

**Practical Change with Design Thinking: Lesbian Edition**

*Claire Baker*



**Design thinking** is a process for solving problems and can be applied to anything you want to change or improve. It's broken down into manageable parts. And, because change can feel hard and scary, everything about this Practical Change with Design Thinking: Lesbian Edition guide is designed to be fun and playful. Your thoughts are your own and you can think anything you want, so why not make it fun?

In design thinking, the five main steps are Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. If you've ever been coached by me you know I'm a big fan of acronyms. The Stanford guys who pioneered this work clearly needed to work on the memorability factor. With due credit and a hat tip to the Stanford Design School, I've made some enhancements for the Practical Change Coaching community. (You'll note that it spells LESBIAN – much more memorable, right?)

- **Listen** – What is going through your mind daily about what’s not working?
- **Empathize** – Develop an understanding of where you are and your current level of satisfaction
- **Select** – Choose an area of your life you want to tinker with for improvements
- **Brainstorm** – Imagine a handful possible solutions that you would consider trying
- **Intervention** – While this might sound like a scary meeting with loved ones, in this context, it is about building out one of your brainstormed ideas that seems fun, most reasonable and relevant to try
- **Act** – Give it a go! Try it out and see what happens.
- **Next Steps** – Review, assess, refine, or re-approach

## Putting it to work

### *Listen*

While you might be completely aware of what you’d like to work on, try using this wheel of life survey identify how you are feeling right now about each aspect of your life with this scale:

5 is I'm doing awesome here, couldn't ask for more!

4 is I'm doing great, no complaints!

3 is I'm doing okay, though could be better

2 is I'm kinda rough or lacking this area

1 is a straight up problem

0 is gah, total failure!

Area of Life	Score
Family	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5
Fitness	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5
Work	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5
Prosperity	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5
Sense of Purpose	<input type="radio"/> 0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5
Totals/Average:	<input type="text"/> or % <input type="text"/> of awesome

### ***Empathize***

Have some self-compassion. This is not new age mumbo jumbo! Research indicates that for lesbians, self-compassion could be a useful intervention in the face of stigma stress. It's okay to recognize that you are worthy and awesome just as you are. Approach your desire to make a change from a place of understanding that as humans, we all have areas we want to work on. Being mean to yourself about how you think you are not measuring up will **not** make you do better. Give yourself the empathy and compassion you'd give a dear friend.

### ***Select***

What is the area you want to work on? While it may be tempting to pick the area with the worst score on the wheel of life, choose one that is at least a 3. If every area is below a 3, pick the one that you feel the *best* about. This may feel counterintuitive, but our human brains are motivated by success, so choose an area where you can rack up a win. Start small and work up. Research shows we are more likely to stick with small goals. And this is a "quick wins" exercise from Practical Change Coaching, not a "designed to fail" exercise from Aim Too High and Be Disappointed Coaching.

Area of life you want to work on: \_\_\_\_\_

What's a *small* change you'd like to have? It's okay if you aren't exactly sure. Don't get stuck here. Pick a little goal instead of an enormous goal – lose a few pounds, drink more water, have a nice evening once a week with your partner, feel better about going to work three days a week, have something to look forward to on the weekend, solve a problem around the house.

Write it down:

I want to: \_\_\_\_\_

Don't change your mind – if you give yourself the option of changing your mind, you will keep thinking about it. Definitely not fun! This is a little thing, so choose and stick with it for a couple of weeks, which is the minimum recommended amount of time to try this process out.

### ***Brainstorm***

This is the part where you think up possible ways to accomplish the change you want to make. Not everyone has crazy big imaginations, and that's just fine. Ideally, you don't want to come up with a million ideas anyway – research shows that too many options can get us stuck and we end up not deciding.

List 3 – 5 ideas that might address the thing you want to change:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now pick one! Here’s how: Look at each idea and ask the following questions:

1. Do you like this idea? If someone were to take any of them away, which would you fight to keep on the list? Which solution(s) would you want to spend your time trying?
2. Is the solution simple? Is it something you would be able to start right away?
3. Do you think it will work well to address the small change you’ve chosen to focus on?
4. Do you think you will stick with it for at least two weeks?

If the choice isn’t obvious yet, eliminate any that you *didn’t* answer “yes” to the “Do you like it?” question. Then go with as many yeses as you can get after that. Still not decided? Then just go with your gut. Or pick #2. But don’t take a long time with this. You are not writing the Constitution of the United States.

### ***Intervention Plan***

Flesh out the details to turn your idea into a plan:

*What will you do?* Keep it simple, be specific and make it measurable. For example, if your goal is to walk more, set a specific attainable number of steps or decide to go for a 10 minute walk four days in the coming week.

*What do you need to put in place?* What barriers do you need to think through? What would keep you from getting started? When you have a list of the potential obstacles, look at each one and develop a

plan. For example, if your goal is to take a 10 minute walk and your shoes aren't comfortable, what's the fastest, easiest way to get you out the door?

*When will you do it?* This is an important step – plan for the action during your day/week. Put it on your calendar or schedule. Remember – small wins. Even if you think you can do the thing every day without fail, plan for less. You can always increase it after your trial run. While you are scheduling, but a reminder on your calendar to assess and review at the end of the first and second weeks.

### **Act**

Give it a try! Do it for a week. Assess and review. Don't skip this part! Write down what worked and what got in the way. Then do it for another week, assess and review. Notice what worked. Observe and record your progress. Give yourself a small reward for success. Stick with this mini-goal. You don't need to have the perfect plan or the perfect execution. You do need to give it a go so that you have information to build on for the next step.

### **Next Steps**

Review your end-of-week assessments. Keep and build on elements that got you closer to success. Reward yourself if you stayed on plan. Don't judge yourself harshly if you didn't (but don't reward yourself either.) Here you have a choice to pick a new solution or even a new problem to work on if this really didn't go well, but I suggest instead that you revisit and adjust your current prototype and test again for another week (Week 3, if you lost count), assess again, then do a 4<sup>th</sup> week. It's good to get practice at a mid-plan course correction, but if the plan is just not workable, it's okay to go back to the drawing board.

How did it go? Don't worry if you are doing B- work. I can't say it enough. You'll have gotten benefit from the exercise of getting clearer on what you want to work on and adjusting your mindset to try something new. It's inevitable that there will be days or elements that don't go perfectly. That is true by design. There's always going to be room for improvement, so don't sweat it.

If you were able to stay at a B- or better with your plan for a full month, congratulations! You are well on your way to cementing a new beneficial behavior. If it didn't actually move you closer to your big goal, now is the time to pick another mini-goal to work on with this process. If it did move you toward your bigger goal, consider expanding this intervention.

### *Is that it?*

If you are wondering "Is that it?", the answer is both yes and no. Of course you want some big changes in your life. But big changes come from small starts and opportunities for you to demonstrate to yourself that you can be successful. If you want to run a marathon, you need to start by walking or jogging more than you currently are. If you want to lose 100 pounds, you'll have to start with 5 pounds anyway. Start right where you are and build from there.

### *Coaching can help*

If you are ready to take on some bigger challenges and want help sorting out your plan and getting some accountability, I invite you to consider coaching. Having support from a good coach will help you sort out what you really want, set realistic goals, create your plan, assess your progress, provide accountability touchpoints and encourage you to celebrate your wins.

Click the button below to sign up here for a free introductory session with Practical Change Coaching to work on building your future by design.



### *About Claire Baker*



Claire Baker is the head coach in charge at Practical Change Coaching. She is a professional certified life coach and has been coaching for 8 years. Leveraging more than 30 years nonprofit management, she coaches practical women who want to live fuller, more extraordinary lives and get what they want, both at work and in life.

Claire works with other practical women – midlife lesbians/Q+ – who may be thinking that your best years are behind you. Through coaching, you can feel better now and create your future by design in an open and accepting way that is consistent with who you really are.