Embracing Change

Barriers to Change

##

## What I’d Change:

Think about one thing that you’d like to change in your life. This can be a physical change, career change, or lifestyle change, but ***NOT*** a personality change.

The change should be theoretically possible and should be something that you would contemplate if you could do absolutely anything you wanted.

Please ***do not*** use a change that you’ve actually made or are about to make.

Please ***do*** use a change that you’ll be happy to talk to others about.

|  |
| --- |
| The change I’d like to make is: |

|  |
| --- |
| Discussion notes: |

## Making Changes: What to Remember

Change can be very unsettling, so it is always good to remind ourselves that:

* Change is a natural process, but is always met with some degree of resistance.
* There is tendency to believe that the status quo is safe.
* Change involves moving from what is known and what we are comfortable with to something less certain and/or comfortable.
* Change always involves an element or risk and we are all, to some extent, risk averse. A basic human need is security, and this is normally achieved by identifying and avoiding risks.

### Implementing Change

When implementing change, either at work or personally, always make sure that:

* You/those involved understand the reasons for change.
* You establish a clear vision of what life will look like after the change.
* You establish steps/goals that will lead you/everyone through the change.
* Make sure that you/others have a strong network of support.
* You establish contingency plans in case things go wrong.

# When Change Really Hurts

When imposed change – change we have not chosen ourselves – hits us, it can really hurt. We often experience feelings of loss, hopelessness, being powerless, worried that we can’t count on anything and overwhelmed by the need to adapt to new demands.

The Change Curve is a model that illustrates the emotional stages we may go through when experiencing this type of change and not only helps us to make sense of our emotions but allows us to recognise that what we are feeling is entirely normal.



The cycle descends, in emotional terms, through these stages:

* Shock: Can I cope? What will happen to me?
* Denial: Change, what change? None of this is really going to happen.
* Anger and Depression: This is not right. It’s unfair. I didn’t ask for this!
* Resignation: What can I do about it? It’s hopeless.
* Acceptance: Okay, I get it. This is the way it is. What’s next for me?
* Understanding and Looking Forward: Are there some possibilities here that I can make happen?

Of course, not everyone experiences change in the same way – our reactions to change are as individual as our fingerprints. We do not always experience all of the emotional stages in the Change Curve; nor are they a step-by-step, logical progression – more an ebb and flow. Occasionally we become stuck in one of the stages and find it incredibly difficult to move on.

## What to Do?

Here are five suggestions for working through imposed change.

**1. Acknowledge Your Feelings:**

How do you really feel about the imposed change? It’s perfectly fine to feel fear, anxiety, anger and so on; if you bottle it all up it becomes toxic to you. Find some way to vent your feelings, perhaps talking honestly and openly to your partner, a friend or someone at work. But don’t take it out on them – just talk about how you feel. Sometimes it helps to look back at other changes you have weathered in your life and remind yourself how you came through them.

|  |
| --- |
| Ideas: |

**2. Work Out the Reality:**

What is the real impact of the imposed change? Think about the consequences of accepting, rejecting or doing nothing about the change. Think through what it means to you, right now, in the medium term and, if you can, the longer term.

What do you really know about the change and what are you speculating about? This is the time to get as much solid information as you can. Sometimes you realise that it’s not going to be as bad as you thought.

Take stock. Look at the resources and assets you have; the people you know who might be able to help or support you in some way; do an audit of your achievements, your experience, skills and knowledge. This is a way of getting in touch with yourself and your life.

|  |
| --- |
| Ideas: |

**3. Put Some Options Together:**

There are always choices about change; at the most basic level it’s a choice to accept, reject, or do nothing. Start by asking yourself (and those you trust) the question: How can I make this change work for me? What can I do? What else can I do? What opportunities does this change present?

Is now the time to do something you’ve put on the back burner for too long? Ask yourself “what if…?” questions. Be flexible; try to create as many options as you can.

|  |
| --- |
| Ideas: |

**4. Develop Your Master Plan:**

Go through your options, even if some seem a bit sketchy or far-fetched. Which seem the most promising and engage your interest? Set yourself some goals – however small and then work out how to achieve them. Who, What, Why and When are the questions to ask to help you form your goals.

|  |
| --- |
| Ideas: |

**5. Look After Yourself:**

Imposed change is stressful. It’s a Catch 22 – stress plays havoc with hormones and an imbalance of hormones can cause stress. Protein and fats are the hormone building blocks so it is important to ensure that you have an adequate intake. If the body has sufficient nutrients, it can repair itself quite quickly. If it is under-nourished or has an imbalance of nutrients, it cannot do so.

Comfort eating, missing meals, ‘junk’ food, eating and working, high intakes of caffeine from coffee, tea or alcohol – none of these will keep you in top form. Your ability to cope with stress depends upon maintaining a balanced diet, which includes protein, and provides you with the range of vitamins needed, especially vitamins E and C, to enable the body to repair and renew itself.

From powerlessness to control—it’s a daunting journey, but the right path to take in times of change.

|  |
| --- |
| Ideas: |

|  |
| --- |
| Notes: |

Passengers

The Driving Seat

Today, you and two of your colleagues are going on a car journey. There are three places you can sit:

**The Driver Seat:**

The driver not only has a clear view of where you’re all going, he/she will also control the route you take to get there, and the speed at which you travel. When there’s an obstacle or block, it will most likely be the driver who decides whether you wait in a queue, try to find a different route or, perhaps, in the case of a serious problem, abort the journey altogether.

**The Front Passenger Seat:**

The front passenger also has a clear view of where you’re going and what lies ahead. They’ll be able to monitor how fast the car is going and warn the driver when he/she is going over the speed limit or has taken a wrong turn. They’ll also be in the best position, perhaps armed with a map, to suggest alternative routes when problems appear on the horizon. (Of course, how much influence the front passenger has, and how welcome his/her input is, will be determined by several factors, including the relationship between the driver and his front-seat passenger.)

**The Back Seat:**

The final member of your team will be sitting in the back. This passenger has only a vague idea of what lies ahead. For the most part, they’ll simply be watching the world go by in a blur. They have little or no control over the route or speed taken. Their lack of control or influence probably means they won’t pay much attention to what’s going on in the front either – so when the car brakes suddenly, or accelerates, they’ll be the ones whose drink goes flying as they’re caught off-guard. Those in the back are much more likely to suffer motion sickness.

What about the other back seat?

**The Hitchhiker:**

The final seat on your car journey is going to be taken by a foreign student, hitchhiking through your country. As a hitchhiker, they have absolutely no control over the route taken and can only hope that the driver will take them in a direction that roughly corresponds with where they’d like to go. The fact that the other passengers speak a foreign language only adds to the risks of arriving at a completely different destination to the one they hope for!

Reluctant Passengers:

Reluctant passengers are those who think they’d be a better driver, than the current one, which might be you. It can be difficult be a reluctant passenger and it can be difficult to have reluctant passengers on the journey with you.

Think about a change where you’ve had reluctant passengers on your team, or where you’ve been a reluctant passenger. Reflect on the following questions and record any thoughts and ideas you have. Consider how you felt in the situation but consider too how it felt for the other person. (In other words, whichever position you were in, try to record some thoughts in both columns.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Driver** | **Reluctant Passenger** |
| Which were you? |  |  |
| How did it feel to be in this situation? |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Driver** | **Reluctant Passenger** |
| How might the situation have impacted your behaviour and the behaviour of the other person? |  |  |
| What could you have done differently to make the journey easier? |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Driver** | **Reluctant Passenger** |
| What did you learn from the journey? |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| Notes: |

# Half Full?

Here are two lists. For each statement score 0 if it is nothing like you, 1 if it is sometimes like you, or 2 if it is exactly like you. Then add up your totals for each list. This is not an ‘either/or’ quiz – it is a consideration of the two extremes.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **List A** | **Score** | **List B** | **Score** |
| Things don’t always go the way we’d like them to – but we learn most from these experiences and grow as a result. |  | If my partner or spouse arrived home from work late on a regular basis, I would be suspicious they were up to something. |  |
| When confronted with a challenge, I face up to it and deal with it head on – striving for a positive solution. |  | I find I often worry about situations and think about ‘worst case scenarios’ to help me deal with them. |  |
| I look forward to going to work and being able to achieve something positive. |  | I often have ‘one of those days’ where things just seem to go from bad to worse. |  |
| When I start thinking about a new project, such as going on holiday, moving house, self improvement – I think about the positive benefits it will bring rather than the hard work it will involve. |  | I really enjoy going on holiday, but I always have that feeling that I’ll have to work doubly hard before and after to catch up. |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I make the most of every opportunity, however small it is. |  | It’s really difficult to make plans as things change so often and you just never know what is going to happen. |  |
| When faced with a challenge or problem I break things down into smaller chunks and remind myself of the benefits I will achieve at the end of it all. |  | You need to be careful who you trust these days as people are not always what they seem. |  |
| I enjoy meeting new people and always try to see the good in them. |  | Sometimes when I meet people I just know from the outset that I’m not going to like them. |  |
| People who are unlucky with relationships just have to believe that the right person for them is out there somewhere; they just need to keep looking. |  | I often refer to myself as a ‘born worrier’ – I like to check and double check everything, just to be as sure as I can that it will be OK. |  |
| If I was ever made redundant, it would be a fantastic opportunity to reassess my career and perhaps even make a change. |  | It’s important to always be realistic and have contingency plans for when things go wrong. |  |
| **Total Score** |  | **Total Score** |  |

## How did you Score?

This quiz looks at what you notice most in life – positives or negatives. Whether you tend towards optimism or pessimism. It is based on a very simple straight line with optimist at one end and pessimist at the other. So it’s not a very scientific measurement, given that the circumstances, mood and even time of day will have an impact on how you respond! However, it does strongly suggest that the more marks you score in column A, the more optimistic you are and the more you score in column B, the more likely to be pessimistic you are.

## More Optimistic

As an optimist, we tend to look back at what has happened in the past and see what we have learned from it. We even think things turned out for the best and therefore why should the future be any different. If we see every cloud as having a silver lining, then we can look forward to the future and expect that things will turn out fine. We look at what’s happening and try to find a positive element within it - regardless.

Optimists believe that things happen for a reason and see challenges as opportunities to perhaps do something different, learn something new or have a new experience – always looking to find a positive step to take, looking for the benefits to be gained.

## More Pessimistic

If we are more likely to adopt a more pessimistic stance, then we will tend to miss or filter out the positive and see the down side or bad in everything, focusing on risk and how things might (or did) go wrong. We’ll see opportunities as problems and be so wrapped up in the challenge this now presents and becoming anxious about how we will deal with it, that we will tend to miss potential opportunities that might otherwise have presented themselves. In some respects, pessimism becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and an easy ‘habit’ to fall into.

Pessimism isn’t just about looking ahead in order to avoid things going wrong; some people would argue that is a positive trait and good planning, but pessimists tend to *expect* things to go wrong and as such, may miss golden chances and valuable experiences. Generally, if we are expecting that things will go wrong, or won’t work anyway, we will often reduce the effort and enthusiasm we put into them - “it’s just not worth it”. Think about the simplest things – if you don’t believe them to be possible, you won’t even try to make them happen! The only time we can truly be comfortable is when something bad happens – because then we know we were right and it proves and reconfirms our choice of pessimism.

You can argue that it’s much more realistic to be pessimistic; pessimists have a more accurate view of what’s going on in the world. But in terms of what feels good, optimism wins every single time and in terms of whether people want to spend time and be around optimists or pessimists, then optimism does tend to be a more attractive trait!

Optimism certainly seems to have an impact on how we behave and how successful we are – optimists tend to look for opportunities, so are seen as achieving more and being more rounded – whilst pessimists tend to be the negative naysayers that we would all prefer to keep away from.

Imagine having a leader who saw challenges as opportunities to learn, develop, grow and move on from – compared to a leader who saw challenges as threats, scary times and fearful moments to be avoided? Which one would you rather work with?

Consider the customer that calls with a concern, and the response is one of, “Well you’re not the first person to express that concern, in fact, nothing we ever do here is right ….I can’t rely on any other department to deliver on time, so it’s no wonder our customers feel the way you do.” A recipe for disaster!

So are optimists or pessimists born or made? There’s certainly some evidence to suggest that as early as six months old, babies respond enthusiastically or warily to situations. Childhood experiences also have a lot to answer for and can mould our adult behaviours – any labels that children are given (“Oh he’s such a miserable child” or “She’s such a happy little soul”) or treatment they received at the hands of the adults and others around them are likely to have an impact.

Even the childhood experience of how adults around us handled situations will affect the way we think and behave, and certainly the language used towards us will affect our later confidence. Imagine being constantly told as a child, “Don’t ever try to do that, it won’t work and you’ll end up looking foolish – hang back and play safe” and the strong message that can send if repeated.

As adults when we are more in control and can make more of our own choices about how we live, work and grow, we can learn to become more optimistic, and there are techniques and tools available if you want to develop a more balanced approach!

|  |
| --- |
| “The optimist sees opportunity in every danger.The pessimist sees danger in every opportunity.”*Winston Churchill.* |

## Why Optimism is Best

Optimism doesn’t just feel better; it works better!

* Optimists are more likely to be healthier and suffer less illness.
* Optimists are likely to live longer.
* Optimists are likely to do better in exams.
* Optimists are more likely to earn higher incomes.
* Optimists are more likely to have healthy families.
* Optimists are more likely to achieve more.

For your health, wealth and enjoyment of life, optimism is always the better choice!

Here are a few ideas for improving your optimistic outlook on life:

* When you get something right, tell yourself it’s all down to you.
* When you get it right again, tell yourself how well you did it.
* When things go wrong, see it as a learning point.
* When things go wrong, see it as a specific reversible setback.
* If things go wrong again, put it down to circumstance, not you.
* Always act to solve problems; don’t accept anything less than a good life.
* If things keep going wrong, believe they can change!

|  |
| --- |
| Notes: |

## Impact in the Workplace

Discuss the following questions in your groups and suggest possible responses that you can then share with the whole group.

Sometimes when people are pessimistic they can start to ‘play the victim’ – “Woe is me, it’s not fair, it’ll never be right for me,” etc. What other examples of pessimistic behaviour at work can you think of?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What impact can pessimism have on other people going through change?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What action can you take to deal with pessimism at work towards change?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What effect does an optimistic attitude have on people’s ability to embrace change? Think about the positive and negative attributes, if there are any!

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What effect does a pessimistic attitude have on people’s ability to embrace change? Think about the negative and positive attributes, if there are any!

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What might you need to do if surrounded by pessimism in the workplace?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

How could you further improve an optimistic outlook without becoming unrealistic in your views and expectations?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

What advice could you offer to someone whose attitude or mood was having a negative effect? Whether that mood was overly optimistic or indeed pessimistic?

|  |
| --- |
|  |

# Planning My Change

This is your opportunity to reflect on what you have be learning and how you can apply it to the change(s) you currently need to embrace.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| My change(s) |  |

| The behaviour I want to change | My goal is | The support I need with this | How I will know this has worked |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |