THOSE CHANGES KEEP COMING!

HOW TO WORK WITH CHANGE INSTEAD OF AGAINST IT

Barbara Rowe, Washington and Lee University
“Our constantly changing workplace demands that we regularly take a fresh glimpse and reinvent how we work.”

Michael Carroll
Awake at Work
Plan for this session

- Look change and our resistance to it
- Personal choices to affect a healthier response to change
- Five practices to manage change in your life (e.g. work)
- Consider change we thrust upon others
- Leave time for your ideas and input
Ancient and modern wisdom

- Rick Hanson 2011 *Just One Thing, Developing a Buddha Brain One Simple Practice at a Time*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
Change happens...

- Filtered water system in my refrigerator breaks
- Three new neighbors moved in within six months
- My daughter moved to Little Rock and I’m empty nesting
- W&L new classroom scheduling system last fall
- W&L new credit card system in December
- W&L new president in January
- W&L new registration system next month (!!!)
- U.S. Presidential election
Resistance

“All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.”

~ Anatole France

- Normal, not bad or wrong
- Reaction can be ‘tight’ or ‘open’
- Respond with anger, irritation, anxiety, sadness, excitement, melancholy…
Wired, but we can re-wire

“There’s a traditional saying that the mind takes the shape it rests upon: the modern update is that the brain takes the shape the mind rests upon.” ~ Rick Hanson

◦ Use your mind to change your brain
◦ “experience-dependent neuroplasticity”
◦ Transform anxiety, resistance, frustration to calm strength, self-confidence, inner peace
◦ All it takes is practice
◦ Kindness to yourself
Resistance

The Practice

◦ Be aware, in a non-judgmental way
◦ Take note of emotions, then make a choice
◦ Say ‘yes’
  ◦ Accept facts the way they are
  ◦ Not resisting, even if you are trying to change them
  ◦ Doesn’t mean you like the facts
  ◦ Breathing exercise: Breath in calm, breath out yes…
Work is a mess

“The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.” — Nathaniel Branden

- Work, by its very nature is unpredictable and messy, chaotic and surprising

- Works inherent chaos and messiness should be expected... it need not be distressing
Work is a mess

**The Practice**

- Accept the aspect of messiness, then relax about it
- Be open to surprises and interruptions
- Messiness is springboard to:
  - Ingenuity
  - Curiosity
  - Adaptability
  - Innovation
  - Good humor
Don’t know

“Resistance at all costs is the most senseless act there is.”
~ Friedrich Durrenmatt

◦ We are ‘know-it-alls’
◦ A mind that is open is spacious and can absorb a lot of new information
◦ A mind this is already full – assumptions, preconceived ideas – has a hard time learning anything new
◦ Find our way back to the openness of a child’s mind, a beginner’s mind, a ‘don’t know’ mind
Don’t know (related to change)

The Practice

◦ Be especially skeptical of what you know is true
◦ In conversation, don’t assume you know where other people are headed… (watch for your reactions)
◦ Ask yourself if it’s important to you to be a person with the right answers, the one who knows.
◦ Notice how relaxing and good it feels to lighten up about needing to know (or be right)
Do what you can

- Stephen Covey's circle of influence.
- Circle containing things you have influence over, and circle of things you’re concerned about
- Focus on the shared border – that’s what you can do
- Trying to control things that you have no control over causes suffering, helplessness, frustration...
- Accept the limits of your influence
Accept the limits of your influence

“If you’ve been pounding your head against a wall for a while, it’s time to stop, accept the way it is, and move on... Don’t try to grow roses in a parking lot.”

~ Rick Hanson

The Practice

◦ When faced with some fact you can’t change, ask yourself “Can I accept that this is the way it is, whether I like it or not?”

◦ Notice good feelings, even mixed with painful ones

◦ Notice that acceptance usually brings you more resources for dealing with life’s difficulties
Your present job is going away

“To be awake at work is to acknowledge that the entire situation – our job, our version of ourselves at work – is fluid and constantly changing.” ~ Michael Carroll

- No ground, no guarantees, just now
- Pay attention, and appreciate, what’s happening with your job now
- ‘pioneers of the immediate moment’
- Why does this make us anxious?
  - Anxious not because of reality of uncertainty, but because we continually struggle against it
At times of risk and stress, cultivate stillness

The Practice

◦ Take a fresh glimpse and adapt
  ◦ Often when we need to innovate we grasp at our routine even stronger (its familiar)
  ◦ Reflection: Ask yourself, am I holding on? Can I let the routine go? Can I let go of my point of view or the way it has always been done? Am I listening?

◦ Mindfulness practice of ‘letting go’
  ◦ Abruptly shift attention from our thoughts to the immediacy of our physical environment (see, smell, hear, touch). Breath
Other tidbits

◦ “Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional”
  ~ Rick Hanson

◦ Our choices
◦ Be realistic
◦ Say goodbye to things
◦ Develop humility
◦ Be compassionate and forgiving
◦ Don’t personalize
◦ Take heart
How we affect change on others

“If you want to make enemies, try to change something.”
~ Woodrow Wilson

- Be aware, and put yourself in others shoes (empathize)
- Tend to the causes
  - You are responsible for the causes you tend to
  - You can relax your attachment to results
  - Focus less on results and more on the causes improves the odds of getting the results you want
Let Things Change

- Drop the struggle to “hold on” to resist change
  - “I accept the reality of change... things are changing and I can’t stop it...”
  - “I wish it weren’t but it is...”
  - “Even as things change, I will do what I can to help them go well..”
- Understand that nothing is fixed or permanent (go with the flow)
- Not!
  - Don’t care, give up, allowing unwholesome changes
Let Things Change

Why?

- See the whole picture, recognize that countless other people are dealing with the same kinds of changes that you are
- It can be a healthy gift to yourself to let things change – soften, calmer, more relaxed
- Possibly a change for the ‘worse’ may be a change for the better
- We invite the wisdom of others
- We listen
- We ask questions, probe, and clarify
- We stop trying to make something happen, and let something happen
- We innovate with confidence, no stress, no resistance
When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.

-Chinese proverb