

Master Change

with These Four Simple Steps

By Brian Tracy

Change is inevitable. Use it to your advantage, or let it work to your disadvantage.

There is a little poem, “Two men looked through prison bars. One saw the mud; the other saw the stars.” The moral: You can improve your ability to deal with change by focusing your attention on the future and by seeing the glass as half-full rather than half-empty.

A critical issue in dealing with change is the subject of control. Most of your stress and unhappiness comes as a result of feeling out of control in a particular area of your life. If you think about the times or places where you felt the very best about yourself, you will realize that you had a high degree of control in those places. One of the reasons why you like to get home after a trip is that, after you walk through your front door, you feel completely in control of your environment. You know where everything is. You don't have to answer to anyone. You can relax completely. You are back in control.

Psychologists call this the difference between an “internal locus of control” and an “external locus of control.” Your locus of control is where you feel the control is located for a particular part of your life. People with an external locus of control feel they are controlled by outside forces, their bills, their relationships, their childhood experiences, or

their external environment. When a person has an external locus of control, he or she feels a high degree of stress. And with an external locus of control, a person is very tense and uneasy about change of any kind. Change represents a threat that may leave the individual worse off than before.

On the other hand, people with an internal locus of control possess a high level of self-determination. They feel that they are very much in charge of their life. They plan their work and work their plan. They accept a high level of responsibility, and they believe that everything happens for a reason and that they are the primary creative force in their life.

Since the only thing over which you have complete control is the content of your conscious mind, you begin to deal with change by taking full, complete control over the things you think. As Aldous Huxley said, “Experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you.” Since change is inevitable and continuous, it is how you think about what is happening to you that is most important in determining how change affects you — and whether you use it to your advantage or let it work to your disadvantage.

“Ineffective people manage change with a ‘reactive-response mode of behavior,’ while effective people focus their attention on their ‘future vision.’ “



*"Crisis is change
trying to take place."*

In his book *Celebrations of Life*, Rene Dubos wrote that we fear change more today than ever before, and for less reason. The reason we fear change is because we are afraid that we will be worse off as a result. No one fears change that implies improvement. For example, if you learned that you were going to have to change your lifestyle because you had just won the lottery, this is not the kind of change that you would avoid or anticipate with dread. It is change that implies unpleasant surprises that you fear and become anxious about, because it causes you to feel that you have lost a certain amount of control in that part of your life.

Your aim is to become a “change master,” to embrace change, to welcome change, to ride the tides of change, and to move toward the improvements you desire.

Boat builders know that the deeper the keel of a sailing vessel, the more stable it will be in storms, squalls, and gusts of wind. The same holds true for you. The deeper your keel — or stabilizing factors in your life — the less likely it is that you will be blown over or off course when unexpected change occurs.

You can deepen your keel and increase your stability by setting big goals for yourself and making clear, written plans for their accomplishment. Goals enable you to control the direction of change. With goals, change becomes planned and deliberate, instead of random and haphazard. Goals assure that the changes that take place in your life are primarily self-determined and self-directed. With clear, specific goals, the changes that take place will tend to be positive and move you toward something that you want to achieve rather than blow you off course.

It is inevitable that you will experience a continuous series of large and small disappointments and setbacks in your life. That is the nature of the game. They are unavoidable. Some things work out, and some things don't. Sometimes you win; sometimes you lose. In spite of your best efforts, unexpected and unpredictable events will derail your best-laid plans. This endless process of change and setbacks begins when you first enter the workforce, and it continues for the rest of your career. Problems and changes in your work are like the rain — they just happen. But if you set clear goals for your work, as well as for your fam-

ily life and for your personal development, then no matter what happens, you can concentrate your thinking on your goals and take a long-term view of your current circumstances. You can, in effect, rise above the challenges of the moment and keep your eyes on the guiding stars of your life and your most cherished dreams.

With clear goals, you will become multidimensional rather than one-dimensional. A setback or disappointment in any one part of your work will be quickly offset by the fact that you are busy in other areas, and you simply won't allow yourself to invest too much emotional energy in one particular thing that doesn't work out to plan.

Now I'd like to share with you a four-step method of dealing with change:

The first step is simply to accept the change as a reality. Acceptance is the opposite of rejection or resistance. Acceptance keeps your mind calm and positive. As William James said, “The starting point in dealing with any difficulty is to be willing to have it so.” The minute you accept that a change has occurred and that you can't cry over spilled milk, you become more capable of dealing with the change and turning it to your advantage.

One of the best ways to deal with the worry that is often generated by unexpected change is to sit down and answer, on paper, the question: “What exactly am I worrying about?”

In medicine, it is said that accurate diagnosis is half the cure. When you sit down and define a worrisome situ-

ation clearly on paper, it suddenly becomes less stressful to you, and it will often resolve itself. In any case, when it is clearly defined, you have diagnosed it, and you now can do something about it.

The second step is to ask yourself, “What is the worst possible thing that can happen as a result of this change?” Much worry and stress comes from the refusal to face what might happen as a result of a difficult problem. When you clearly define the worst possible outcome and write it down next to the definition of the problem, chances are you will find that, whatever it is, you can handle it. Often, your worries will begin to evaporate after you have determined the worst that might happen as a result.

Now decide to accept the worst possible outcome should it occur. Mentally resolve that, even if the worst possible consequence ensues from this situation, it will not be the end of the world for you. You will accept it and carry on. The very act of accepting the worst possible outcome helps to eliminate the stress and anxiety associated with the situation.

The third step in dealing with change is adjusting your behaviors and actions to the new situation. Ask yourself, “What are all the things I can do to make sure that the worst does not occur?” Sometimes we call this “damage control.” In the business schools, this is an important part of decision making, and it is called the “mini-max regret solution.” What can you do to minimize the maximum damage that can occur from an unexpected change

The Four-Step Method for Dealing with Change:

1. Accept that change is reality. Ask yourself, “What, specifically, am I worried about because of this change?”
2. Determine the worst case. Ask yourself, “What is the worst possible thing that can happen as a result of this change?” and decide to accept it if it does happen.
3. Minimize the maximum. Ask yourself, “What are all the things I can do to make sure the worst does not occur?”
4. Take action to maximize your current situation — become an “inverse paranoid.” Ask yourself, “How can this change be a healthy and positive step toward achieving my greater goals?”



or setback? As you begin thinking of all the things you can do, you are adjusting your mind to the new information and preparing to take steps to deal with the change effectively. Write these things down next to the result of step two.

The final part of this four-step method for dealing with change is to improve on the existing situation. Often, a change signals that your plans are incomplete or that you might be heading in the wrong direction. Serious changes, which create real problems, are often signals that you are on the wrong track. There is an old saying, "Crisis is change trying to take place." You will often find that the change is a healthy and positive step toward achieving your goals.

W. Clement Stone, the billionaire and founder of Combined Insurance Company, was famous for his attitude of being an "inverse paranoid." He was convinced that everything that happened to him was part of a conspiracy to help him to be more successful. Whenever something unexpected occurred, he immediately said, "That's good!" and then looked into the situa-

tion to find out exactly what was good about it.

If you look into any change, you will always find something good and beneficial for you. Look for the valuable lessons contained within every setback. What is the hidden advantage that you can turn to your benefit? Is this change a signal that, if properly responded to, will save you from a much bigger change or problem in the future? Since your mind can hold only one thought at a time, if you force

Don't mistake activity with productivity.

yourself to look for the positive aspect of any change, you'll keep your mind clear, and you'll keep your attitude optimistic and confident.

Viktor Frankl said that the last great freedom of man is the freedom to choose his attitude under any given set of circumstances. You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing

it to master you.

A mark of a successful person is what has been called "tolerance for ambiguity." This simply means that you have the capacity to deal effectively with a rapidly changing situation. The more successful you become — the greater your income and responsibilities, the higher your status and position — the faster the rate of change that will be around you. At every stage, it will be your ability to function with calmness, clarity, and quiet assurance that will mark you as the kind of person who is going places in life.

In the final analysis, your ability to perform effectively in a world of ongoing change is the true measure of how well developed a person you are. As you continue to do this, you will experience a wonderful feeling of self-control and self-determination that your whole life will be bright and positive — and so will your results. ■

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