

## Responding to Change

The Western world is in an uproar over the predicted-by-some, yet surprising-to-most, election win by Donald Trump. For me, the event and its aftermath is a fantastic example of what many experience as “unwanted change”, and the behaviours that manifest at such times. This is a fantastic public theatre of what occurs on a smaller, often ignored, scale within organisations undergoing change, planned or unplanned, welcomed by or imposed on the employees. This article highlights some of the more obvious behaviours being exhibited and highlights some considerations that may create a more positive outcome at an individual level.

We have seen significant grass-roots responses to unrecognised needs by those in power in the form of Brexit. Now a surprise (to some) Trump victory. As life giving as change can be, it is not always positive. Enough wars show change can be damaging. Fear is palpable now. For many groups, if Trump seeks to fulfil his intent stated in his campaign speeches, there are real threats to loss of rights and liberty. Some of his early choices suggest he intends honouring, as far as possible, what he promised during his campaign.

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### Abstract

*When confronted with change there are common behaviours, not all of them productive. This article explores common behaviours exhibited following the 2016 Trump election, and challenges the reader consciously choose productive responses rather than be in a reactive framework.*

### Keywords

Act, assert, attend / presence, authenticate, conscious self, fabricate, fight, flight, freeze, organisational change, personal change, personal power, self-leadership, self-responsibility, survive reactions, thrive responses

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*“I have to find safety. My home is disappearing!”*

Based on some of the more obvious behaviours being demonstrated since the Trump election win, here are some ways people react to change:

- **Polarisation and strengthening of positions:** Ardent fighters for and against a change strengthen their positions and fight it out. The fight may be peaceful, or might descend as low as individual human morality allows. There will be a mixture of those aggressively assailing others with a different point of view, whether physically, emotionally or through power over. Others will assert themselves, clearly identifying who they are and what they stand for, without imposing on others. Mahatma Gandhi and his followers' non-violent protests of British rule is a good example of the latter.
- **Run away and hide:** This may be observed as people and groups getting busy with something else, a way of distancing from the pain of loss and occupying themselves with something they have control over. It may be literally exiting the scene, leaving the country, becoming a hermit, or otherwise divorcing self from the challenge of being or staying engaged.
- **Filter reality:** Notice how many proponents of each side argue, using only the information (often opinions of others rather than real facts) that supports their view, and ignore anything counter to their position. This also shows when others are accused of falsehood when citing something that is counter to the position held. The media are getting a lot of flak for beating up situations if they merely mention something that doesn't support promoted views.
- **Normalisation:** "Give him a chance", "Wait and see" and in a practical sense, sitting on one's hands. Then, almost as in a frozen state of numbness nothing is said or done as ongoing change initiatives bring into reality the worst nightmares of those who voiced fear of the worst. For example,
  - Steve Bannon, former head of alt-right nationalists' recommended media source, Breitbart News, appointed as Chief Strategist
  - Myron Ebell, a global warming denier, as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency
  - Trump's own children being put forward for cabinet and advisory roles, and simultaneously running his and their own businesses, with a simple, "You can trust us." Very basic ethical principles are trampled underfoot, and seems to be widely accepted as okay. Not if anyone else tried it!
- **Disavow any responsibility:** "I don't know", "I didn't realise this would happen?", "How could

I know?" Or as in Seth Meyer's case, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, when challenged on calling Bannon 'controversial', he was unwilling to give an opinion because he had not met the fellow conservative. Seth Meyers, of the *Closer Look* program, called Meyers on this side-step well when he said, "I've never met John Wilkes Booth, but I let his past work inform my opinion of him." It is as though many are running for cover and refusing to say anything that may impact their future position with the one in charge. They could do with taking Lucy Gennaro McClane's advice to Matt Farrell in *Live Free or Die Hard* (aka *Die Hard 4.0*), "You need to grow a bigger set of balls!"

When facing change, we each have choice. We can allow fear to overcome us and react to what is happening from that place. We rely on the fear-based survival reactions fight, flight, freeze and fabricate. Alternatively, we can function from our personal power, and manifest the power-based thrive responses assert, attend, act and authenticate. The former requires little consciousness from us, with our amygdala (or reptilian brain) reacting to threat. The latter requires conscious choice and self-intervention to assure we behave in a manner that is of our choosing. The thrive responses also require that we are clear about and are congruent with our values, not relinquishing them when the going gets a little tougher.

What I experienced as warm, heart-felt and assertive was the plea and invitation offered to Vice President-Elect Mike Pence by the cast of *Hamilton* at the end of their show. The play was themed around freedom, the constitution and diversity. After the final curtain call, Brandon Victor Dixon addressed Mr Pence, inviting him to listen, and said:

*"We, sir, are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us — our planet, our children, our parents — or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope this show has inspired you*

**For more information related to themes in this article, refer to:** Harrison, S. G. (2012). *Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*. Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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*to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. All of us.”*

***New York Times, 19 Nov. 2016 ([link](#))***

Debate is as polarised around whether this was appropriate as it is on many other issues related to the election and subsequent events. One of the bigger questions is how to voice disagreement in an environment that seems hostile to any opinion counter to the future Commander-In-Chief.

While I have used very public examples from the follow-on of the Trump election, these behaviours often occur

in change situations. The choices you make in response determine your contribution to the outcome. When confronted with change, particularly change you do not welcome, what do you choose to do? Do you voice concerns you hold? Do you assert what matters to you? Do you shrink away and leave it to others to work through? Do you get overwhelmed and find it all too much, unable to find anything you can constructively do? Do you look for what you can do, stay engaged and take some action? Do you blame others for what has happened? Do you act from a place of personal responsibility and ownership and attempt to help shape next steps?