

September 2012 Turning Change into Opportunity

“We change, whether we like it or not.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

The world seems to be picking up speed, with events and challenges occurring at a frenetic pace. This is particularly true with the concept of change, both in a societal and individual sense. There may have been a time when ignoring or avoiding change seemed like a viable option. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to survive in 2012 without recognizing and adapting to the changes we face.

There are three basic principles that serve as a foundation for understanding change:

- Since it is not possible to have total control over our external environment, change is really not an option. It just happens, and we need to accept that it is a critical part of our lives.
- The way we respond to change reflects our perceptions of the impact it will have on us which can generate a variety of negative emotions, such as fear, anger, frustration, and anxiety.
- If we move beyond the negative emotions and look at change as an opportunity to grow in our professional and personal lives, the frame of reference moves from pessimism to optimism.

Change is not always positive, in fact sometimes it creates very difficult challenges that can alter our lives in unpredictable ways. However, the approach and attitude we take to addressing change can make a significant impact on our success in dealing with it. Looking at change as a way to create opportunities can translate a difficult situation into a more positive one because we gain a stronger sense of control, not of the change itself but of our reactions to it.

“There is a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse! As I have often found in traveling in a stagecoach, that it is often a comfort to shift one's position, and be bruised in a new place.” ~ Washington Irving

So if we can address change more effectively by viewing it as an opportunity, how do we go about doing it? Here are a few suggestions:

- Listen to the internal conversation that goes on in most of our brains when we face change. No, these internal voices are not a sign of schizophrenia; they represent an effort to sort out our feelings, assumptions, and past experiences when dealing with disruptive situations.
- Redirect negative thoughts and reactions to a more proactive, positive perspective, focusing less on frustration and avoidance and more on analysis and planning.
- Assume a much stronger sense of control by understanding as much as possible about the changing situation or condition, and developing a plan that articulates our potential role(s) in addressing it.
- Become part of the solution, as opposed to part of the problem by actively participating in reestablishing stability that was disrupted by the change. It is reasonable to ask questions and express opinion and concerns, as long as these actions are coupled with a genuine desire to solve problems. This approach generates opportunities!

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.” ~ Helen Keller