

Taking the Positive Steps in Change

Why do some people thrive through change and transition while others experience great difficulty? Are there individual characteristics or traits that explain how people weather the storm of change? Is there a personality profile that describes better coping skills and contributes to a better outcome? All good questions, but the fact is there just aren't simple answers.

Of course, having mastered the art of change over the course of a lifetime provides a great advantage. The more experience you have with the process, the more you come to know what to expect along the way. More importantly, you gain knowledge through your own cumulative personal transitions about your response to change. Over time, you have the opportunity to alter your responses to change in order to create a more satisfying experience.

Until you reach that level of comfort and command of the process through change, there are some basic things to consider and some things you can actually do to help you negotiate and navigate your course.

The three A's of change

The three As of change can help you to seize the opportunities that change brings.

Accept the challenge of change. Whether you accept the challenge that change brings, it's there before you. What are you going to do? You can be in-different to it, retreat from it, or accept the new challenges that have been presented to you.

Change always brings new challenges. It requires new ways of thinking and new ideas. What's important is to not allow the negative voices around you to discourage you. Success will come as you navigate the waters of change, and you will probably make a few mistakes along the way. But if you will accept change with a determination to succeed you will.

Learn to accentuate the positives of change. In order to do this, you have to shake off old assumptions that all change is bad. Sometimes it is, sometimes it's not. One thing is for certain, you'll never move toward success if your attitude towards change is negative.

Accentuating the positives of change occurs when you understand that change is the gateway to future success. As long as you stay where you are, you'll never get to where you want to be. In business, if you're sitting still, you're getting left behind. Accentuate the positives of change, your survival depends on it.

Appreciate the value of change. Appreciating change only works when people understand why you are changing in the first place. That is the task of good leadership. A leader can't change the climate of the organisation if he hasn't communicated the value of it.

Change presents you with new opportunities. It takes you out of your routine, it challenges the way you think, and it causes you to look at the same things in new ways. Whether you are an agent of change for good, or a victim of it, depends on whether you embrace it.

Practice the five Ps.

1. **Learn patience.** Generally, things do not happen overnight. In fact, it may take some time before a desired and/or reasonable outcome is reached. Don't be impulsive or try to rush the results. Patience will help you arrive at the best possible place you need to be.
2. **Be persistent.** It's easy to want to give up, especially when things are not going your way, or are even looking glum. Keep on chipping away at the issues; the outcome or solution you're seeking may be just around the bend.



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3. Be practical. Some changes require an immediate response to remedy a situation, but in most instances, there's simply no rush to the finish line. Go about your life in a way that focuses attention on maintaining balance. Stay present, firmly rooted, in the here and now. In other words, create a structure that provides stability and support while you're in the process of transitioning.
4. Be positive. Expect 'ups and downs'. In fact, that's more the norm while you're going through change. A sense of optimism will help equalise the highs and lows will keep you focused and committed.
5. Have a purpose. No matter how many major changes and transitions you go through during the course of your life, having an organising guiding principle that is vital to you and gives meaning to your life is essential.

In addition, keeping an open mind and being curious about the possibilities that change promises, being flexible, staying motivated, and having a sense of humour will buoy your resiliency and help you persevere.

Stay focused on who you are and what you need. This is often difficult since so much of the way we define ourselves is through the 'externals' such as relationships, work, power, money, status, etc. It's easier said than done to focus on just your Self, first and foremost, when other factors, especially people in your intimate world, are part of the change. Compromise may be necessary and you may not always get what you want completely. But that principle is pretty basic to most situations in life.

Question, assess, and evaluate your core beliefs about change.

Our beliefs are largely moulded (one can even say, we are programmed) by parents, teachers, and other authority figures during our earliest years. What we come to believe is often never questioned and is considered to be absolute and true. So just imagine if what you hear about change is negative messaging: 'Nothing ever good comes of change'. 'Change is too much work; it's not worth the trouble'. 'Don't take risks; there's too much to lose'.

Take as much time as you need before you respond. So much of human behaviour is reactionary, not responsive, and often not responsible. We are constantly reacting to what is imposed upon us from outside of ourselves, rather than just being able to take the necessary action for what is most essential for ourselves and our well-being.

Change is a process that involves endings, transitions and beginnings.

Endings:

During the change process, we are in the position – either voluntary or involuntarily – of having to end an attachment to an old way of doing things. This detachment is what

we refer to as an ending. Endings are often painful and disorientating. Even though we may fully realise – intellectually – that the ending is necessary or inevitable, it still hurts to let go. One common problem in change situations is that we don't let go. We refuse to break and end up carrying emotional excess baggage into the new venture. The key to the ending process is to recognise exactly what we are hanging on to and then begin the process of letting go.

Transitions:

The process of letting go is what we call transitions. And the logical question we ask is: transition to what? It's difficult enough to let go, but it's doubly difficult if there isn't something there to hang on to or at least reach for. As a result, the key to transitions is to clarify a direction and a goal. Even if these are only sketchy at first, they still represent something to head for. Eventually, as the direction and goals become clearer and more concrete, we are able to comfortably end the old and begin the new.

New Beginnings:

Once people are committed to or at least moving in direction of accepting and owning the change, new beginnings can occur.

Here are some suggested ways to manage change instead of letting change manage you:

- Express your feelings about the change to supportive friends, co-workers or family.
- Enlist the support of others
- Plan for known change
- Obtain as much information as possible about what is happening
- Mark or celebrate endings
- Set yourself short term objectives
- Identify and use your internal and external resources
- Take time to look after yourself
- Deal directly with your concerns about change
- Identify what you are in control of
- Avoid 'catastrophising' and 'awfulising'
- Practice regular relaxation techniques

References:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-flux/201107/5-tips-help-you-respond-effectively-change>