



Change Your Mind: Change Your World

by Lorraine A. DarConte

When you become comfortable with uncertainty, infinite possibilities open up in your life.
—Eckhart Tolle

Do you vacation at the same resort each year? Do you live in the same town where you grew up? Would you rather stay in a dead-end job or unsatisfying relationship than change it? Does trying new things make you uneasy?

If you answered yes to all or most of these questions, then you may have an aversion to change. What makes us so resistant to change, even when we know the change will be positive?

“All of us have fears,” says pastor, life coach, and author Andy Thompson, “especially when it comes to taking risks in our professional and personal lives. In fact, it’s been said that FEAR stands for ‘Forget Everything And Run,’ which is a logical reaction given that, by definition, risk [contains] the possibility of suffering harm or loss.”

Theoretically speaking, change is relatively routine. If you are driving to work and encounter construction and road closures, you take a different route to the office. If your babysitter comes down with the flu, you either change your plans or find another sitter. Most of us deal with a myriad of changes on a daily basis with little or no fuss. So why, when it comes to making some life decisions, do we freak out and freeze up?

The definition of insanity—according to the witticism attributed variously to Albert Einstein, Mark Twain, and Benjamin Franklin, among others—is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. If that is true and if you are not insane, and you want to have a better job or a nicer house, to lose weight, or to quit smoking, it follows that you may have to change your strategy to reach your goal.

However, most people will make a change only when forced to. They don’t willingly alter their lives simply because they’re unhappy or bored. Change is hard, notes mental health therapist and self-care expert Justine Brooks Froelker, even when we know it is best for us. It is hard because it is the unknown. “And nothing is scarier to us than the unknown,” she adds.

People typically believe they should feel comfortable about making life changes, when, in reality, the feeling is just the opposite. “Change requires us to be uncomfortable, which is great because that means we are growing and changing,” says Froelker.

Beyond the fear of the unknown, there are other reasons people fear change, says Bo Carrington, managing director of Triangle Performance, LLC, a company that helps businesses and organizations address challenges in performance, productivity, and leadership. "People fear the change will not work," says Carrington. They may also fear they don't have all the necessary information they need to make a decision, and/or they may not trust the initiator of the change (if it was someone other than themselves).

"About 40 percent of the population fits into a behavioral trait called 'steadiness' that dislikes change," adds Carrington. "They are psychologically motivated to live in harmony; [for them] change is a disruptor and causes disharmony."

April Masini, a relationship-advice columnist and author who is the voice behind the online column Ask April, says there are several "types" of people who dislike change, including those who like to be in control, those who are paralyzed by fear (in extreme cases, to prevent change from occurring, they may not leave their house), and those who think the worst will happen. (What if... is a phrase that defines them. What if the plane crashes? What if he doesn't like me? What if I fail?). "These are all ways that [some people] talk themselves out of change," says Masini.

No Guts, No Glory

According to Andy Thompson, many people are fearful of getting out of their comfort zone and taking those barrier-busting leaps of faith. "Our most powerful knowledge base comes from taking small and large risks in life, and experiencing the consequences—the good, the bad and the ugly," he explains. For Thompson, the word "risk" evokes a sense of excitement and limitless possibility: "It reminds me of the famously insightful notion to 'go out on a limb, because that's where the fruit is.' Truer words cannot be spoken, as risk is the preeminent propelling force that helps companies and individuals alike accelerate and achieve key success benchmarks."

What about those who are excited about making a change but who, instead of receiving encouragement from friends and family, are met with resistance? Perhaps you're planning to leave Tucson for Santa Barbara, swapping the desert for the beach and trading your service industry job for something in the tech world. Maybe you're really excited about the possibilities: meeting new people, mak-

ing career strides, enjoying the cooler temperatures. Your friends and family, however, see only the negatives: you don't know anybody there; it's expensive; what if you can't find a job?

"People who lack the clarity, courage, or determination to follow their own dreams will often find ways to discourage yours," writes Steve Maraboli in his book *Life, the Truth, and Being Free*. "When you change for the better, the people around you will be inspired to change also...but only after doing their best to make you stop."

Change is an essential part of life, and we can't begin new things without it. "Many people are deterred from taking risks because of the fear of failure, disappointment, and others' perception of the failure," says Thompson. He continues: "However, while failure is not something that anyone wants to experience, it statistically increases your chances of success. Did you know 9 out of 10 startup companies fail, and that the average millionaire goes bankrupt at least 3.5 times? So, statistically speaking, some would say that the more times you fail, the higher chance you have of succeeding the next time."

Fear, however, has its benefits. "You should appreciate fear [because] without it, your achievement or success wouldn't be so rewarding if fear wasn't there to serve as a barometer and provide perspective," adds Thompson, who also advises people not to "quit your job or end an important relationship on a whim!... All justifiable risks have a time and a place. Ideal situations for risk taking are those where you have the time and/or resources needed to 'rescue' yourself should your pre-determined worst case scenario present. The risks with the most at stake are also best taken when time is on your side and you can put contingency efforts—Plan B, C, and D—in place, if needed."

Thompson believes it's also better to take a big risk when you are stable, such as when finances and life circumstances are on your side—optimally, when you have a support system should things take a turn for the worse.

"That said, there is another ideal circumstance for a big risk that's actually quite the opposite: when your back is against the wall and you don't have much to lose," concludes Thompson. "When your only way out is up, it's time to take that leap of faith."

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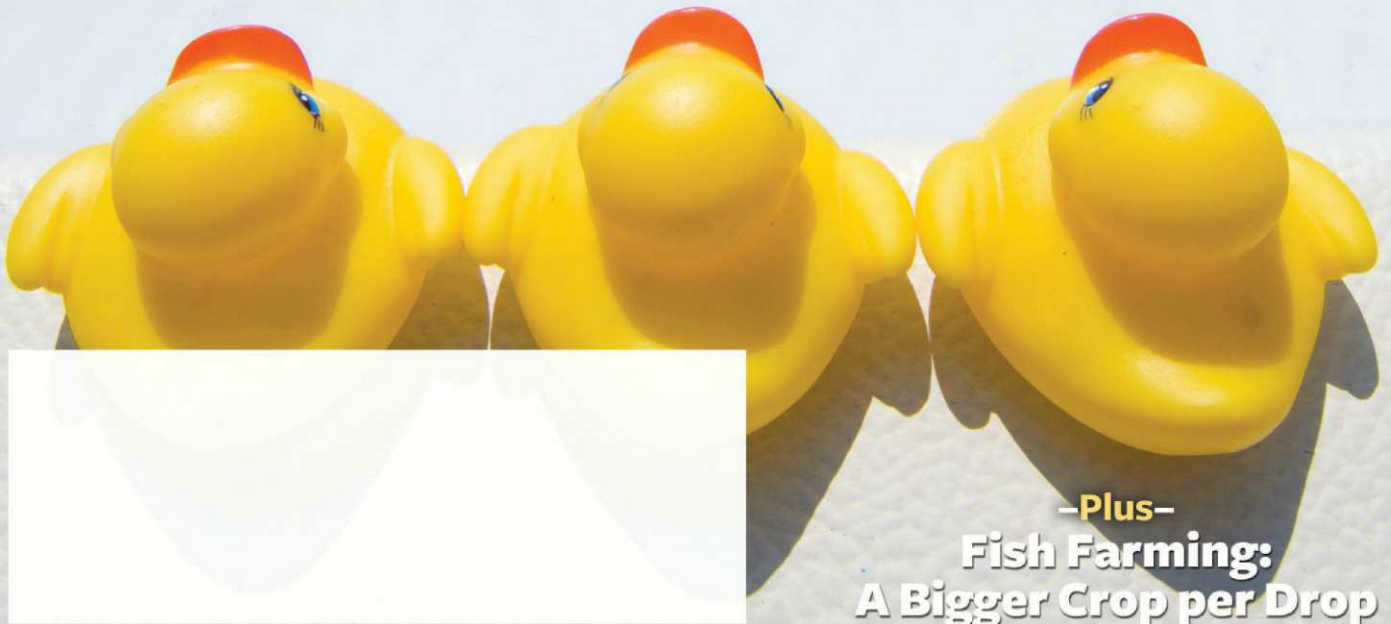
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