

Building Personal Resilience in Twelve Steps

Step 5: Being Change Aware



“One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make”

So much is written about change. It’s often seen as a journey and sometimes a “change curve” is drawn showing emotional stages (some) people may go through as they experience change. It’s seen by some as exhilarating as surfing white waves and for others as a deep and dark pit into which one has been mercilessly thrown.

There is a tendency to suggest that all of us react to change in similar ways. We don’t. We experience change in different ways because our personalities vary and our life experiences which shape us influence the way we see the world and adapt to events.

Inevitably, our way of processing change and reacting is impacted by these differences. Some of us need to feel caught up in change, emotionally stimulated and drawn to the excitement it can bring. Others approach change with caution, wary until things are clear and wanting to work through the issues in a logical way. The jargon talks of those who are “early adopters” and those who are “in denial” but neither term seems entirely appropriate - glib catchphrases are not helpful.

Change itself is different. Not all change is good: not all change is bad. Enforced change may clearly be seen or experienced very differently to planned or desired changes. Sometimes it seems as if we ever utter a word against any “change” we shall be labelled as stuck in the mud, hostile, or in the all-too-glib jargon as “change averse”.

The speed of change is never constant and often seems totally out of our control. Some changes are gradual: we get used to things slowly and gently. Other changes are so sudden that we really cannot believe it is happening and we struggle to take in the implications.

It’s a complex topic and we are not well served by those who over-simplify the nature of change, the speed of change, or indeed ourselves as both agents and recipients of change. There is no one recipe book nor a clear sat nav route followed by everyone.

Our current experience is a case in point. No-one really saw it coming, nor knew the extent of the impact it could have, nor how quickly it could take a hold on all our lives. We had no time to prepare, at a personal level nor really at the organisational or national level. Caught unawares with such momentous events it is small wonder that so many of us have been left still trying to work out what it all means, how we feel, or what to do. We are drawn back to our own resources and never has there been a time for us to move to looking inward and examining our own ability to be change aware.

If we are looking to build our resilience then we cannot find our way through thinking there is a set way we should approach it, a set range of emotions we shall experience, or a right or wrong way to feel about the changes. Comparing ourselves to others in this way seldom helps. What we need to do instead is become “change aware” - and by that, I mean understand ourselves better so that we become aware of how we can prepare for on-going change and how we might adapt. We come back to something said in earlier blogs --- there is no perfect solution and in some cases all we can do is believe in ourselves based on our past experiences.

Building our resilience through becoming change aware is our task for this week. Know yourself better and exploring what conditions you need for you to be able to manage change in your own way and find your own way through.

1. Do you like to get involved early in any changes or do you prefer to hold back?
2. Is the pace of change exciting to you or worrying?
3. Do you need to think things through on your own and in your own time or do you prefer to get on with things and see where it leads?
4. Thinking back over two or three significant changes that you have experienced do you see yourself as someone who handles change well or badly?

Answering these questions will make you more self-aware, in sync with your personal response to change and your own reactions and this in itself strengthens your resilience.

Please don't expect too much of yourself or of others too soon. It's a time to accept fragility and vulnerability as part of the human condition.

One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make.

The Wellbeing Team

Next Week Step 6: Positive Thinking