

Time For Change?

Like taxes, change is unavoidable. So don't hide your head in the sand, embrace it! Author of *The First 30 Days: Your Guide To Making Any Change Easier*, **ARIANE DE BONVOISIN** knows first-hand how hard it is – and she's dedicated her life to helping others shift gear seamlessly

For me, at the tender age of 31, there were already a few things I knew needed to change. I wanted to break out of the corporate world, break off a relationship I knew was wrong and lose weight (finally). I couldn't ignore that inner microphone anymore – the one telling me where I should be heading and what changes I should be making.

Deep down something was wrong, missing; I was unhappy despite this external semblance of a good life. I knew I was climbing the wrong ladder. I didn't know what was next, what work I wanted to do, if I'd find another man, but I finally got the courage to make the change. I ended the engagement, left the impressive job and decided to follow my intuition. I would find work that was meaningful and pursue my dream of writing, speaking and helping others. I would find a man I had a soul connection with, not just the right things ticked off. I would trust that life would show me the way. And it did. As it does for anyone who decides to be brave and make a change.

How did I pull it off? To begin with, I got honest. No use pretending anymore that all was well. If you want to make a change, ask yourself, *What am I not being honest about?* Everyone knows the truth, we just don't want to admit it because it often involves consequences and hard work. And our lives are ruled by excuses: I'm too old, I don't have the time, I'm not clever enough – and on and on.

I was no different; the fear was there. It always shows up for the "change party". Why? Because we all crave certainty. We don't like the unknown and it's uncomfortable when our identity and what we know is challenged. Suddenly we're out of work, or single, or we have less money or are pregnant. We don't get given the manual for this next step.

But something good comes from every change, even the hardest ones

you can imagine, because the core of who you are comes from new experiences. Not from keeping everything together perfectly and comfortably. We never take the time to acknowledge all the amazing changes that happened that were positive – you graduated, found a job, bought a home... You are a combination of all the changes you've ever faced. Think about the most difficult change you've been through, then ask yourself, *What positive thing came from this?*

I believe that learning how to successfully navigate change is the most important life skill by far and we need to understand how every one of us can actually become better at it. It's not random; it's not genetic. My research revealed nine principles that make change easier and are typically the habits of people who successfully navigate change. >



"That's better – my back was killing me!"

The Nine Principles In Action



1

ASK THIS: What are the best and worst things I'm telling myself?

DO THIS: Be optimistic and have positive beliefs about yourself, life being on your side and this change you are going through. What your mind tells you will literally play itself out.

2

ASK THIS: How will this be a good thing?

DO THIS: Train yourself to focus and look for the good that is on the other side of a change.

3

ASK THIS: Am I playing the victim, or avoiding being the best I can be?

DO THIS: Remember how strong and capable you are. You have a change muscle! Use it. You are much better at change than you think. You've been through dozens of changes in the past.

4

ASK THIS: Which of these emotions – I call them change demons – is running the show: fear, doubt, blame, impatience, guilt, shame?

DO THIS: Find its antidote: faith, surrender, self-responsibility, endurance, forgiveness or honour. Don't let your emotions determine the course of your life.

5

ASK THIS: What do you need to get honest about and accept?

DO THIS: Accepting a change is half the battle. When you resist the change, it comes with a bunch of suffering. Stop arguing with reality; go with the flow of where life is now obviously taking you.

6

ASK THIS: Is the way I talk and describe my life empowering me or holding me back?

DO THIS: Take control of what you can: your language, the negative questions you keep asking yourself and the stories you tell yourself and others about your current situation. You can't control your environment, only what's inside your mind.

7

ASK THIS: Am I trying to retain control by staying busy?

DO THIS: Find your spiritual side, the part of you that never changes, despite all the drama on the outside. Take time to be silent, listen to your inner voice, go for a walk, meditate, do nothing.

8

ASK THIS: Am I asking people for help or shutting myself off?

DO THIS: You never change alone, so find your change support team. Very often, these are not your family and best friends, who often prefer you not to change. New people will come into your life and encourage you through change.

9

ASK THIS: Am I looking after myself?

DO THIS: Your health is always the first thing that goes out the door during times of change. And yet, with enough energy and endurance, your self-esteem rises and you will feel you can handle any life change.

So what is the change you know you need to make? Write it down. All change starts with awareness, a decision and then putting a commitment in place. Change takes you to places within yourself you didn't ever know existed. You are stretched and fall down many times, but you always come out a stronger version of yourself and with an experience that only you know what it took to get through. Be courageous. You don't need to be perfect or get it right the first time. You just need to start.

CHANGE AGENT #1

NARINA EXELBY, 35

From desk job to roaming reporter



For 13 years I lived a fairly predictable life: I worked in an air-conditioned office, crafted words and ideas, planned magazine issues six months in advance and earned a monthly salary. And then one day last year, I gave it up to pursue a life less routine. I now work as a freelance writer, and live and work from wherever I drop my kitbag. This year it's been Southeast Asia, next could be South America.

WHAT TRIGGERED THE CHANGE?

A few months before resigning, I started to write a travel blog (www.parallelworlds.blog.wordpress.com); my feet began to itch

and I realised how much I missed experiencing the world. Yoga was also a trigger. The longer I practised, the more my self-awareness grew. I realised that instead of being true to myself, I was trying to fit into the box in which I thought the world expected me to belong. I started to resent routines and structures.

THE GOOD STUFF

There is so much variety in my life. I move around frequently and my "office" changes daily. Today it's under a sacred tree in remote west Bali; tomorrow it might be a house in a rice paddy. I feel like I'm actually living – not simply existing – in each day.

THE HARD STUFF

I struggled to get into the freelance groove, where I am mistress of my own time and responsible for all of my admin (yawn). I still battle with time management, often spending too many hours on jobs that aren't big payers; plus I tend to work erratic hours and rarely take a day or weekend off. I often worry about the daunting irregularity of my pay cheques, but I'm learning that everything does eventually fall into place.

THE SURPRISING STUFF

Living and working on the road has offered interesting insights into

relationships and I've been surprised by the unexpected friendships that have grown and the established ones that have dwindled. The biggest lesson I've learnt has been in letting go – of perceptions, expectations and belongings.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

I wouldn't change a thing. The experience I gathered while working full-time is invaluable and I'm grateful for that – it provided an excellent base on which to build a solo career. It's all been part of a personal evolution and I'm now thriving on the freedom of this journey.

CHANGE AGENT #2

NASREEN MATHIR, 29

From single to married in three months

I've always been a very practical, independent and career-driven person. So I surprised myself when a spur of the moment trip from Joburg to Durban resulted in my family introducing me to a man they considered marriage material – and I agreed! Within a few months he'd proposed and two weeks later we were married.

WHAT TRIGGERED THE CHANGE?

I was happy, but also ready to settle down, and when I met Dawood I instantly felt a connection with him. Over the next seven weeks we chatted on WhatsApp and by phone every day and I realised I really liked his personality and could picture a future with him. The next time I saw him he proposed.

THE GOOD STUFF

I was terrified that I'd miss my previous way of life, but this huge change has actually allowed me to grow and evolve as a person. I had to overcome my own fears and the stigma of an arranged marriage and just accept that he was the right man for me. Getting to really

know each other within the marriage has been an incredible journey. I've re-evaluated my life and what "success" and "achievement" mean to me.

THE HARD STUFF

Having to think about someone apart from myself was a huge adjustment – I was so used to being on my own. It's been a lesson in compromise over even the smallest things like what we eat.

THE SURPRISING STUFF

My independence was everything to me. But my marriage has taught me that sharing your life with someone doesn't have to change that. It has actually made me stronger and happier, which is a great foundation on which to build my career and life.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

Absolutely nothing. When we got engaged I wanted to have a big reception at a later stage so all my friends and family could be there. Instead we married quickly. I'm incredibly grateful that it happened the way it did, as my mom passed away very suddenly just three months after my wedding. It means a great deal to me that she was there the day I got married.



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CHANGE AGENT #3

DR KATHRYN CHU, 41

From career surgeon to humanitarian aid worker

I was working in America at a top university hospital as an assistant professor. It was a great career opportunity but I'd always yearned to work in resource-limited settings. My department already had over 50 surgeons so I wanted to work somewhere where I felt more useful.

WHAT TRIGGERED THE CHANGE?

The perfect job fell into my lap: to be based in Cape Town and travel to other parts of the world as an MSF (Doctors Without Borders) surgeon and public health specialist. How could I not take it? Of course, my friends, family and colleagues in the US thought I was crazy – especially when they learnt the salary was only a fraction of what I was earning before.

THE GOOD STUFF

It's been very rewarding to provide surgical care to people who would otherwise not have access to it. MSF works in disaster relief so the

urgency of the work is also very exciting! I've travelled by Land Cruiser, on motorcycle, helicopter and single engine Cessnas to over 20 countries and operated in tents, containers and even an aircraft hangar.

THE HARD STUFF

Maintaining a relationship was difficult since spouses and friends are not allowed to visit. Keeping a blog and emailing friends and family really helped with loneliness. It's also taught me to appreciate the small pleasures of life: I love hot showers!

THE SURPRISING STUFF

Learning so much about the political situation of African nations and visiting so many African countries. I was based in Zimbabwe for three weeks in 2008 just before the presidential elections and also worked in an internally displaced camp in Darfur. Chatting to people about challenges and hardships they faced was eye-opening. ■

READY, STEADY, GO...

The first 30 days are the hardest. Here, the typical obstacles you'll face

> You will stumble, fall and not want to get back up. But you will.

> You will make mistakes, feel like you didn't do it perfectly or did something wrong. Let yourself be human.

> You will be impatient; you will want to speed up this whole change business. Give yourself more time to get the change you want. Impossible deadlines never work.

> You will feel like giving up: it's too hard, why bother; your previous life wasn't all that bad. Maybe, but then again, the inner voice that told you to make this change will never go away and it's not pleasant having to avoid it.

> You will feel alone, like you are the only person going through this much change and finding it so hard. Yes, we all wonder if other people just have it easier than us. They don't. All change takes discipline and endurance.

> Other people may discourage you, pull you away from your goal and question why you're doing this. Remember, this is between you and you. No one else.

> Your regular habits are going to win for a while. It's normal – they've been your go-to actions for a long time. Persevere. It takes 21 to 28 days for the brain to get used to something new.

> You may not see or feel much progress. Don't worry. Change at the start happens on the invisible level. Acknowledge yourself for what you know you've done already.