

coping with change

Terrified of change? Find out how to adapt positively to your changing world.

Change is exciting and scary. Change can demand great sacrifice. Change is many things to many people. It exposes our fears and diminishes our perceived sense of “control” over our lives and fitness careers. In every case it requires adaptability to survive. Fitness pros who don’t adapt often find themselves extinct, left behind, paralyzed or stuck.

How can you learn to make change easier and less terrifying? The key is to discover practical skills, attitudes and actions you can use in the face of change.

Experiencing Change

Change can mean different things, both positive and negative, for different people. In what ways do you define change? Keep in mind some of the following positive words related to change:

- different or radically different
- a new course or direction
- to exchange or replace with something else
- to modify
- a fresh perspective or look
- to pass to a new phase
- to lose an identity and gain a new one
- liberation from sameness or repetition

We all experience change in our lives. It happens daily, weekly, monthly and yearly. Most changes are slow and subtle, but some are so devastating that we react with shock, numbness and debilitating depression. We age, lose our jobs, lose friends and family through death, end marriages and friendships, move from one place to another, and switch careers in the quest for more income.

One of the shocking changes I experienced involved my career as a personal trainer. I was happy and comfortable in my role as the head personal trainer at a commonly owned group of five health clubs in the early 1990s. I had a flourishing business that completely supported me. I liked and trusted the owner and was free to run the program as I chose. The life-altering moment of change came the day the owner called me into his office to break the news that he was selling his clubs and that new ownership would take over the following month. What I did not fully comprehend at that time was that the new owners would require the whole staff to leave, because they wanted to hire their own.

Talk about terror! My entire income rested on that club. What did I do? Over a period of a couple of weeks, I transformed in-club clients to in-home clients and found another fitness center in the area to train those who had no interest in training at home. Initially, change was about survival. Little did I know that this change would become my sole motivation to build the profitable in-home training business I have now operated for 14 years. It appeared that I was losing everything, when in reality I had so much to gain. The key in coping with change is being patient in the transition. I had to grieve and come out on the other end with a new plan. So, how can we make change tolerable and palatable for us?

Attitudes and Actions for Mastering Change

So much in life boils down to attitude. With the right attitude, change can always be the gateway to something better, more fulfilling, more satisfying and expansive. Such was the case for me. Counselor Barbara Nedderman, LPC, in Grapevine,

Texas, provided me with the attitudes and practical actions necessary to cope with and master change. They can help you as you wrestle with change in your life.

Attitudes

Accept Change. Change is a natural part of life. People who do not like change naturally resist it. Anticipate and expect change. A healthy mental perspective accepts change and faces it as it comes.

Make the Best of Change. Because change is inevitable, we must choose to make the best of it. Focus on the positive and on health-producing options. Recognize the negatives, but do not focus on them. There is always treasure in the darkness. Look at change from a strength perspective. How did you cope effectively before?

Gain New Insights. Change may disturb us, but it reveals areas we need to work on. What did you learn? What do you need to alter?

Actions

Be Real. Experience the full gamut of your emotions. Feel them, talk about them and deal with them. Let them heal you. Stuffing your emotions will stunt healing.

Practice Positive Talk. Tell yourself positives until you begin to believe them. Write positive phrases on note cards and post them where you will read them several times per day.

Eliminate the Negative. Quit the pity party, and stop calling yourself or others names. Refuse to let negativity become your new attitude.

Maintain Hope. Understand that in every change and new situation, you have at least three options. What are they? Think creatively here. Look at your situation from every different angle, and get

friends to help. For example, let's say the club where you have been training clients has just been sold. What will you do? Three possibilities might be (1) meet the new owners and decide if you can—and want to—continue training there; (2) look at the change as the perfect opportunity to begin your own in-home business, since you have wanted to do that for years; and (3) look for a better location to train your clients, since the club is a long commute for you and you want to work with new clientele.

Agile Adaptability

The human mind is one of a kind. It can generate thoughts, beliefs, feelings, emotions and attitudes. However, it can also get in our way by allowing us to create false beliefs, overanalyze things and generate fear. Two-thirds of our thoughts are fear-based. And in the majority of cases, our fears never materialize! Many of us grow bored to tears because we are stuck in routine. Laziness keeps us there. Change forces us out. The key to being not only adaptable but agile at change is to memorize and practice these steps:

1. Expect change. (Life will change this year.)

2. Anticipate change. (Watch the trends.)
3. Keep an eye on change. (Take notes.)
4. Adapt quickly. (Get in front of the pack.)
5. Enjoy the benefits of change. (“There is something better out there!”)

For example, if you are a personal trainer, here's how you might apply these five steps:

1. Expect change: Business will probably slow this summer.
2. Anticipate change: Three clients are going on 2-week trips in June and July.
3. Keep an eye on change: Business has been slow the past three summers, and I need to come up with some new money streams or take a vacation myself during this time.
4. Adapt quickly: I need to plan a summer vacation now. I also need to organize special summer workshops or group classes and start advertising them in April.
5. Enjoy the benefits of change: The variety in summer gives me a nice break from routine, and I get to take some time off!

To successfully manage change, we must believe that every change in our lives frees us for a better opportunity, a chance to grow and thrive and to move out of

monotony. Yes, I too can fear change. But instead I choose to look forward to a future of change, because it means growth, learning and the possibility of more fun!

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suffering of the stubborn

If you constantly practice the following beliefs and behaviors, they will make successful change an improbability for you.

False and Limiting Beliefs

1. This great situation will never change.
2. It has always been this way.
3. This is mine.
4. It (and only it) makes me happy.
5. It is owed to me. I am entitled to it.
6. I am so special; it will not happen to me.
7. This is all I know (or am willing to know).
8. I can't or won't do anything else.
9. If I ignore it, it won't happen to me.
10. If things change, I will *lose* something (versus *gain* something).

Poor Behaviors

1. becoming overly comfortable
2. counting on security
3. building my entire life around something
4. worshipping something with my time and money
5. being prideful, boastful, arrogant and egotistical about my situation
6. becoming blinded to reality by denying it or fighting it
7. overanalyzing change before I do anything about it
8. wallowing in self-pity or shame
9. passively waiting for life to be different; becoming immobilized and paralyzed
10. banking all my plans on my current situation

wisdom of the willing

Adopting these attitudes and practicing these strategies make change a more positive experience.

1. Know that things change constantly.
2. Watch daily for subtle changes, and take notes.
3. Don't put all your eggs in one basket in case it is dropped and you lose them all.
4. Keep your eyes open to what is going on in the world around you.
5. View change as gaining something new versus losing something familiar.
6. Visualize something new and wonderful in the process of change.
7. Quit assuming the worst.
8. Smile and take life less seriously.
9. Understand that life moves steadily on.
10. Realize that the same behavior will just get the same results.

Want to learn more about change? Check out *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal With Change in Your Work and in Your Life* by Spencer Johnson, MD (Putnam Adult 1998).