

CHANGE AND THRIVE

Whenever we discussed remodeling our kitchen, my wife Sue's position was an emphatic "No"! I clumsily did my best to persuade her that it would be a positive change. Our kitchen was dated. Formica was not in style. I hated the brown cabinets. Sue liked what she had.

Our stalemate endured for years. I would pester her. She would resist. I brought in remodeling contractors but Sue remained unmoved. Sue could visualize every inconvenience, all the work, each speck of dust, every difficult choice or decision that had to be made. All I could see was the finished job and how strikingly attractive it would be.

What finally ended the impasse? Our contrasting personality types remained in place. What ended the struggle was the arrival of a charismatic contractor who won Sue's heart and mind. He had just the right amount of emotional persuasion and factual argumentation to motivate Sue to change her stance.

Change or Die Relate – Repeat – Reframe

Alan Deutschman in his 2006 exploration of change, entitled Change or Die, posits a three-stage formula for change. His three stages are Relate – Repeat – Reframe. Sue fulfilled the **Relate** requirement in that she only became receptive to change when just the right contractor appeared. Take some time now to review your major life changes or decisions and notice that you may have been inspired by an exemplary person, group or community.

The second step or stage is **Repeat**. Most of us know that we must repeat a new behavior many times for it to become habitual. Neuroscientists used to believe that our brains at maturity were fixed. Now due to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) of our brains, neuroscientists are able to record and map brain changes known as neuroplasticity. When we relapse into an unwanted behavior it is simply a reflection that the earlier neural pathways have not yet been totally replaced by the still developing new neural pathways. Sue might still experience some residual misgivings about agreeing to the kitchen renovation but as the renovation moves into fruition, she will gleefully embrace what she opposed for so many years.

The third stage is **Reframe**. Reframing is our wonderful human ability to change our attitudinal stance. The perennial example is half a glass of water. Is it half-full or half-empty?

Our ability to fluidly reframe depends upon the strength of our observing ego. This is our uniquely human ability to assess the thoughts that come into our minds, evaluate them and then experience choice or freedom in selecting our attitudinal stance. An added provision is having the mental agility to change our stance as new information becomes available. Mental fixity equates to a closed mind while mental fluidity equates to an open mind.

As we age, we may notice a tendency to stay with the “tried and true”. Hopefully, we have transitioned from iceboxes to refrigerators but moving from CD’s to Ipods might be more challenging. Joyful aging would encompass our awareness of our varying levels of resistance to change and laugh about it!

Another aspect of reframing involves our emotional motivation. If we made our living from football, we may resist believing in the applicability of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) to our sport. (See recent movie, Concussion.) If we are connected to the fossil fuel industry, we may be loath to endorse Global Climate Change. If we are a believer in a particular religion, we may fail to accept the value of other religions.

Reversing the Sequence

Try reversing the Change or Die sequence of “Relate – Repeat – Reframe.” You might achieve true and lasting change through Relate – Repeat – Reframe or through Reframe – Repeat – Relate. In the latter sequence, you would first change your cognitions, repeat them until you believe them, and lastly associate with people who subscribe to your new identity.

Reflect

Taking time to reflect each day is undoubtedly the key to identifying any change we may wish to make. A first step in fostering intentional change is to become conscious of our self-defeating, unconscious defenses, such as denial and avoidance, that block us from change. The challenge for each of us is to identify the conscious or unconscious cognitions that keep us from changing.

Self-Motivation

Dean Ornish, in advocating intensive lifestyle changes to reverse coronary heart disease, proclaims, “People don’t resist change; they resist being changed”. Kay Redfield Jamison, the famous psychologist and author of An Unquiet Mind could only accept the reality of her suffering from Bi-polar Disorder after many years of loving interventions from both her husband and her therapist. Bill Gates only became interested in philanthropy when he reframed his cognition from it being a burdensome, moral obligation to an opportunity to engage in intellectually, challenging discussions with geniuses.

After reflecting upon the many anecdotes of change reported in Change or Die, it appears that we humans have ample knowledge available to us about effective methods of change but we don’t seem to use what is available. Fascinating stories about General Motors Corporation, DuPont, Gore-Tex, Theories X and Y, Amazon, IBM, KIPP Schools, Delancey Foundation etc. attest to both resisting and embracing change.

While Buddha said, “Change is the only constant in life”, we might be wise to live Martin Luther King’s admonition, “We should not fear change, we should embrace it.”

My formula is Reflect-Reframe-Repeat-Relate. But please take the time to create your own approach!

Dr. Jim David is a practicing psychotherapist in Silver Spring, MD, who adheres to positivity in all areas of life. Visit his website at www.askdrdavidnow.com or email at james519@comcast.net.