

Embracing Change!

By Chrissie Webber

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„X The only thing that is certain in life is change
„X Life is what happens to you jK just when you've made other plans

These two quotations are very well known, but they are worth repeating because the world IS always changing AND most change upsets our comfortable plans.

Change often comes from the quarter we least expect, catching us off-guard. It is usually a rude shock, but our reaction to it is predictable. Below, is an interesting little graph, we call the "cardiogram of change", which shows the peaks and troughs of the change cycle. Our model here is adapted from the pioneering work done by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1983), amongst others, working with families dealing with that most painful of human changes - bereavement.

What is important to recognise, is that change does affect most of us in similar ways. It is often not a pleasant experience, but if we accept that it is a natural process, we can decide how we will react to the situation and manage our own behaviour to get the most out of it.

The Cardiogram of Change

The vertical axis of our model deals with the individual's level of morale and anxiety during the change process. Morale and anxiety are usually related to one another by an inverse relationship. For example, when our morale is high, our anxiety is low and vice versa.

The horizontal axis simply denotes the change process, over time.

This describes the typical change journey, using the model above. It might go something like this:

„X We start in our comfort zone. At this point we are not expecting change or perhaps we are in a state of passive denial, where we know that change is happening, but do not think (or perhaps simply hope - like a deer, frozen in the headlights) that it will not affect us.

„X From this point on, whatever our starting level, our anxiety increases and our morale begins to slump. There is usually, a small rally, when, at some point, we decide to actively resist change and get angry against the "injustice" of it all.

„X However, most change inexorably wears us down, as we realise that it really is happening or has happened. Our lowest ebb comes with our morale at rock bottom, our anxiety sky-high, where it all seems too much and we are in the depths of depression or despair. How long this point lasts, really depends on our individual capacity for resilience and how soon we can accept and embrace change.

„X Once we DO accept and embrace the change process, our spirits lift and our anxiety begins to lower. However, there is usually a slight fall in morale and increase in anxiety as we confront, for the first time, the challenge ahead.

„X The learning / adaptation curve, starts off slowly and then usually becomes steeper in change situations as we acquire new skills, develop coping strategies and behaviours.

„X Once we have integrated the changes into our lives and become comfortable with them, our morale is high again and our anxiety lower.

„X At this point, perhaps we can look back over the journey we have made and continue to improve our morale and manage our anxiety level downwards, because we realise that "change happens" and because we have "survived" - we now have skills to handle new change, when it happens.

Finally, we end this short article with some advice. There are many techniques and methods for coping with change. An excellent small book (with a deceptively simple style) on how to manage change is "Who moved my cheese" by Dr. Spencer Johnson. We summarise here his steps for managing change:

„X Change happens

1. Anticipate change;
2. Look out for the signs that herald change;
3. Adapt quickly to the change situation;
4. Envision the change goals clearly;
5. Do it - change;
6. Enjoy the challenge of change.

„X Change happens

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