

The Hero's Sherpa: Your Guide Through Life's Challenges



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PREPARE FOR THE JOURNEY

Introduction

Prepare For Your Change Journey

Wait!

How can you prepare for the journey when you haven't yet planned it?

The truth is, you can't...at least not fully. At the same time, if you begin by planning, it's likely that the only things you will prepare for are what you have planned...and I have seen that have disastrous results. If circumstances allow, I invite my clients to not leave until they are prepared. One of my favorite authors is Phil Cousineau. In *The Art of Pilgrimage* he writes, "Being ready mentally, spiritually, and physically makes us lighter on our feet, more adroit at making decisions, and perhaps even helps keep chaos at bay."

Over decades of entering my own changes—and accompanying clients on theirs—I have learned a great deal about preparing for the journey. Being prepared requires several things. It requires knowing your destination, and knowing it in your heart and gut, not just your head. It requires creating your change story. Being prepared requires planning the journey once you know the destination. It will most likely be long, and arduous. While you can plan some things, other things cannot be anticipated. How will you know that you are making progress? What milestones will you be looking for? Being prepared means doing what is required mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically so that you can face the challenges—expected and unexpected—that you will face. It means doing whatever you can to lighten your burden as you step out on the road. Being prepared means having the belief in yourself—and in those people and things that will anchor you on your journey—so that you have the courage to take that first step, and then the next, and the next, without turning back.

If you don't take the time to sit and reflect before you leave, you'll surely be remembering what you've forgotten on the way to the airport or on the plane. By then it's too late. This tends to be true for what goes into your bags as well as what goes into your heart about your journey. The Art of Pilgrimage, Phil Cousineau

Most of us approach change with some understanding of where it is taking us, and a belief that we know what to do to get there. There's a strategy, a goal, or outcomes of some sort that we are seeking to achieve. And, there's a plan to execute in order to achieve the desired end result.

Rarely, however, do we focus on fully preparing for the journey itself. We may make physical preparations (e.g. get a passport, purchase tickets, reserve lodging for travel; or meet with a career coach, research certification options, register for classes for a career change). But that is not enough.

Preparing for your journey means more than packing the bags, or selecting a path forward. The change journey itself is a “whole person” experience; no aspect of your being is left untouched by a difficult change. Fail to prepare any aspect of your being, and you are putting success at risk.

And, it’s not enough to prepare yourself for the journey. Those who are making it with you require preparation as well. Knowing where you are going, what the journey will be like, how you will be measuring progress, what is changing and what is not, what role each person will play in the change process, what will be done to help them be successful with the change…all these things and more give people a greater sense of stability and control. Each one contributes to the preparation.

Here are a few of the questions you will need to address.

- Do you really have to make this change, or is it just a good (maybe really, really good) idea?
- How bad does it hurt to *not* make the change?
- Are you talking with the right people?
- What needs to change about how you and others think, both to make the journey and to maintain success once it is completed?
- What needs to change about how you and others act, both to make the journey and to maintain success once it is completed?
- What are your anchors, and how will your relationship with them have to change in order for the change to succeed?
- What do you need to do in order to be prepared for the resistance that will inevitably arise during the change journey?
- Where are your boundaries? How will you protect them?
- What plateaus will you be visiting along the way, and how will you utilize your time on them?
- how are you going to maintain your balance?
- Do you have enough discipline to succeed? If not, what options are there for developing more, or for making the change less demanding?

- Do you have the courage the change will require for success? If not, what options are there for developing more, or for making the change less demanding?
- Who do you need to enlist in the change? How and when will you do that?
- Are you prepared to effectively utilize both one-way and two-way communication...at the right times, in the right ways, with the right messages?
- What are you going to stop and or slow down so that you have everything that is required (time, resources, change adaptation capacity, etc.) to succeed with this change?
- Who do you need to listen to in order to be successful?
- Are people—including you—prepared for the catharsis that is an inevitable part of big changes?
- Are you prepared to commit to outcomes, and not just actions?
- Do you know when to trust, and when to not trust, your intuition?
- Are you prepared to make mistakes, own up to and learn from them, and move on with the change?
- Are you prepared to tell the change story? Is the change story prepared to be told?
- *And, at every step of the way, are you prepared for what comes next in the change process?*

Planning and preparation are tightly interwoven. I always begin with preparation, because you can only plan for what you are aware of. Proper preparation heightens your awareness. Without it, you may travel somewhere. But it is unlikely you will reach the destination you set out to attain.

Change Principles 2

In the introduction I provided several key change principles. There are additional principles that warrant attention as you begin to prepare for your change journey.

All Change is Political.

All major change requires power shifts to be successful. This is as true in personal change as in organizational change. It is a rarely spoken truth. All change is political. Power shifts are an inherent part of every change. This is as true at the personal level as it is at the organizational and the societal levels.

We know this when we think in terms of national change. Certainly it's true of political races, whether local, statewide, or national. There is not a broad social movement that doesn't quickly engage—or scare off—politicians. Politics come into play in school board races, in social club

elections, and in community-based organizations. They show up in our religious institutions. Parents attempt to coach their children's athletic teams, or lead their youth groups, in order to have some control over their children's experience. Those in power run for re-election to retain power. Those out of power run for election to continue the path of a retiring incumbent, to build on but shift the path, or to put things on a completely different path forward.

In our organizations, we have all heard of "office politics." Every big change messes with them. While it is rarely, if ever, part of the official planning process, these changes result in power shifts which can be of significant magnitude. One place we often do see acknowledgement of the power dynamics of a change is in the leadership of acquired organizations. While it is not unusual for their contributions to be acknowledged, for a significant payment to be made, and for a place to be found in the new organization, it is unusual for them to remain in that new place any longer than necessary to receive the maximum personal benefit; they no longer have the power—the political influence—they had before the acquisition.

But how is personal change political? During personal change you are taking power, you are giving it up, or you are re-negotiating a power relationship. For example, if you are entering into a committed personal relationship, you are re-negotiating the power dynamic between you and your partner. On the other hand, if your partner is filing to legally end the relationship, you may feel yourself in a powerless position; or, if you are the one filing, you are taking power over the future of the relationship that was not granted to you in the initial negotiation.

Let's briefly look at a few other examples within the context of changes that recent clients of mine have undertaken.

- Ron had to let go of some of the power he had over his personal life as he went from being a mid-career professional to a PhD student. The academic calendar and curriculum took control of his schedule much more than his prior employment did. He had to establish a new "student budget" with a much lower income. He renegotiated his social relationships, and even recast when he would undertake home projects; he no longer had the same level of freedom (in terms of both time and finances) to do so.
- Alice had to re-calibrate what it meant to exert leadership power when she was laid off from a high-level global corporate leadership position and become the Executive Director of a small nonprofit. In some ways she became "a bigger fish in a much smaller pond," but other than Alice and a part-time administrative assistant, her new organization was staffed entirely by volunteers. As a result, her power became solely based on relationships; she no longer had the power of authority.
- After getting divorced, Drew left the comfort of self-employment to join a major consulting firm in order to ensure a more stable income. He struggled with the challenge of "maintaining his personal brand" in an environment that demanded conformity. He relinquished control over decisions regarding work hours and travel. At the same time, based on his position he assumed positional power over a number of subordinates.

These changes at the personal level give us much to consider as we look at the role of power and politics in the context of change.

To restate, change involves shifts in power dynamics. Whether you initiate the change or it is initiated by others, your life—the power that you have and the way you can execute it—will be different at the end of the change from what it was before the change was initiated. So, a key question to consider is whether a change you are facing (or are involved in) will affect your power, and if so, in what ways.

If the answer to the first question is yes, it is important to spend time with another question. *How do you legitimately reclaim power in the face of this change?*

Let me tell you how I approach these challenges. This is my perspective; I know it is not shared universally. Most importantly, the way to reclaim your power in the face of change is to ask yourself whether or not you can actually control—or directly and legitimately influence—the change itself. If yes, then exercise your control and/or influence. If no, reclaim your power by taking charge of your response to the change. That is a power which no one can take away from us unless we allow it, unless we place ourselves in the role of victim.

Change Doesn't Play By the Rules

While there are universal principles, there are no rules for change. Things will go wrong. There will be mistakes, distractions, exhaustion. Be prepared. We know this... Yet it seems to be one of the lessons we have to learn over and over and over and over again.

When it comes to big change, there are a very clear set of principles that we can apply. But it is important to remember...these are principles, not rules. Change doesn't unfold neatly. It doesn't proceed according to plan.

You will make mistakes; it is inevitable. Decisions have to be made in the absence of adequate information; some of them will be wrong. "Fess up," and make the necessary adjustments, the sooner the better.

You will be distracted. There are a lot of "bright, shiny objects" that can easily catch your attention. And, there will be unanticipated crises that will do likewise. Be careful; it's easy for the change to "go off the rails" when this happens. When faced with distractions, acknowledge them and let them go.

When faced with crisis, evaluate it in the context of the change. Whatever your role in the change, you cannot delegate it. Do you need to slow the change down; to defer decisions

and/or actions, to redeploy resources? You may need to decide these things and act on them quickly... But decide and act, don't default.

You will be worn down. Change drains us emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually. Be ready! Ensure that the others who are taking the journey are ready as well!

In 2007 I completed a Himalayan pilgrimage with several others from my yoga studio. This was to be a major change from my life in metropolitan New York City in many ways. It was planned as a series of treks requiring camping, with nights in between spent in guest houses. Our first trek took us from Hanuman chatti to Dodital and on to Sangam chatti. On the second day of this trek I wrote, "Sometimes, the only thought can be, *Where do I plant my trekking pole? Where do I take my next step? Where do I plant my pole for the support that I need, and so it doesn't become wedged? Where do I plant my foot so there is a place to plant my next foot.* Even these thoughts sometimes just skim the consciousness."

I had prepared in the gym for months. But I also prepared on the yoga mat, on my prayer/meditation bench, through reading, and in reflection. Our journey had a series of planned "plateaus," those evenings spent in guest houses. When we completed this first trek of three days, four of the twelve announced that they were leaving. While the reasons they gave varied, the reality was that they were not prepared emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally for the challenges of this change. They spent the remainder of their time in India at a spa, an experience that was far less challenging—and far less of a change—than the remainder of us experienced.

Prepare, prepare those around you, and plan for the plateaus. Know where you are going...not just in your head, but in your heart and in your gut. Big change journeys, just like a Himalayan pilgrimage, will test you and all who are traveling with you. The ability to call on your internalized experience of the destination will help sustain you along the way. Prepare. Then let go of your expectations, and be present to the reality that unfolds.

Change Happens

Sometimes we avoid change, and some change is avoidable. Sometimes we delay the inevitable. And sometimes we are totally surprised by the changes that are coming at us.

Change happens. No big insight there. Change happens all the time. Nothing new there. Change happens. Everyone knows that.

Yes, everyone knows that change happens, and that it happens all the time. And yet all too often, we lose sight of that fact and its implications. Let's look at different responses to changes that happen, and the consequences of those responses.

"There Are Changes I Avoid"

Not every change has to be embraced. In fact, in today's ever-changing environment, I encourage my clients to avoid any change that is not essential. But that is the tricky part. What is an essential change?

Essential changes are those that will have a significant impact—positive or negative—on your future. They may be changes that you have the option of initiating, changes you have the option of participating in, or they may be changes that impose themselves on you. What is important is the effect the change will have on your life whether or not you elect to participate in it.

Let's look first at avoiding the changes that you have the option of participating in. There are a myriad of examples to draw from. For example, I met with someone who was bemoaning the pending demise of the Blackberry telephone. He had chosen to avoid the global transition from Blackberry to smart phones; and he was trying to "negotiate" how he would move forward with communication in a future world without his Blackberry.

What about the changes that impose themselves on you? Here we can look at the 2016 presidential election...and the re-engagement of so many who felt disenfranchised, having avoided adapting to changes in our demography, socio-economic disparities, and cultural mores for decades. We can also look at the very personal level. It is likely that you have avoided some medical issue that has arisen in your life. "I don't have time for a cold." "I don't know what that pain in my side is; let me wait a week and see if it will go away."

It is also important to know the difference between change you have a choice about opting into and those that impose themselves on you. I spent years when I was younger avoiding "coming out." I acted as if being gay was a choice that I could make, a choice that I was drawn to, but that I could avoid. It isn't; it is a part of who I have been since the day I was born. Once this change in awareness happened, my path forward became clear.

Don't confuse those things that you can choose whether or not to participate in with those changes that impose themselves on you.

The bottom line is, we tend to avoid changes that are uncomfortable to us. But, changes happen, whether or not we attempt to avoid them. There will be something after the smart phone. There will be a new president after the current one. There will be continuing change in America's demography, economics, and cultural mores. Our bodies will continue to change. All of these changes are essential to pay attention to; each of them will have a significant impact—positive or negative—on each of us.

Avoidance is the equivalent of denial. It may be denial of the change, or it may be denial of the change's impact on you; it really doesn't matter. Avoiding a change, denying that it is happening, does not mean that it will go away, or that it will pass over you. It only means that you are allowing yourself to become victim to it.

"There Are Changes I Delay Acting On"

Delaying does sometimes make good sense. Not every new technology that enters the marketplace will take root. For example, you may not want to be first in line for the first new product to replace the smart phone; you may not want to purchase the first commercially available self-driving car.

But all too often, "delaying" is another word for avoiding or denying. I once worked with a client organization that continued operating in a mainframe computer environment long after the world had shifted to PCs and laptops. They were in crisis. Suddenly a significant number of their programmers were retiring, and they were having difficulty finding anyone skilled in COBOL. They had delayed too long, and paid a significant business price when they finally acted in accord with the changing environment.

Delay is a fair strategy when you are unable to determine whether the change is essential (it will have a significant impact—positive or negative—on your future). But don't delay too long. Monitor. "Make the call." Take control of your response, even if you can't take control of the change.

"I Didn't See it Coming"

Sometimes it feels good to be insular; it makes it much easier to deal with the few things we allow through the filters. Likewise, it is empowering to have a clear intention of where we are going on our change journeys, and are powerfully moving down the path to that future. However, in both cases, you can be bitten, and bitten hard, by what you don't see coming.

Keep your eyes open. Don't be afraid of information. Don't keep your filters too tight. Know that your changes may need to change due to forces outside of your control, shifts in the external environment, things you learn along the way.

Change happens. We change. We develop new awareness and insights into who we are and how we show up in the world. Our bodies change. The world around us changes. Keep your eyes open. Watch for those changes that will impact you, make choices about those changes that are essential to your future. Then take charge. Don't avoid, don't delay, don't be blind-sided, don't be a victim. As I quoted my grandfather earlier, *You can't determine the hand that is dealt to*

you; you can decide how to play it. Play all your hands with courage, and with the strength that says you are in charge.

Change on a Dime

“In this environment, we have to be able to change on a dime.” If you haven’t said it yourself, you’ve probably heard others saying it. Is it possible to “change on a dime?” Do you want to, even if you can? Having the ability to “change on a dime” would clearly keep you out “in front of the Joneses” in the neighborhood. But is “changing on a dime” what you really want to strive for?

In order to answer this question, it’s necessary to look at the constraints that keep us from having—or exercising—this ability now. First and foremost are those things that stabilize our lives day-to-day, our anchors. At work, we might refer to the organizational culture or the operating paradigm. At home, it is the family routines, lifestyle, or traditions. Much of the time, these anchors—whatever form they may take—are operating in the background. They provide us with the stability we need in order to focus on other things. We know which decisions to make on our own, which ones require consultation with others, and which ones are to be made by someone else. We know what behaviors are acceptable, and what behaviors are not. We know how to do what is expected of us, whether as the accountant, the CEO, the spouse, or the parent.

Our anchors, whatever they are, wherever they are, keep us in relative stasis. They keep us, our families, our organizations, and our communities (even our society) generally heading in what has been determined to be “the right direction.” The stronger the connection to any specific anchor, the more tightly it holds us in place.

Changing on a dime—if the change is significant—means changing our relationship to one or more of those tightly bound anchors. It means letting go of who we have been, what we have been doing, how we have been thinking, and becoming a different person or organization “in an instant.” From this perspective, the best way to “change on a dime” is to be adrift, without anchors. Much like a leaf floating downstream, we can “go with the flow,” bobbing quickly through the rapids, and swirling slowly in the eddies.

Once you put even one anchor down, your ability to change instantly is at risk. It is not as easy to move across the country if you have a family, or own a house (or factory). But, having no anchors leaves us—quite literally—adrift.

Given that we as individuals, as well as our institutions, tend to be strongly anchored, changing intentionally requires us to reflect on our anchors. Which ones do we let go of; which ones do we realign our relationship to; which ones do we sustain? This reflection will slow us down—both

as individuals and as organizations—at the same time as it helps us change wisely. And, this reflection, when done well, doesn't happen "on a dime."

So if changing on a dime is not, in fact, something to aspire to, how do we better position ourselves to be able to change more rapidly? *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeon is a book that provides sound guidance in this regard. For now, let me highlight a few elements that address how we can become more quickly adaptable to change.

According to McKeown, the nonessentialist seeks to be all things to all people, engages in the undisciplined pursuit of more, and lives a life that does not satisfy. The essentialist thinks less is better, engages in the disciplined pursuit of less, and lives a life that really matters.

What really matters to you as an individual? What really matters to your organization? What can you not say "No" to without damaging the core of who you are and what you do? Once you know what that is, McKeown states that it is time to begin saying "No" to all those other things whose weight you are carrying. And, it's time to begin saying "No" to the change opportunities that come your way, but do not move you forward on your essential path.

McKeown's message is, in some ways, a familiar one. "You can't be all things to all people" is the popular saying. Writers, programmers, project managers, designers, and many others learn, "It's not complete when you can't put anything else in, it's complete when you can't take anything else out." Taking this essentialist approach will not enable you to "change on a dime." But it will free you of many of the anchors that are slowing you down now. And, fewer of the changes that appear on your horizon will warrant a second thought. Those factors alone—knowing what is essential, letting go of unnecessary anchors, and letting nonessential changes pass by—will significantly increase the speed by which you can change when the essential opportunities present themselves.

Change: What's Poetry Got to Do with It?

What does poetry have to do with change? Sometimes, everything.

Rumi was born in 1207 in Afghanistan, at the time a part of the Persian empire. His poem *The Guest House* holds many important lessons for us in life, and in change. Below is the poem, followed by the lessons it calls out for me.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes

as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are crowded with sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Here are some of the change lessons that I find in Rumi's poem. You may see them, or not. You may see others.

- *Don't be surprised by the surprises; life is full of them.*
- *Sometimes we may see those things we are facing as positive, sometimes as negative. Each has its purpose.*
- *"When one door closes, another opens."*
- *Sometimes, change demands that we let go of things—"furniture," "baggage,"—in order for us to move forward.*
- *Don't live as a victim of history, but embrace the uncertainty of the future. Live boldly into it.*
- *Change is hard; big change is harder.*
- *Both how we think and how we behave are important.*
- *Things happen that we don't understand; accept them. We don't need to understand why they happen to understand the lessons that they have to offer.*
- *Be graceful and act with integrity, whatever the circumstances we face.*

Important Changes Can't Be Undone

There is no "undo" button for change. For this reason, it is important to approach big change thoughtfully.

I admit it...I am not sure who some of my Facebook friends are, or where they came from. There must be some connection, some reason I either offered them a friend request, or accepted one

that was sent my way. It's easy enough to unfriend them; but then again, why bother? Our relationship isn't that important to either of us.

Just like unknown "friends" on Facebook, little changes can be easily undone. If you fell in love with the paint chip in the store but hate the way the living room looks now that you have painted it, you can paint it again. If you felt good about the way the new suit looked on you in the dressing room but saw it differently once you got home, you can return it. Some car dealerships are now offering exchange and/or return options for new car purchases.

But, important changes can't be undone.

Getting divorced is not the same as never having been married. Obtaining a new job is not the same as never having held the current one. Moving to the city then back to the country is not the same as never having lived in the city. The examples are endless. Whether the change was personal (e.g. returning to work after the birth of a child or a serious illness), organizational (e.g. withdrawing a new product from the market after its launch as a result of quality control problems), or social (e.g. significant movement toward equal rights)···you can't undo the change.

You can't undo it because people have experienced it. you can't undo it because people have been changed by it. You can't undo it because it is part of the way people now think/see/behavior in the world, or part of how they now think/see/behavior toward you, or part of how you now think/see/behavior.

Ultimately, as I have written elsewhere, all change is personal. And when people are personally changed you can't undo it. Whether mother or father, if you have taken time off of work for the birth of your child, you are returning to work with a different perspective. If you are the business that launched—and withdrew—a faulty product, the marketplace sees you differently. If you have experienced being treated fairly after a lifetime of judgment and discrimination, you are not going to willingly relinquish fair treatment.

Important changes can't be undone. For this reason, some people refuse to make them in the first place. They hold onto the old ways, the old beliefs, the old technologies. While millions of photographs are taken on cellphones around the world each day, there remain photographers with large-format cameras and film, and photographers who are making albumen and cyanotype prints. Someday, cellphone cameras will be replaced by a future generation technology, not by a return to film. Important changes can't be undone.

The Amish shun technology and modern conveniences. They continue to travel in horse and buggy, sharing the roads with today's cars and trucks. It is likely that in the not-to-distant future they will be sharing the road with driverless vehicles; today's cars and trucks will not be replaced by horse and buggy.

Important changes will expire; they can't be undone. It was the thinking of the past that fostered today's changes...thinking that challenged the status quo, that sought creative and innovative solutions to the problems and the opportunities being faced then. Every solution, every innovation, every change, brings with it new problems. Albert Einstein is quoted as having said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." Nor can we solve them by returning to the thinking of the past. Important changes cannot be undone.

If important change can't be undone, what is the answer to today's challenges in our lives?

First, don't act/react impulsively. Explore; consider options; "think outside the box;" ask those who think differently than you for their perspective, and listen with an open mind.

Learn from the past. There are reasons that change happened back then. Many of the factors that made things work—that sustained the status quo—back then are no longer in place.

There were mistakes that were made along the way. Learn from them; don't repeat them.

Avoid "change for change sake." if there is no other reason than to make change, then you are squandering your capacity for change when you may well need that capacity for unforeseen changes that are just around the corner.

Recognize that our memories of the past will often "let go of the bad" and "reinforce the good." The "good old days" may be old, but it is doubtful that they were as good as they are remembered...and if they were as good for us, it is likely that they were less-than-good for others who are in a better place today.

Consider the anchors that keep you tied to the past. Are there ones that you need to let go of, others that you need to connect to differently to meet today's challenges?

Is This a Big Change, or Not?

We've all experienced this. We are facing a really big change, and yet when we begin to discuss it with others going through it with us, they shrug their shoulders and say, "No big deal." Or, vice versa.

Is it a big change, or not? What makes a change big, or not?

There are two critical perspectives to apply when answering this question. The first is examine the change itself; the second is to view the change as seen by those who are experiencing it.

Before we explore these perspectives, let's return one more time to the definition of change: *Change is a disruption in expectations. The bigger the disruption, the bigger the change.*

Applying a Change Perspective

Is this a big change? Here are some questions to reflect on as you apply a change perspective.

- How many different sets of expectations are being disrupted?
- What, specifically is being disrupting? Is it:
 - Who people interact with
 - How they interact with one another
 - The expectations of those interactions
 - How people think about one another
 - How people think about what they are doing
 - That power bases will be shifted; some people will gain power, others will lose it
- How large are the disruptions it requires?
- How many people are being disrupted? Is it a small number, or does the change ripple across an organization or large familial/social network?
- how clearly defined—and visible—is a successful outcome?
- How clear is the journey from the present state to the desired future state?
- How important is it that the promises of the change be fully delivered?

Applying a Change Target Lens

Is this a big change? To some degree, that is in the eye of the beholder, those who have to modify their behavior, and perhaps even how they think about things, if the change is to succeed. There are several factors that come into play.

Is the change perceived as positive or negative? It is likely that different people will see it differently, and thus approach it differently. If you are approaching something from a negative perspective it is generally much more difficult to face than if you are approaching it in a positive manner; change seen as negative appears tougher—and bigger—than if it were seen in a positive light.

How much else is going on? If life is really quiet, people have more mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional capacity for adapting to the change than if there is a lot going on. One of the challenges is that, especially in organizational change (but sometimes in personal change as well), we really don't know what is going on in people's lives beyond what we see in our interactions with them. Mary might have a sleep disorder; Charlie might have just lost a loved one; Tommy may be a single dad working two jobs. Nonetheless, to the degree that you can, it

is important that you factor in people's capacity for change, and that you watch for signs of overload.

How resilient are those being affected by the change? Each of us has a different level of personal resilience. How resilient we are affects how much change we can handle at one time. Our resilience also affects whether we approach the change proactively, or reactively. And, it may affect whether our "default position" is perceiving change as positive or negative."

How much control—direct and/or indirect—do people have? The greater the sensed loss of control (including the ability to accurately know what to expect), the bigger the change is perceived. Think of it this way. If the lights go on and off when you flip the switch, you are in direct control. When you see someone else walk over to flip the switch, you have indirect control, since you know what to expect and how to respond to it. But, if the lights just—apparently randomly—start going on and off with no one near the switch...your environment has suddenly changed significantly.

Do people have the skills, or know that they will be able to develop the skills, needed to adjust to the change? For those who do, the change is not as big as for those who don't. How invested are they in the status quo? As we have discussed before, even if people don't like the status quo, they often stick with it because they know what to expect. The more invested you are in the current way things are, the bigger any change that disrupts things.

How aligned is the change with one's world view, personal beliefs, values, etc.? If the change remains equidistant to these things, or moves closer, it will be perceived as a less disruptive change than if it moves further away.

The answer to *Is this a big change?* is sometimes self-evident. But often it's much more nuanced... "Yes" for some, "No" for others.

It is unlikely that you will ever be able to know the answers to all these questions for a change touching more than a small handful of people. Nonetheless, there are things that you can do to take these factors into consideration, and to lessen the disruption of your change.

What's Your "Plan B"?

How many times have you heard that question? For me, I am sure the answer is "in the hundreds." It began as a young boy who wanted to become an architect. And, it has come back any number of times since then in both personal and professional situations.

What's your Plan B?

I have now wrestled with this question and the best way to answer it for more than five decades. For me, the wrestle isn't about "what" my Plan B is, but whether I should have one; for my clients, my wrestle is whether I should recommend that they have one. Why wouldn't I have—or recommend—a Plan B? Here is my reasoning. I will illustrate it with my own circuitous career path.

In fourth grade I discovered graph paper. How cool! I could draw rooms, design buildings. Suddenly my perspective went from logic and words (I was good writing on lined paper, but not an artist) to more creative visual thinking. Architecture became a passion that stayed with me through high school. I had a drawing board mounted under the window in my bedroom, and would spend hours lost in designing. I took mechanical drawing every semester, advancing my skills. The money I earned after school went into buying drafting supplies and books on famous architects. On career day I would visit a local architectural office. I entered competitions. When the time came for college I applied to three architecture schools, and was accepted to one. I had no Plan B. Being an architect was the one career that, in my heart, I wanted to spend my life pursuing.

As it turned out, by my junior year of college I had lost that passion. I no longer wanted to be an architect. I could probably succeed and make a living at it, and I knew that if I did, I wouldn't feel very good about myself or my work. But by then, I had developed another passion... I was doing youth work on the Onondaga Indian Reservation, and had become very interested in Native American cultures. My new major became cultural anthropology. ("But what are you going to do with that? What's your Plan B?") I continued into grad school with the same focus, thinking I would love to teach cultural anthropology at a college or university.

Midway through the first semester of grad school I received my draft notice. The next four years were spent as an Air Force Basic Military Training Instructor ("drill sergeant") and earning two masters degrees. My passion for Native American studies morphed to larger issues of social justice, and my focus on higher education shifted from the classroom to administration.

Eight years of various higher education positions led to four years of consulting to higher education and nonprofits. It was during this time as a consultant that I was introduced to the nascent field of change management, and realized that underneath every career shift I had made was a commitment to executing change.

By 1990, AIDS was a growing crisis in America; I became the Deputy Director of Finance and Operations at an AIDS organization providing permanent housing and support services to homeless people with AIDS. The organization needed to put in place an infrastructure that would help ensure their long-term viability without becoming bureaucratic, and I knew how to do that.

And so the path has twisted and turned, even to today. The thread has always been change. It has taken me inside of organizations, and outside. I have worked independently, and on teams. I have been a residence hall director, a fund raiser, an internal (as well as external) change consultant, a coach, a trainer, a mentor, a trusted adviser.

And, I have never had a Plan B.

I have spent time exploring options. But those explorations have always been just that...where am I being pulled to go next?

Perhaps if I had a Plan B when I made some of these transitions, I would have made them more quickly. But for me, the only way to have a Plan B is to say, "I am good with doing either A or B." And, if that is the case, then I would not be able to fully invest myself in either one. If Plan A failed (and some of them have), I would never know whether—had I been more fully committed—I could have made it work. And, given that we go into big changes in our lives naive about the difficulties that will inevitably arise, it would be too easy to walk away from the realities of Plan A to begin the uninformed optimism of Plan B.

Big changes are tough. There is no guarantee of success. That is why I always begin, for myself, with an exploration of what is in my heart...what is my passion? That is why I always invite the same reflection for both personal and professional clients. If you are not passionate about the intent of your change, how will you ever complete the journey? I have been laid off, fired, and had a nonprofit that I attempted to start fail to get the funding that it needed; in each case, I can say that I put everything that I had into success.

I have also had incredible successes. I have turned around a stagnant annual giving program, established a living learning program, and supported major strategic shifts that make a difference in people's lives both within the corporate and the nonprofit worlds. I have engaged in issues of social justice. I have helped individuals successfully navigate some of the most difficult personal life-changing events one could imagine. I have taught, coached, and mentored students, change practitioners, and organizational leaders. Along the way, the changes that I have been engaged in have touched tens of thousands of lives. And I still have no Plan B.

When my clients ask me if they should have a Plan B, I tell them quite honestly that I can't answer the question for them. I help them to understand the reasons I do not. I point out how uncertain a Plan A tough change is, and the fact that there is no such thing as "this change cannot fail;" every change can fail. I help them understand the reality of a difficult change journey. And, I assist them in determining whether developing a Plan B is right for them.

Sometimes, when the realities of change sink in they revert to an immediate Plan B...and don't proceed with the change. Sometimes, they develop a Plan B (which they may or may not ever

call on). And sometimes, like me, they dive headfirst into Plan A and leave the idea of creating a Plan B behind.

How do you answer this question for yourself? Do you have a Plan B? Should you develop one?

Why Are Some Changes So Difficult?

Some people seem to be able to move across the country into a new job with a new employer, and to do so with relative ease. For others, changing the snack offerings in the break room leads to weeks of consternation, frustration, and lost productivity. Most people fall somewhere in between. And, even those who move through most changes with apparent ease do find change difficult at times. So why are some changes so difficult?

I would like to focus on two pieces to the answer: our skills and our minds. While I am approaching them as separate, needless to say, they are highly inter-related. (An important third element, resilience, is addressed separately in a section written by Dr. Linda Hoopes.)

The Mind and Change

The first thing to remember is that change is personal. It doesn't matter who starts it. It doesn't matter whether it is a "personal," organizational, or social change. If it touches you, it is personal. If it touches me, it is personal. Change succeeds, or fails, through people.

Change is emotionless. It isn't positive or negative; that's just how we see it. You received a promotion; it is most likely a positive change for you. Your best friend is offered a similar promotion, and is concerned about all the negative effects it might have on his life (more time on the road, having to supervise former colleagues, the stress of the added responsibility, etc.). You see the move across the country as positive; it will bring you closer to where you grew up and other members of your family. Your spouse/partner sees it as negative; he will have to find a new job, the children will have to re-establish new friendships in new schools, and so on. How we perceive the change will affect how easy or difficult it is to move through.

Throughout this book I reference anchors...those things that "hold us in place." By definition, change requires an adjustment to our anchors. We may need to cut some loose; we may need to redefine our relationships to others. We may need to add new ones. The bigger the anchors we have to adjust, the more difficult the change will be. Road construction that causes me to take a new route to work rubs up against the "routine" anchor, but it is no big deal. A change that causes me to go from solely working from my home office to working in the office with my co-workers five days a week rubs up against many more anchors. A change that challenges my religious, spiritual, or other deeply held beliefs is even more difficult yet.

Often, a change in routine is the simplest. However, even then it does require some attention. Routines are executed based on our neural programming. A change in routine requires reprogramming. The bigger the change in routine, the more reprogramming is required. Meanwhile, we have to be attentive so we don't slip back into the old routine. The factors that cause the change may also come into play; having to alter our snacking habits because of a medical diagnosis may well be more difficult than altering them because the company put in different vending machines. The latter is a change of convenience, the former may be a matter of life and death.

We tend to take pride of ownership in those things we create: whether a piece of art, a home, a product/service offering, or an organization. The more we invest in the creation and the longer we engage with it, the stronger that sense of ownership is. Changes that are intended to reshape institutions—whether they be personal, organizational, or social—are really tough. Often the very people who created the institution, who nurtured it to maturity, who have ensured that it sustains over time are now being called on to radically change it—to let go of what they built and replace it with something else. Doing so requires a real shift in thinking. It may require a period of mourning, or some form of ceremonial “letting go.” At the organizational level it sometimes requires new leadership; it is just too tough for those who have built and sustained things for so long to now tear them down and create something else in their place.

How much we feel we have control over the change plays into how difficult it is for us. “Calling the shots” makes the change a lot easier than if we don't have any voice. Having a voice—even if it is to voice opinion, provide suggestions, etc.—gives a sense of indirect control, making the change once again easier to address.

How well you understand the patterns of change affects the difficulty of change. It is akin to having a road map; it doesn't tell you what the scenery will be like, but it lets you know where to turn, and what type of road you will be on. It helps to demystify the process, and takes some of the surprise out of the surprises.

Finally, the limitations we put on ourselves affect how difficult the change is. If “it's impossible” or “it's really, really, really hard for me to do this,” then it is impossible, or really, really, really hard.

Skills and Change

If we don't have the skills, and don't think we can get them (there's that brain at work again), change is really difficult. That's why it is so important to pay attention to—and communicate—how you are going to help others learn what they need when you are driving (or guiding) a change. This is as true for the child who is heading off to college as the person to whom you are delegating more and more responsibility.

And, with big change it is not only skills that will need to change; it is also ways of thinking. That new college student will need to think about budgeting time, and personal responsibility, and eating habits, etc. in ways she probably didn't have to while living at home. The newly promoted manager will need to think about solving the client's problem, no matter how long it takes, rather than referring the problem immediately to you.

Preparing Yourself for the Journey

Anchors Aweigh

We all have anchors in our lives. They may be family, friends, career, community, job (or even job title), spiritual or religious beliefs. They might include our personality types, our egos, our education and credentials. For some, they are possessions: homes, furnishings, clothing, jewelry, vehicles, boats, bank accounts. Habits and hobbies are often strong anchors. There are those whose anchors include a cat, or dog, or fish, or snake, or...

Our anchors help give us a sense of stability, of security. They often become a part of our personal identity, of how we see ourselves, and how we claim our own unique place in the world.

All too often, during really big changes, people lose sight of their anchors. You hear, "My world is turned upside down." "Everything is changing." "I don't know what to expect anymore." Perhaps one, or even a few, of their anchors have been cut loose. But the others are still there, available to provide some stability.

This is the first reason that I ask my clients to spend some time focusing on anchors... It is too easy to feel completely adrift, even when you aren't.

What are your anchors?

If you know anything about boating, you know that there are many different types of anchors. Fundamentally, they fall into two categories, those that rest on the seabed and "sea anchors." Let's look at each of these in the context of change.

The anchors that rest on the sea bed are the ones most of us are familiar with. They come in many different sizes, shapes, and weights, but their purpose is the same...to keep the boat from drifting away. The boat can rise and fall with the tide, turn with the current, rock with the waves. Our anchors help provide some stability during the rise and fall of our day-to-day lives. They allow us to rock with the waves, and turn with the current without drifting away. But, in general once you have anchored your boat, you know where to find it when you return.



There is reason, however, to know whether each of our anchors rests on the seabed. Quite simply, if the turbulence is great enough, if the change is disruptive enough, they may prevent us from navigating the storm successfully. I live in Hoboken, NJ. During Hurricane Sandy in 2012 the city flooded; the primary source of the flooding were the inlets that sit on the northern and southern borders of the city. Several people anchor their sailboats in the northern inlet. I have a photo of a sailboat that broke loose from its anchor during the storm, and ended up on a waterfront walkway. This is a photo of a boat that was anchored too tightly to survive the levels to which the waters rose.

What is your relationship to each of your anchors?

If an anchor is keeping you from changing, putting your change success at risk, are you prepared to change your relationship to it, or change the change to accommodate it?

The second type of anchor is a sea anchor. It might be used because the water is too deep to anchor to the sea bed. Or it may be used when you are at sea to help ride out a storm. During storms a sea anchor is used to keep the bow (or stern) of the boat facing into the heavy seas so that it won't be rolled by the waves.

The equivalent of a sea anchor is important when going through major change as well. No matter how high the tumult, how strong the winds are blowing, how stormy the seas, we need to keep ourselves facing into the change.

Whether you are thinking of making a major change in your life, or are already on that change journey, take the time to sit down and reflect on your anchors.

1. *What are your anchors?*
2. *What is your relationship to them? Are you willing and able to change that relationship if needed in order for the change to succeed? If not, are you willing and able to redefine the change in a way that will allow you to both honor the anchor(s) and to succeed with the change?*
3. *Which of the anchors are your "sea anchors," keeping you facing into the change when it gets really rough?*

Avoiding!

Earlier we focused on avoiding certain changes. Now I want to look at the role of avoidance within our change journeys. The human mind is amazing. So much goes on inside our brains that we are never conscious of. One of the things that I see over and over again with my clients who are engaged with major change is avoidance. Sometimes it is intentional, but often they are unaware that it is even happening.

It may be an old tape that is playing. Or a relationship that needs to be addressed...but is way too uncomfortable to tackle. Perhaps it is "the one thing I really hate to do." At work it may be a commitment issue with a key colleague. At home, maybe it is anchors that need to be cut loose. But in every case, the avoidance becomes a form of self-sabotage. After all, if you didn't need to address it to move forward, you would be ignoring it, rather than avoiding it. There is a difference.

What are you avoiding?

This is a difficult, and often painful, question. Yet it is a critical one to hear, to answer, and to address if you are undertaking a major change. It is best heard early in the process of preparing for your change journey. Maybe it should be tackled in the near term; maybe you need to put some things in place before tackling it. But you can't have it both ways...succeeding with your change and avoiding the tough issues will not work.

I am single, and on a journey to find my soulmate. A while ago I met someone on a social dating site. We chatted for hours over the course of a few weeks. There seemed to be a real heartfelt connection. We seemed to be aligned in many ways in different aspects of our lives. He told me that he is out, except at work; at the time, I didn't know the nature of his work. While I am out completely, I can understand that some workplaces may be less welcoming. We had one pizza date...I discovered that "out, except at work" was a bit broader than I had anticipated. As a Catholic priest, he is neither out at his workplace, nor his residence (with fellow priests), nor within many miles of his community where he may encounter parishioners...all places that translate for him to being "at work."

In his case, he is conscious of his avoidance; and, it is unlikely that he will find that lasting heart connection with another man that he is seeking unless he addresses it. Being conscious of what you are avoiding is one thing; doing something about it is quite another. The more strongly you avoid it, the more likely it is important that you tackle it...and the less likely you will unless you are wholeheartedly committed to success. Are you?

If yes, then the next thing to do is to figure out when, and how, you are going to take this monster on. How far forward can, and should, you go with your change before addressing the

issue? Are there things that you need to get in place before you do? What do you need to do to prepare yourself? What type of energy (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental) do you need to have in reserve, and how much of that energy, in order to move through this? Are there others who need to prepare as well? Who can provide guidance? Who can you call on for support? Whose counsel do you trust as you consider alternative approaches? How do you move past avoidance to address and resolve this thing?

Give yourself the time and energy to answer these questions. I often refer to my mind as a nursery, and I see a similar thing often happening for those I work with. Plant the seed. Nurture it with thoughts, questions, etc. Then, let it be. Don't forget it, but don't hover over it. The answers will come. For some, it is literally in their dreams. For others, it may be when journaling, while exercising, during a solitary drive, in the shower, or in a coaching session.

And Do It!

When the time is right, stop avoiding. "Take it on!" "Crack the nut!" "Tackle it!" "Break through the shell!"

When you do, I encourage you to do so from a place of strength. There may be fear, or nervousness. There may be apprehension. There may be an urge to delay. You may want to continue to avoid. Simply put, if it is the difference between failure and success, when the time is right, do it.

As the saying goes, "The first step is the hardest." Make sure that you are rested, that your energy stores are sufficient. Make this the priority of the day. "If I only do one thing today, this is it!" And do it!

Being Eye to Eye With Change

When was the last time that you looked at yourself in the mirror?

Not the combing your hair, brushing your teeth, checking the make-up, tying the necktie, "how do I look in this" looking in the mirror. Not the take a selfie for Facebook, Instagram, texting looking in the mirror.

The *looking at you* in the mirror.

The *eye-to-eye with yourself* looking in the mirror.

The *"I really see me"* looking in the mirror.

When was the last time you looked in the mirror in that way?

When I ask people that question, the answer is often “when I was a kid,” or “when I was a teen.” Once in a while someone will reference a special event: their wedding day, the birth of a child, or a death. Almost never do I hear “today,” or “this week,” or “it wasn’t too long ago.”

Earlier I wrote about my own daily mirror practice. I was reluctant at first; that told me I had to continue. The fact that I didn’t want to see all of me told me that I had work to do. It told me that what others saw when they looked at me wasn’t the person I wanted them to see. It told me that if I was to change—to more fully show up as the person I am—I had to continue looking in the mirror.

Now it is part of my daily routine. Sometimes I smile at me. Sometimes I frown. Once in a while there is a high-five, or a thumbs-down. There are always words. I tell myself how proud I am of me for stepping up to a challenge. How grateful I am for the opportunity of being able to help a client make a new discovery or overcome a hurdle. I tell myself “thank you” for allowing me to take a day off and have fun, to re-create. And I tell myself when I really screwed something up. I ask myself what I can learn. I explore with myself how I can avoid making the same mistake again. I forgive myself; after all, I am human. I let myself know when I am disappointed in me, and when I am proud of me.

So what does this have to do with “Being Eye to Eye with Change?” Everything.

Big change doesn’t happen outside of us. It happens inside.

It doesn’t matter if it is a personal change, or an organizational change, or social change. If it disrupts our lives, that is happening inside of us. The way that we expected things to be isn’t that way anymore; our relationship to whatever is changing is being disrupted. If the change is big, we don’t just recognize it consciously. We feel it in our bodies. “My heart aches.”

“Remember when...? I long for those days again!” “My stomach turns over when I think about...” “I have a bad feeling...”

Being mentally attuned to a big change may be necessary to make the transition, but it isn’t sufficient. Again, it doesn’t matter the “level” of the change (personal, organizational, social). Catharsis is needed. There has to be a release of what is holding you in the present so that you can move into the future. You may be able to talk the talk without that; you may even be able to walk the talk. But you won’t be able to internalize the new without letting go of whatever it is replacing. And that leads to anger, to resentment, to stress, and more. That becomes additional baggage to carry every day.

Being eye to eye with yourself when facing change allows you to witness those emotions, to examine them, and to address them. It provides a forum for being honest with yourself, for holding yourself accountable as to how you are approaching the change, how you are addressing it, and how you are responding to it. It calls on you to examine the ways in which you are—and are not—being attentive to others affected by the change. It challenges you to use this change opportunity to step up more fully as who you are. And, it allows you to honor yourself for your efforts along the way.

I invite you to be eye to eye with yourself today, even if there is no big change happening at the moment. I invite you to be eye to eye with yourself tomorrow, even if there is no big change happening then. Become comfortable being with you, truly with you. For many people, that will be a big change in itself. And, for each of us, it is valuable preparation and provides a firm grounding for when the next highly disruptive shift occurs.

Character and Presence (Daryl Conner¹, author)

There is a quote that “eighty percent of life is showing up.” While showing up is certainly important, it has become clear to me through my years of work in the field of change management that *how we show up* also plays a critical role both in our ability to influence and to lead others, and in how we experience change ourselves. At the root of how each of us shows up are our character and our presence.

Character

Underneath what you do is who you are—not the values you espouse but may not live up to, not the habits you have acquired over the years, and not what you have learned to do or say so others will accept you. Character is what is left after all the trappings and illusions have been stripped away. It is here that your optimum impact resides. Of all the things you can draw on to create leverage with those around you, your true nature, the indigenous core of who you are, is your greatest asset.

- The term *character* is impartial; it applies to both positive and negative elements of who we truly are. Your character is comprised of many components. Some promote favorable outcomes; others may not.
 - Positive components might include things such as devotion to serving others, commitment to honesty, and passion for the work.

¹ For more than four decades Daryl has been a thought leader in the field of change management. I have had the good fortune to study and work with Daryl often since I first trained under him in 1988. In the last several years, he has increasingly turned his attention to the role that character and presence play in the effectiveness of change practitioners and organizational leaders. In this section Daryl discusses character and presence, encouraging us to consider the role our own character and presence plays whether we are leading, facilitating, or otherwise undergoing change.

- The negative side to a person’s character might reflect such things as self- centeredness, manipulation, insecurity, etc.

Whether it advances or detracts from achieving change aspirations, character is a critical determinant of the value received from your efforts.

- A positively oriented character brings life to your capabilities.
 - It operates as a filter applied to what we know and how we operate. By screening everything through our character, we infuse our unique state of being into our change work.
 - It is far more than the knowledge and competencies we’ve acquired—it influences how we inform decisions, guide actions, and whether or not we ultimately facilitate successful outcomes.
- The knowledge and skills we use in executing change are actually neutral. We can employ the same techniques to connect with, or distance ourselves from those we interact with. The same concepts can generate clarity or add to confusion. The spin our character puts on these otherwise agnostic tools of change bends their impact toward either advantageous or adverse outcomes.
- Character differentiates much more than the skills we use. Others can apply the same concepts and techniques, but no one can duplicate the outcomes we produce when our character interlaces with our words and actions. The secret sauce isn’t in our heads, it’s in our hearts.

Presence

A strong character, comprised of mostly positive components, is necessary, but insufficient, to be seen as high impact. Character is your true nature, your essence. As such, it is an internal phenomenon that is accessible only to yourself. Character is imbedded so deep within you that people don’t actually interact with it as much as they do with the presence your character projects. Your interior character needs a “voice” to be expressed to the exterior world. The presence you extend to others is that voice.

Presence is like a force field that you project when you express aspects of who you are. It is the temperament you emit that serves as the conduit through which your character comes. Beyond concepts and techniques, presence is another key pillar in your repertoire. Whenever you attempt to influence someone, you draw on not only what you say and do, but also on this reflection of who you are.

- Presence is like a subliminal identity signature embedded within your interactions. It might fall into a broad category such as peaceful, hectic, accommodating, demanding, etc., but it also has a unique frequency that, when released, creates an ambient bubble like no other. Whether the exchanges are face-to-face, by phone, through email, or by text, interactions inside your “influence bubble” are distinctive to only you. Whether this bubble engenders a high or low regard for you by others directly affects the amount of influence you can exert.
- The problem is that all the verbal and non-verbal communications inside this bubble are affected by our presence, yet most people pay little, if any, attention to its impact. We tend to think more about weight, hairstyle, and attire than we think about our presence.
- Just as not all aspects of character are conducive to success, presence also contributes to or detracts from whether you achieve your desired outcomes. When you emit a positive presence, it affects others in three ways.
- People with a powerful, constructive presence are usually seen as having deep and passionate convictions. An effective presence is not a function of superficial façades or manipulated images. It’s an expression of one’s authentic being.

- Presence brings with it an assuredness noticed by others. They sense when you believe you can and will achieve the change you set out to make.
- Radiating a convincing presence can have the effect of penetrating the unconscious defenses people sometimes use to guard themselves against new thinking, challenges that appear beyond their reach, or interpretations other than their own.

The combination of definitiveness, self-confidence, and the ability to help people open themselves to new possibilities can have a compelling effect on what is seen as achievable.

When you transmit a clear, persuasive presence, your self-assurance and conviction often become contagious. While others may not agree with everything being stated, they are often drawn to the excitement, intrigue, and enthusiasm that can come from being around someone living their own truth.

Character, Presence, and You

Whether you are a change leader, practitioner, or are otherwise experiencing change; whether the change is professional or personal; showing up is necessary but not sufficient for achieving the greatest possible success. It is not enough to know what the desired outcome is and to have a plan for achieving it. Your character—who you are at the core—and your presence—how you show up—will play a significant role in both the change journey and the outcome.

Are You Here Now?

In *Zen Judaism: For You, A Little Enlightenment*, David Bader writes, “Be here now. Be someplace else later. Is that so complicated?” It shouldn’t be that complicated. But, somehow, being here now happens a lot less than it should.

Think about today. Do you remember waking up, how you felt, where you did—or didn’t—ache, how rested or tired you were? Do you remember your shower or bath, what the water felt like on your body, the temperature, whether you were hurried or leisurely? What did your breakfast taste like this morning? Do you remember the experience of preparing it?

For most of us, getting dressed for work is a straight-forward routine. We may have to reflect on what is on our calendar (is it business, business casual, or casual), but chances are even that reflection is so routine as to be lost as quickly as it is completed. I will never forget my first meeting with my new supervisor at the University of Minnesota. I was Assistant to the Vice President for Finance and Operations; David Lilly was a founder and retired as the CEO of Toro before serving on the Federal Reserve, becoming Dean of the School of Business, and now, the Vice President for Finance and Operations. As “Assistant to” I realized my status was particularly vulnerable; I had been hired by his predecessor. I spent a great deal of time thinking through the value-add I would bring to the University, and to David; I had my talking points. I also had down the questions I would ask. The day of the meeting, my mind was full of talking points, questions, answers; I was not focused on getting dressed. But, when I crossed my legs in front of

him I realized I was wearing one brown shoe and one black one; they were the same style...but definitely different colors. I spent the rest of the introductory conversation with my feet tucked under my chair. I spent my lunch hour running home and changing one shoe! Clearly, I was someplace else (reviewing my speaking points and my questions in my mind) when I should have been present to getting dressed.

Many of us spend much of our time someplace else, or no place at all. We are “zoned out,” neither present nor “in the zone.” We are couch potatoes at home, and desk potatoes at the office. We have the conversations. We do our jobs. We parent our children. We partner with our spouses or significant others. At the same time we think about yesterday. We plan tomorrow. We replay the conversation that went awry. We try a thousand ways to have an upcoming conversation in our heads. We find excuses. We look for ways around a problem we don’t want to address head-on. We plan our vacation, or the new home, or... We do everything except “be here now.”

I recommend that all of us (including myself) intentionally work to “be here now” more often than we are. It is important for our lives, for our careers, and for our relationships with others. And, it is definitely more stimulating than “being someplace else now!”

That being said, “being here now” is vital to success when you are involved with a change of any magnitude. Changes introduce new and unanticipated challenges. They require you to think differently, to behave differently, to let go of many of the anchors that let you move through the world without being present to it. They require that you be “in the zone” of navigating change, rather than “zoned out.” Much about succeeding with major change is counter-intuitive, yet when we aren’t fully present we aren’t even accessing our intuition.

Mistakes during change are inevitable. We even make them doing our daily routines when we are “someplace else.” How far have you driven before you became present enough to realize you had missed your exit, or a turn? Can your change—can you—afford the lost time, the lost investment when you make a mistake and keep on traveling for days (or longer) before you realize it?

People communicate with you in ways—and with messages—that are different during change. While their agreement on day-to-day issues may be genuine, their agreement during change (especially change that is going to disrupt their lives) may be superficial. The words may tell you one thing, while their body language—and subsequent action—says another. If you aren’t here with them in the moment, you’ll miss these cues.

During change there are cues all around you, if you are present to them. The whispers at the coffee pot stop when you approach. The conversations at dinner become more superficial. The late nights at the office, or at the library, become more frequent. The “open door” is closed more and more often, or—if it is your door—fewer and fewer people are walking through it. Each of

these warrants investigation, understanding. But, if you aren't "here now" to them, they don't register.

There are numerous things you can do to help yourself spend more of your time "here now." Here are a few that work especially well for me.

- I start early, and give myself more than enough time. I get up early, so I don't need to "be someplace else now" as I prepare for the day. I try to get to appointments early, so that I can spend time preparing while I am preparing, rather than while I am traveling.
- I take breaks, unless I am "in the zone." I actually use a timer on my computer so that I don't spend time "zoned out" while I am working on things. When it goes off, if I am in the zone, I reset it. If I am present, or zoned out, I take a break, get up from the desk to quite literally be someplace else for a few minutes, and then return to work again.
- I focus on being consciously here during the most routine of my activities. One of these is my shower...about the most routine thing I do. I have found that if I consciously attend to being here now as I shower, that attentiveness tends to carry into the day.

Cultivating Presence

The Mind

There are three elements of the self for which such presence is important: the mind, the body, and the heart. We all know that mental presence is important. And, almost without exception, we have each in our own ways tried to cultivate it at some time or another. Perhaps it was meditation. It may have been daily reminders, or periodic alerts on our computer/tablet/smart phone. Journaling is a mindfulness practice for some. Then there are the times when we end up "in the zone;" time—and the world—disappear as we focus fully, presently, on a particular person or activity. For me, this most often occurs when I am coaching, writing, or photographing.

And, we all know how easy it is to lose that presence of mind. The project that is running behind schedule; making sure the kids have the clothing they need for this weekend's event; the disagreement with our best friend. The future and the past often seem to want to control our minds, leaving no room for being present with ourselves or anyone else.

Yet, there are people who always seem to be present. When you are "in their presence," you know you are in their presence—there is no other world for them outside the space the two of you occupy. As much as I wish to be that person, and I am still working on it, that is not always me. Nor, most likely, is it always you. If you are like me, we learned long ago how to be "not present." Learning to be present takes lessons, and practice.

How do you cultivate mental presence? Here are two lessons.

It's best to begin in a quiet place, the less the ambient distractions, the easier it is to begin. As you practice and develop the skill, it will become as applicable in highly turbulent environments as in a library or meditation hall.

If possible, find a place where the light can be soft and muted. Find a comfortable place to sit, or to lie down. Notice your posture, your position; you want to be comfortable, relaxed but you also want your body open, not folded and scrunched. Reposition yourself if you need to. Focus on your breath. Don't try to control it, just become aware of it. As you take a breath in, think, "breathing in." with the exhale think, "breathing out."

Don't be surprised when your mind goes off somewhere else; it will. Just note that, and return to "breathing in;" "breathing out." I had one teacher liken it to standing on a busy train (or subway) platform. There is always another thought pulling into the station. It is our choice as to whether or not we let it take us for a ride away from presence. Let each thought leave without you. "Breathing in." "Breathing out."

Set a timer so you don't keep looking at your watch. Allow yourself ten minutes a day for this practice. If you can give it more, great! If you can do it more than once a day, great! If you cannot commit ten minutes to practicing presence, make it five; anything is better than nothing. And, as with any new skill, the more you practice, the better you will become with it. As you practice, you are becoming present, in the moment "Breathing in." "Breathing out."

Let's look at another "presence of mind" practice related to changes in habits that you want to make. Here I am drawing from the writing of Doug Silsbee in his book *Presence-Based Coaching*. Having applied this practice myself, I can attest to its power to foster mental presence.

Begin by identifying a habit that you want to change. Write a brief description of it. Develop a personal template that you can use for self-observation. In the template, include the following.

- When will you observe yourself, watching for this habit? (For example, "during staff meetings.")
- How long a period of time will you observe yourself? (For example, "through the month of May.")
- When will you complete and record your self-observations? (For example, "after each meeting.")
- What will you use as a reminder of what you want to observe? (For example, "include the following questions to answer each time I record my observations.")

Silsbee provides these questions as an example for someone who finds himself too prescriptive.

- *When (in this situation) was I prescriptive?*
- *What drove this tendency? Was it habit, or was it the best choice at the time?*
- *What did I do?*
- *What was the impact?*
- *What alternatives were there?*

During the observation period, focus on observing, not on changing the habit. Remember, this is a presence practice. Periodically review your observations. Over time, you will become aware of the fact that you are more self-present in those moments the habit is executed; then, you become more self-present in advance, as it is being triggered. You will note that you have choices, including—but not limited to—the habit you want to change. You can begin making new choices, and leaving the old habit behind.

Mental self-awareness—being present—is one of the often unspoken keys to change. It doesn't matter whether the change is personal, organizational, or social...if it requires you to change the ways in which you think and/or act, change won't happen without your presence.

What do you do to help become present? Is it something that you practice? Do you consciously call on yourself to become present?

The Body

There is a direct link between mind and body when it comes to change; if we are going to do something differently than in the past, we need to change our body's memory. Imagine Michael Phelps in Rio for the summer Olympic games. He's in the pool, competing for another gold medal, all the time thinking about what he wants for dinner. The thought of it puts a smile on my face, because I know how unreal that image is. Not only is Michael Phelps mentally present when he is in the pool (as well as when he is preparing to get into the water). He is physically present. He is attuned to every movement of his body, every breath, how his body contacts the water that surrounds him. Yet we tend to be more like that imaginary Michael Phelps than the real one as we face the challenges of change (or even as we go through our day-to-day lives).

Why is body presence important when facing change?

The body is incapable of not practicing. And what we practice we become...Even as you sit here reading...you are shaping yourself by your posture, the way you're breathing, what you're thinking, feeling, and sensing. While this may seem subtle and far below the level of our awareness, over time this has a powerful effect in how we perceive the world and how the world perceives us. Richard Strozzi-Heckler

There is an unequivocal link between our mental and our physical functioning. Habits are actions that have been neurologically programmed through repetition. At one time they may have been conscious actions; now they no longer are. If we want to break a habit, to change what we are doing in response to certain stimuli, or how we do it, we can't just think about it. "Thinking" the change is necessary, but not sufficient. If we don't "act" the change as well, it doesn't occur. And, "acting the change" requires us to engage our bodies.

I was once doing a photo shoot with an actor. He was telling me that he was learning the relationship between his facial muscles and emotions. He explained, for example, that as he changes his facial muscles to reflect anger, the muscles throughout the rest of his body follow suit; he—in turn—feels that anger "welling up inside." Through his body presence, through his conscious control of his facial muscles, he is able to almost immediately alter his mood.

Michael Phelps' body presence isn't just a nice thing for him to experience. It was essential to making the changes in his stroke, his kick, his breathing that allowed him to take home the gold again and again. Likewise, our body presence isn't just a nice thing to experience when we want to avail ourselves of it. It is the way in which we bring change to life.

So what can you do if you want to foster greater body presence?

The first practice that I recommend is "centering." Any internet search will turn up hundreds of different approaches to centering; most that I have seen are viable. The one I am offering here is based on an approach presented by Mind Tools (www.mindtools.com).

Step 1: Focus on Your Breathing

Concentrate on breathing deeply, using your diaphragm to draw air all the way down into your lungs.

Tip:

If you're not familiar with deep breathing, try this exercise: Lie on the floor, or somewhere comfortable but supported. Place one hand on your stomach, and take a deep breath in through your nose. Use the air you breathe in to push against your hand. Your chest and shoulders shouldn't move – only your stomach. Exhale slowly and deliberately through your mouth.

Spend a while completely focusing on your breathing. Mindfully release the tension in your body. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply, while scanning your body for feelings of tension. Start with your toes and work your way up your body, paying attention to each group of

muscles as you go. Relax any muscles that feel tense by clenching them and then releasing them.

Step 2: Find Your Center

Locate your “physical center of gravity” which, in Centering, is visualized as being about two inches below your navel. Become familiar with where your center is, and remember what it feels like – you’ll probably find that you feel grounded and stabilized by focusing your mind on this part of your body.

When you begin to feel stressed, turn your attention to your center to remind yourself that you have balance and control. Once you’ve found it, breathe in and out deeply at least five times. Continue to concentrate on your center and feel the sensation of being stabilized and on the ground.

Step 3: Redirect Your Energy

Finally, channel your energy into achieving your goal.

Imagine all of the energy in your body flowing into your center. Find some imagery that works for you, for example picture this energy as a glowing ball, or perhaps a balloon. Visualize putting all of your negative thoughts into the balloon and then releasing it. As you inhale, say “I let…” and as you exhale, say “… go.”

If you picture your energy as a ball, imagine throwing it far into the distance. If you see it as a balloon, imagine it floating away above your head. Let go of everything that is causing you to feel stressed. Imagine your center filled with calm.

On your next inhalation, think about what you want to achieve, and focus on thinking positively. Use affirmations like “The job is mine,” or “I give great presentations,” while letting your tensions go. You could even repeat one word to yourself, such as “success,” or “confidence.”

As with any practice, the more you do it, the better at it you become. As you learn to center, it becomes a practice that you can apply at any time, in any place. You don’t need to be lying down. You can be sitting, or standing, walking, swimming in the pool, standing in the subway, or stuck in traffic. Healthcare workers often center as they stop in the hallway briefly between hospital rooms. Practice your centering often.

The second body presence practice comes from Doug Silsbee's *Presence-Based Coaching*, and focuses on experiencing your somatic responses to others. (Somatic: of the body; the integration of mind and body)

It's very simple. We want to know what to expect. Our nervous system is always on alert for cues. Usually we are unconscious until we are actually triggered; but you can bring your somatic knowledge to the level of consciousness. Think about a particularly happy experience...what was happening; who was there; where you were; what it smelled, tasted, sounded, looked, even felt like. Once you have evoked that imagery, turn your attention to your body. Most likely you have a smile on your face; the tension or worry, or anger, or tiredness you were feeling a few minutes ago has shifted. Try it again with a less pleasant experience, and draw your attention again to the shifts you experience.

Practice. Be consciously in your body with whatever it is experiencing, then shift your focus to the outside observer, seeing the stimuli and your response to them. Pay attention to your somatic responses in the presence of others...co-workers, loved ones, strangers; pay attention to your somatic responses when listening to a political debate, your spouse or partner describing the plans for "date night," your child telling you about the schoolyard bully. Your opportunity for practicing body presence in this way are endless.

The Heart

Your heart just isn't in it.

Have you ever heard those words in a performance review? Whether or not they have shown up there, it is likely they have shown up in other areas of your life. Perhaps you thought them to yourself...about yourself or your partner in a relationship. Maybe it was a reflection on yet another too draining and totally unrewarding week at work. Or, you might be thinking it as you leave early Monday morning for the weekly business trip away from the family.

Your heart isn't in it.

I can tell when a client's heart isn't in it. Rarely do they have to tell me. The low energy, the tonality in which they speak, the lack of vibrancy of their words all say, *My heart isn't in it*. I can feel it in their energy, even over the computer.

Whether in our professional or our personal lives, *heart* shows up—or doesn't—in many ways.

- *You're all heart.*

- *The way they terminated Mary was heartless.*
- *I'm all in, heart and soul.*
- *The tributes to Tom at his going away party were truly heartfelt.*
- *I was heartbroken when I lost that account.*

We can choose to pay attention to heart or not. Either way, our relationship to heart is infused in how we relate to others. The examples above reflect those times that heart is clearly and loudly making its presence known, whether in joy or in pain. By cultivating heart presence, you can “listen to your heart” even when it is whispering.

One warning about cultivating heart presence...If you don't want to bring greater compassion into your life, into how you relate to yourself and to others, then don't cultivate your heart presence; it will only get in the way.

So what can you do if you want to cultivate heart presence?

The first practice is quite simple. With practice you can often complete it without those around you even knowing you are doing it (if that is important to you). It's simply about touching your heart. Not thinking about touching your heart. Not thinking about other things as you touch your heart. Simply touching your heart.

When you begin this practice it is best done in a quiet place, alone. After all, it is a practice. It becomes easier with repetition. Find a comfortable place to sit. (With practice you can do this in any position.) Close your eyes. (Again, after practicing for a while this won't be necessary.) Center yourself. Now reach to the upper center of your chest, and touch your heart. Smile. And wait. At first, you may or may not feel anything. That's okay. Remember, it is a practice. When you do feel, let the feeling grow. Let your heart grow. Cultivate presence in your heart.

Over time, much like some of the earlier practices, you will be able to cultivate heart presence in any situation, at any time.

I learned this second practice when I was a child; I have forgotten and relearned it along the way. There are numerous forms of this saying; here is one.

Before you judge someone, walk a mile in their shoes.

This is a lesson in nonjudgment and gratitude. It is a lesson in cultivating heart presence. Make it more than an intellectual lesson; make it a practice in cultivating compassion. The next time you find yourself being judgmental, step into the other person's life: their situation, their body, their mind, their heart. Feel what they feel as that voice that sounds like yours says what it is saying. Feel what they feel as that body that looks like yours shows its repulsion for them. Feel what

they feel as that heart that is your heart shuts them out. Then step back into your shoes. Open your heart, and smile.

One of the important things to know about heart presence is that it can lead you to a different place than mind presence. We all know this; we all have experienced it. The new person in your life that has all the right boxes checked on your list; the new job that meets all the criteria that you were looking for. Yet there is that nagging...*I'm not really feeling it in my heart.* But you ignore it. (I know. I've been there before, more than once.) The feeling doesn't go away. And it doesn't go away. You ignore it; you shut the door on it; perhaps you build a wall between you and that feeling. But it doesn't go away.

It remains there, peeking through the cracks, ready to burst out and shout its presence until something changes. Perhaps you change your relationship with that new person, or with the new job. ("I know this isn't the job for me after all, but I need the income so I will stick with it until I find the right one. I won't, I can't, put my heart into it, but I can still do a good job.") Or, as one of my clients did, you may want to tear down the wall. ("I am gay, but have built a wall between who I am and how I have lived my life. It is time to come out.")

What is in our heart is part of who we are. Cultivating heart presence helps us live in integrity. It can help to define the change(s) we want to make. And, it will provide guidance as we prepare for, plan for, and take our change journey...and live our new reality.

Don't Focus on Breaking Old Habits

For the most part, our habits are more visible to others than they are to ourselves. They are, by definition, "routine." We don't think about them before we do them; we aren't aware that we are doing them; and too often we don't notice that we have done them. Others may anticipate them... "This is when she always turns her notepad over and looks with disdain across her desk." They certainly recognize them... "Here he goes again. One. Two. Three. Beet red and now his fist pounds the table." But, for the most part it is only afterwards that we think, "I need to stop doing that," if we even are conscious that we just did it.

The problem is, stopping doing *that*, whatever *that* is, can be extremely difficult. Breaking a habit means not only recognizing the habit, it means being conscious of—and alert to—the triggers that set it off. It also means letting go of something that, in its own way, is comfortable to us. We may "like" the habit, even if we recognize that it is not good for us (and/or perhaps for those around us); I know that certainly was true for me during many of the years I was a smoker. Or, we may dislike it. Either way, focusing on breaking old habits is tough, and more than likely will be unsuccessful. It's hard enough letting go of things when they are in our consciousness; it's harder yet when time and again they slip by unnoticed.

Don't focus on breaking old habits. *Focus on creating new ones.*

New habits are unlikely to be successful, however, if they are seen as ends in themselves. This is why so many New Year's Resolutions fail. For most people, working out for the sake of getting more exercise or making healthier food choices for the sake of eating better is not sustainable. New habits are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. They facilitate moving toward something. It may be a new way of relating to ourselves or to others. It may be a new way of attending to our physical, mental, spiritual, or emotional wellbeing. It may be a new job, or a new career. It may be a less chaotic and cluttered home or life. New habits are ways of facilitating the achievement of outcomes that are important to us.

As Create Your Change Story emphasizes, it is important to begin by getting clear about where you are going and what life will be like when you get there. Once you have established that clarity you can begin to identify the old habits that will get in your way and the new ones that will facilitate your progress.

Then it's time to focus on creating those new habits. Be attentive to the triggers. Recruit others to call it to your attention when the triggers bring back the old habits. Know that it will take time, and the old habits will continue to show themselves along the way; that is an inevitable part of the change process. When I quit smoking, I realized how present cigarettes had been in my adult life. The physiology of quitting happened relatively quickly; the psychology of quitting took much longer. Again and again, I would find myself reaching for that pack, find it absent, and discover that here was yet another situation that I would have to learn how to address differently; here was another new habit I would need to develop. I needed to learn to have a cup of coffee without a cigarette, to get off the elevator without lighting up, to drive to work with both hands on the wheel. Six months after I quit smoking, I was at the airport for the first time without a pack of cigarettes. When I was asked whether I wanted a non-smoking or smoking seat on the plane (this was in the mid-1980s), my automatic response was "smoking." For me, learning the habit of flying in the non-smoking section of the plane was the final step in developing a healthier, tobacco-free relationship with my body. I had failed many times before to break the old habit of smoking. I had succeeded this time in positively changing the way I related to myself physically, and developed several new habits along the way.

How Well Do Your Beliefs Serve You?

Our beliefs are our truths. They are the way things are. They are "facts," often taken for granted. Much like those truths in the Declaration of Independence, we hold our truths to be "self-evident." They are unquestioned. They are what we believe. They are Truth (with a capital T).

But, are they really truth everlasting? Are they really facts? Are they the way things are, to remain unquestioned? Or are they open to examination?

Our beliefs are among our strongest anchors. I certainly wouldn't recommend throwing them to the wind, cutting ourselves lose from them without careful reflection. But, when you are facing

change, when you are moving from a past into a future in an intentional way, I do encourage you to ask the question, *How well are my beliefs serving me?*

It isn't necessary to ask of every belief. But it is worth asking of those that may, in fact, not be serving you well. Here is a short list of some of the beliefs that I have found clients holding that were preventing them from moving forward successfully with their changes.

- I can do it all.
- I can't say no.
- I'm no good with technology (or languages, or math, or...).
- I can do this in X time (while always underestimating by magnitudes).
- I'm no good at selling.
- I'm too shy to network.
- I have too many years invested to change now.
- By my very nature I'm a workaholic.
- I can't fail.
- I never succeed.
- I would have to start all over again, and I'm not in a position to do that.
- They need to change; I don't.
- I know what I am doing; I don't need any help.

It's easy to see how each of these beliefs could work against successfully making a major change.

So what do you do if you have a belief (or beliefs) that are not serving you well? The first question you have to ask yourself is whether the belief or the change that it is preventing is more important. If you can't have both X (your belief) and Y (your successful change), which are you going to let go of?

If the answer is that you are going to let go of the change, acknowledge to yourself that this is a choice you are making, and move on. The change may have been a bad idea anyway...or perhaps it was a good idea. If it is essential, you aren't going to let it go.

If your decision is that you need to move forward with the change, you are going to have to confront your belief...to change it, or to let it go completely. This takes courage, and it takes discipline. It takes learning new ways of seeing things and thinking about them; it takes new ways of acting. It takes falling down, and getting back up again. It is best accomplished with the support of others. (None of us can do everything by ourselves.) Perhaps it is a coach, a mentor, family members, co-workers, or friends. Find someone—or someones—who have a commitment to your success, and recruit them to cheer you on, to lift you up, to stand by you, to hold you accountable...and to call you out when you let up.

It's likely you will want to let up. Challenging beliefs is not for the faint at heart. You have every right to change your decision; it will lead to a different result, but that is your call. There is a price to pay for challenging our beliefs, and a price to pay for standing by them. Just don't pay the price blindly. Ask, and answer, the question, *How well are my beliefs serving me?*

What beliefs do you have to challenge to move forward with an important change? What will helped you move through the challenge successfully? What will block you?

The Resilience Advantage (Linda Hoopes², author)

Resilience is the ability to adapt to high levels of disruptive change while maintaining high levels of well-being and productivity. It is the result of applying a set of *change muscles* that help you use your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy most effectively when you encounter challenges. Understanding what resilience is and how it works is a very helpful tool for change leaders, change agents, and anyone going through change. (Hmmm...that might be everybody!)

Challenges

Let's start by looking at the nature of the challenges we face inside and outside of the workplace. To understand this, you first need to know that our human brains build models of the world that allow us to anticipate the future. Based on our past experiences, on various sources of external information, and on our own creative thinking, we create pictures of how we expect things to unfold. These mental models help us maintain a sense of control and enable us to function effectively inside and outside of the workplace.

However, we frequently encounter situations that are different from what we thought or hoped would happen. Sometimes these situations are momentary—another driver changes lanes in traffic suddenly and we need to swerve to avoid them—but quickly return to our predictable flow. Sometimes the situations are longer-lasting—we wake up with the flu on a day when we are scheduled to be at an important meeting, or we find that a close friend has taken a job in another city. Sometimes these situations are self-created—we decide to have or adopt a child and find that we had not fully anticipated the lack of sleep we would encounter; sometimes they are the result of someone else's actions or of natural processes—a neighbor decides to mow the lawn very early in the morning, or a thunderstorm knocks out the power.

Organizational changes create challenges as well. When leaders make the decision to implement a new process or pursue a new goal, it often disrupts the expectations of people who must adjust their mindsets and behaviors, take on new roles, and learn how to do different things. If a change requires that people leave the organization, or move to a new location, it presents even larger challenges.

² Linda Hoopes is the Founder and CEO of Resilience Alliance, an organization dedicated to helping individuals strengthen their personal resilience. She has been a student of resilience for nearly three decades. While this section addresses resilience within organizations, the same lessons are of value at the personal and interpersonal levels.

Adaptation

Hidden within the nature of challenges is the secret to overcoming them. The goal is to realign our mental models of the world with the real-life situations we are facing. We have two main levers we can use to do this.

1. We can change the situation we're in. Sometimes it is within our power to change what is happening so it better matches our mental models. For example, if I find a flat tire on my car, I can likely change it and be back on the road very quickly.
2. We can change our expectations. When we're not able to change what's happening in a situation, we can often build an updated mental model that incorporates the new information and allows us to operate effectively. For example, if someone learns that his mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, he can do research to learn more about this, talk to others who have encountered this situation, and begin to envision what will happen in the months and years ahead.

Much of the time we use a combination of these strategies. For example, if an organization decides to implement new technology, it often creates challenges for individuals who are not experienced with the new system. They can change the situation by taking a course to increase their knowledge, but they may also have to adjust to the fact that they must do things differently in their work.

We can say that someone has successfully *adapted* to change when he or she has created a match between *expectations* and *reality*. During organizational change, part of the agent's role is to anticipate the challenges that people will face and help them adapt so they can operate with high levels of productivity and quality and achieve the goals of the change.

Resilience

Some people seem to be able to adapt more quickly and effectively than others. And each of us has times when we adapt easily and times when we struggle to deal with a challenge. By observing patterns in how people respond to change, my colleagues and I (along with quite a few other researchers) have identified a set of *change muscles* that people can use to help them adapt. As with physical muscles, we each can use these elements to some extent—there may be people who are stronger than we are, and people who are weaker, and we may be able to use some of the muscles better than others. We can also strengthen each of these muscles through practice. Here is a summary of the change muscles and how they help in the process of adaptation:

1. **Positive:** The World Resilient individuals effectively identify opportunities in turbulent environments. This helps them stay motivated to deal with the challenge rather than giving up.
2. **Positive:** Yourself Resilient individuals have the personal confidence to believe they can succeed in the face of uncertainty. This helps them persist in the face of obstacles and difficulties.
3. **Focused:** Resilient individuals have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and use this as a guide when they become disoriented. This helps them direct energy toward the most important outcomes rather than getting distracted and drained.
4. **Flexible:** Thoughts Resilient individuals generate a wide range of ideas and approaches for responding to change. This helps them open up new possibilities and options rather than getting stuck in old ways of thinking.

5. **Flexible:** Social Resilient individuals draw readily on others' resources for assistance and support during change. This helps them expand their options and draw on others for emotional and practical support.
6. **Organized Resilient** individuals effectively develop and apply systems, processes, and structures when dealing with change. This helps them use their energy efficiently.
7. **Proactive Resilient** individuals initiate action in the face of uncertainty, taking calculated risks rather than seeking the comfort of the status quo. This allows them to experiment with new ways of thinking and acting.

Each of these seven change muscles is important by itself, but they are most effective when combined in action. Every situation calls on a different mix of characteristics. An organizational change that has a negative impact on people's jobs may require people to deeply engage their Positive muscles, while a change that is driven by the need to respond to new competition in the marketplace may require more of the Flexible and Proactive muscles.

Energy and Change

Human energy is the currency of change. For an organization to successfully realize the full benefits of change initiatives, people throughout the organization need to shift mindsets and behaviors to operate in new ways. Depending on the nature of the challenge, they spend some combination of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy to make these shifts. When this energy is depleted, people take longer to adapt to change and have a harder time responding in a resilient fashion.

Physical energy is used when people work long hours, exert their bodies to accomplish tasks, or do things that are physically uncomfortable.

Mental energy is used when people learn new skills, solve complex problems, or produce results that require high levels of analysis and focus.

Emotional energy is used when people deal with their own anger, sadness, or loss; it is also used when supporting others who are going through challenges.

Spiritual energy is used when people feel disconnected from a sense of meaning or purpose, or when they feel that their efforts are not valued or are ineffective in achieving important goals.

These forms of energy are interconnected—when one type of energy is expended, it affects the others as well. Although energy can be replenished over time, people have a finite supply that is used for all the changes they are facing, both inside and outside of the organization.

Points of Impact

To support the overall resilience of the organization during change, leaders and change agents can focus their attention in several areas:

1. Making sure that people have the opportunity to build and replenish their energy through healthy practices, a sense of community, learning opportunities, and connection to a sense of meaning and purpose. For example, an organization in which employees regularly bring junk food to the office will likely have people with less physical energy than an organization in which healthier practices are the norm.
2. Ensuring that change initiatives are well-chosen, well-planned, and well-managed to ensure that they do not consume any more energy than necessary. For example, an organization that begins new initiatives without thinking about other projects already taking place in the organization is likely to create confusion and overload, placing unnecessary strain on individuals.
3. Helping people understand that there are natural emotional cycles they are likely to experience when they go through change; this helps them avoid feelings of concern or worry when they, their peers, their managers, or their direct reports go through predictable periods of reduced effectiveness during a change initiative. For example, a leader who recognizes that her team needs to take some time to process emotions related to a recent staff layoff will likely achieve better results than a leader who expects that people will just “get over it.”
4. Teaching people about their own resilience “change muscles,” and providing opportunities to develop these characteristics so they can be applied to change-related challenges. For example, a team in which members understand their resilience strengths and weaknesses can consciously draw on one another’s strengths to achieve better results when dealing with a change initiative.
5. Managing each change initiative in a way that enables people to engage their change muscles easily. For example, clear communication about the most important priorities during a change supports people in applying their “Focused” characteristic.
6. Creating a culture that supports the development and use of the resilience characteristics. For example, a culture that encourages and supports people in experimenting with new ways of doing things is more hospitable to the “Proactive” characteristic than a culture that punishes people for making mistakes.

Change Roles and Resilience

Sponsors: People in leadership roles take on additional responsibilities during change related to effective change *sponsorship*. Some of the things that sponsors can do to support individual resilience include:

- Understanding the true impact of the change on the various individuals and groups that are affected. This helps them accurately estimate and prepare for the amount of energy required to adapt.
- Delivering influential communications that help people understand the reasons for the change, what they are expected to do, and how the organization will support them. This increases individuals’ ability to set accurate expectations and spend less energy in the adaptation process.
- Modeling effective responses to disruption. When leaders do not deal well with the demands of change, the ripples spread throughout the organization. When leaders are able to demonstrate high levels of resilience, they enable others to increase their own effectiveness as well.

Agents: As change initiatives are planned and executed, the role of the agent in supporting individual resilience is important as well. Some of the things that agents can do to support individual resilience include:

- Effectively identifying all the targets of the change—those who need to shift their mindsets and behaviors; understanding the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual demands that each group will face; and taking this information into account in the planning and implementation process.
- Developing and delivering communication that is frequent, clear, positive in tone, and enables individuals to develop accurate mental models of the future state.
- Incorporating target training that helps people understand their own reactions to change and gain an awareness of their resilience muscles and how to use them effectively when responding to disruption.

Targets: Individuals going through change can enhance their own resilience and that of the people around them by:

- Taking time to sustain and replenish their energy—taking care of their own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
- Listening carefully to what is communicated and asking questions that will enable them to create a clear picture of the future.
- Understanding and managing their own responses to disruption, and providing support to others who are experiencing negative impact.

Advocates: People who have strong positive or negative opinions about the change but are not in formal leadership positions can support the overall resilience of the system by:

- Turning negative opinions into constructive ideas—suggesting options and maintaining a positive tone rather than being obstructive and negative.
- Using informal sources of power and influence to speak up on behalf of the change—leading the way and showing people what is possible.
- Modeling resilience in dealing with the more challenging aspects of an initiative.

System Capability

It's easiest to think about resilience when a major change is in process or on the horizon. This is when concerns about individual adaptation are most prominent. However, it's easiest to *build* resilience when people are in an environment where smaller changes are taking place, as these situations provide low-risk opportunities to try out new ways of responding to change and to build change muscles that can be applied to larger challenges. Organizations who see resilience as a strategic capability, and work continually to build individual energy, prepare people for ongoing change, and create a culture that celebrates and supports effective responses to turbulence are better prepared for both the planned changes they make and the unexpected changes that they encounter.

What Questions Are You Asking Yourself?

For the individual change practitioner (the coach, the mentor, the therapist), questions are a critical—even the primary—tool.

Organizational change practitioners rely on them as well, though generally not as often.

But what about you if you are the one taking the change journey? What questions are you asking yourself?

I'm not referring to questions like *Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening now?* and so forth. I am referring to those self-exploration questions that help move you forward on the path.

What are some of those questions?

"Why am I taking this journey?"

If this is a change you have elected to take, why? If it is a good idea, will that be enough to get you through the tough times? If the change is imperative, why?

When you reflect on this question, where are you feeling things in your body? What are you feeling? What does that tell you about taking the journey?

"How can I not be a victim of what is happening to me?"

I went to work for the AIDS Resource Center in New York City back in 1990. At that time, the basic paradigm was "people die of AIDS." We provided permanent housing and support services for homeless people with AIDS. Some clients saw their diagnosis as a death sentence. Others went so far as to call it "the best thing that ever happened to me because I have a home, people who care about me, and a fresh start on life."

There are things over which we have little or no control that drive us to change. It may be a medical diagnosis, an accident, a death of someone close, the loss of a job, an unanticipated divorce. While you will have an emotional response to changes such as these, it is also important to ask yourself, "How can I not be a victim of what is happening to me?" Taking charge of your response, empowering yourself, will have a significant impact on the journey even when you cannot control the destination.

"What do I need to let go of?"

Sometimes our change journeys are stalled—or can't even get started—because of anchors that are keeping us from moving forward. Don't forget to look at your anchors when preparing for and planning your change, as well as when you are on the way. They can't all stay as they are!

"What do I do like breathing?"

There are a number of tools that practitioners use to help people prepare for major change. As a coach I have developed some of my own. At times I have also found it useful to use "StrengthsFinder 2.0," or Resilience Alliance's "Personal Resilience Profile."

But there is one question that I routinely ask clients to reflect on that isn't in any tool I have seen: "What do you do like breathing?"

Perhaps if you underwent a battery of assessments the answer to this question might appear in one of them. But your own self-observation is the best source to turn to. What do you do like breathing? Whatever it is, it's likely that you take it so much for granted that you don't realize this is a resource you have that you can call on during change.

For me, the answer to this question includes my ability to see both the big picture and the detail that goes into achieving it; it includes my intuition for asking the right question at the right time and for providing the right information at the right time; and it includes my ability to remain present.

My encouragement, even if you are not facing change at the moment, is to reflect on this for yourself. Perhaps carry around a small notebook (or use your smart phone); take time to reflect on your day and make notes. "What you do like breathing" may surprise you! And, being conscious of it can be a great resource.

"What is the worst thing that can happen?"

Years ago I read this advice; I wish I could remember the source. The author recommended that we prepare ourselves for the worst thing that could happen in a particular situation. The reasoning was that if we are prepared for the worst, we will be ready for anything. I am not sure that I buy into that thinking 100%, yet I know that I frequently ask the question. For me, it is often motivational. "What is the worst that can happen if I take on this challenge? I can fail... And if I don't take it on, I have no chance of succeeding."

"Who will help me on the journey?"

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main* (John Donne)

Even the most solitary of journeys touch and involve others. If this is a big change, think through who you will count on for help. Communicate with them. For example, one of my clients knew

an upcoming change would dramatically reduce his time to spend with friends. He reached out to the friends in his support network, told them about the change, and asked them to be sure to check in with him if/when he goes silent.

If this is a change that takes you “outside your zone,” find others in the new zone who will share with you their perspectives and insights. For example, if it is a career change, talk with people in your future career field. If you are moving to a new region, get online and find people to talk with who live there. Don’t take anyone’s word for gospel… but by talking with a number of people you will be able to get a sense of where you are heading.

And, don’t hesitate to ask for help. Organizations bring in consultants all the time because of their expertise. There isn’t an Olympic athlete—or a professional one—who doesn’t have a coach. There are often mentoring programs in larger businesses, or find a personal mentor. Many religious organizations offer some form of peer counseling if that is appropriate. There are many ways to find a Sherpa for your journey. Don’t try to take it alone. “No man is an island.”

What’s in Your (Internal) Change Toolkit?

When people think about change toolkits, they generally think about things like assessments, guides, white papers, and the like. Those may be important, especially when engaged in organizational change. But that is not what I am talking about here. I am addressing those things that are inside of you and help or hinder you as you navigate change.

What do you do like breathing? What an important question to ask as you think about your change toolkit! *What do you do like breathing?* What is it that comes so naturally to you that you don’t even know that it is there? What do you do with such unconscious competence that you don’t even see it as a strength?

One challenge of unconscious competence is that you can’t call on it when you need it… Either it works, or it doesn’t. On a bad day, it doesn’t. If you raise it to the level of consciousness, you can intentionally apply it when it is needed.

Below are some of the most significant “tools” in a strong change toolkit. Some you may “do like breathing,” others you may be okay at, and others you may not do at all well. You definitely want to know your strengths, and be prepared to apply them. Use this as a checklist for determining what is in your toolkit, what you need to strengthen, and what you have to add. Remember the old adage, *If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.*

(Note that it doesn’t matter whether the change is personal, organizational, or societal, and it doesn’t matter whether you are leading the change, or are playing another role in its execution, these tools are all important. The list is in alphabetical order.)

- **Accountable:** Whether this is a personal change or a global transformation initiative, if you do not hold yourself personally accountable for how it unfolds—if the organization and/or the people around you do not do likewise—it is unlikely to go well.
- **Ambiguity:** Whatever your change, if it is big, you will be dealing with a great deal of ambiguity. Get used to it. You need incredible clarity on where you are going. You need incredible clarity on how you will know you are making progress, and how you will know when you have achieved success. And along the way, you need the ability to move through ambiguity. If you need “all your ducks in a row,” or to “know what’s waiting around the corner,” undertaking major change is not for you.
- **Big Picture; Little Details:** You need to be able to see the big picture. Where is the change going? What will the journey be like? What is required to achieve success? How will we know when we have gotten there? And, you need to be able to define (and execute or have executed) all of the infinite number of steps required to successfully complete the change. You can fudge on the little details, if you have people that you can trust to fill in the gaps in your toolkit; if it’s an organizational change, you should step back from the details so you aren’t micro-managing. If you are in a leadership position, you can’t fudge on the big picture; you have to own that.
- **Boundaries:** Know when to work, and when to step away, when (and who) to let in others, and when (and who) not to.
- **Courage:** Big changes are not for the timid; you will be stepping into the unknown over and over again. There are risks, many of which can be preempted if you “know the patterns” (below); but they are real, and they can be scary!
- **Decisive:** If the change is big, you need to be able to make decisions, and act on them. And, you need to be able to do so even when the information available to you is insufficient.
- **Hold On; Let Go:** If you are to succeed, no matter what the change or what your role, you need to know what to hold onto, and what to let go of. And you need to know when to hold on, and when to let go. (also, see Mistakes)
- **Know the Patterns:** This tool is fundamental to all the rest; in some ways it is “Tool # 1.” There is a clear set of patterns that underlie the human response to change. If you know the patterns, you can apply the other tools to help you successfully navigate your way through them. If you don’t, you are “flying blind.” You have tools, and you may be applying them...but you don’t really understand what is going on.
- **Mindful:** Are you one of those people who remembers getting into the car in the driveway, and then finds yourself parking it at the office? Never assume anything about your change is so routine that you can do it on autopilot; you need to be mindfully attentive every time you touch it.
- **Mistakes:** You will make mistakes along the way. Success requires recognizing them, admitting them (which may need to be a public process in some cases), learning from them, applying the lessons learned, and moving on.
- **Open to Diverse Perspectives:** If you surround yourself with people who see the world through your eyes, they are going to miss the same things you miss. You need to be open to hearing a wide range of perspectives.

- **Pay the Price:** Big change isn't cheap, no matter what. There are some changes that may not cost a lot of money, but they still require an incredible investment of time, energy, personal power, etc. You cannot avoid paying the price, so it is better to pay it in prevention than in healing.
- **Reflective:** Step back and think about your change periodically. Have things shifted in the environment that require adjustments to the plan, or even to the desired end state? What is going well, and what isn't? How effectively are you executing your role(s) in the change, and what do you need to do differently?
- **Reframe:** How many lenses do you have in your tool kit? Can you reframe how you see things? Can you reframe them so that others see them differently?
- **Resilience:** How well, and how quickly, can you recalibrate to changes in expectations?
- **Resolve:** It may be that this is the best idea you ever had. It may be that you lose sleep every night over it. It may be that you "can't afford to fail." All of that may be, but in the absence of resolve, it will fail. Big change means a difficult journey; you will need resolve to get through it successfully.
- **Story Telling:** You need to be able to move people's hearts, and their guts, not just their heads. All the logic in the world cannot accomplish that. Story telling can.
- **Teamwork:** You can't do it alone. Even the most personal of changes, if it is major, requires skills and insights beyond what you possess. Day-to-day you may pride yourself on being an independent spirit. At work your people may love you because you protect them at any cost. But when it is time for change, you can't be independent; you can't be siloed.
- **Trust:** You are not going to get through big change alone. It's that simple. Even the most personal of big changes affects—and is affected by—others. You need to be able to trust, and you need to be trustworthy.
- **What You Need to Hear:** Some people surround themselves with others who tell them what they want to hear; to some degree I guess we all like to have cheerleaders. But you also need to seek counsel from those who will tell you what you need to hear, even when you don't want to hear it.

Where Are Your Boundaries?

One of two things often happens when we become deeply engaged in a change. We develop impermeable boundaries that can end up shutting out those whose support we need most; or we feel guilty for the time and other investments we are making in the change, and we end up with Swiss cheese for boundaries.

Both options put the change at high risk for failure.

Let's look at the risks associated with establishing boundaries that are too restrictive.

First and foremost, really big changes are not solo expeditions. (Even if your change is about you going on a solo expedition, you will need incredible support in your preparation; it will be important to know that support is there while you are on the journey; and you will welcome the support on your return.) Boundaries that shut people out—make them feel devalued—lessen the likelihood that they will build commitment to the change.

Enrolling people in support of the change requires ongoing dialogue; if the only time that dialogue can occur is when you “let people in,” it is unlikely that the dialogue will be meaningful. And, it is unlikely that they will be deeply enrolled in supporting your change.

If your change is a big one, you most likely have neither the understanding nor the skills to pull it off alone. You need the candid advice of others. Making it difficult for them to give that advice makes it less likely that they will bother trying.

If you set your boundaries too loosely, you will never reach your destination. There will be clamors for your attention—and energy—from every direction. Those who don’t want you to go forward with the change will seek to make their arguments heard at every opportunity. Those who want changes to the change, or the way it is being implemented, will plead their cause again and again and again. And then there are those who call on you for the myriad reasons in your life other than this change. Just because the change is a major one in your life, it doesn’t mean that they will stop their demands for your time and attention around other matters.

Even if you don’t always yield to the demand, the effort required to turn away is effort taken from your change. The energy required to sift through the cacophony is energy down the drain.

Exhaustion, frustration, and lack of momentum are all likely results of a set of boundaries that is too loose.

When it comes to setting boundaries as you move into and through your change, the Goldilocks principle applies: not too hard, not too soft, you need to find the balance that is just right.

What this really means is that your boundaries will shift from time to time. There may be points along the way where you need to “go off the grid” in order to reflect, or write, or make tough decisions.

There may be people whose relationship to you needs to change; a significant part of shifting those relationships is the redefinition of the boundaries between you.

You may need to open the boundaries to people, and to ideas, that are foreign to you, but that are capable of informing your change if you let them in.

There is no science to setting boundaries during your change. But that doesn't mean it should occur haphazardly. Think it through. Plan it. Test it. Adjust it. Fine tune it. Remain aware of your boundaries, of how they are supporting your change efforts, and how they are undermining you.

Time Management and Change

It's simple, at one level. You need to make the time required for your change. Here are a few techniques for increasing your productivity through time management.

In 2016 I enrolled in Ryan Eliason's Visionary Business School; this section is drawn from our time management training, and includes both techniques that were refreshers for me, and ones that were new. Hopefully there are tips here that will help you improve your productivity, and free up time to invest in the changes you are making in your life.

The First Big Questions

Each of us has our own "tricks" for keeping track of what we need to do. Sticky notes; white boarding; to-do lists; Kanban; index cards; file folders; stacks of paper...the options are endless. As we finish each task, we throw out the sticky; erase the white board item; check or cross off the item on the list; move the task along the flow; file the paper; etc. What most of us fail to do, unless we are using an actual project management system, is to ask one simple yet critical question.

What is my next action step?

What we record through each of these approaches is a set of tasks; but it is an incomplete set. And, in most cases, they are not linked to one another. So, we complete a task and it is done. We move on. We look at the set of tasks that we have laid out, and select another one from the list; it may or may not have anything to do with the task we just completed or the project and outcome we were working on. If it does not, it is all too easy to lose sight of that project and that outcome until a red flag pops up.

These days, each time I check something off, I ask myself, What is my next action step on this change? What will move me one more step closer to the outcome I am seeking to achieve? And each morning as I set about my planning for the day I ask myself, Which of my next action steps are the most important ones to be working on today? If I am only able to complete one priority today, what is that one?

Importance and Urgency

Importance is not the same as urgency, yet we tend to give urgency the greater priority. If the email is urgent, if the phone is ringing (it may be an urgent call), if the family member or friend is interrupting, we respond. Ryan reminded me of this when he provided this graphic based on the teachings of Steven Covey.



The Four Quadrants of Time Management

<p>1. IMPORTANT & URGENT (REACTIVE /WORKING <u>IN</u> YOUR BIZ)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crises• Pressing problems• Deadline-driven projects	<p>2. IMPORTANT & NOT URGENT (PROACTIVE / WORKING <u>ON</u> YOUR BIZ)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevention, capability improvement• Relationship building• Recognizing new opportunities• Planning• Recreation• Rejuvenation
<p>3. URGENT & NOT IMPORTANT (REACTIVE /WORKING <u>IN</u> YOUR BIZ)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interruptions, some callers• Some mail, some reports• Some meetings• Popular activities	<p>4. NOT IMPORTANT & NOT URGENT (REACTIVE /WORKING <u>IN</u> YOUR BIZ)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trivia, busywork• Some mail• Some phone calls• Time wasters• Television and empty pleasures

While his focus is business ("biz"), you can easily apply the model to your life, and the critical changes that you are undertaking. Not only do the urgent (including the urgent and not important) claim our time and attention; we tend to fill in the empty space with the "not important and not urgent." They don't require a lot of time (unless we want to give more time to them); they don't require a lot of energy; and they are a great way to relieve the stress of the day. They also don't move our change forward.

Working on your change means setting aside time for what is important and not urgent. And it means giving priority to those things over the things that are unimportant, whether or not they are urgent. Now I set aside one day a week for "business strategy;" working on my business to build it in a way that better serves me in the long term, rather than working in my business focusing on only serving my customers.

Two More Big Questions

Two more big questions that relate to the urgency/importance focus. (Thanks again to Ryan Eliason.)

Am I being productive, or am I just being busy?

Am I inventing things to do in order to avoid what is truly important?

The invitation is to set aside time—3-5 minutes—three times a day to ask yourself, and honestly answer, these questions. So simple. So challenging. So revealing. These two questions alone should help guide you to improved time management, and increased productivity as you tackle your change.

What Are Your Limitations?

We all have limitations. We may not know what they are. Or, we may not want to admit them. We may imagine them as more impermeable than pushing up against them would reveal. Nonetheless, they are there.

Knowing—and challenging—your limitations, as well as working with them, are key factors in achieving really significant change.

Knowing Your Limitations

It is important to inventory your limitations at an early stage of defining and planning your change. Perhaps they are resource-based: time, money, the balance of personal and work lives. They may be limitations of skills and abilities, or understanding. There may be geographic limitations.

As the desired end state of your journey begins to take shape, think: *What will it take to achieve, and sustain this?* Not surprisingly, the limitations inventory should be made in comparison to those things; if you don't need a particular thing at all, not having it, having it in short supply (or having an overabundance) isn't a limitation. At the early stages, you will be working at a high level; this is not when you need to think about "dotting the i's and crossing the t's." It is important to remember, though, that you are working at a high level on both sides of the equation: both the requirements for and the availability of the elements you are evaluating. If there is an imbalance, proceed to the next step.

Challenging Your Limitations

Too often when it comes to change, we make one of two major mistakes at the outset: we set out to achieve the impossible, thinking that somehow "it will work out." Or, we aim too low,

“settling” for what we think is possible without any sort of stress-testing to see if we can go further. (If you set your goal as X because reaching and sustaining X will deliver the change results you are seeking, that is not what I am talking about here. However, you should stress-test whether you believe that X is the goal you need to achieve; if it is, don’t allow yourself to say, “but let’s only go to M because I know we can reach and sustain that.”) Stress-testing your limitations may also allow you to discover that the goal that you have set could—in fact—be raised significantly.

So how do you go about stress-testing your limitations? Begin by challenging the underlying beliefs and assumptions. (Yes, that is hard to do!) How strongly is the limitation anchored in fact vs. perspective?

Let’s look at a simple example. Imagine that you are a freelance corporate sales trainer. You contract with training firms and internal training departments to deliver their programs. You want to expand your business in order to grow your income, but you are limited by your work-life balance, and by the amount of time you spend traveling to deliver training.

Limitations

- Time available for work without significantly shifting the work-life balance
- Current billing rate is near the top of the competitive range in the marketplace
- Your time spent on traveling approaches 40% given the duration of the programs being delivered, the geography of clients served, and the distance you are from airports.

The time available based on your work-life balance is a self-defined limitation. While you know that it can be adjusted toward more work, that comes with a price too high for you to be willing to pay; stress-testing this limitation has happened before, and it has proven too uncomfortable to take on this time around.

Given your billing rate vs. the market, it is likely that any increase will lead to a decline, rather than an increase, in income. This is the opposite of the result that you want. You may want to have some conversations with current clients to test their response, but do so as a test, asking “what if,” vs. saying “I am.”

The last limitation requires a few different tests.

- If you delivered longer programs, there would be less time spent traveling between deliveries. Is there a way to shift your work away from those half-day and one-day programs to longer ones over time? This would increase the delivery/travel ratio and the income, at least to some extent nullifying the limitation.
- Can you expand your client base locally over time, reducing the need for air and overnight travel? Even if this required some reduction in your billing rate for the local

market, it might more than offset the time you cannot now spend delivering due to travel.

- Don't assume deliveries require travel. It may well be possible to avoid travel altogether for some of the programs (and perhaps even clients) you are serving. What if you became skilled in remote delivery? Moving 25% of your business to remote delivery would free up considerable time for additional deliveries.

There is something paradoxical about some limitations as well. We think about them as holding us back in some way, and they do. But, we also think that challenging them means moving beyond them. In fact, in some cases, we are best served going in the other direction. Bringing an "essentialism" mindset to your limitations may well prove to break many of them wide open. (If you have not read *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown, I recommend adding it to your reading list today.)

To me, Steve Jobs is perhaps one of the most widely known essentialists; he said "no" to an incredible number of ideas, many of which would have had success in the marketplace, in order to say "yes" to a small handful that have changed everything from how we buy and listen to music, to how we buy and read books, and more; in the process he built perhaps the most widely known brands (and one of the most successful) in the world. He addressed limitations of time and creative focus not by seeking to do more, but by limiting where they were focused. When you look at your limitations, what can you say "no" to that will redefine the degree to which they limit you? What limitations should you seek to further tighten, rather than loosen?

Quite frankly, most of us are not good at challenging our limitations on our own; we can't see what we can't see. The most effective challenges to your limitations will come through someone who 1) is committed to supporting your success, and 2) can remain objective about your change and what is required to succeed. This may be a coach, a mentor, a friend, a family member, or a trusted advisor. It has to be someone who can be brutally honest with you when necessary; who can empathize with your struggles and yet will not let you take the easy path out; and who will unconditionally 100% support you once you have made your decisions. This is neither someone who tells you what you want to hear, nor someone who undermines you when your decisions are different than they would have made.

Working With Your Limitations

If you have sincerely challenged your limitations, it is now time to work with them. Begin by updating your inventory against your identified needs. Should you redefine your desired outcome (e.g. moving it from X to Z because Z is now achievable, or moving it from X to R because you will get past M, but not make it all the way to X)? What limitations have now become assets that you can apply to the change journey (e.g. the time that will be freed up as you move to delivering longer programs and delivering some programs remotely)? Which remain limitations?

Don't look at your limitations as negatives; they are the reality in which you need to move forward. In fact, some of the greatest progress can be made in constrained environments. For example, think of your own cycle of growth and development from those earliest days out on your own until now. It is likely that early economic constraints kept you focused on work and growth, that while living in what you now (and perhaps then) perceive as a constrained environment you were able to make some of your most profound discoveries about yourself and your place in the world.

In her book *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert tells some wonderful stories about working within constraints. While she sought to write every day, she also "always had a day job;" she had successfully published three books, all of which were reviewed by The New York Times, and one of which was nominated for a National Book Award. She kept writing, and kept her day jobs. She was a waitress; she worked on a ranch out west; and she kept writing. She kept her day jobs until the success of *Eat, Pray, Love* allowed her to know that she could support her creativity without placing financial demands on it. She knew that depending on her art for income would place an unnecessary—and most likely destructive—limitation on her creativity, and removed that limitation by working day jobs.

Preparing Yourself and Others

Are They Really Helping You?

It feels good when people agree with you. It feels even better when they say supportive things and offer their encouragement. But when it comes time to carry out a really tough change, are they actually helping?

The answer is, it depends...It depends on whether they are saying what they think you want to hear, or telling you what you need to hear in order to be successful.

Some people set themselves up for failure, surrounding themselves with head-shakers, yes-sayers, make-you-feel-gooders. Those who dare to speak up and say "The emperor has no clothes" are quickly silenced. We see it with business leaders, with politicians, and even with our family and friends. Inevitably their trains go off the tracks; unfortunately, they are not the only ones who suffer in the process.

Most of us are more open to the truth, even when it contains bad news. After all, you don't want a doctor giving you a clean bill of health because he doesn't want you to be upset about the illness he has diagnosed.

Unfortunately, all too often friends, family, change practitioners, and peers are less candid. Perhaps they don't want to upset you, to hurt your feelings, to dim your enthusiasm. But, in their

absence of candor they are not helping. In fact, they are putting the change you are working on at risk.

Tell people that you want them to challenge you, and mean it.

Tell them to give you the bad news as well as the good, and don't shoot the messenger.

Have candid conversations.

Ask tough questions.

Be vulnerable.

Acknowledge your mistakes, and learn from them.

Learn from the mistakes that others have made.

Surround yourself with people who want to help you by being truthful with you. Then encourage them to do so. You will hear the good news, get the encouragement. And, you will hear what you need to hear in order to course-correct, to stay on track, to succeed.

Commitment Is Easy

Or is it?

How long have you been thinking about this change? Analyzing it? Considering the pros and cons? Shaping it in your mind? Assessing what it will take, and how likely that it will work? Maybe you've talked it over with a few people, a spouse or best friend, or (if it is a business change), key colleagues and those who report directly to you. You've decided to move forward. You're committed!

Or are you?

And what about the people who have to make this journey with you?

Let's take a look at a few key things about commitment.

For as much time as you have spent with this important change maturing in your head, it's likely that you don't know what you don't know. Every big change, whether personal or business, positively or negatively perceived, has a "honeymoon." You don't know what you don't know. The road ahead has unforeseen obstacles. The dream, the fantasy, the "ideal future" isn't as easy to obtain or to sustain as you imagine it to be. Even if others have told you to expect the surprises, chances are you will still be surprised.

As you learn more, you will be challenged to continue forward—to continue deepening your commitment—or to let go of the change. There will be periods of pessimism as the inevitable challenges surface. There will be mistakes, and some really big mistakes, that will drain resources, confidence, and time. If you are prone to believing in your own infallibility—or even to just projecting that image to others—your self-confidence, and the confidence of others in you, is likely to wane.

Commitment to something new means uncommitting to something old. And, if the change is big it often means uncommitting to something that you have been strongly committed to. Committing to a serious monogamous relationship or marriage? It means letting go of those free-wheeling days (and nights); letting go of the dishes in the sink, books in the oven, Chinese take-out in the fridge; letting go of the open toothpaste squeezed from the middle; letting go of the dirty clothes strewn around the apartment or the laundry basket overflowing. It may mean letting go of friendships, or professional relationships...it can even mean letting go of family.

As you get older, commitment to something new often means uncommitting to something that you have invested significantly in creating and/or sustaining. At work, it may be the systems, the processes, the structures, perhaps even the products, services or people on which you have built your reputation. In your personal life it may be your lifestyle, your friends, your leisure activities, or your home.

Commitment requires deep understanding. Each time you learn more, commitment is tested. If it passes, the commitment is strengthened. If the new learning breaks the commitment-building cycle it is time to work at either rebuilding, or to "cut loose."

Commitment comes in different forms.

Compliance is one way to express commitment. You wear your seatbelt because you don't want to get a ticket. You "follow orders" because you need the job, or you don't want to get into a conflict with your boss. You perform your job "by the book" since you've seen how that gets others bonuses and promotions. You attend religious services regularly "to keep peace in the family." You host family Thanksgiving dinner because "it's become a tradition." Commitment at this level is externally driven; remove the external driver and you would be doing something different.

Internalized commitment is much stronger. It is self-motivated, self-powered, self-reinforcing. It is also much more difficult to achieve, especially when the change is not one that you have initiated. For this reason, always consider whether the commitment needed for success can be a commitment of compliance, or whether it has to be internalized.

As difficult as commitment is to achieve, it always baffles me how many people assume that others will instantly commit when introduced to a change.

In organizations, the leadership team may take months building their understanding, commitment, and alignment to a change. It continues to strengthen as the project team plans the roll-out, establishing their own commitment to the initiative. Yet when the change reaches the front line the expectation is often that people will readily—and rapidly—let go of the old and fully embrace the new. They won't.

In our personal lives the pattern is much the same. Others come to us with changes they have been contemplating (or working on) for extended periods of time; the expectation is often that we will "jump on board." We, in turn, do the same with others. There are all sorts of rationales given for avoiding earlier conversations. "I wanted to make sure that I was committed myself." "I had to do the research so I could answer questions." "I wasn't sure how people would respond." Etc. While these may be valid reasons for waiting to enter the conversation, they do not overcome the reality about commitment. It doesn't just happen. If you get expressions of commitment when you first introduce the new idea, remember, it is only commitment to the idea. Time will tell whether it can and will develop into commitment to the reality.

What's Trust Got to Do With It?

Mistakes and Trust

Mistakes go hand-in-hand with trust.

There is no such thing as an error-free human being. Mistakes are an inherent part of the change process, and we all make them. We make mistakes in our personal lives. We make mistakes as partners, spouses, and parents. We make mistakes at work as well.

Sometimes our mistakes are small ones. Sometimes they are quite large. I was recently talking with someone who told me that after she received her law degree and was admitted to the bar she "practiced law for three minutes." The adversarial environment was not right for her. Major companies launch new brands, or new strategies, that fail. (For those of you who can remember 1985, think "New Coke.")

Many years ago I unexpectedly ended up having lunch with Curt Carlson. Curt was, among other things, the founder of Ask Mr. Foster Travel and Radisson Hotels. His was a multi-billion dollar privately held empire. At the time, I was heading a team that was tasked with selecting a travel agency for an organization with a multi-million dollar travel budget, and Ask Mr. Foster was one of our final two candidates. While there are many stories (and lessons) that I can share from that experience, one stands out here. After reviewing the terms of the service package his regional director had offered us, Curt spent the rest of the lunch telling us stories. The stories he told were stories about his mistakes, the businesses he tried to launch (or launched) that were total failures. He told us about his mistakes, the lessons they taught him, and how he then applied those lessons to achieve success. Many things contributed to Curt Carlson's tremendous success. One of the key contributors was admitting, owning, and learning from his mistakes.

If we fail to own our mistakes, whether personal or professional, we don't learn from them. We can't examine them with the help of others to determine where we went wrong, what we might do differently the next time. If we don't own our mistakes and don't learn from them, it is likely we will repeat them.

So where does trust come in? It's quite simple. People know that people are not infallible. If every mistake of yours is someone else's fault, I will quickly learn to not trust you. If mistakes are "buried" and not talked about, I will quickly learn to not trust you.

Trust is earned not by infallibility, but by honesty, by integrity. Trust is earned, at least in part, by owning our mistakes.

What Does Mary Think?

Whether asked aloud or not, all too often the opinions of others are an important consideration when thinking about and executing change. As we have discussed in earlier blogs, it is important to get input from a range of people who will be affected by the change. It can inform decisions about what to change, when to change, and how to execute the change. So, asking, *What does Mary think?* makes sense when done at the right time, and in the right way. But, all too often, how we respond to the answer does not.

I had just begun grad school in September 1971 when I received my draft notice. In order to complete the semester, I enrolled “delayed enlistment” in the US Air Force; I began basic training in early 1972. Among the 48 men in our training group was “Airman Jones.” Airman Jones was from a rural part of the country, not highly educated, and not very coordinated. At the same time, he was good humored, and was one of the most hard-working people I have ever known. Everyone was willing to put in an extra effort to make sure that he was able to keep up with the rest of us in meeting our academic and physical requirements. What we never were able to do, however, was to train him to stay in step when marching. Sometimes he would step off with the wrong foot, sometimes not. It really didn’t matter; either way, he would regularly drift in and out of step with the other 47 of us.

There is a marching command, “Change Step, March.” On the word “March,” everyone does a quick “step-step” within a single beat of the cadence. The result is that you essentially are marching “Left. Right. Left. Right-Right. Left. Right.” We became very skilled at executing this command, which was given with one slight modification… “With the exception of Airman Jones, Change Step, March.” The result, 47 of us were regularly adjusting our pace to be in step with the one person who could not stay in step with us.

I tell this story because it is much like asking, “What does Mary think?” and then adjusting to align with the answer, regardless of what it is. And, when it comes to change, in one way or another this happens all too often. The top salesperson is allowed to maintain an administrative assistant and call his orders in rather than moving to filing them digitally on a tablet because “Tom isn’t technically savvy and he is too important to lose.” The CIO agrees to keep shadow systems running for the CFO because she doesn’t like “making all that information so readily available to others.” Joe’s newspaper continues to get delivered to the apartment door even though he has long-since moved out because “What would the neighbors think if they find out we are getting a divorce?” If Tom doesn’t need to become digitally savvy, the word soon spreads that you are not really serious about the change. If the CFO can run shadow systems to continue to maintain control over information, the purchasing department in Des Moines will be doing the same thing soon enough. And, sooner or later, the neighbor will know Joe is no longer living there, and why… and will most likely just shrug and go about her own business.

If the change is big, it’s tough. And when you are executing tough change, people are not going to be happy. If it is really okay to adapt the change when it makes Mary, or Tom, or you uncomfortable, then how important is it?

If it’s that big and that unimportant, why are you doing it? *If it’s that big and that important, then be respectful of the discomfort it is causing. And continue to move forward.*

What Would Steve Do?

Some of us have trouble figuring out and committing to a path forward. The reasons are varied. We may not have all the facts we think we need. We may not be certain that we can get those whose support we want on board. We may feel uncomfortable with making decisions in general, or this decision in particular.

It is then that we all too often turn to someone else (a consultant, a coach, a therapist, a friend...) and say, "What would you do?" As a professional coach, I hear it all the time.

When I hear this question, I often think of a quote from Matsuo Basho: *Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old, seek what they sought.*

There is nothing inherently wrong with the question. It is a way of gaining different perspectives, especially if you are asking a diverse group of people who bring different backgrounds and experiences to the table. What does this look like through a financial lens, through a magnitude of change lens, through a market lens, through a feasibility lens? What does it look like through an interpersonal lens, through a spiritual lens, through a personal alignment lens?

Ask the question. Gather the insights. Weigh them.

It's all too often what happens next that concerns me. Sometimes the decision is to not decide; there are too many divergent perspectives to commit to a path forward. Sometimes, it becomes a "hop scotch" of trying one thing for a bit, then jumping to the next, waiting to find something that seems to stick. And, sometimes we have someone else to blame if the chosen direction or actions don't work out. "John got it wrong." "Steve put us on the wrong path." "How could Hannah have been so off?"

The truth is simple. If it is your change, you need to own your decisions. You need to own the correct ones. And, you need to own the incorrect ones. You ask John, Steve, and Hannah because they are bringing something to the assessment that you don't have. None of them has everything you bring to the table either; none of them own the change in the way you do. You shouldn't be asking them if you suspect they may give you bad advice, intentionally or

otherwise. But what you are getting is advice, not instruction. If you choose to go forward with it, that is your choice, not their responsibility.

As Basho suggests, don't follow in their footsteps, follow in their wisdom. If it will be helpful, go ahead and ask "What would Steve do?" Then have the courage and strength to make the decision, and to hold yourself accountable for the consequences.

Additional learning to support you as you *Prepare for the Journey*

- *A Few Reminders: Key Change Principles (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Don't Just Leave! (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Every Big Change Needs a Roadmap (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Fear of Failure, Fear of Success (Create Your Change Story)*
- *How Often Are You Present With Yourself? (Create Your Change Story)*
- *I Would Do It, But... (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Tear Down the Walls! (Create Your Change Story)*
- *The Future Ain't What it Used to Be (Create Your Change Story)*