## Change, Life’s One Constant

We have all experienced rapid change as of late on global, national, professional, and/or personal levels. We experience change constantly, sometimes in ways that are blatantly obvious and sometimes in ways that are hard to see. To navigate change successfully, it is important to understand that process and how to manage it.

Change is a transformational process that results in a modiﬁcation of the status quo on multiple levels simultaneously. Such levels can be subatomic, atomic, molecular, individual, and/or relational. Change occurs within groups, cities, states, countries, the earth’s atmosphere, and the universe. Change on one level impacts other levels to which it is connected.

Change is ubiquitous, omni-present, and often powerful. It has a life of its own but can be directed. It is sometimes intentional and sometimes spontaneous. It occurs inside of us and around us. It is usually the result of forces coming together simultaneously. For example, climate change occurs because of the combined forces of nature and man. When not managed well, change can be chaotic and turbulent.

But when managed well, it can occur smoothly and take us in a positive direction.

### As a mental health provider and psychiatric therapist, I invite you to read the deep impacts of change on our lives through my latest book. Gain insights into managing transitions efectively and understanding the emotional landscapes that inﬂuence our responses.

Change is a process that occurs naturally in living things. It is part of a life force that moves us forward, sideways, or backwards as we travel along our individual paths.

The greater our understanding of the process of change, the better we can direct it.

Some change is good and some bad. It is usually both. How we label change is largely dependent on how it makes us feel and how well it meets our needs. Good change makes us feel happy, content, and satisﬁed. Bad change produces unhappiness, discontent, and dissatisfaction.

When we evaluate change it has a major efect on our judgment. Sometimes good change only looks good and sometimes bad change only looks bad. For example, taking a job that pays well, is located near our home, and provides a path for advancement looks good until we learn in time that it is boring, puts us in an ofice we share with disagreeable people, and requires us to work weekends, taking away from important family time.

Our typical response to change is to resist it. But why resist good change? It is often because the outcome of change is frequently unknown. We like stability and predictably. They make us feel safe. Change takes us to a transitional zone of anxiety that makes us feel uncomfortable and insecure. We resist feeling anxious which we manage by doing our best to slow the process, avoid it altogether, or move in reverse, traveling back in time to territory with which we are familiar.

On a personal level, we may gravitate toward old patterns of behavior and relationships because we are familiar with them. We forget the reasons that we changed our life circumstances to get where we are such as the pain and frustration we experienced at the time. We convince ourselves that it will be diferent this time even though we have no evidence to support that belief.

Daniel and Mary were married for 22 years. The last ﬁve were very dificult because of changes they made individually. Daniel became interested in collecting Indian artifacts which consumed a considerable portion of their assets and reset the decorative tone of their home.

This upset Mary greatly. She had no interest in Daniel’s expensive hobby and bemoaned no longer having the funds needed to travel. She resented his making purchases without consulting her and his replacing decorative pieces she valued with artifacts that she detested.

### Are you struggling to navigate change in your life? As a psychiatric counselor and mental health expert, I’ve written practical strategies and insights into accepting change positively. Discover how to overcome fear and resistance, and turn transitions into opportunities for growth and fulﬁllment.

Mary, who had been a homebody, had become obsessed with travel. She couldn’t get enough. Daniel remained a homebody and resented Mary’s taking frequent trips

with her girlfriends. He complained that she was wasting money, viewing her travels as frivolous and unnecessary.

Daniel and Mary argued frequently which they hadn’t done to a signiﬁcant degree before. Their relationship changed dramatically because of the changes they’d made individually. The pain and frustration became increasingly intense with no end in sight.

Unable to accept the changes each made, Daniel and Mary concluded that the only option they had was to divorce. They believed that they would be able to ﬁnd peace and happiness by changing their life circumstance.

Mary accomplished that goal, but Daniel didn’t. She enjoyed taking even more trips with her girlfriends. She also felt peaceful with no one in her life with whom she was in nearly constant conﬂict.

Daniel, on the other hand, experienced a tremendous loss. Not only did he lose Mary, but he also lost the funds he needed to support his expensive hobby. He furthermore had to downsize his residence which meant that he no longer had room for the artifacts he had collected over the years and had to put most of them in storage.

The losses left Daniel with an emptiness he decided to ﬁll with another relationship. He chose a woman who appeared to be like the “old Mary”. Hoping to take care of her own emptiness, Elaine lied to Daniel, telling him that she was a homebody with a large house who was done traveling.

Daniel impulsively moved in with Elaine after two months believing that she was the answer to his prayers. When he spoke with her about moving in his artifacts, she asked him to wait a few more months. She also informed him that although she had said that she no longer wished to travel, she had committed to several trips with girlfriends, promising that that would be the end of it. It wasn’t.

Daniel had not handled the changes associated with losing his marriage well. He didn’t allow himself to grieve and he tried to ﬁll his emptiness by replacing Mary with a woman he saw as the “old Mary”.

Daniel and Elaine argued much as he had argued with Mary. Unwilling to tolerate the conﬂict, she asked him to leave which put him in the same empty spot he’d tried to escape. This time, however, Daniel looked at his inability to manage change successfully. He decided to see a therapist.

The therapist helped Daniel look at his resistance to change. He looked at changes in his life, focusing on the fact that his family had moved every year or two during

his entire childhood. His father was in the Army and had been reassigned on a frequent basis, moving the family from base to base and country to country.

Daniel sufered loss after loss as a result of the frequent moves. With each move, he lost friends and social status. He lost his home, his sports teams, his piano teacher, stability, and emotional security.

When Daniel graduated high school and left home, he promised himself that he would never move again. He went to college in his last hometown, obtained a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree, and remained in that city for the remainder of his adult life.

With the help of his therapist, Daniel came to see that his avoidance of change had been deeply ingrained during his childhood and was largely responsible for his inability to accept changes that occurred in his marriage. He saw that he was unable to enjoy traveling with Mary because of his having moved around so much when he was a boy. He had collected stamps and coins then which he took with him when the family moved. They served as his “teddy bear”, providing him a sense of continuity. Collecting Indian artifacts as an adult had given him a sense of stability much as he had had when he collected stamps and coins.

Daniel also came to see that his avoidance of change had led him into a premature relationship with Elaine. In his mind, she was the “old Mary”. He hadn’t given himself enough time in the transitional zone of fear and anxiety needed to overcome those feelings and see who she really was.

Fear and anxiety are the most potent obstacles to change. We build systems of belief to manage them. People from other cultures are perceived as threats. So are people who don’t look, behave, and think like us. We believe we are in danger when major cultural shifts occur even when they are positive.

Change also involves loss. We must give up old ways of thinking and being when changes occur. Loss requires grieving. The greater the change, the greater the loss. No one enjoys those feelings. We try to keep them out of our consciousness by avoiding them. We remain stuck in the past.

Understand the depths of change in my book, where I, along with other **mental health clinicians’ expertise**, explore the intricate dynamics of adaptation and transformation. Learn to tackle the power of change to enhance your relationships, career, and personal well-being.

Change also involves the potential for gains. We gain new, more adaptive ways of thinking. We gain forward movement along our individual and cultural paths. We gain opportunities that we would not otherwise have had. When we manage change

well, our relationships improve. Our socioeconomic level may be enhanced. And the country in which we live may become stronger and less fraught with conﬂict.

Finally, I would like to ofer tips on how to manage conﬂict:

* Anticipate change individually and socially. Know yourself and the world you live in. Understand why you respond to change as you do.
* Use your cognitive abilities to assess the nature of changes when you experience them. These include your intellect, foresight, and your abilities to diferentiate between the forest and the trees, to separate the wheat from the chaf, and to consider long-term and short-term goals when developing a plan to manage change.
* Assess the likely positive and negative impact(s) of the change(s) on your goals and those of the group.
* Determine whether you need an immediate response to change, a gradual response, or one of each.
* Estimate the amount of time that a change will take without locking yourself in.
* Make sure you have what you need and will need to manage the change.
* Develop a clear view of the obstacles and resistances to the change.
* Provide stability and predictability when planning how you’ll manage change.
* Maintain balance in your life. Change can upset the apple cart. The more balanced your life, the less likely that this will happen.
* Manage your moods and emotions efectively, ideally with support.
* Look within to see what a particular change activates from your past.
* Grieve losses associated with the change, preferably with support.
* Learn from your mistakes. Examine how you’ve managed change in the past, what has worked, and what hasn’t. Get the education if you’re going to pay the tuition.

To come full circle, change is inevitable, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. The better that you are equipped to manage change, the more you will gain from the it. Embrace positive change. Don’t be automatically afraid of it. It is part of everyone’s life from birth to the end of the trail.