



Changing the way fund managers charge fees would offer clients a better deal and help global markets, including the Nasdaq, to function better. Picture: BLOOMBERG

Ariane de Bonvoisin's book *The First 30 Days* is a guide on how people can deal with change in their lives. Picture: SUPPLIED

The ultimate advice on how to handle change

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CHANGE always involves loss. It is also probably the only given in life, unless you count Mark Twain's death and taxes.

It is, then, both understandable and odd that so many people find change extremely difficult. Struck by this, Ariane de Bonvoisin researched what it was that those who weathered change well did differently, and wrote a book to help everyone else.

Her central message is: don't try to control things.

"Changes always involve a lot of thinking — too much thinking, in fact," De Bonvoisin writes. "Our brain tries to figure it all out: the why, the how, the when. Sometimes we just need to turn off the thinking switch."

She combined life experience and research — including interviews with about 3,000 people who had undergone radical changes — when writing *The First 30 Days*.

She sets out nine principles for dealing with change. Each chapter is short, succinct and ends with tasks such as writing a "change CV" to show how well you have already dealt with change.

"By becoming aware of the changes you have lived through, you will not only recognise all that you've successfully handled, but also become more conscious of who you are at your core," De Bonvoisin writes.

She distills the essence of surviving change with aplomb to letting go of control and believing there has to be some light at the end of the tunnel.

"At its core, people who are positive and optimistic experience life differently. Their focus is not that 'life is against me' ... all the power is in how you think and what you say about yourself."

The First 30 Days works on psychology's premise that it takes 21-28 days to forge a habit, and on the idea that choosing to think positively about change for that many days will establish new thought patterns that will help readers weather change for the rest of their lives.

The 2008 financial crisis had a heavy mental toll across the globe. "Especially for men, when your work is affected, it affects your entire identity," says De Bonvoisin.

"When it feels like 'this is about me', when it becomes personal, pervasive and permanent — when it feels like the situation won't change — it becomes incredibly difficult. It is very different when you see (what has happened) as just a fact, not a personal story, you become more creative.

"When you show up to a new job interview, you will be more positive and people hire positive people, people they want to go out to lunch with."

One of the biggest mistakes is believing your personal crisis is so unique that there is no help to be had from others.

"A lot of people try to figure it all out by themselves," says De Bonvoisin. "They feel they should know how to deal with whatever crisis they are facing. People don't reach out, they don't ask for help, but asking for help is not just a way of solving what's happened, it's a way to see light at the end of the tunnel ... it's a huge problem, it's the worst thing we do, we think we are alone."

De Bonvoisin urges that people end the battle to find answers to "why" something has happened that changes their lives.

"Instead of working to understand what life is telling us ... you can help yourself move through change by looking for clues to the mystery, for what is next for you, what is around the corner."

The First 30 Days is

People who are positive and optimistic experience life differently

honest, realistic, nonjudgmental and fairly easy to implement. She illustrates almost every point with personal vignettes, and is open about her own traumas and tragedies.

Along with relinquishing control, De Bonvoisin suggests the only way to properly deal with change is to quiet the mind and trust your intuition.

"We ignore our intuition because we are convinced we know better, that what we think — as opposed to what we feel — is always right."

Rather hard in a world that lionises knowledge, but she proposes that people tune in to their intuition, listening to others' advice but relying on "what feels right" over any advice from others, or personal rationalisations.

"Incorporate the best of what you hear and learn, but always come back to yourself."

Then she asks that those who find the spiritual "too New Agey" suspend their disbelief and choose to believe things will get better and there is something out there that is larger than an individual human, and is not against you.

"It's during these first few days and weeks of change that you truly need to be grounded, to know without a shadow of a doubt that things will work out, that you will make it through."

It's a tough job, but a survivor's got to do it.



Ivan Epstein, CEO of software firm Sage, which helps to build entrepreneurship in SA. Picture: RUSSELL ROBERTS

2003. Softline now employees more than 14,000 people.

The Sage Foundation, which helps build entrepreneurship in SA, commits all its employees to contributing five days a year to work with socially conscious organisations.

The foundation also gives grants to create entrepreneurial opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

Renowned international businessman Rich Benton praises local entrepreneurs as "among the best in the world".

Benton, one of the founding directors of the UK's Capita Group and chairman of the Global Social Entrepreneur Network, says budding business brains should be groomed in their formative years.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2014

report, 19.7% of SA's adult population had seen opportunities to start a business, and this figure rose to 37% last year.

The National Development Plan estimates that by 2030, 90% of new jobs will be created by entrepreneurs and the expansion of companies.

According to experts, benchmarking is one of the most effective things businesses can do to improve their operations and boost profitability and productivity.

Chinoda says research shows that companies whose best practice performance measures rank in the top quartile of their industry are 10 times more profitable than companies that rank in the bottom quartile.

"Benchmarking enables companies to determine which of their processes and procedures could benefit the most

from improvement and in which areas these improvements might yield results," she says.

Engelbrecht says entrepreneurs can use a number of measures to evaluate their businesses. It is vital for them to ask themselves if their businesses are financially sustainable and whether they have a growth strategy for the future.

"Although entrepreneurs often get stuck in the day-to-day operations of a business, a strategic growth plan needs to be in place to ensure that it remains viable in a constantly changing environment," he says. mungadzes@bdfm.co.za