

Embrace Change with Power and Purpose

According to James Baldwin, the American novelist, “Most of us are about as eager to be changed as we were to be born, and go through our changes in a similar state of shock.”

Regardless of its nature, we need to embrace change with power and purpose. While there may be some change we do want, I also refer to those changes we do not want or seek. It is the challenge found in the unwanted and significant changes that truly tests our character.

Resilience, fear, and letting go are three factors we need to address when responding to change.

As humans, we have physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. Our emotional and mental bodies are similar to our physical in that without exercise and challenge they become flabby and lose tone. Our spiritual body does not so much get flabby. Rather we disconnect from it and lose sight of the being we are, or become aware we never have truly known who we are. It is our relationship with who we are that gets flabby. Change is the catalyst for encouraging and requiring



Changes, a new new mind-set required

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Abstract

Working through change powerfully and purposefully requires that we address three factors: resilience, fear and letting go.

Keywords

Act, assert, attend / presence, authenticate, assertive, authentic self, fabricate, fight, flight, freeze, fear, personal change, resilience

First Published

22 June 2016

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“whole-of-being fitness”. How cleanly and powerfully are you able to respond to change? Does change throw you into a stressful place? Can you ride the wave of change and maintain your composure? The **fitness of our whole being forms the basis of our resilience**. Physical health, emotional intelligence, mental acuity and a powerful sense of who we are amidst change ensures we are internally resourced.

Fear is a natural reaction to change, even when we want the change. We fear losing the status quo, our current state. There is comfort in the familiar. We don't KNOW what the end state will be like, even if the grass seems greener. There is the **motivating force that pushes for change**, and our **reactive fear that retards our fluidity**. If the reactive fear is greater than the motivational force, we are stuck.

When faced with fear we tend to be reactive and the four F's come into play: **FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE and FABRICATE**. The first two are instinctual, reactions driven by the reptilian brain, the amygdala. Freeze is related to higher brain function becoming overwhelmed with information and decisions, and shutting down. We

become stuck. Fabricate relates to creating or projecting a mask, a false image, like a chameleon changing colours, so we don't have to fully face what we fear. It is a learned behaviour, often from our childhood, used to cover our fears. Whether belligerence, shyness, a whimpering "poor me", these devices seek to control the actions of others in relation to us. We often use fabricate so fluently, these manufactured behaviours become confused with our personality, embedded patterns.

When I received the surprising news that I had a six cm benign tumour in my brain I left the specialists office and told my wife, Juanita, very matter-of-factly that I had a life threatening condition that needed urgent surgery. An observer could have misjudged me as being remarkably calm. I certainly portrayed calm. I was in fact overwhelmed, emotionally closed down. I coped by distancing myself from my emotional world. I was fabricating calmness. All natural, understandable, and in fact necessary. Time and space was needed for me to internally process and get my ducks in a row. However, I had to move past this initial reaction and connect with what was really going on for me to powerfully and purposefully work with the change.

To move forward powerfully, we need to bring the fullness of our being forward. We need to change our F's to A's. Fight, flight, freeze and fabricate need to transform to **ASSERT, ATTEND, ACT and AUTHENTICATE**. Assert who we are and what we need. Stay present. Take action. Be real and call on others to be as well, in themselves and in relationship with you. Then we are responding to change rather than reacting.

For the first few days I maintained my calm demeanour. There was also some overwhelm, self-pity and helplessness. I couldn't be bothered looking for ways to be powerful or purposeful. Knowing the specialist was referring me to a surgeon, I was prepared to let the hospital process take its own natural course. My wife proactively followed up on it and found it was stuck in the system and would have never got to the surgeon without intervention. I would be dead without her efforts.

My overwhelm shifted. I took ownership of the process. I researched the tumour, and thoroughly understood its impacts and what the surgeon could do, and what the implications would be. By the time I saw the surgeon he was telling me what I already knew, apart from the date for surgery. A friend was a grief counsellor. In speaking with her, she suggested I actively enlist the support of friends as that would make the process easier for me and Juanita. I informed friends in various networks I was part of about my situation. I had been a facilitator of programmes for men for a number of years. I attended a meeting of men and shared my news, my terror and my uncertainty. I experienced a wonderful outpouring of love and support. That grew when the network of several

thousand men were informed. We had friends from all around the world in a vigil while I was under anaesthetic, praying or otherwise actively sending positive energy in my direction. Over 120 people were on the update list who chose to be kept informed of my progress for the first few months. Many of those who were local visited me as I had strength to receive them. As shocking and frightening as the news was for me that I had a tumour, I never would have learned the power and support available in such time without it. It really was quite humbling. There was more good will available than I had the capacity to receive.

However, the surgery was only part of the journey. I found that as the post-surgical reality set in, I had enormous grief related to loss of function – primarily hearing, balance, and emotional composure. From time to time, uncontrollable grief welled up, and I would burst into tears for no apparent reason. I would have fits of rage, something entirely alien to me before surgery. These, among others, told me I was not functioning correctly, that I was broken. That is where the third major factor came into play. I had to let go of being who I had been and learn to accept my new self. Over time many of the extremes have disappeared, but my emotional world is much more volatile than it used to be, and some of the qualities I really liked about myself prior to surgery have been lost. Part of the process of letting go has been to reframe my new reality into something meaningful and workable for me. Reframing provides the brain with rationale for why the new situation is okay, positive, good. Once the brain becomes can then settle and find new and productive ways of working within the new context.

This experience has been a series of challenges for me. I have not always managed to embrace the change with power and purpose. In fact, sometimes I have struggled against my new reality, a thoroughly futile thing to do. However, I have never lost sight of the fact it is up to me, no one else, to create the life I want moving forward.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 8 (Befriending Pain) of:

Harrison, S. G. (2012). *Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*. Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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While potently and patiently supported by my wife, who has been my rock, it has still been up to me to positively move forward, to assert myself, stay present, take action and be real.

What challenges are you currently facing? How could you strengthen your response to the changes so you claim

and maintain your purpose and power? Whatever it is you face, I wish you potency and strength to face up to the challenges. May you find your resilience, your way to overcome your fears, and a means for letting go of what is no longer available in ways that work for you.