



Change Ability: Ready or Not?

By Jean Ann Larson | Submitted On June 06, 2013



All of us have different strengths and challenges around how we experience, process and deal with change in our professional and personal lives. It is helpful to look at our change capabilities with a multifaceted approach. I have identified eight dimensions of change readiness that will help you assess holistically what you are vulnerable to during change and transition as well as highlight strengths that you can harness to help you learn and grow through the experience of change and transition.

Flexibility

Flexible people have goals and dreams like everyone else, but they're not overly invested in exactly how they turn out. When something doesn't work out, they'll say, "Plan A doesn't work, let's go to Plan B." If you are highly flexible, you are generally able to take things in stride. If the situation changes, your expectations shift right along with it. If you are not flexible, you may be very set in your ways and you may not like it when goals or expectations change.

Tolerance for Ambiguity

The one certainty surrounding change is that it causes a lot of uncertainty. Without a healthy tolerance for ambiguity, change is not only uncomfortable; it's downright scary. If you have a high tolerance for ambiguity, it indicates that the fact that not everything is defined or under your control does not threaten or frighten you. If your tolerance for ambiguity is low you may tend to feel that any kind of change, new direction or idea, seems threatening and scary.

Resilience

Resilience is that quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Resilient people take delays, obstacles and setbacks in stride. Failure or mistakes do not throw resilient people. They don't dwell on them or get depressed. They bounce back quickly and move on. If you are resilient, you are more able to bounce back from the setbacks you experience in your life. On the other hand, if you have low resilience, you may feel hit particularly hard

when something doesn't turn out the way you had hoped; and it may take you longer to recover from setbacks.

Adventurousness

Two ingredients capture the adventurous trait: the inclination to take risks and the desire to pursue the unknown or to walk the path less taken. Adventurous people love a challenge. If you are highly adventurous, you may frequently ask, "why not?" when it comes to taking risks or exploring new options. You are often the ideas person and innovator on the team. However, if you do not have this trait, you are probably very risk averse and do not like to try new things. You may be suspicious of anyone suggesting a new way of doing things or suggesting that you try something new.

Optimism

Optimism is highly correlated with change readiness since the optimist recognizes opportunities and possibilities while the pessimist observes only problems and obstacles. If you are highly optimistic, you believe that things always work out and you find encouragement and hope in every situation. If you are not optimistic you may be the one who can too easily see the possible bad outcomes of any situation. You may be perceived as overly cautious, pessimistic, fearful and negative.

Confidence

If optimism is the view that a situation will work out, confidence is the belief in your own ability to handle it. There is Situational Confidence - "I know I can swim across this channel, learn this program, write this report", and Self-confidence - "I can handle whatever comes down the pike." Self-confidence is what is most critical for dealing effectively with change. Thus, having a high level of confidence indicates that you are an individual with a strong sense of self-esteem. You believe that you can make any situation work for you. Having low self-confidence indicates that you may be lacking in self-esteem and have a lot of self-doubt about your abilities. The only impact of change that you can envision is one that brings bad news and more difficulties into the situation.

Passion or Drive

Passion is the fuel that energizes all the other traits. If you have passion, nothing seems impossible. On the other hand, if you don't have passion, change can seem exhausting. Passion is your level of personal dynamism. It shows up in your level of intensity and determination. Your passion helps propel you forward and get things done. To make a new procedure work, to overcome the myriad of problems that any plan for change may produce, you must have passion, enthusiasm and drive. Being highly passionate can help you move through even the most challenging and difficult changes even when others doubt it can be done. However, if you are too passionate, you may come across as somewhat pushy, bullheaded and stubborn. You may also be at risk of burning out and at times you may not be able to see and deal with obstacles. If you have low passion, you may come across as lacking in drive, energy or the ability to get difficult tasks done. You may give up too easily when a bit more perseverance would help you be more effective.

Resourcefulness

Resourceful people are effective at making the most of any situation and utilizing whatever resources are available to develop plans and contingencies. They see more than one way to achieve a goal, and they are able to look in less obvious places to find help. They have a talent for creating new ways to solve old problems. Being highly resourceful indicates that you always find an answer or solution even when others have given up or when they tell you that everything has already been tried before and won't work. Individuals who are not resourceful at all may dig in their heels, and go back to the old way. They have a difficult time finding solutions and methods to address new or challenging situations.

Conclusion

Ideally, we would be strong in all eight of these traits. However, this is not the case for most of us. Most likely we have both strengths and weaknesses in our ability to handle change. Your goal should be to identify and become aware of any traits where you feel that you are strong or weak and be mindful of the caveats offered. Being aware of them helps you take advantage of those traits that can help you deal more effectively with change while minimizing those traits that don't serve you as well. Also, another strategy is to seek out other perspectives from colleagues who have different strengths and weaknesses on the traits than you do.

Dr. Jean Ann Larson is a keynote speaker, author and consultant on leadership, performance excellence and business strategy. She has been helping leaders, teams and organizations build their capabilities for over 25 years. If you or your team wants to learn more about how to harness your "change-ability" strengths, please contact me for a free assessment at jeanann@jalarson.net or <http://www.linkedin.com/in/jeanannlarson/>

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