

# A NEW DIRECTION

After dealing with fear in our first instalment of the series on the entrepreneur's personal journey, in this article we look at how you can navigate change successfully

By Ariane de Bonvoisin

Change is the new buzzword—and never before has it been more certain for the entrepreneur. It is not uncommon for everything in your business to be modified: the logo, the website, the revenue model, the brand, the team.... Getting good at change is the most important skill to develop, yet we've never been taught how to manage it. So, are there ways to make change any easier?

**I became fascinated** with this question about 10 years ago after working with several startups from a venture capitalist and advisory-board perspective, and realised that everybody one meets is either facing or thinking about change. I have interviewed more than a thousand people and heard common phrases from entrepreneurs: "Change is hard", "I hate change", "I'm not good at change", "I feel alone, I don't know what to do now". Typical excuses included: being too old or too young; not having the skills or the time; not having the money; not knowing where to start. Yet we all know those who seem to do just fine when change comes along. So how are these people able to navigate change successfully while others simply get stuck?

I developed the following nine principles from my research that formed the basis of my book, *The First 30 Days: Your Guide to Making Any Change Easier*. They apply to you as a future or existing business owner, but also in other areas of your life: your relationships, your finances, your health and your family—all of which have a huge influence on how you show up as an entrepreneur.

## 1. STAY POSITIVE AND CHOOSE YOUR BELIEFS

Your beliefs shape your reality and your world: beliefs about yourself, what you're good at, your inner dialogue about being a founder, speaking in public, taking a risk, creating a product and launching it, etc. Next, there are beliefs about life: Is it on your side, conspiring for good, or are you unsafe with no net below to catch you? Beliefs about raising money, hiring people or being successful are the foundation of how you will navigate change

in your business. Cleaning up some of these beliefs will rewire what you perceive about running your own business. People who are good at change are optimists at their core.

## 2. THE CHANGE GUARANTEE

This states that, “From this situation, something good will come.” Write this down somewhere you will see it often. Write it in your office for others to see. We are all obsessed with what to do with our startup. Instead, be obsessed with your attitude, how you show up—especially in the midst of change. Characteristics of people who are good at change include being open-minded and willing to try anything; being in a state of abundance, not scarcity (there are more clients, more investors, more money to be made etc.); they are not focused on the past (the deal they did not get or the bad decision they made); they do not compare themselves to others; they do not play the ‘poor me’ game (how unlucky they have been); and they keep a sense of newness and momentum. There are many entrepreneurs who failed with their first or second company and then boom! Something better came out of it and they were ultimately successful.

## 3. THE CHANGE MUSCLE

You have a part of yourself that is much more resilient and better at change than you have ever thought. Every business has a change muscle. On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong is your business’s ability to go through change? You personally have been through dozens of changes already and need to acknowledge those: You left a safe job, raised some money, built a website, hired or fired people... Look at how you have typically dealt with change in the past. Even though the change you are facing now in your business may be different, you are not coming naked to the change party. You already have a toolbox of go-to strategies that work for you.

## 4. MEET THE CHANGE DEMONS!

People who are good at change are very human; they make mistakes, they feel their emotions, but know how to move past them. The top three ‘change emotions’ that are guaranteed to make an appearance are Fear, Blame and Doubt. Others are Impatience, Guilt, Shame, Anger etc. Which is your dominant one right now? Bring it out of your blind spot so that it does not have

as much control over you. Find the emotion that is stronger—for example, instead of blaming someone for the major mess-up that happened, how can you take responsibility for fixing it?

## 5. ACCEPT CHANGE

Change itself is not the hard part; resistance to the change is. As well-known self-enquiry author Byron Katie says, “When I argue with reality, I lose—but only 100% of the time!” Move in the direction of the river. As entrepreneurs, we are constantly trying to have things go our way. Become very mindful of what the market and the people around you are pointing toward, even if it is really difficult for you to accept.

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Ask yourself these three questions for successful business change:

- ▶ What do you need to stop resisting? (e.g. changing the business model)
- ▶ What do you need to get honest about? (e.g. your overspending)
- ▶ What are you avoiding? (e.g. firing someone you know is not working out)

## 6. YOU CAN'T CONTROL EVERYTHING

Do not try and control other people. Instead, control your language and the words you use; “difficult”, “nightmare”, “this is killing me”, “worst day ever” are not going to help your situation. Control and change the stories you have: about your team, South Africa, your competitors, what you are weaker at. Control the questions you keep asking yourself—go from “Why is this happening?” to “How can this be a good thing? Who can help me?” Your inner state is the only thing you really can control.

## 7. BELIEVE IN SOMETHING GREATER, AND IN HELPING OTHERS

Power moves through those who serve. Focus your business on ways that contribute and add value. People will pay you for things that help them. More and more entrepreneurs are taking care of their inner world, meditating,

keeping a journal, being in nature; in doing so, they are finding this intangible part of themselves they can always rely on. Only when you do this will you realise you are able to find creative solutions to what is needed.

## 8. CREATE YOUR CHANGE TEAM

The worst thing we tell ourselves is that we are alone; we are the only one going through this; no one else has had such a hard time. So, who are the top five people with whom you spend the most time? They are the ones who have a huge influence on you and your business. Are they positive? Are they excited for you? Are they qualified to help? Get around other entrepreneurs. Be honest and specific about what is going on; only then can you get

people to help. Who needs to be on your Change Team? A financial person? A tech geek? One new person can take your idea or business in a radical new direction.

## 9. TAKE ACTION

The most important action an entrepreneur needs to take at any stage of the business’s growth is to take care of themselves, their energy and their health. This is your fuel. Have you made this a priority? Without energy, change will be overwhelming. With a calm, rested body and mind, solutions always appear.

When it comes to action, it is the small changes that create the bigger results, over and over. Little things are not little for the entrepreneur—they are everything. If something does not work, continue changing your approach. Do not simply think about it—get on the court and try it. You will get feedback very soon.

In short, focus on the change you are in the midst of, or which you know you need to make. Businesses that do not pay attention to change will not be around for very long. Next, scan the aforementioned principles and see which can most help you navigate this change. Change is not a bad thing, not something to wish away. It is merely life calling you to be more, to have your business be more, and to be more successful in the end. ☺



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