2:** Write your specific goal. How often? What time? Where? How long? (Specific goals create clarity.)

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**Step 3:** Fill out the Triple Paradox table.

<b>Advantages of Staying the Same</b> <i>What emotional benefits do I get?</i> <i>What makes this comfortable or easier?</i>	<b>Positive Qualities / Core Values Reflected</b> <i>What good qualities does this show about me?</i> <i>What values am I honoring (family, rest, safety, stability, comfort, etc.)?</i>	<b>Disadvantages of Changing</b> <i>What would be difficult, uncomfortable, or unpleasant about changing?</i> <i>What would I lose or give up?</i>

**Step 4:** After filling out all three columns, ask yourself: “Given everything I wrote, why would I want to change?”

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- If you realize you are okay staying the same, wonderful.  
You’ve made a thoughtful, intentional choice.
- If you still want to change, also wonderful.  
Now you can use tools like Externalization of Resistance to help increase your motivation and follow-through.

Sometimes completing the Triple Paradox creates a sudden emotional shift all by itself.

### **Important Things to Keep in Mind**

- The Triple Paradox is designed to help you feel less stuck, not pressured.
- All three columns naturally lean toward *staying the same*. That is the paradox.
- If you genuinely want change, your motivation will come from **fighting back** against the reasons in the table or from taking action regardless of motivation.
- If it feels difficult to fill out the table, a therapist can guide you.
- There is no right or wrong decision. There is only the one that feels most honest and meaningful for you.

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### **Final Note**

The Triple Paradox helps you understand your resistance with compassion rather than self-criticism. When your resistance feels seen and respected, motivation becomes clearer, decisions feel more authentic, and taking action becomes easier.

This tool can be revisited anytime you feel conflicted about a change you want to make.