

Embracing Change

How can we deal effectively with change?

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The Challenge

Change is all around us, it's unavoidable, in fact, *change is part of the process of life*. So ... why do we chronically fear change and react with anxiety through this natural process. We should be used to change by now ... it's been part of life for millions of years!

The reason we may fear change is between what we might call "familiar" and "unfamiliar" types of change. Familiar change is the type we all can, more-or-less, expect and anticipate: we grow older, we learn new things, we expect to get a flu in winter, our favorite (mostly winning) team goes on a (mostly) losing streak, etc.

It is, however, normal to feel disoriented in the midst of *unfamiliar*, or unexpected, change and cues. In our rapid-fire, rapidly changing world, our schedules, plans and routines become disrupted in a totally unexpected way. The recent mortgage crisis, the stock market crash, and the global economic turmoil are all unexpected, profound, changes that most people simply did not expect to happen.

The challenge is to learn skills so that we can deal with both types of change, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the expected and the unexpected. How do we learn to become resilient and confident in our ability to deal with change?

The Solution

In the midst of change most of us get off of our center because we are creatures of habit. We normally gravitate to sameness and routine unless we work really hard at doing different things. For example, we take the same route to work, eat in the same restaurants on the same day of the week, eat the same cereal for breakfast everyday, wear the same style clothes all the time, watch the same TV shows, etc.

The first step to coping with change is to break some of these simple habits. If we can change in some small ways, we can get accustomed to dealing with change and the bigger, less familiar changes will be easier to deal with.

On the flip side, keeping some routine can be a very useful tool in managing uneasiness and shock. By keeping some things the same, we can cope better with big changes. We need a sense of security and stability during unexpected change. Getting up at the same time, frequenting our favorite restaurant, and keeping a hand-me-down gives us consistency and control.

It's all about balance!

So the important point is achieving a proper *balance* between habits we keep and those we can easily break, that is, finding a center point. People that survive the best in the face of the fury of change are those who can go with the flow of change. There are countless examples of people who have lost relationships, jobs, homes and fortunes just because they couldn't embrace change; and others who have faced similar challenges and yet have excelled and thrived.

Actually the best defense against change is to get plenty of exercise, plenty of rest, and watch your diet. Stay centered. Even if you take all the right steps and follow the best advice, undergoing change creates stress in your life, and stress takes energy. By being aware of this, you can compensate by taking special care of your mind and body. Also know your limits and don't be afraid to take reasonable risks. Enrolling in a recreational club, community college or adult education program in your area can have positive effects on your confidence.

Get help when you need it. If you are confused or overwhelmed with the changes swirling around you, ask for help from those around you. If your anxiety is getting the better of you and is affecting your sleep, then tell your primary care physician who can help you get on the right track with the help of a professional counselor.