

The Power to Change

What's in it for me? Master the power to change.

"The only constant is change." The origins of the saying are unknown, but the idea goes back thousands of years to the ancient philosophers of both the West and the East. And it's even truer today, in an age of unprecedented change. Think of all the upheavals that have happened in recent years, including Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. And think of all the current transformations likely to accelerate in the years ahead: global warming, artificial intelligence, automation, genetic modification, the gig economy – the list goes on and on. Now, more than ever, happiness and success are a matter of rolling with the changes the world throws your way and playing an active role in making change happen in your own life. But how do you do that? In these blinks, you'll learn

the difference between a Burning Platform and a Quantum Leap change; the predictable patterns of how people react to change; and the steps you can take to help yourself cope with the most difficult changes.

Changes happen in a matrix of four possibilities: big or small, and self-initiated or externally imposed.

Imagine you're standing on the edge of an oil platform somewhere in the North Sea. You look down and see dark blue, bitterly cold water churning a hundred feet below you. The last thing you'd want to do is fall. But now imagine a fire is raging behind you. The flames are unstoppable. No ladder is in sight. You need to get off the platform right away or you'll be burned alive. So what do you do? You jump. This burning platform scenario provides a vivid metaphor for one of the four types of changes that can affect people's lives. What are they? And how do they relate to your everyday life – a life that hopefully doesn't involve oil platform catastrophes? To answer that question, you first need to understand something the author calls the change matrix. The key message here is: Changes happen in a matrix of four possibilities: big or small, and self-initiated or externally imposed. Whenever you're dealing with a change, there are two fundamental questions you can ask about it. First, does it have a big or small impact on your life? And second, did you initiate the change yourself, or has it been imposed on you by other people or circumstances? By answering these questions, you get four basic possibilities, which, together, form the change matrix – a way of classifying changes. On the less impactful side, you could have a small change that's externally imposed, like your city switching the garbage collection day from Tuesday to Thursday. Or you could have a small change that's self-initiated, like getting a new haircut. The same division applies to the more impactful side of the matrix. You could have a big change that's externally imposed, like getting laid off because of a corporate restructuring. The author calls it a Burning Platform change. Like that oil platform fire scenario, it's a major, life-changing event that you didn't choose for yourself and that often requires an equally major, life-changing response. Other examples could include losing a loved one, getting a serious illness, or – on a happier note – winning the lottery. Alternatively, you could have a big change that's self-initiated. The author calls this a Quantum Leap change. It's one of those pivotal moments where you take a giant step forward, like

switching careers, getting married, or moving to a new city.

People's reactions to big changes generally follow a curve.

Small changes are relatively easy to handle. But bigger ones, like Burning Platform and Quantum Leap changes, are another story. These are transformative events in the most important areas of life, like love, health, and career. That makes them deeply personal, emotionally charged, and difficult to navigate. The details vary from one big change to the next, but the general ways people react to them are surprisingly predictable. If you were to learn that you have cancer, you'd probably react with shock – the typical first reaction to a Burning Platform change. It's usually followed by a series of subsequent reactions that can be visualized as a curve: the Burning Platform Change Curve, for short. The key message here is: People's reactions to big changes generally follow a curve. After the initial stage of shock, the Burning Platform Change Curve swoops downward, as you descend into increasingly negative emotions and behaviors. The next stage is denial. In it, you think things like, It can't be true; I'm too young to get cancer. When the truth becomes undeniable, you then reach the anger stage. This is unfair, you shout, shaking your fist at the universe. Next comes fear. Terrible images of chemotherapy, death, and grieving loved ones might fill your mind. Finally, you sink into depression – the trough of the curve. You may wallow there awhile, but eventually, the curve starts bending upward. You come to understand and accept the change, and then you can move on to the next stage of your life. Quantum Leap Changes have a curve of their own. Imagine you've decided to start a new career. At first, you feel excitement about the adventure ahead. But then, as the curve descends, you fall into apprehension, wondering, What if I don't succeed? Next comes fear, as you start to think, Oh no, I'm going to fail! Finally, there's remorse – that's when you find yourself saying things like, Ugh, I should have never quit my old job! Assuming you don't give up at this point, you'll eventually start climbing out of these negative thoughts and emotions by adopting a sense of rational optimism – the next stage of the Quantum Leap Change Curve. This is where you rationally acknowledge that your situation is tough while at the same time optimistically reminding yourself that you can handle it. But it's not enough to just repeat a bunch of positive self-affirmations; you have to invest them with genuine belief in your ability to succeed – the last stage of the change curve. Then you'll be ready to embrace the change – getting yourself fully on board and ready to make it happen.

Some ways of navigating the difficult parts of a change curve are healthier than others.

What if you could just skip the negative stages of your change curve and jump straight to the positive ones? That might sound nice, and it does happen sometimes. But usually, it doesn't – and that's okay. The curves are normal human reactions to change – and that applies to both their peaks and their troughs. Consider the depression stage. Why do you go through it? Well, every Burning Platform change involves a loss – the loss of your job, your partner, your health, or whatever the case might be. Even if it's a positive change, like a promotion, you're still losing something, such as the comfortable

familiarity of your old position. When you experience a loss, the natural thing to do is grieve – and that’s what the depression stage is about. It’s a completely healthy thing to do, as long as you handle it in a healthy way. The key message here is: Some ways of navigating the difficult parts of a change curve are healthier than others. There’s no way to sugarcoat it: loss hurts. It takes time for the pain to go away. And as anyone who’s ever experienced the loss of a loved one knows, grieving is a necessary step in the healing process. You need to let yourself experience it. But you also need to prevent your grief from turning into self-blame or victimhood – two of the most common and harmful directions it can go in. Imagine your spouse has filed for divorce. This might make you castigate yourself for losing your marriage, believing that it’s all your fault. Or you might pin the blame on your former partner or in-laws – anyone other than yourself. This, in turn, allows you to cast yourself as the helpless victim. Neither way of thinking is healthy or productive. Regardless of why your marriage ended, you need to let yourself grieve your loss so that you can understand it, accept it, and then move on. Self-blame and victimhood are toxic ways of avoiding this process. Similar lessons apply to the other difficult stages of change. It’s natural and normal to experience anger, misapprehension, and fear. In fact, you may have good reasons to feel these emotions! In any case, don’t try to repress or ignore them. That just makes them fester. To move forward, you’ve got to let them out and confront them in the open.

To escape victimhood, recognize and reconfigure the destructive thought patterns behind it.

Saying you should avoid victimhood, let out your frustrations, and confront your fears is one thing. Actually doing so is another. So how exactly do you do it? Well, most importantly, don’t just hope that negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors will magically disappear. And don’t try to chase them away, bottle them up, or berate yourself for falling prey to them. Instead, acknowledge them, and then work on moving them in healthier, more productive directions. To start the process, make sure you’re avoiding victimhood. The key message here is: To escape victimhood, recognize and reconfigure the destructive thought patterns behind it. If you’ve already fallen into the trap of victimhood, don’t chastise yourself over it. That’s just moving to the opposite extreme of self-blame, which is equally unproductive and unhealthy. Instead, start climbing out of it. How? First, acknowledge what you’re doing and realize the danger it poses. By casting yourself as a helpless victim, you’re absolving yourself of any responsibility or power over your situation. Now, there might be an element of truth to this. For example, you may actually not be responsible for or have any power over the corporate restructuring that led to your layoff. But you do have control over how you respond to it. By forgetting this fact, you’re disempowering yourself. By remembering it, you’re putting yourself back in the driver’s seat. Next, think of the victimhood trap as a triangle consisting of three people. First, there’s you, the Victim. Then there’s a second person, the Persecutor – someone you think has maliciously wronged you, like the boss who fired you. Finally, there’s a third person, the Rescuer – someone who treats you like a victim and tries to comfort you. Maybe it’s a friend or colleague. They usually mean well – they just want to help – but instead, they end up reinforcing your sense of victimhood. To get out of this triangle, reconceptualize the Persecutor as a Challenger and the Rescuer as a Coach. For instance, you could think of your boss as giving you the challenge of taking a new step in your career, and you could ask your colleague for

coaching on how to take it.

Identify your fear, so you can productively engage with it.

Suppose that after getting fired, you decide to start your own business. Great! That's taking a Burning Platform change and using it as an opportunity to make a Quantum Leap change. But that means you're also about to take a ride down the Quantum Leap Change Curve. First comes the excitement of starting a new chapter in your professional life. But then comes apprehension, which soon develops into full-blown fear. And what exactly are you afraid of? Well, the precise answer to that question will depend on your personality and circumstances. But generally speaking, it'll fit into one of three categories: fear of failure, fear of the unknown, and fear of blame. Once you know which category your fear fits into, you'll be in a position to do something about it. The key message here is: Identify your fear, so you can productively engage with it. Quantum Leap changes often entail significant risks, so it's understandable why they can provoke fear of failure. What if your business goes bust? Well, what if indeed? What's the worst that could happen? Rather than recoiling from this thought, confront it head-on. Mull it over. Lay out the probable consequences of failure. The worst-case scenario usually isn't the end of the world, but it can seem that way as long as it remains a vague, unexamined figment of your imagination. Fear of the unknown is even more straightforward. Are you afraid you don't know how to start a business? Well, learn how to start a business! Do some research. Talk to mentors. Find out what it takes. Afraid you're lacking certain skills? Look into your options for learning them – and then do it! In other words, use your fears as calls to action and clues about which steps you should take next, rather than reasons to give up. Finally, fear of blame boils down to a fear of looking bad. Imagine someone floats an idea for running your business differently. If you adopt the idea, it could be seen as an implicit admission that there was something wrong with the way you were previously running it. That can make you feel defensive – interpreting the idea as a criticism and then rejecting it as such. But it's usually not a criticism; it's a suggestion – an idea that's meant to help you. See it as food for thought, rather than a threat.

Respond to difficult emotions with openness, empathy, and a constructive attitude.

Imagine you work through your fears, and they prove to be unfounded. Your business is a roaring success! Congratulations. You're now the leader of a sizable company, with a number of employees working under you. One day, you decide it's time to take another bold step forward: a major restructuring of the company. That's exciting! Another Quantum Leap change – for you. But for your employees, it's probably going to feel like a Burning Platform change. And that means you should expect them to slide down the Burning Platform Change Curve – greeting your initiative with anger and fear. What should you do? Well, the same lessons that applied to your emotions apply to theirs: don't repress. Allow, acknowledge, and engage – the more openly, empathetically, and constructively, the better. The key message here is: Respond to difficult emotions with

openness, empathy, and a constructive attitude. If you're in a leadership position, provide your team with the space and time to process the negative emotions of the Burning Platform Change Curve. Remember: those emotions are natural and normal reactions. Show empathy. Your people are going through a difficult experience, and they need your support. With that in mind, invite them to share their thoughts and feelings. Hear them out, and be open to what they have to say. At the very least, this will allow them to get things off their chests – and you may very well gain some valuable information, ideas, and suggestions along the way. But what if you're not in a leadership position? What if you're one of the employees in the previous scenario? Well, find a way of constructively putting your fears, frustrations, concerns, or doubts on the table. The key word here is constructively. Don't just spew them out. Unless you've got the most empathetic boss in the world, that's probably going to get you in trouble. Not only that, it's unproductive. Your thoughts and feelings are likely to be rather raw and half-baked at this point. You haven't examined them yet. Before you voice them to others, voice them to yourself. For example, what exactly are you doubtful about? And are those doubts well-founded? If the answer is yes, then go ahead and express them. Just make sure you do so in a respectful, amicable, and constructive manner – and stay open to the possibility that your doubts could turn out to be unfounded in the light of further information.

To maximize your chances of success, build resilience, create favorable conditions, and seek out help.

Many obstacles can get in the way of making a big change. You now know some of the main hurdles you're likely to face: the negative emotions and behaviors of the Burning Platform and Quantum Leap Change Curves. You also know how to overcome these challenges. But now that you're ready to make a change, how do you actually make it? Well, the details depend on what kind of change you're making. Starting a new business entails very different things than, say, starting a new relationship. But to give yourself a leg up with making nearly any sort of change, there are some general steps you should follow. Many of them draw on lessons you've already learned, but they extend the underlying principles even further – tying them together into a powerful approach to making change happen. The key message here is: To maximize your chances of success, build resilience, create favorable conditions, and seek out help. Change is difficult. Even after you've made it past the low points of the change curve, you're likely to face all sorts of other setbacks, challenges, and vexations before you reach the finish line. The more resilient you are, the more you'll be able to weather these storms. Fortunately, resilience is a trait you can strengthen. Two of the main ways you can cultivate it are by developing skills you've already learned about: managing your emotions and keeping ahold of your agency. Remember: you can't always control what happens to you, but you can control how you respond to it. Negative events and emotions may be inevitable, but you can minimize their effect on you by adopting a thoughtful, hopeful, and proactive mindset. Believe in yourself; trust in your ability to overcome your obstacles. But don't make things more difficult than they have to be. Create favorable conditions for success by changing your routines and environment to remove unnecessary challenges. For example, if you're trying to lose weight, you could change your route to work to avoid that fast-food restaurant that's always tempting you to cheat on your diet. Finally, don't go it alone. Seek support. If you're experiencing a Burning Platform change, that

support will ideally come from the person or organization imposing it on you. But if that's not the case, find someone who can be your coach, and get help from your family and friends.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Whether they're self-initiated or externally imposed, big changes often provoke a predictable series of difficult emotions and behaviors. Fortunately, you can anticipate them and learn how to handle them in a healthy, productive way. And here's some more actionable advice: Make a plan. You wouldn't start a business without a business plan. Apply the same idea to yourself. If you want to make - or if you're being forced to make - a big personal change, create a personal change plan. To get started, answer the following questions. What events, factors, or trends led to the change? Why do you want it to happen? Or why does it need to happen? What's your objective going forward with it? What are the likely consequences of achieving that objective? And what are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats you'll muster and encounter along the way? Or in other words, do a SWOT analysis on yourself!