

CHANGE & ITS IMPACT



Source Lines

Technical innovation, global competition, and the expectations of institutional investors are three constant sources of pressure on most of us at work requiring that we change and adapt at what seems like an ever faster rate. Take technical innovation for example. Before about 1980 the pace of technical change in the typical office was glacial. A clerk-typist who learned how to type in 1960 on an electric typewriter could, after an absence of 10 years, walk into an office in 1980 and immediately begin typing. Today this could just never happen. Leave the office for three years or so and you're likely to return as a stranger in a strange land.



Talking about change and its impact on us is indeed a daunting task because it has so many faces. Fortunately a number of things about change are clear. Change is frequently accompanied by - *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*.

Let's think about it for a minute. Imagine that you just won 15 million dollars in the lottery. You might say *The Good* is totally obvious. Your financial worries are over. You can quit your job if you wish, take a trip, buy a new house or car and on and on.

OK, so what is *The Bad* about winning 15 million dollars? Well for one thing when you go to pick up the cheque from the Lottery Corporation they get to take your picture and have it published. Guess whose face would be on every

newspaper in the country? Think of all those nice helpful lawyers, financial experts and stock advisors who would be lining up in front of your house and ringing your phone off the hook with all their excellent offers of advice.

The Ugly appears on the scene when all those old friends and family begin calling and showing up at your door to offer congratulations and see how you're managing. Some drop hints about how you might help with a 'loan.' Others boldly ask for a slice of the pie. You didn't really 'work-for-it' after all. Do they care about you or your money?

The National Film Board of Canada made a documentary about Canadian lottery winners and found that they struggled with the requests of friends and family for money and loans. Moreover, the winners' lives were changed so much by their windfall that they struggled to know where in society they belonged. They had money but did not belong to the world of people with money. Typically they had time and resources to enjoy the things only money can buy but no family or friends who could afford to join in the spree. And so they had to deal with *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. Within a couple of years many winners were poorer than before the time they won.

Sometimes what is, on the surface, Ugly, has unanticipated Good. The story about the recent devastating earthquake in Pakistan provides an example. The quake had also touched parts of India in the disputed province of Kashmir. One change that was dis-

turbingly obvious was the devastation. One minute people had a home, family and life and the next minute, they lost all. The other change that emerged powerfully was the change in the relationship of these two countries, India & Pakistan. Here were two blood enemies who had fought at least 3 wars in the last 50 years that had cost 50,000 people their lives, now working together. India is the largest provider of assistance for the earthquake. Indian military aircraft are landing regularly in the capital of Pakistan with aid. One month ago if you said Indian military aircraft would be landing in Islamabad they would have asked you to take a saliva test. Who would have believed this turn of events! Great negative change can also open the way to new positive thinking and action.

I think that today we all know that change is a constant in our lives. Our struggle is more with the size and pace of the change we face. Most of us can handle slow subtle change. Like my hair slowly turning gray. My vanity, which does not like the gray, can accept this relatively gradual change process. If, however, I woke up one day and found myself totally gray, my change equilibrium would be totally unbalanced. When we experience massive change it is normal, for a little while, to feel and be out of control. Once the dust settles and we have time to integrate the change we end up establishing a new balance or equilibrium with a higher level of complexity: the new normal. This happens in all parts of our lives, personal and professional.

To recap let's remember the following:

All change, whether initially seen as potentially good or bad carries good, bad and ugly consequences.

Large-scale change will often up-end our equilib-

rium causing us to feel unbalanced and anxious until we establish the new balance or new normal.

Change is a constant in everybody's life

Change (for better or worse) carries a money-back guarantee to be stressful. It can feel like a vampire, draining our energy, challenging our creativity and stamina, and straining our coping mechanisms. All of this can negatively affect our health and productivity. If we only see change as negative these problems are more likely to be worse. When change is managed well (individually and organizationally) it can be exciting and invigorating. It can result in new successes, accomplishments and meaningful relationships.

In summary, all change is stressful and our lives are full of change. The only people I know with no stress are deceased! Change challenges our life balance and stability. It pushes us to look at our world differently. There is often uncertainty and even fear as we experience a sense of loss of control as we have to give up what we know and are familiar with in order to take in the new.

Change also allows us the opportunity to understand the good, the bad & the ugly of every experience and learn the lessons offered by that change. Our personal view of change is influenced by whether we look at our life as either a positive or negative experience. Dealing with the change can be done by exploring new options and entertaining new ideas.

Change can be exciting and fun. In the midst of change, it's also important to maintain your spiritual clarity about what really matters most to you. Staying in touch with your values can help handle the stress of change no matter what it might entail.

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