



Change is Inevitable. Growth is Optional. Choose Wisely.

If change is truly inevitable, why does there seem to be so much resistance to it? We've all heard (or muttered) the lament, "*Change is hard.*" There seems to be a universal acceptance of this "truth".

But what if we change the way we see, think about, interact with, and adapt to – change?

Change often feels hard because it puts us outside of what is familiar – our patterns of thinking and behaving – our habits. Change is a direct affront to our comfort zone. It takes us off track; out of our groove (or rut); on a detour or course correction. Sometimes we are intentionally directing the change and sometimes, it comes hurling at us, completely unexpectedly.

What's to fear?

The idea of change can trigger all kinds of stress; creating feelings of being scattered, frustrated, pressured and even out of control or overwhelmed. Fear of change, fear of the unknown, lack of control or predictability, lack of clarity of vision or direction, fear of making a mistake, lack of belief in what's possible are all driving factors for the discomfort we feel when we face change.

Change Management (Coping) Mechanisms

Faced with the ominous threat of the supposed hardship of change, we humans have creative and often complex ways for relating to it. We procrastinate. We resist. We ignore. We avoid. We fret. Or, we try to hide. On the other end of the spectrum, we change at breakneck speeds. We constantly put out fires we started. We change just for the sake of change. We change priorities. We change tactics. We change our minds. We change direction, and sometimes, we seem to try to change everything at once.

New Thinking = New Reality

Besides creating strife, change can also ignite feelings of excitement and anticipation that often accompany the thought of new possibilities. Consider any effective change agents you've known. They are frequently highly adaptive, passionately curious leaders; inviting others to join in their vision. They are proactive advocates for what's on the horizon.

Becoming a change agent requires a shift in perspective. Change becomes not something to be managed, but integrated as a way of thinking, believing and behaving. Change presents a



constant opportunity to evolve – yourself and your business. By embodying a healthy attitude towards change, you put yourself in the driver seat, ready to respond, not merely react.

One of my clients has defined “adaptability” as core to who they are and how they operate. The leadership team challenges each other to integrate this foundational value into the daily dynamics of how people think, work, look at challenges, see opportunities and respond to the fast-paced world of construction. What does this mean to their bottom-line? They experience increased effectiveness in making decisions, in responding to opportunities in the marketplace and in developing efficient new ways to operate and execute their work.

Having a mindset of openness to that which is new and different can create a culture of innovation. You cannot simultaneously be innovative and resist change! An attitude adjustment to change can monumentally change your reality.

Navigating (and Embracing) Change

In reframing your relationship to change, you gain a more prepared and workable approach. If you are in a mental state of readiness for change, you can *“initiate and respond to change in ways that create advantage, minimize risk and sustain performance.”* (Torben Rick, international change consultant).

Get motivated. Find more reasons to be excited than to be afraid or resistant. We often think we are rational beings, but more often than not, we make decisions based on our emotions. Make the emotional case for positive change and align the rational. In other words, create compelling benefit and value for the change – for yourself and others.

Don't be afraid of the dark. Don't let the unknown be the boogeyman. Define the objections, concerns, obstacles, and fears. To alleviate the rational brain's fears, rigorously examine the prospective change for risks, pitfalls, unintended consequences, and alignment with your core values and what you say you want. Design a road map that sheds light on what's real and what's possible.

Watch your language. How we speak to others, and ourselves, greatly impacts our receptiveness to change – and the adoption of new initiatives. Catch yourself thinking or saying such things as, “we've always done it this way ...”; “we don't do it that way...”; or “that's just the way it is.”



Put yourself in new situations. When we change our environment, our habits, our schedules or routines, we see things differently. This new perspective can help you shift from resistance to seeing and acting on new ideas or opportunities.

Role model it. If you want change in others, role model the attitudes and behaviors you want to manifest. Practice being a change agent. Gandhi instructs us to, *"Be the change you want to see in the world."* That world includes your office, hallways, jobsites, meetings, emails, water cooler conversations – in short, anywhere you show up.

Provide real time feedback. People can make shifts more readily if they are aware of exactly when, where and how they show up – and how that is or isn't conducive to growth. If they are doing something right – catch them in the act, acknowledge and reward them. If they are off course, bring it to their attention as soon as possible for a course correction.

Organizations don't change. People do. Or they don't. Before you can get buy in for organizational change, people often have to feel the pain of the problem. *"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."* Anaïs Nin. Help your team see the value in changing, and the cost of not. Make sure they feel empowered to impact change (and make mistakes). Your company's growth depends on it.

Change might be inevitable, but it doesn't have to be hard. Life starts at the edge of your comfort zone. Start living. Choose growth. You just might find it exhilarating.



Karen Natzel serves as a business therapist to leaders who want to create healthy, vibrant and high performing organizations. Karen helps her clients navigate change and growth by serving as a confidential sounding board; as facilitator, trainer, conflict-resolver, relationship-builder, awareness-raiser, communicator, coach and strategist. Her passion is inspiring others to cultivate their potential and live authentically.

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