

CHANGE

Nothing ever stays the same and everything is different all the time, change is constant and ongoing, sometimes almost imperceptible and at other times completely inescapable.

Change is an abstract concept. Do I create change or am I simply adapting to it? My experiences have convinced me that change can only bring two outcomes:

- 1) The results that I want**
- 2) The results that I don't want**

Either way I am an integral part of the process and define the relationship that I have with change. I become aware of change through the wanted or unwanted results that occur from it.

Change can be scary when it challenges my sense of control, and yet this sense of control is an illusionary framework that allows me to act in a manner that increases my chances of success.

If you think about it for a moment, I live on a planet with a precarious ecosystem, hurtling through space at an amazing speed with a chance of being hit by a meteorite and all life obliterated, the middle of it is molten lava and yet I talk about control? Once I realized that **my sense of control was an illusionary framework**, I found ways to recreate that sense of control anytime I wanted.

I have always been ambivalent towards change and this may explain my fascination with it. Although I deal very well with the wanted results of change, I do quite poorly with the unwanted results, but ironically, they have been responsible for my framework.

My father was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident before my tenth birthday. The suddenness and finality of the change was devastating, but the process of adapting to this change taught me

some of the most important lessons of my life. This is reflected in some of the concepts that I discuss.

How do we respond when we are confronted with the impossible? Plunged suddenly into a situation that nothing before has prepared us for? What do you do when your sense of control is so brutally challenged by change?

I remind myself that the only thing that I have lost is my “illusion” of control, to get it back all I have to do is focus on situations or things where I have control. I force myself to focus on the here and now, what I am doing in the next minute, then next hour and next day and in this manner, I only bite off as much as I can chew and my sense of control is gradually restored.

When I feel frustrated, it is because I am trying to control a potentially uncontrollable situation. Once again, to counteract this feeling I focus on areas where I have control, for example my breathing or my speech. Techniques like these are “functional adaptations”.

I can **influence change by focusing on my choices**, realizing that, the results of change that I want are a natural consequence of the choices I make. I am always aware of the fact, that in any situation I find myself, I always have a choice to make and when I don't exercise this responsibility, I am asking “the system” to make a choice on my behalf, further reducing the likelihood that I will get the results that I want.

No matter how terrible my previous choices may have turned out, or how uncertain I may feel about my ability to choose in the future, the truth is, I am still the one in the best position to invariably understand which choices are the best for me.

It is important to **own my choices and take responsibility for them**, be willing to reinforce my chosen direction through repetition of the appropriate action, until I finally get the results that I want.

When I am mentoring anyone, I remember that no method can solve every problem, that energy and resources are limited, so I very quickly introduce the idea that although feelings and emotions are relevant, they are not always important in adapting to change. Our actions are what determines the final results.

In 1987 when I first arrived in Canada from Nigeria I was constantly struck by how very different things were. Most of the things that Canadians were very familiar with were very new to me and I required a very steep learning curve to adapt.

I remember riding the public transport in Toronto, a gentleman politely said, "do you want to close the window please?" I answered "no". I was surprised when he got visibly upset. The lady beside me quietly said, "he wants you to close the window". I replied, "why did he not say so?" He had actually done just that, but being British trained, I was not familiar with a request being presented in the form of a question.

Could you close the window, meant that I should close it when I could, will you close the window meant that I did not have a choice and should close it right away, but do you want to close the window meant that he was simply seeking my opinion on whether I wanted to close the window or not but was not requesting me to act.

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 often be mistaken for anger, modulating both the tone and intensity of my voice was a very important part of adapting to Canadian society. It also highlights how important it is to understand the subtle aspects of change that are required to fit into a new environment.

The ability to define anything is an integral part of the ability to perceive it, in turn, the ability to perceive something is an integral part of the ability to adapt to it. Defining something allows it to be remembered, giving it a name increases the ability to recognize it when it is encountered again.

Even when I have defined things wrongly and my perception of them are wrong, this erroneous definition still impacts my reality and affects the way I perceive whatever is going on. My perception of things creates my reality. What I am perceiving is what I think is going on and so it is what I experience, even when this may not be accurate. My perception only changes when more information becomes available to me.

For example if I am afraid of snakes because I perceive them to be dangerous, when I encounter a non-poisonous snake, I would treat it as dangerous until I gather more information that alters that perception.

When change is implemented properly there is a good chance of getting the results that are wanted. The need for change often arises because there is dissatisfaction with the situation or status quo (I do not have the results that I want), things may happen that force a change of view or present a need to do things differently.

When I am required to change, it is easy to become resistant because of my fear of the unknown and my tendency to be more comfortable with what I am familiar with (even when it is not working well). When trying to create change in others it is important for me to remember that it is hard to influence another person's behaviour but it is much easier to influence mine.

The only thing I can (because I want to or because I have to) change is myself, by doing this, everything around me changes. My reluctance to change will often impede the change in others. The motivation to change is often low when I am being compelled to change but the motivation is stronger when change is something I want or have initiated.

Generally when the motivation for change is low it is often because a need to do this is not well appreciated by the person in whom the change is requested. When a person is compelled to change this change may only occur if the unwanted results 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 so.

When introducing this “**Model of Change**” I start off with a leading statement such as, “I have made some assumptions to facilitate our relationship, I will review them with you and encourage you to let me know if you agree or not”

1) You are seeing me because **change is required**. We don't know what the change is but know that it is required because we know 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 know why it has not happened but we simply know that the status quo is not fully satisfying our needs and that our hope for our needs to be met has not occurred.

3) Through our interaction we have hope that **we will facilitate this change**. Although we don't know what the change is, we know that it is required and also 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.

When a consensus is reached on the “Model for Change” I document it so that we can both remember “the agreement”. It may be necessary as time goes on to remind ourselves of the agreement especially when motivation is low. Remember this model is intended for someone that is willing to engage with the process, capable of some degree of reflection and motivated to use the tactics that

would bring about the change that they want. It is not intended for someone who is pre-contemplative, uninterested or with poor cognitive function or in an altered state of mind.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with starting with an assumption of success but it is important to stay focused on the process and allow the outcome to develop from the process. Even though some direct questions about the change have been asked prior, these questions are simply starting blocks and so there should be a certain amount of flexibility that allows a response to the change that is occurring, even if it was not the change that was expected. Sometimes what is needed is different from what is wanted.

When using this framework, often times we may start out with a set of assumptions that are anxiety provoking and discover that part of the reasons for this was these assumptions were not consistent with our process, by changing things we would end up with outcomes that were both unexpected and delightful. Often times when I see people who are in distress they are stuck and have not moved on with the changes that they had experienced. Not only had they not adapted to the unwanted results of change but they have held on tightly to the memories of how things were.

Points to remember:

Change is constant and ongoing producing **results that you want** and **results that you don't want**

To be functional adapt to change in a manner that allows you to get more of the results you want and less of the results that you don't want.