



Book The Change Cycle

How People Can Survive and Thrive in Organizational Change

Ann Salerno and Lillie Brock
Berrett-Koehler, 2008
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Recommendation

Ann Salerno and Lillie Brock bring good cheer and great advice to a potentially depressing topic. Millions of people face altered lives and circumstances they never imagined possible. They have to change their lives in unexpected ways without preparation. The authors present their six-step “Change Cycle” as a simple, practical way to understand how your emotions work during such shifts and what you need to do to get your life back on track after massive change. Each stage of the process helps you determine what you have to do to master change, and to get to the next stage of adaptation as quickly and constructively as possible. By cheerfully emphasizing the present, and by showing you how to take small, effective steps into the future, Salerno and Brock help you realize that success is possible. They use real life stories to illustrate the ideas and principles they want you to try. *BooksInShort* thinks this easy-to-read, breezy manual will help those who are dealing with job loss, involuntary job change, mandatory relocation or other traumatic shifts.

Take-Aways

- Change can come in the form of a new workload, relocation or separation.
- During big changes, adjust your frame of reference about how the world works.
- To survive drastic shifts in your life, embrace the six-step cycle of change.
- Step one is adapting to new realities. Drop any expectations that keep you from moving ahead.
- Step two is to move away from fear. Instead, base your life on opportunity and hope.
- Remember that rain falls on everyone; resist clinging to being a victim.
- Step three is getting motivated. Don’t use worrying about the future as an excuse to do nothing now.
- Step four is taking action. Movement, even in less than an ideal direction, allows you to change course.
- Step five is realizing how conquering change benefited you and brought out your best qualities.
- Step six is integrating change, learning from the journey and sharing its lessons.

Summary

The Only Constant Is Change

Change is a fact of life. Your company probably engages in multiple change initiatives that require you to alter the way you work and to learn new skills. You might be required to move or you might even lose a job you thought was secure. Choosing change is one thing, but having it imposed on you without warning and with no choice can be a difficult, life-wrenching experience. Most people feel anxious when they hear rumors of change, and even more anxious when they confront it. If not managed,

this anxiety can spin out of control and become destructive.

“Change comes in all shapes, sizes and intensities...Sometimes it sneaks up on us...sometimes we are lucky enough to choose when and how it happens.”

If you understand and work with the six stages of the “Change Cycle,” you can cope with your anxious thoughts as you go through each stage. Don’t passively accept change that is forced upon you. Address it by understanding and using the change cycle. You can learn techniques and exercises that will help you constructively engage in the change process, and end up stronger, more flexible and more experienced.

“Change Cycle Stage 1: Moving from Loss to Safety”

Sudden – especially big – change can be shocking. Uncertainty causes fear and fills you with a sense of loss. You long for what you once had, and feel that you’ve lost your sense of security and control over your life. Such feelings are common and can occur even when the big change seems positive. If the change is negative, for instance, if you have been fired, you also may lose your feeling of self-worth. With this comes a sense of paralysis and an inability to act. You may feel trapped in a dark cold mist that makes you unable to understand anything beyond emptiness and insecurity. When you try to think clearly, caution impels you to resist making decisions or taking action. This can be healthy because another part of you probably wants to try anything to fix the situation. This stress-induced pressure to act rashly can turn a difficult situation into a disaster. Listen to your instinct to go slow, but don’t get frozen in place. The only way out of these woods is through them. The option of turning back is gone and the sole route to safety is ahead of you. Specifically imagine the worst possible outcome and you will see that it is almost certainly not as bad as your emotions portend.

“Our attitude in change is either the key to a locked door, or a spring that makes an open door slam in our faces. It’s our responsibility to choose well.”

By choosing your direction and ultimate goal, you regain control. Knowing where you are headed helps you recapture a sense of safety. Avoid the tendency to generalize about your current situation. Thinking about what always seems to happen, or harping on why certain people always do this or that, will not help you. Instead, work toward clarity by pinpointing aspects of the nature and magnitude of the change you are experiencing. Identify a specific change you are undergoing and the specific losses you are feeling because of it. Which loss is the most difficult, and why? Then recast all this information into a single, positive statement. This positive emphasis will help you begin your recovery.

“Doubt is the brain’s hard-wired way of slowing us down in an unfamiliar situation so we take time to gather information before acting.”

Don’t try to fix everything by making one sweeping gesture or by pretending that the change will go away on its own. To better manage your anxiety, remember that others in your organization are probably going through the same process. If you listen to them, you might well pick up information that can help you.

“Change Cycle Stage 2: Shifting from Doubt to Reality”

Once the initial shock of change wears off and you begin moving through the woods to someplace new, you will naturally feel angry that you have to deal with all the thorns and mud. You may be furious at your old company, your past boss, and maybe even some co-workers who seem to have come through the situation more quickly and easily than you have. Many people get upset with themselves, which is rarely constructive. Worse, your annoyance may spill over and hurt those who matter to you most, and who are in no way responsible for your current difficulties. In fact, they probably have been doing the most to sustain you.

“Properly managed, anger can be a catalyst.”

You also may feel resistant. Some unexamined, unmanaged emotions may cause you to act in ways that you think will slow down or sabotage the process but that actually make things worse. At this stage, keep a sharp eye on your mental state, emotional energy and actions. Stay as constructive as you possibly can. Just as feeling cautious in the first stage protected you from acting rashly, taking care in the second stage protects you from negative skepticism. If doubt keeps you from acting or trusting in anything, it is undermining you. Dismiss it. You want the skepticism of a detective – check your facts and be as certain as you can of the evidence. Think deductively like the TV detective Columbo rather than pessimistically like Eeyore, the mokey donkey from *Winnie the Pooh*. By moving from doubt and fear to reality and evidence, you powerfully affect your ability to use your change experience purposefully.

“Change Cycle Stage 3: Going from Discomfort to Motivation”

Even though you are dealing with loss and doubt constructively now, you still have to eradicate your natural feelings of discomfort. You’re anxious, your thoughts jump around in confusion and, even when you’re busy, you aren’t getting much accomplished. Don’t let mental confusion sap your confidence, and don’t linger on thoughts that endlessly loop from blaming others to wishing uselessly that things were different.

“Where anger causes trouble is when we nurse it internally or go external with it in some out-of-control way.”

When you feel anxious, get some rest; stress is exhausting. Do exercise that is appropriate for your physical condition. Lethargy accompanies feeling anxious and down. Examine yourself for signs of distraction, constant worry about the future and an inability to prioritize tasks. Don’t take on big new projects or work endless hours to distract yourself from the change you need to confront. Instead, reframe your thoughts into positive statements. Look only at the next task rather than seeing the future as an endless sea you cannot navigate. Don’t wallow in feeling overwhelmed. Instead, admit that your workload is heavy, prioritize your activities and accomplish each task in order. Eat, rest, exercise and have some fun, too.

“Change Cycle Stage 4: Trekking from Discovery to Perspective”

You are now ready to make positive discoveries about your new situation. Anticipate taking on new tasks and challenges, and seeing what tomorrow will bring. Your new perspective will help you see the resources around you and release you to use them to move through the change cycle successfully. Former dead ends are now potential breakthroughs.

“The change has just given your mental muscles a workout – they’re stronger. Exercise them as often as you can. Maintain their strength.”

Remember how much energy you wasted being anxious, frightened and worried? Use that energy now to act positively and constructively. Where once you were confused and unsure, now you are able to move forward and realize that you can change direction as needed without getting anyone’s permission or feeling like a failure. Life is about movement and choices, even though some choices don’t work.

“A great thinker once said, ‘Confusion is the final step before learning.’ Which is all well and good, but the problem with confusion is it drags down your confidence and with it your energy.”

Changing direction can be very healthy. Your perspective on life is now broader and you have access to more information. Pay attention to how you make decisions and learn about your process with a view to improving it. Emphasize innovation, clear decision making and a sense of integration, both within yourself and in concert with those around you.

“Change Cycle Stage 5: Understanding the Benefits”

When you see the fruits of your hard work, your confidence in your ability to handle change will soar. You might still see the big changes you have made as difficult and even painful, but you can be proud that you picked yourself up and put yourself in a position to enjoy new successes. No matter what life throws at you, your experiences will give you the confidence to manage the challenges that change presents. Your new self-assurance will be obvious to others and their confidence in you will reinforce your own sense of achievement. Think about the value of teamwork and the powerful resources you have in your network of other people.

“If you’re hesitant about making a decision, is it because of what others might think or say? Is it possible you’ve made not-deciding a comfort zone?”

Now, take your thinking to a higher level. You no longer need to manage fear, your thoughts are clear, and you view opportunities and resources with flexibility. Don’t let your thinking become cumbersome by trying to deal with each complexity. Keep your models simple. If you fall into the trap of overthinking, you will move backward in the change cycle. Measure your progress by assessing the productivity of your decisions and actions.

“Once you have clarity about the change, you might be surprised to find that by dealing with the most worrying issue, other concerns tend to diminish.”

You will know that you are back to normal when you are making steady progress, your life isn’t full of ups and downs, and you aren’t working harder just to stay in place. Now, your motivation comes from deep within rather than being driven by external situations. Acknowledge all that you have accomplished and stay on this progressive path rather than losing momentum by rewarding yourself with a break. Don’t be obnoxious and hold yourself up as an example to others. People will see what you have accomplished and learn the lessons they are ready to learn. Provide support, but don’t undermine others’ progress.

“Change Cycle Stage 6: Experiencing Integration”

The change cycle offers some additional benefits. At this stage, you experience a sense of wholeness, of integration, of knowing who you are and why you have changed. Your satisfaction is a powerful indicator that you are close to the cycle’s last, highest stage or that you have achieved it. Your initial sense of loss and confusion is just a memory. You have accomplished so much along the way that you can take pleasure in your increased abilities, in where you are now, and in seeing how your fellow workers also have found ways to succeed. Not only are they not a threat to you, you now have the strength to reach out and help those who are still struggling. Don’t allow destructive feelings of conceit to derail you now.

“Having thought the thought, it’s time to walk the walk. You’re ready to meet job challenges brought about by the change. You’re ready...to dive in.”

When you analyze your thought process, you will see how focused you have become. You are now oriented to reality, able to prioritize and accomplish your objectives. While the end stage of this cycle is not sainthood, you now have the strength to be generous. You have the experience and sensitivity to teach the change cycle to those who are ready to hear about it and make the process work.

“‘Simplicity is the last thing learned.’ The statement is less a judgment on the value of complexity vs. simplicity, and more an observation about the process of understanding.”

Stay flexible. You have not reached a life stage where change will stop occurring. In fact, your life could be torn apart again later this afternoon. But, if you maintain a flexible approach and remember the lessons you have learned, the next change disruption might be painful, but it won’t paralyze you, because now you know how to work through it quickly and efficiently.

“Are you truly seeking further information, or is there something you’d rather not face or do?”

Don’t be like the tourist who goes through the trouble and expense of travelling to an exotic place only to stay inside a hotel that provides all the comforts of home. Get outside and learn from the journey. Look ahead, do your best to figure out what changes might come and prepare your life for them. With preparation, you have a foundation for whatever happens and you can see opportunity where others only see crisis.

The Power of Belief

Many athletes realize their dreams of playing professional sports after changing their positions on the team. Just because you played quarterback in high school doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be a receiver in college or the pros. Some college pitchers whose control and power isn’t quite enough to dominate the pros have found success as hitters. Refer to these examples of flexibility to boost your tenacity as you seek your place. By believing in yourself strongly and working ferociously, you can persist long enough to find opportunities that will get you where you want to go.

“It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.” [– John Wooden, legendary basketball coach]

The late, talented actor Christopher Reeve had a marvelous career as a handsome leading man until a horseback-riding accident left him paralyzed. He could easily have given up, but his friends rallied around him and he worked harder than ever. He directed films and gave his life to helping those with similar devastating spinal cord injuries. As he demonstrated, the key to mastering change is to accept the shift in your life, take a new path and believe in your ability to cope with whatever life hands you.

Don't take it personally, because change happens to everyone. You now understand the change cycle and you know how to transform those natural feelings of loss into new opportunities and accomplishments. What a powerhouse you have become!

About the Authors

Ann Salerno is a trainer, consultant and the author of four books. **Lillie Brock** is a speaker and facilitator, and co-authored *Caring Commitment and Choices*. Together they created the *Change Cycle Series*.
