

CHANGE

The truth is that nothing ever stays the same and everything is constantly changing, sometimes almost imperceptible, and sometimes inescapable.

Change is an abstract concept. Am I creating it, or am I simply adapting to it? What I have experienced in the past has convinced me there can only be two outcomes to change:

- 1) Results I want
- 2) Results I don't want

As an integral part of the process, I define the relationship that I have with change through the results that it provides.

Even though change can be scary when it challenges my sense of control, I can act in a way that increases my chances of success by manipulating my sense of control.

Consider this for a moment: I live on a planet whose ecosystem is so precarious it could be hit by a meteorite and all life would be obliterated, the center of it is molten lava, yet I talk about control on this planet? As soon as I realized that my sense of control was an illusionary construct, I began to find ways to recreate it whenever I wanted.

I have always been ambivalent about change, which may explain my fascination with it. Although I am quite adept at dealing with the wanted results of change, I am not so adept at dealing with the unwanted results, that ironically have been responsible for my framework.

I was ten years old when my father was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident. Adapting to this change was devastating, but it taught me some of the most important lessons of my life, which are reflected in some of the concepts I discuss in this book.

Is there anything we can do when our sense of control is brutally challenged by change? What do we do when we are confronted with the impossible?

In my mind, I remember that the only thing I lost was my illusion of control and I can regain that illusion by focusing on situations or things within my control. By focusing on the here and now, I force myself to take small bites and gradually restore my sense of control by only eating what I can eat, then the next hour, then the next day.

A feeling of frustration arises when I am trying to control a situation that might not be in my control. I counteract this feeling by focusing on areas in which I have control, such as my breathing or my speech. Such techniques are referred to as "functional adaptations".

It is my responsibility to influence change by focusing on my choices, knowing that the results I desire are a natural consequence of my choices. In any situation I find myself in, I always have a choice to make, and when I fail to exercise this responsibility, I am asking "the system" to choose for me, further reducing my chances of achieving the results I desire.

Whatever my past choices may have been and however uncertain I may feel about my ability to choose in the future, I am still the one in the best position to understand which choices are best for me.

To achieve the results that I am seeking, I must own my decisions and take responsibility for them. I also must be willing to reinforce my chosen direction by repeating the appropriate steps until I am finally able to accomplish what I am after.

When I am mentoring anyone, I always remember that no method can solve every problem and that energy and resources are limited. Therefore, I introduce the idea very quickly that feelings and emotions aren't always important in adapting to change, and that the outcome is determined by our actions.

When I first arrived in Canada from Nigeria in 1987, I was constantly struck by how much everything was very different. Things that Canadians were very familiar with were very new to me, and I had a steep learning curve.

When I was riding public transportation in Toronto, a gentleman politely asked me, "Do you want to close the window please?" When I said no to him, he got visibly angry. The lady beside me whispered to me, "He wants

you to close the window.” My response was “why didn’t he say so?” He had actually done so, but I was unfamiliar with the Canadian manner of putting a request in the form of a question.

Could you close the window means that I should close it as soon as possible, will you close the window means that I had no choice and should close it right away, but do you want to close the window means that he was simply asking me whether I wanted to close the window or not, but not requesting me to do so.

I use this example because over the years I have come to understand how Canadian society is uniquely different from some of the other societies that I have been exposed to. I find that Canadians are very subtle with their requests and expect the same from me while I on the other hand have been brought up to be more direct and so I was often viewed as confrontational or upset.

I learned the hard way that passion can sometimes be mistaken for anger, and it was very important for me to modulate my voice tone and intensity to adapt to Canadian society. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of understanding the subtle aspects of change that are required to adapt to a new environment.

To perceive things, we must be able to define them, which allows us to remember them and allows us to recognize them when they are encountered again. Definition allows us to perceive things, which in turn enables us to adapt to them.

Even when my perception of things is wrong and I have defined things wrongly, this erroneous definition still impacts my reality and affects the way I perceive whatever is going on. Reality is created by the way in which I perceive things. Even though this may not be accurate, what I experience is what I think is going on, and my perception only changes as more information becomes available.

As an example, if I am afraid of snakes due to my perception that they are dangerous, I would treat a non-poisonous snake as dangerous until I gather more information that would change my perception.

When change is implemented properly, there is a good chance of getting the results that are desired. In many cases, the need for change arises

because of dissatisfaction with the current situation or status quo (I do not have the results I want), or because of situations that force a change of perspective or make it necessary to change things.

The fear of the unknown and the tendency to be more comfortable with what I know (even when it does not work well) make it easy for me to become resistant to change when it is required of me. I need to remember that it is difficult to influence others' behaviours, but I find it much easier to influence my own when trying to create change in others.

When I change myself (because I want to or because I must), everything around me changes as well. It is often my reluctance to change that hinders the change of others. Often, I am reluctant to change when compelled to change, but I am more motivated when I initiate or wish to change.

A lack of motivation for change is often the result of the person for whom the change is requested not fully appreciating the need for change. For a person to change, they must be compelled to do so if the undesirable outcomes outweigh the benefits of not complying. This can sometimes be used as a motivator when change is necessary, and the individual is reluctant to do it.

To introduce this "Model of Change," I start with a leading statement like "I have made some assumptions to facilitate our relationship. I will review them with you and encourage you to comment."

- 1) You are seeing me because a change **is required**. We don't know what the change is but know that it is required because we are aware that you are not completely satisfied with the status quo.
- 2) This **change has not happened**. We don't know what the change is, but we know it is required and we also do not understand why it has not happened. We simply know that the status quo is not fully satisfying our needs and that our hope has not yet been realized.
- 3) Through our interactions, we hope to **facilitate this change**. Although we don't know what the change is we know that it is necessary and that it has not happened yet, but we are invested in the possibility of it occurring.

4) **Change will happen.** Although we have many unanswered questions, we are fully invested in this change happening and we will not quit. We will find ways to facilitate this change.

I document the “Model for Change” when we reach a consensus so we can both remember the agreement. The agreement may need to be reminded as time passes, especially when motivation is low. Remember, this model is designed for people willing to participate in it. It assumes the individual is capable of some reflection and motivated to take the actions necessary to achieve their goals. This activity should not be undertaken by anyone who is pre-contemplative, uninterested, suffers from poor cognitive function, or is in an altered state of consciousness.

In my opinion, there is absolutely no problem starting with the assumption of success. It is imperative to remain focused on the process and to allow the outcome to emerge from the process itself. Even though some of the direct questions about the change have been asked in the past, these questions are merely starting points. It is important that there is flexibility so that the response to changes can be made even when they are not what was expected. Sometimes what is required differs from what is desired.

As we use this framework, we are often tempted to start with assumptions that elicit anxiety and discover that part of the reason was that these assumptions were not consistent with our process and that we would end up with unexpected and delightful outcomes if we changed things. People in distress are often stuck and have not yet moved on with the changes that they have experienced. Besides not adapting to the unwanted results of change, they have also held on tightly to memories of the past.

Points to remember:

The constant and ongoing process of change produces both the results you want and the results you don't.

To be functional, you should adapt to change in a way that allows you to gain more of the results that you want without getting more of those that you don't.