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Putting the Focus on Change in Our Lives

We live in a society in which the pace of change is faster than in any time in history. The changes in communication technology including things like smart phones, tablets, netbooks and computers are a good example of this. It's hard to get the latest updated version before a new one comes out. The mobility of our society increases the rate of change. Most people will move on average about every three to four years. The old saying is "The only thing that does not change is change itself". Following are a few tips to help us thrive on the changes that life throws at us on a daily basis.

Attitude: Our attitude has a lot to do with how we deal with change. Many times in dealing with the stress of change we can fall into the victim attitude. If we fall into the victim role, we become negative, lose energy, creativity, and stamina which are all needed in dealing with change. Those who deal with change the best adopt the attitude of the pioneer. Just think about the qualities of pioneers. They are trailblazers, have high energy, and look at the unknown of change as exciting and an opportunity to learn. Keep your attitude as that of a pioneer rather than that of a victim.

Rituals and Routines: Another tip is to keep as many things as possible the same during change without getting in the way of the change. It's important to

keep your rituals and routines the same if possible. No matter what the change is keep having that cup of coffee, exercise, meditation, or quiet time at the same time every day. When I was in the military, my family and I were transferred from a base in Louisiana to a base in Keflavik, Iceland. We always had a Saturday night routine/ritual of having popcorn and watching a movie. We arrived in Iceland on Saturday morning and got settled into our temporary quarters that

evening. My daughter asked about our Movie Popcorn Night. I soon scrounged up some popcorn and we had our regular movie and popcorn night. This brought a little bit of the familiar to our big change. Our rituals and routines give us a sense

of continuity and security no matter what changes we are going through. So keep all your rituals and routines as much the same as possible without letting them get in the way of the change.

Communication: One of the things we have learned from studies about large companies going through significant changes is that the better communication is, the better people go through the change. So whether the change is in your workplace or in your family, the more information that is communicated the better people will adapt to the change.

THRIVING,
Not WRITHING,
In CHANGE

Mike Huddleston, LPC, CEAP, CDAC

Workplace Change and the Grief Process

-Emily Durham, LPC, CEAP

“The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change...” Isaac Asimov. People experience significant changes in their lives every day in relationships, jobs, finances, responsibilities, etc. Then why is change so often difficult and painful? Change is often experienced as a kind of death. An end or loss of the way things were - a death to a particular way of life - and grief is a universal response to death. Grief is the experience of letting go, of saying farewell to something loved and familiar.



Changes in our workplace, job, or profession present unique challenges to our ability to cope. Work provides to the individual a sense of identity, purpose, and stability. Drastic changes in this area of life often bring on a period of mourning as we make the inevitable transitions and accommodations necessary to survive and hopefully, to ultimately, thrive.

This grief is experienced on many levels. Grief can affect us physically, causing such symptoms as sleep and appetite disturbance, fatigue, and even actual illness. Grief can affect us cognitively - altering our perspective, causing intrusive or obsessive thoughts, limiting our ability to concentrate and make good decisions. Primarily, grief affects our feelings. A whirlwind of intense emotions can threaten to overwhelm us. Anger, fear, denial, guilt, despair, confusion, sorrow... may all be part of our grief process. Grieving is not a weakness - it is the process through which we must journey to heal from our losses and move forward in our lives.

Grief is not a linear process and no two people grieve in exactly the same way. There is no right or wrong to this process and no particular time limit. What we can do is be proactive in our own healing - taking our next right step as we move through the process. (See “Next Right Steps on Page 7)

There will be good days and bad days as we adjust to the changes in our work life. Eventually we will find a new place of comfort and stability. We will find ourselves concentrating more on the world around us and less on our feelings of loss. We learn that we really are strong, we really can endure and that our lives, though changed, will go on.

“All changes have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.”

Anatole France

CHANGE ANYTHING THE NEW SCIENCE OF PERSONAL SUCCESS

Margaret Morgan, LCSW, CEAP

“Someday I want to.....
_____ (fill in the blank).”

Have you said this as many times as I have? Probably. We are good at finding reasons that we aren't doing it right now....focusing on obstacles. Maybe even believing that we should “feel like doing it” in order to do it.

Part of the challenge of creating change in our lives is that some of the things that would help us be successful are boring, uncomfortable or even painful. Sometimes it seems easier to live with the negative consequences of our current behavior rather than change.

The VitalSmart group (Crucial Conversations) has a new book and set of web tools available to help you move past the “someday”. “ChangeAnything.com is a social network that helps people change chronic behaviors for good. Based on the ground-breaking principles in the book, Change Anything: The New Science of Personal Success, it guides people through their unique change challenges in their personal and professional lives.”

Change Anything helps you to look in depth at sources of success or failure in change efforts. The authors contend that having a view of a single thing being the cause of failed change efforts is very limiting and misses information that if understood, can help an individual make meaningful and lasting changes. One big root of failed change is the belief that willpower will alone help us meet our goals.

“When people believe that their ability to make good choices stems from nothing more than their willpower—and that willpower is a quality they're either born with or they're not—they eventually stop trying altogether. The willpower trap keeps them in a depressing cycle that begins with heroic commitment to change, which is followed by eroding motivation and terminated inevitably by relapse into old habits.”

“Then, when the built up pain of their bad habits becomes intolerable, they muster up another heroic but doomed attempt at change. We feel as if we were ascending a summit when in fact we're simply walking a treadmill: lots of effort, no progress. That's the willpower trap.”

The model is based on six sources of influence on change efforts. Below is a summary of those six sources:

Source 1: Love What You Hate-make the right choices pleasurable

Source 2: Do What You Can't-develop skills that will help you reach the desired change

Sources 3 and 4: Turn Accomplices into Friends -look at the people in your life and have a crucial conversation about your goal and their role

Source 5: Invert the Economy-Bribe yourself to change...create incentives!

Source 6: Control Your Space-Look at how environment affects your change efforts.

If you are interested in moving past “someday” and moving forward, this book is an excellent resource. Your Employee Assistance Professional can assist you in your change efforts and be a powerful ally as you create your personal motivation statement and go about these changes in a scientific way.



Is Your Family Changing Into Something You Never Dreamed?

-Glenda Davis, LPC

While the image that comes to mind at the word “family” usually involves nurturing, warmth and stability, today’s reality about families is that they are far from stable. By its very nature, family composition changes. Two individuals come together and form a bond, bringing with them all their diverse backgrounds, their emotional baggage and even their eccentric relatives. From that bond, often spring children, who then grow up and leave. At some point, the bond may be broken and the family split. Children may live with grandparents or other relatives. Other relatives may move into the household. Adult children may return to live with their parent(s). While mental health professionals tell us that children need stability, it is very far from the norm for many - maybe most - families.

As we age, we find new challenging changes coming our way. Retirement, becoming the caretaker for our own parents, divorce after many years of marriage and health challenges are just a few. We must come to terms with our own mortality and that of our loved ones.

How can we deal with the inevitable changes in our family, for the sake of the children, our loved ones and for our own mental health? We gain our image of how a family should operate from our own family of origin and other families we were closely involved with. But suppose your family begins to diverge from anything you have known before, what then?

“What you call yourselves and how people refer to you as a family greatly impacts your children, who are constantly trying to figure out where and how they fit into your modern family.”

~Kela Price

Be flexible. Don’t try to mold your family into a model that no longer fits it.

Example: Your own parents never divorced, but you find yourself divorced, remarried and a step-parent. The way you learned to parent from your parents does not seem to be working in this situation. Your parenting style will have to adapt.

Be patient. If no one’s health or safety is at risk, you benefit by doing nothing rash. Many problems will work themselves out in time.

Example: Blended families need time to become a cohesive unit, otherwise they may become “blendered” families. Rather, think of the combining of 2 families as a crock-pot dish where you put all the ingredients together, set the heat for low and wait.

Communicate. Don’t assume that other family members are on the same page. As families go through transitions, all family members should be open about how those changes are affecting them and what the new norms will be. This is especially important in a 2 parent home as both parents need to be in agreement about how to deal with the effects on the children.

Get help. When you find yourself in unfamiliar family situations you need a navigational aid, just as if you are in a new territory and need a map. This may involve learning a new language – such as the texting shorthand used by teenagers. It may involve reading books or articles written by those who have knowledge about similar situations. Or, it may involve finding a guide who is knowledgeable about these changes.

Your AEAP consultant can help with counseling, referrals, resource materials and support. We don’t just see individuals; we see families and couples also. You don’t have to try to do this on your own.

Retirement = Change

Betsy Johnson, LCSW

I've begun to think ahead to retirement, and sometimes I dream about how nice it will be to do whatever I want, whenever I want. However, I know myself too well - when I have unstructured time, I tend to laze about and daydream and end up feeling like I've wasted time. This led me to a little project - what do I need to do now to prepare for the future, and how do I really want to be spending my time when I'm ready to go down that road? There are some obvious things that come to mind - taking care of my health and my retirement account, for instance. But what about the day to day, the hours that work fills up for me now?

I started talking with friends and co-workers who have recently retired did some reading, and started thinking about this time of change in a different way. As one author puts it: "The magic and the curse of retirement is that it is the same as your earlier life; it is all up to you. You can pursue whatever you wish. Just be careful what you wish for." (Roiter, 2008: Beyond Work: How Accomplished People Retire Successfully)

Many people, like me, need some structure to their days, and turning off the time clock may require some major readjustment. Every activity becomes a choice to be made. How do you structure your leisure time now? Are you spending all your time on the weekends running errands, taking care of the house, and watching TV? If so, can you imagine doing that 24/7?

As Bill Roiter also points out: "Our choice of how we spend our energy and time is closely related to what we consider meaningful." What is important in your life now? Will it sustain you when the stress and pressure of work subside?

What about your social life? For many of us, our work friends are the people we spend the most time with. When you retire, will you be taking that circle of friends with you?

Think about how much of your identity is wrapped up in who you are as a worker. If you retire completely, you will lose that identity. You will no longer defined by what you do so much as by who you are. When we immerse ourselves in our roles as worker, spouse, parent, or caregiver, however satisfying that is for us, we may lose a sense of who we are and what our guiding passions are. On the other hand, if we find passion and meaning in our work, maybe we will choose to continue some kind of work in a different way, at a slower pace, or as a consultant or volunteer.

(Cont'd on Page 8)



Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.
— Mark Twain

FEEDING THE WOLVES

An elder Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me...it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

This same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too." They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied..."The one you feed."



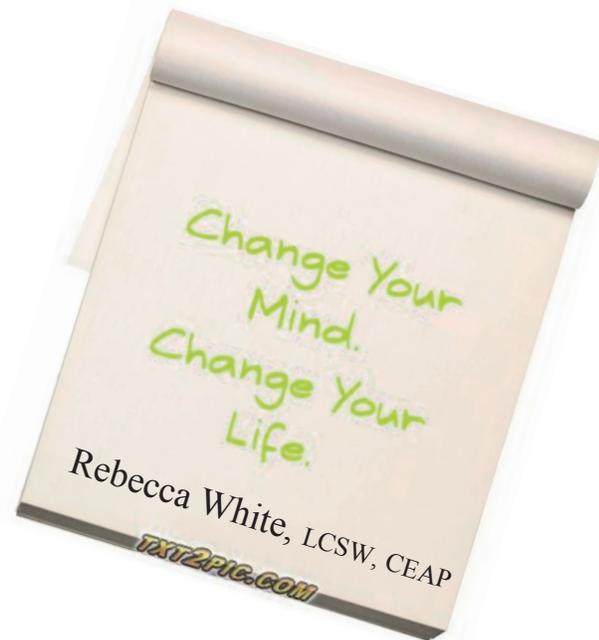
It **IS** possible that changing your mind might just help you feel better!

Over the years, we develop many habits in our lives....some helpful....some not so much. This can happen with our thinking patterns as well....some are helpful and some are not. If you find yourself feeling more negative in life, feeling more distressed or even anxious or depressed, take a look at your thinking patterns.

Thoughts play a big role in how we feel and how we behave. Thoughts don't cause all problems; however, you can change some dysfunctional moods and behaviors by changing some of your thoughts and assumptions. For example, if you are thinking, "This always happens to me....I'll never figure it out and no one will help me", how will you react to those thoughts? Will you give up? Will you avoid asking for help? Will you feel alone, helpless or hopeless?

Look at the list of Unhelpful Thinking Styles (next page) and ask yourself if you fall into any of these styles of thinking. Once you have identified unhelpful thinking patterns, you can begin to challenge them, change them or distance from them and begin to see your situation in a different light. So maybe now you are thinking, "Sometimes this happens when I try it....I'll figure it out....I know who can help me". What is your reaction to those thoughts? Will you keep trying? Will you ask for help? Will you keep figuring things out?

Your Employee Assistance Professional can assist you in this quest to Change Your Mind and very possibly, help you Change Your Life!



Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking

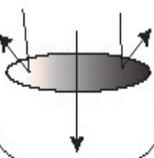


Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'.

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

$2 + 2 = 5$

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser

I'm completely useless

They're such an idiot

Over-generalising

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

"everything is always rubbish"

"nothing good ever happens"

Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Personalisation

Blaming yourself. Taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

"this is my fault"

Thriving in Change (cont'd from page 1)

Self Care: During change it is important to take care of ourselves physically and emotionally. Remember, with big changes in our lives, sometimes we have to let go of the familiar past and embrace the future. This will involve the grieving process. We will go through denial, anger, depression, maybe guilt, trying to bargain to prevent the change, and finally acceptance. Let yourself go through this process while practicing some of the other tips in this article. Pay attention to your physical health. Eat healthy and get aerobic exercise if possible. This will help deal with the stress of change. These are good things to make a part of your rituals and routines as mentioned earlier.

Humor: Humor is good medicine for you during change. Exposing yourself to laughter and humor causes some of the same chemical changes in the brain as regular aerobic exercise does. So, if you can't exercise, expose yourself to humor and laugh a lot. As you know comedians live a long time. Just think about George Burns and Bob Hope. Keep a copy of Readers Digest around and always read the section entitled Humor the Best Medicine. It will do your body good.

In summary, in order to thrive in change, adopt a pioneer attitude, increase communication, maintain your rituals and routines, take care of yourself emotionally and physically, and maintain a sense of humor. If you find that in spite of your best efforts you are struggling, consider professional consultation to help you navigate those life changes!



The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit provided by your employer. Your employer contracts with EAP as a result of a commitment to the well-being of valued employees. EAP provides counseling, information and referral (if indicated) for employees and their immediate family members. EAP's are ideal for individuals and families experiencing personal distress, or simply seeking to improve health and well-being.

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Next Right Steps (cont'd from Page 3)

What you can do is be proactive in your own healing - taking your next right step as you move through the process:

- Surround yourself with supportive, positive people - constant negativity is a drain you cannot afford.
- Learn all you can about the changes you are experiencing and evaluate how these changes will actually impact you in your day to day routines.
- Decide you will survive these circumstances and your own intense emotions. Find a peaceful place to "feel your feelings."
- Now or later find a place to talk about your experience. A trusted friend, a loving spouse or a supportive counselor can provide a safe place to explore feelings. Telling your story is an essential part of healing.
- Take control of the small things that are within your power - recreating and reclaiming your place a little at a time.
- Continue to take good care of yourself physically - sufficient food, sleep and exercise will keep your body strong in this difficult time.
- Continue to do your work - there is power and healing in the act of doing.

Retirement=Change (cont'd from Page 5)

The consensus is this: **if you want to have a good life after retirement, the best way to plan for that is to have a good life NOW.** That is, your interests and hobbies, your social life, your travels, your fun-filled adventures, and your relaxing moments are not going to magically fall into place the moment you walk out that office door for the last time. Think about your life as it is right now. Are you stuck in a rut? Do you enjoy your leisure time? Do you have a circle of friends outside of work? Do you have a hobby or pastime that you look forward to? Think about the things you enjoyed when you were young – sometimes this can give you a clue about new directions to pursue.

One more thought. Are you running too much and not taking enough time to relax? Remember the original meaning of Sabbath: a day of rest. If you took a day off and did not let yourself get involved in home or work projects, what would that day look like for you? Remember that you may have many of these days . . . sometime in your future. Would you like to spend those days in meaningful and enjoyable pursuits? Activities that leave you tired and happy at the end of the day, not bored and dissatisfied?

It's your life and only you can know what makes you happy. Dream on, think about your future, and find a way to begin walking toward those dreams. Why wait?