

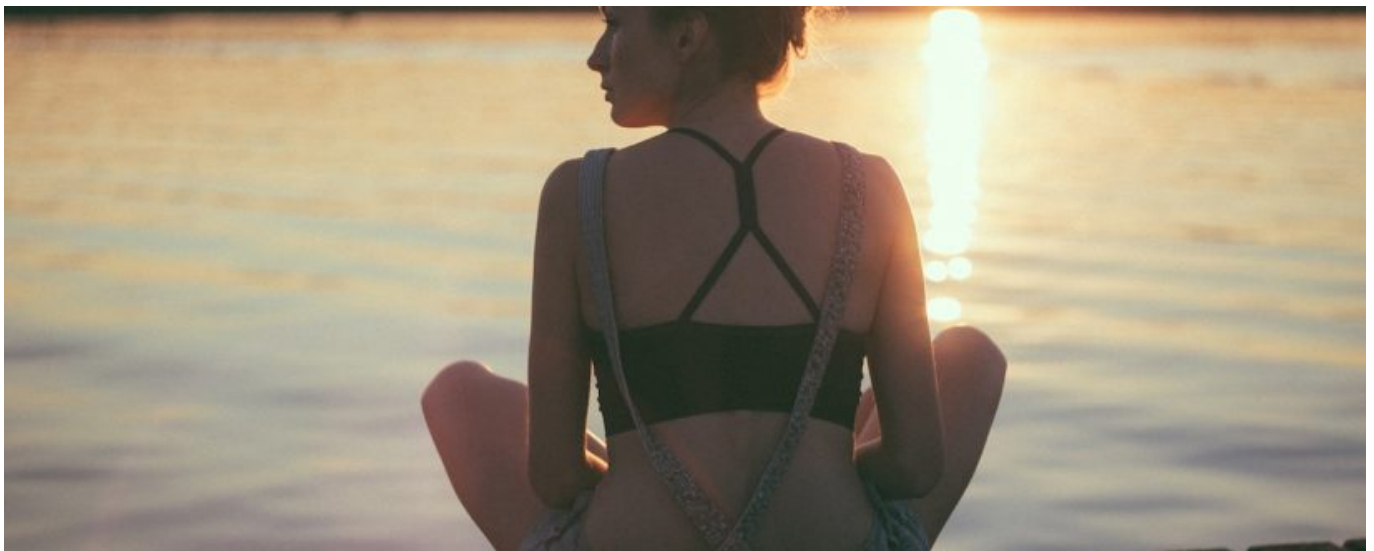


KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

How to Heal: Identify the Competing Commitment Standing in Your Way

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | JUNE 22, 2019



We all know how to live a healthy life, right?

We're smart. We're savvy. We've done our research. We know how to craft the perfect self-care plan (food, sleep, movement, meditation, and so on) to address our genetic legacy, our problems, and our many sensibilities about how we'd like to feel and function at our best.

But many of us just can't make our best plans work. We can't sustain them.

What's with that?

On the one hand we're committed to our excellent health. No doubt about it.

But on the other hand . . . what's that?

Is there a competing commitment?

[Karyn Shanks MD](#) | How to Heal: Identify the Competing Commitment Standing in Your Way

I've borrowed the phrase "competing commitment" from Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey's well known work about [creating change](#). The phrase refers to our fearful tendency to want things to stay the same. Resistance to our worst-case scenarios (fearful assumptions about what "will" happen if we change) becomes our competing commitment (often unconscious) to the change we desire.

We're committed to our good health (yes, we truly are!) while we're also committed to keeping things the same (to avoid what we fear "will" happen).

These competing commitments "protect" us from our fearful imaginings about the future, keeping us stuck right where we are.

What do these competing commitments look like?

It will be too hard, and I might fail.

People will think I'm a freak.

My family won't support me.

I'll no longer belong to my friends who do things the old way.

I'll lose the comfort of my old familiar ways.

I'll feel deprived and that appears fatal.

If I feel good, I'll be expected to do the impossible, or [fill in the blank].

Sound familiar?

Me.

I've had my own competing commitments. When I first took gluten and dairy out of my diet almost twenty years ago, I got a lot of backlash. Members of my medical family looked upon me with suspicious scrutiny. It just wasn't a part of the prevailing dogma about healthy eating. In addition to that, I was the odd person out at social occasions and often had to carry my own food. But I felt so much better that after a few bumps in the road, I persevered (and my critics have all come around since then!).

Deprivation.

We all know [deprivation](#) and it brings up all kinds of fear.

[Karyn Shanks MD](#) | How to Heal: Identify the Competing Commitment Standing in Your Way

I experienced many moments of deprivation on my early journey of healthy living, and my competing commitment 'to not die from it' led to undesired falling back on bad habits. But as I boldly faced my fears, I learned that: 1) I'm a badass; 2) No one dies from feeling deprived of comfort food or having to go to bed early; and 3) With some grit and patience the feelings of deprivation completely fade away.

How to explore the competing commitments that thwart desired change.

Consider the following roadmap if you've struggled to maintain healthy self-care habits. Choose an important change you'd like to make in your life but have been afraid or frustrated by your own inertia or obstacles that have gotten in your way. There may be a competing commitment.

First, express gratitude. This will always put you on a fast track to success. Expressing gratitude shifts you instantly into a state of hope and infinite possibilities. *Thank you for this challenge, for the opportunity to explore and discover myself.*

Name your problem (what you'd like to change). Where do you feel stuck? *I'm tired and know I should eat a healthy diet to support my energy.*

Decide to change—accept ownership of your problem. Create a statement clearly accepting ownership of your problem (if it's yours to manage you can do something about it). *I eat crappy food for comfort—it's what I know and makes me feel better (temporarily). But I'm a badass and I can change.*

Shift your problem into a positive personal affirmation. This acknowledges the truth that your problems can change. And makes your new goal for change "sticky," mobilizing resources needed to bring it to life. *I enjoy radiant new energy as I consistently eat beautiful healthy food.*

The moment of reckoning: if you know what the obstacles are to achieving your goal, then why don't you just remove them? If you know you need more sleep, why don't you get more sleep? If you know you need to ask for help, why don't you just do that? What supports those obstacles? What fearful assumption stands in the way of achieving your positive personal affirmation? *My family won't support me. I'll be perceived as a freak by my friends. I might fail. I'll feel deprived.*

Identify your competing commitment: this is based on the assumption you've identified in #5 about what "will" happen if you make the change you desire. *I'm imposing on my family through my special needs. By doing something no one else is doing, I won't belong to my people anymore. I can't succeed by being anything less than perfect. I'll be sucked up by the black hole of deprivation.*

Look it squarely in the eye. Now that you've named your competing commitment (based on your fearful assumptions), look carefully at it. Breathe deeply and ask, is it true? If you say

yes, ask yourself: How do I know? How can I possibly know the outcome of my desired change? Isn't it a bit of hubris to assume I know what the future will bring (yah, a little come to Jesus talk!)?

Once you've identified your competing commitment, courageously resolve to try again. *I will consistently eat beautiful healthy food to achieve my radiant new energy. The people who love me will support me. I will manage my temporary feelings of deprivation in a positive way. I can enjoy the companionship of family and friends all the while eating the way I choose. If I mess up, I'll forgive myself, evaluate what went wrong, and start again.*

Practice. Practice. Remember it takes thirty days to jumpstart a new habit. *I start eating well today. I enlist support. I persevere. I am a badass.*

Practice patience. *I give myself time to learn and grow.*

Embrace failure. If you fall down, get right back up and back at it. *I am imperfect but I don't give up. My failures are just opportunities for me to learn the best way for me.*

Do you struggle with sustaining healthy habits that you want badly?

What gets in your way?

Can you identify a competing commitment? What is it? How might you make peace with it and get it out of your way?

Resources:

Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey. [**How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation.**](#) 2001.

Karyn Shanks, MD. [**Deprivation: The Challenge of Lifestyle Change.**](#) 2017.

[**Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy \(FINE\) Food Plan.**](#) 2018.

[**FINE and GRIN Food Plan Reinforcements.**](#) 2018.

KARYN SHANKS MD

Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner

wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

[READ MORE ARTICLES](#)

[CONTACT KARYN](#)

[GET INSPIRED](#)