


All About Change

...and change...and change
...and more inevitable change



Truly successful people love change. They are constantly seeking ways to improve themselves and how they relate to others. They are also quick to see the opportunities in change.

Learning to embrace change and use it to your advantage requires a great deal of introspection and courage.

WHY WE RESIST CHANGE

Most of us are comfortable in the environments we have created. We identify with our sets of habits, attitudes and activities. As a result, it's threatening to our sense of self to pursue habits, attitudes and activities that are unfamiliar—or ones we've always dismissed.

Reason: Change creates the anxiety of *ambiguity*—an uncomfortable feeling that causes us to feel as if we don't know exactly who we are.

You may be kept from changing by loyalty to friends, family, your "true self" or even a memory. Sameness is familiar and safe, while change feels like a betrayal of groups or ideals to which you are committed.

But embracing change is healthy. Life cycles change, as do our culture, technology and other areas of our existence. Change is only negative when there is excessive search for novelty or when it is done to withdraw or hide.

When faced with a situation that requires change, you may feel invaded or challenged. You defend yourself by digging in your heels and refusing to change. That resistance to change—frequently called *pigheadedness*—is essentially a defensive reaction.

LEARNING TO EMBRACE CHANGE

● **Recognize that all change involves loss**, even if you're moving to a

new neighborhood where life will be more pleasant. You're losing your old way of life, and it's instinctive to want to cling to it—at least to some degree.

By recognizing that loss is part of life, you will be more equipped to view change as a normal course of events, not as an emotional sneak attack.

● **Be clear about what is unsatisfactory in your current life.** The desire to escape anxiety, toxicity, frustration or boredom and the need to expand your horizons and experiences drive change. Define what you want to leave behind and why—and remind yourself of these reasons regularly. This exercise will put you in the right frame of mind to accept change for what it is—an opportunity.

● **Define your goal or path.** By knowing what you want to achieve in your work or private life—and by keeping that image in your mind—you will find ways to make change work for you.

If, like most people, your goal is cloudy, clarify the practical steps that will bring your goal into focus.

Example: You desperately want to move away from a city you don't like, but you don't know where to go. Start by assembling a strategy that will help you clarify your needs and affinities, and find the best place to live for your needs.

● **See yourself as others do.** If you don't know who you are, you won't know what needs to be changed and how.

Example: One patient was enormously frustrated with his wife. He said her

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Martin Groder, MD, a Chapel Hill, North Carolina, psychiatrist and business consultant.

His book *Business Games: How to Recognize the Players and Deal with Them* is available from Boardroom Classics, Box 11401, Des Moines, Iowa 50336. 800-678-5835. \$29.95.



failings were hindering his career. It turned out that the patient was projecting his own weaknesses—and his unrealistic expectations of himself—onto his wife.

Ask others what they think of you. Allow them to offer criticism by being calm and appreciative rather than coercive or punishing.

● **Find role models.** Someone who has learned to cope with change and face it is often the best source from whom to learn how to accomplish it yourself.

Example: If you want to change careers, find someone who has actually done it. Ask about every emotion that the person went through and how he/she overcame the fears associated with change.

● **Enlist support.** Family and friends can be supportive or subversive of your efforts to change. Use your diplomatic skills to get people on board. Discuss how your change will affect your life and theirs. Don't spring a big move on them and expect immediate support.

If a projected change is opposed by your family or friends, find a trusted, impartial confidante who will help you clarify your vision and move prudently in the right direction. ■

Happiness

