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Change

Stage 1: LOSS
 Feelings of: FEAR
 Thoughts are: CAUTIOUS
 Behavior is: PARALYZED

Stage 2: DOUBT
 Feelings of: RESENTMENT
 Thoughts are: SKEPTICAL
 Behavior is: RESISTANT

Stage 3: DISCOMFORT
 Feelings of: ANXIETY
 Thoughts are: CONFUSED
 Behavior is: UNPRODUCTIVE

Stage 4: DISCOVERY
 Feelings of: ANTICIPATION
 Thoughts are: RESOURCEFUL
 Behavior is: ENERGIZED

Stage 5: UNDERSTANDING
 Feelings of: CONFIDENCE
 Thoughts are: PRAGMATIC
 Behavior is: PRODUCTIVE

Stage 6: INTEGRATION
 Feelings of: SATISFACTION
 Thoughts are: FOCUSED
 Behavior is: GENEROUS

Danger Zone

Two more questions at the start of our “change curiosity” were:

- Are there common triggers that interfere with people’s ability to understand and to take action concerning the changes they face?
- Could a more systematic approach to dealing with life’s changes assist people in how they manage variables and how they act during a transition?

The answer to both questions, we found, is yes.

When working with organizations in the midst of change, it is common to hear employees at all levels wishing another part of the organization would “get fixed” and that the change process would be smoother, easier, better. Managers want workers fixed, employees want management fixed—you get the picture. The bottom line is that every level of an organization can become more change-resilient, just as every individual at every level can. As human beings, we are self-correcting, once we know the way.

Self-correcting up to a point, that is. There are reflexes and non-conscious concerns—the triggers mentioned in the bullet point above—that come alive during a change situation, no more so than right at the beginning. The good news is, the more you know about these triggers—the things that impede acceptance and understanding of a change—the faster you can get out of the first two stages, *Loss* and *Doubt*, and the more freedom you create for yourself to act in a way that moves you through the change process.

But at the outset—when the change hits—you actually don’t want to try and “move” too much or even “do” too much. You might move (some even run) in the wrong direction. You’ve barely begun to process the new information, and your decision-making mechanism—your compass; your inner GPS—is not yet sitting squarely in its housing. Hence the “red” stages—red as in stop sign, as in the color of the traffic light. Your work-life has just changed. Life has just changed. Don’t try and run the red. Decelerate. Press the brakes. Stop at the intersection. Look left and right. A change can put you in a “fight or flight” mode. You want to do neither.

The light is red. Wait till it is safe to go.

Stage 1: Loss to Safety

We arrive in Stage 1 because our work-life has become different in some way. Maybe something is lost—a job, a promotion, a client. Maybe something is new—a boss, a project, a transfer. Change is standard equipment in any of those scenarios. The primary experience of Stage 1 is loss of control. And either consciously or non-consciously, our thoughts become cautious; we experience feelings of angst, maybe even fear. Our behavior gets paralyzed.

Even a perceived “good” change, if it is of significant scope, can evoke these responses. This first stage can be a difficult one, because like driving in fog, what you know about the road ahead is equaled by what you don’t know, and yet, for your own safety, you have to keep moving. It is important to acknowledge, not ignore or deny, your losses and concerns. Your priority in Stage 1 is to find personal safety—to regain a sense of control.

Key questions to answer: “How am I going to be affected?” “What’s the worst that can happen?” “Can I handle that?”

Stage 2: Doubt to Reality

Stage 2 finds us experiencing doubt and a disquieting sense of uncertainty. Doubt is the brain’s way of slowing us down, even stopping us from taking action, until more relevant information is gathered. Doubt often triggers defensive behavior as a way of maintaining control. This can lead to varying degrees of resentment, skepticism, and resistance that are counterproductive at best and in some cases even harmful.

Stage 2 can cause you to ignore the obvious and only see the picture your way, causing you to defend your view of the situation as if it were The Truth. Job 1 in Stage 2 is to move past fictions and step into reality.

Stage 2 can be dramatic in organizational change because emotions run high, and anger, accusations, and varying levels of mistrust surface to drive and distort communication. More often than not, there will be a sizable number of people within the organization who will use blame and who will fight to prove that “their way” or the “old way” is still better. They argue, lobby, protest. But change is not fair, even if we beg, demand, plan, or wish it to be. Stage 2 is the soapbox for organizational change complaints, home to currently running soap operas like *The Change and the Restless*, *All My Changes*, and *As the Change Turns*.

The Yellow Stages: Discomfort and Discovery

As in the world of your commute or drive to the grocery store, the color yellow in the Change Cycle means that you should exercise a little caution. You're not on the open road yet. It's not time to click on cruise control. You've got traffic, a cross street, a car waiting to turn left in front of you. Whether you're a “step on it” type behind the wheel or someone who slows down when you see yellow (you know who you are!), in the world of work changes, beating the light is not really an option. There's a limit to your powers of acceleration.

Nor would you want to floor it, even if you could. You're still getting your bearings, you don't quite see the way clear yet. There's still some mental fog.

Better things are ahead, but you're not quite sure how to get there yet.

Stage 3: Discomfort to Motivation

Stage 3—*Discomfort*—is characterized by anxiety, confused thoughts, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Together they add up to sluggish behavior. Here, we wait while the brain works to assimilate—to organize, categorize, and put language on the new change picture.

We feel informed but disjointed, and there is a natural tendency for productivity to drop and for even the normally well-organized person to become absentminded, lethargic, “off their game.” This can be a frustrating stage because by now employees have clarity about the change and what it will ultimately mean for them. Absenteeism is often high during this time. Planning for this predictable “slow-down” period is imperative, a smart investment for any organization.

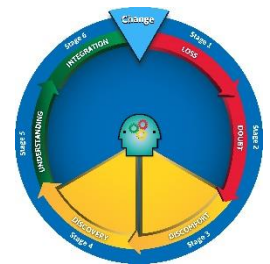
To break through, to move forward, in Stage 3, you need to decide on small steps to take and make a concerted effort to reengage your motivation and keep it sustained.

Those who can't find motivation? They may stall, even backslide. They've entered . . . “The Danger Zone.”

Stage 4: Discovery to Perspective

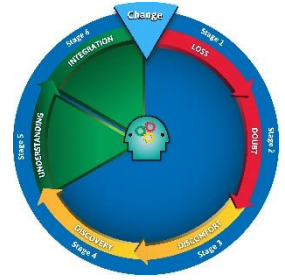
Issues in the first three stages were “problems to solve.” Here in Stage 4, *Discovery*, there are “solutions to implement.” Perspective—moving beyond constrictive thinking—is the reward in this stage. Your energy comes back. Your concentration returns. Your challenge is to take the created options, and make choices and decisions about the next best steps. A broader vision, a renewed decisiveness, bring a sense of control and optimism.

In Discovery, you learn to entertain opposing views as a way to widen your work and life lens. You search out optimal choices, eyes on both present and future.



The Green Stages: Understanding and Integration

Understanding and *Integration* are what you have been moving toward, the reason for your work of self-understanding and self-assessing. Understanding will have you doing some calm looking back at your change experience in order to glean insights to use down the road. That's not all that happens here, of course, but it is part of it. The Integration stage is where wisdom comes into play, and you find yourself looking into the future of your work and life with a cheering clarity of vision.



In these last two stages, you place a few final pieces into the change jigsaw puzzle and all at once you are looking at the complete image. No more hesitation or cautious looking left-right as the light is green and you zoom onward.

Stage 5: Understanding the Benefits

As we identify the benefits of the change, both short-term and long-term, our behavior becomes more insightful—and more pragmatic. We feel we finally have a good understanding of things. We've learned what it takes to make this change work, we've learned about ourselves; we've learned lessons that will be of use in the next work or life change. In this heightened "learning mode," we find ourselves wanting to take in as much newness, as much information, as we can absorb, both at work and outside work. We're confident. Productive.

To move on, we reflect on the deeper meaning of the change and the change process.

Are you "happy" in Stage 5? You might be. It depends on the change. As with all of the stages, this one can involve things we wish were otherwise. And of course some changes will never be completely reconciled, neatly packaged, or fully accepted. At times, crisis, chance, or nature force us to endure events that cannot be "managed well"—in any way—by anybody. Layoffs, downsizing, mergers, transfers, bankruptcy, project failures, burnout—and that is just at work. Change is not always easy or pretty. Life is a messy, mysterious, eventually fatal business, yet in Stage 5, we accept and understand that, like it or not, somehow we go on.

Stage 6: Experiencing Integration

Here we fully integrate our change experience into our life—at work and at home. Emotionally, we experience empathy and often find ourselves freely offering assistance to others who may not be as far along in the process. We feel a renewed confidence in our ability to flexibly adjust to the next round of changes life will bring. In Stage 6 people speak of having crisp focus and feeling contentment. Stage 6 challenges include avoiding ego and complacency, and elevating understanding into wisdom.

You've gone from "survive" to "thrive." You have insight into the ramifications, consequences, and rewards of the change—and you can clearly assess past, present, and future.

When whole organizations can consistently move to Stage 6, they are successful beyond the marketplace. They count—to their communities, their customers, their vendors, their stakeholders. "The Change" isn't a big transition anymore; it's simply the *status quo*.

When people can consistently move to Stage 6, they deepen their change resiliency, they're flexible through uncertainty, they move closer to their larger work and life goals.

Change 101

Change comes in all shapes, sizes, and intensities. It happens to all of us. Sometimes it sneaks up on us, sometimes it hits us over the head, sometimes we are lucky enough to choose when and how it happens. But it always happens. Growing up, we all needed a Change 101 class. This training is that class. No spitballs.