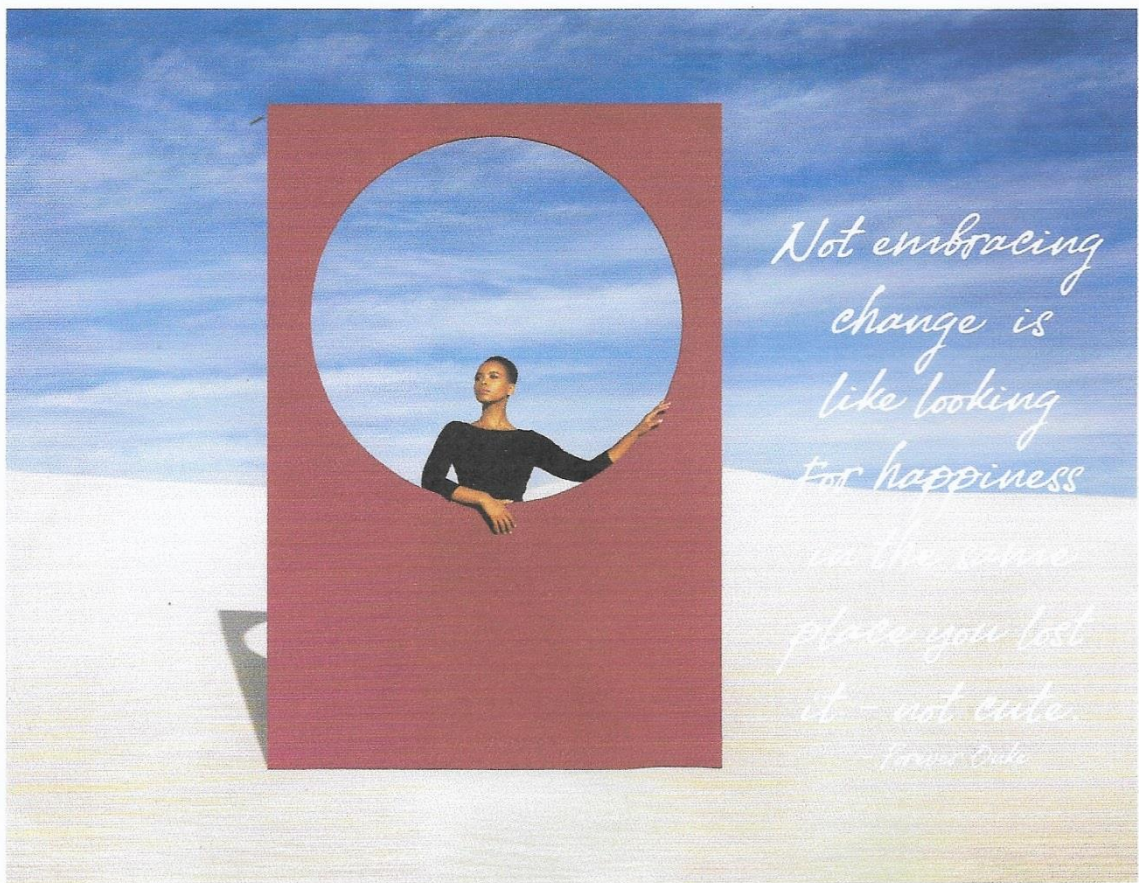


EMBRACING CHANGE

Things change – it's the nature of life. As creatures of habit, a sudden adjustment to the *status quo* is needed to force us out of our complacency and propel us towards better things. Being prepared can make the transition smoother

By: Zukiswa Zimela



*Not embracing
change is
like looking
for happiness
in the same
place you lost
it - not cute.
- Lewis & Clark*

“We’re creatures of habit. Routines become automatic, but change jolts us into consciousness, sometimes in uncomfortable ways,” according to the *Harvard Business Review*. This isn’t to say that human beings are indolent and uninspired; the shock is sometimes necessary because our brains are designed to be risk-averse. “We don’t like change because our brains like the familiar. It’s safe – and we want to feel safe,” says Penny Holburn, life coach and owner of Penny Holburn Coaching.

Faced with the unknown, the brain is biologically hard-wired to resist going towards something it perceives as dangerous. In *Managing With the Brain in Mind* (*strategy+business* magazine), neuroscientist Dr David Rock notes that “when you encounter something unexpected, a shadow seen from the corner of your eye or a new colleague moving into the office next door, the limbic system (a relatively primitive part of the brain, common in many animals) is aroused”.

When this part of the brain is stimulated by a potential threat, “neurons are activated” and the body is flooded with hormones. If the situation seems threatening, the body goes into a fight-or-flight response, which can feel emotionally overwhelming, Rock explains.

While difficult, embracing change can be what we need to create the life we’ve always dreamed of. “Although it’s uncomfortable and often very frightening, it’s a chance to move on to something that will make us happier and more fulfilled. Change may mean the opportunity to have a better job, a happier relationship, new surroundings or a better lifestyle. And if you handle change well, then you’ll always grow as a person,” says Holburn.

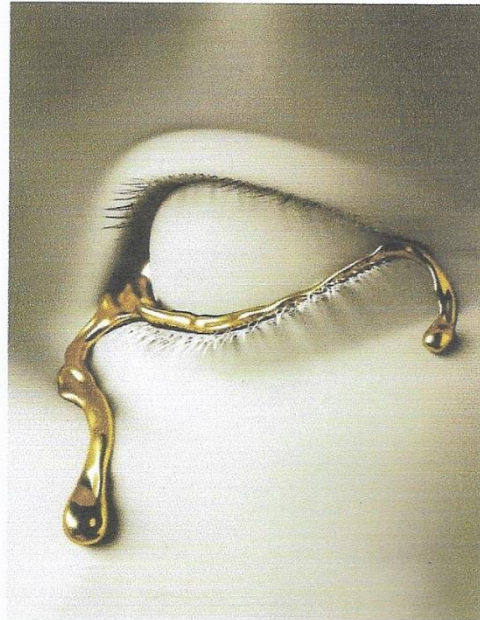
“Unless your life’s already absolutely perfect, then making a change means the possibility of creating something better for yourself.”

Once you’ve gotten over the inertia of transforming your life, other unexpected factors can crop up and seeing a therapist or talking to a trusted friend or family member can be a good idea. This is because experiencing change can dredge up uncomfortable feelings that may need to be attended to. “Because change can be scary, it often brings to the fore problems we may have. So sometimes change highlights poor self-esteem, or underlying depression, or extreme anxiety. In many cases, a difficult change highlights the necessity of finding someone to talk to in order to resolve these issues,” explains Holburn.

She offers some suggestions on how to prepare yourself for easier adjustment to change:

Let go of shame

There’s no reason to feel shame with change. Everyone goes through change. It isn’t a reflection on your worth as a person – it just happens. Unless your life’s already absolutely perfect, then making a change means the possibility of creating something better for yourself.



Release any preconceived ideas you might have about who you are

Very few of us really know who we are. It’s through life experiences and confronting changes that we really get to discover our identities. In order to negotiate your way through change successfully, you need to be flexible. It’s very important to have a strong core sense of self – but it isn’t good to be so attached to ideas and beliefs that you can’t let them go. In general, being too attached to anything, including one’s view of oneself, isn’t helpful in dealing with change. You want to be committed to what you’re doing, but you also want to be able to dance with the situation and the times, or you’ll be left behind.

Forgive yourself for not being perfect

People differ enormously in how they handle change. Some have a strong sense of self, really good coping skills and supportive resources, and can move through it very quickly. Others are in a bad space in their lives, have a poor sense of self, a low sense of their worth, few resources to support them and battle hugely with any change. Experiencing the change journey and coming out the other side is a very individual thing.

Embrace your vulnerability

Having challenges and failures in life can be good because they force us to confront our vulnerability and humanness. They also help us develop coping skills to deal with significant upheaval. If you can recognise your vulnerability and stop trying to see yourself as a person who has it all together and needs to make a huge success of everything, it’s easier to deal with change because it’s less of a shock.

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