

Personally Preparing for Change

by Mark Samuel

Whether we like it or not, change is all around us. The organization embarks on a new change effort, and just as our new processes are steady enough for us to come up for air, another change effort is announced.

Change efforts are inherently disruptive, and we must cope with disruption effectively for the change to succeed. We must avoid victim behaviors, like finger pointing, and be prepared to assume our role in the change effort, even when changes seem to come from outside our sphere of influence.

Sometimes being ready for change means anticipating or initiating change so that we stay one step ahead. However, this could lead into the trap of thinking that we can always control the change, which will ultimately leave us unprepared. Change is not necessarily to be controlled. I learned this hard lesson when my father died in the hospital after a successful surgery that went awry. If we can't control the changes, then what steps can we take now to get ready for them?

Step 1: Keep Moving

Responding to change is like any athletic endeavor: you must keep limber and loose, so that your body can respond without pulling a muscle. With regards to your personal life, it is important to keep moving and progressing, and avoid becoming too sedentary or comfortable in one position.

Identify things that you would like to change. This could include habits that you want to change, or activities that you want to begin doing again or that you haven't done before. Make the change an uplifting experience, one you can feel proud of or enjoy after the change is made.

One way to stay limber is to alter your daily routines: vary your route to work, rearrange the furniture in your office, or sit in a different chair at the dinner table. Altering mundane activities helps to keep us adaptable and ready for change.

Step 2: Stay Aware of Change Around You

Staying aware of change simply means keeping your ears and eyes open for changes involving the people that impact you. Start by asking your customers and internal suppliers about changes they experience, the frustrations they encounter, and the goals they achieve. These serve well as indicators of change.

Simply put, we are impacted by the people around us, and the changes that affect them eventually affect us. If we are aware of their change, we may see our next change; it's like Strategic Planning for ourselves as individuals.

Step 3: Prepare for Change

Based on the anticipated changes around you, take time now to prepare for the ones that

could impact you. For instance, if you see teams forming in your workplace, attend a team building class, or ask your manager and peers to provide you with feedback on your team skills. Ask yourself: "What training or skill development do I need to respond to current trends in my industry?"

If your organization is downsizing, find out what you can do now to prepare yourself for your role in the new organization, or for leaving the organization to find a new job or career. It doesn't help to keep your head in the sand and pretend that the change won't affect you, so be watchful and take steps to prepare yourself for changes you foresee.

Step 4: Giving Up Control, Not Command

Setting a clear intention to give up control without losing command can be a very freeing experience. This is a process of continued growth that may change the way you see the world. Few of us ever master this particular step, but we can still reap the rewards that giving up control can provide, like less stress, less crisis, greater joy, and greater peace.

While setting a clear intention is a way to begin the process, there are a few steps that you can take to move your process along. You can agree to allow others in your life to make decisions that you normally make and move into acceptance of their decision even if it isn't what you would have chosen.

Take a day to "go with the flow." If your initial plans change, follow and see where it takes you. This could be a wonderful adventure. As you go with the flow, notice "coincidences" that support you during the day.

I remember being upset when a house that I wanted to buy was sold before I could make an offer. It was the first one I really liked after many months of searching. I took command by not letting my disappointment take over, and the very next week, I found a better, less expensive house. I went with the flow, not knowing where it would lead, and thus avoided getting sidetracked by disappointment.

We are ready for change when we have enough trust in ourselves and can respond to change when life deals us a wild card. Being ready is ultimately an internal process that we can develop and strengthen through flexibility, feeling our emotional responses without reacting, and by observing the wonderful things that happen in our lives that we didn't plan, anticipate or prepare for beforehand.