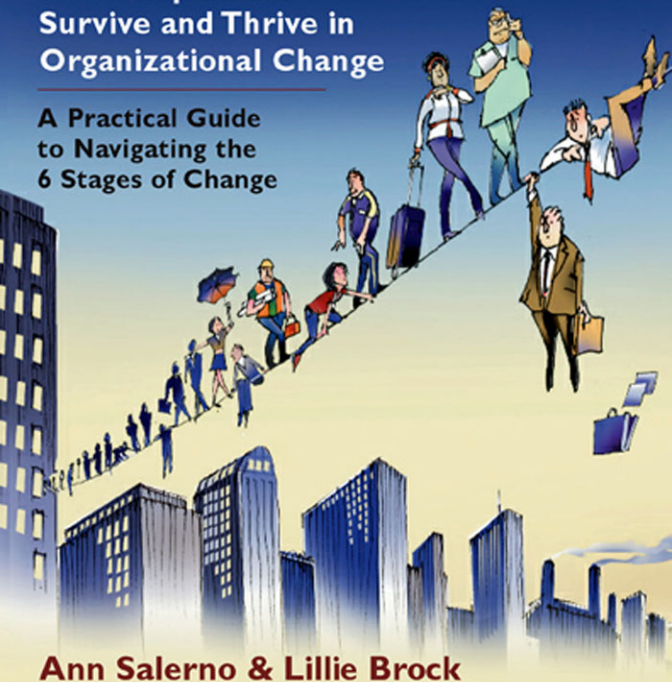


# The Change Cycle

How People Can  
Survive and Thrive in  
Organizational Change

A Practical Guide  
to Navigating the  
6 Stages of Change



**Ann Salerno & Lillie Brock**

an excerpt from

***The Change Cycle:  
How People Can Survive and Thrive in Organizational Change***

by Ann Salerno and Lillie Brock  
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# Preface

*Herding frogs.* The image, you might say, “jumped” out at us as we thought about ways to visualize what it can feel like when you’re in the middle of a difficult change at work or in the nature of your professional life. Weathering change can be chaotic, frustrating, even maddening. At its worst, a challenging or sudden change can do such a number on your confidence that you might experience moments verging on hopelessness—and we thought trying to herd a bunch of frogs might have the same effect if you stayed at it long enough (say, anything longer than a minute).

Helping you move successfully through your change is the reason we wrote this book. Our goal is for your experience not to feel like frog herding. On a muddy riverbank. With a hundred bullfrogs. And in truth we set our sights higher than that: our hope is that there are lessons in this book that can help you not only survive your change but *thrive* in it. What’s more, you will be better equipped for the next work change to come your way. And the six-stage model we discuss can guide you through changes outside work as well, so whatever you find of value this time around will be there for any significant future change in your professional or personal life.

This book helps you navigate your way through change by utilizing The Change Cycle model (see front inside cover). The model depicts the six predictable and

sequential stages of change and the specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with each stage. Each chapter covers one of the six stages of The Change Cycle and features stories of workplace change, draws on recent organizational and psychological research, and highlights the most important things we have learned in fifteen years of studying and teaching change. Here and there you might run into a little humor, too. Change at work is hard enough—we didn't want this book to stare back at you like a dour academic. Or a displeased boss.

The Change Cycle has been road tested by people in companies and organizations across America and on four continents. It has been used by people contemplating a career change, by the self-employed, by the recently promoted, and by the recently laid off. The model works for people up and down an organization and that is how we wrote the book: it is meant for anyone who works, manages, supervises, or leads.

At times our advice is addressed specifically to employees. In other places the insights are directed toward managers. That said, we believe there's value for everyone in these moments because they bring you inside the perspective of those on another level of your organization. Plus, any targeted discussion is set against the background of what we *all* experience going through change.

There are shelves of books about organizational change. This book is about what it actually feels like during a work change, and how to come out the other side. *The Change Cycle meets people where their emotions are*, said a friend of ours who read the book in draft form. We think that's about right. We hope that as you read

on, this book does indeed meet you where your emotions are. And in so doing, that it helps you gain insight into your change experience—insight that will help move you through the process.

Jump in.

Ann Salerno and Lillie Brock

# Change@Work

### Note from Ann

#### “Conversations at 37,000 Feet”

I travel a lot. Often my seat neighbors will ask me what I do. “I’m a corporate trainer,” I say. “I help organizations trying to change. Because no matter what their business, how well they manage change will determine their success. They need to be ready.”

*Change* in the same sentence as *success* often gets their attention, and then they ask, “How do you train a company to change?”

My answer is always the same: “Well, once I teach a company’s people the stages of change and how to navigate them, workplace changes are much easier to take.”

Marketplace shifts, new industry standards, a current event with company impact—businesses are hit with myriad changes. I make the point that when speaking of change, the emphasis must go to the company’s *people*. Change only becomes a reality within a business or organization when its individual members commit and carry out the new initiative, accommodate the new structure, follow the new system, or turn out the new product.

This sometimes causes a moment of skepticism in my seatmates. “Yeah,” they say, “that’s all we ever hear—change this, change that.” They comment on how fast change happens, how it happens all the time—how

## 2 The Change Cycle

important change is—but no one ever seems to know how to do it well, whether personally or professionally.

At this point in my airplane conversation, I usually admit that despite fifteen years as a “change agent,” I, too, struggle with life’s changes at times—at home and at work. Some changes are great—a new love, a promotion, a financial bonus—but many changes in life (maybe most) are simply hard, really hard: a company layoff, a divorce, the death of a loved one, a business failure. They hurt. They make us feel out of control.

Knowing that even a change professional can have trouble coping with change seems to somehow comfort my seatmates. The next question they typically ask is, “Can you help regular people deal with change?” By this time I know a conversation about some difficulty of theirs is coming. So I make it easy for them by explaining that managing change is more about understanding and accepting a set of common human reactions than it is about some kind of “attitude adjustment.”

Change is life, life is change. It just happens, like the weather. Changes result from chance, choice, or crisis, and are generally unpredictable. But the process of “how” we move through life’s changes is predictable, I explain. This usually brings a measure of both curiosity and relief.

In my work I have seen many employees struggling to adjust and regain their productivity following some new initiative or shift in leadership and direction. Both professionally and in my personal life, I have seen people grasping at straws trying to make sense of circumstances that leave them at a loss as to what to think or do next.



I've seen people in "change pain"—sad, mad, angry, blaming, afraid—their sense of loss and confusion often driving their lives into uncharted emotional waters. These are places they wouldn't have to go (or at least enter so deeply) if they understood more about the universal process of change: what to do, and what not to do, as they progress through the regular and sequential pattern of experiences that is The Change Cycle.

By this point in the conversation I'm drawing on a napkin, explaining how we as humans are wired to react and respond to change in six stages, how these stages are defined by characteristic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and how (best yet) they occur in an order that can be anticipated, so much of the mystery of *What's happening?* or *What will happen next?* is eased.

Then I ask my seat neighbor if there is a change in their life that is causing some angst. Sensing I won't judge them and seeming appreciative to have a chance to talk, they tell me things like, "My husband just got laid off," or, "My mother recently passed away." "My oldest just dropped out of college," they might say, or, "My best friend has breast cancer." Sometimes it's just, "I have a new boss." I listen as they tell their stories. The way they talk—the words they choose, the thoughts and emotions they describe—are clues I need to determine which stage they are in now. I show them where they are, explain what it means, and suggest what they might consider or explore or do next. Sooner or later, I assure them, they'll feel back in control, though they may not ever actually like or appreciate the change.

I love this moment. It's the one when they get it—"it" being the reminder that whatever they are going through, it's only temporary. After all, I tell them, just because you have a flat tire doesn't mean you have forgotten how to drive.

And then we share a laugh.

Knowing what's likely to happen next is the part that gives people the most comfort. Yes, when brought to their attention, they see the pattern—the natural sequence of change, just like there is a cycle of the seasons or phases of the moon.

Through the years, I've heard hundreds of change stories. At 37,000 feet I have listened to tales of life's battles lost, and life's wars won, of changes that brought some people to their knees and propelled others to new emotional heights. For all the good and bad that can be said about life, the fact is we will all face challenging transitions—personally and professionally—that will continue at varying intensities throughout our lives.

Learning to manage change is a skill we all need to acquire, improve, and master—in all aspects of our lives. I hope this book will assist you in improving your change resiliency and help you find your footing during times when the going gets tough.

### **The Focus of Our Book** **Change@Work**

When we speak of work or professional changes, we mean both the "big ones" and the mundane ones, the ones that took weeks or even months to complete and the ones that kicked in overnight, the ones that seemed ridiculous but

turned out pretty good, and the ones that appeared to be no-brainers but crashed and burned. This book provides a framework to assist you in gaining perspective on the change and its impact, insight that will guide you through the transition.

Our central goal is to help you take responsibility for how you react and respond to a changing work environment by giving you tools of self-awareness and assessment—instruments to light the curves and bumps on your change road. It's all about getting through the change emotion and commotion with minimal damage to your blood pressure, career, relationships, productivity, and confidence—whatever your role in the company or organization.

It is our belief that there is no magic way to achieve a pain-free experience of a significant work change—or a significant life change, for that matter. But understanding the regular, cyclical nature of the process helps you navigate the change in a conscious, anticipatory way, minimizing the fear, loss, resentment, and anxiety which to one degree or another accompany so many changes in work and life.

For all we know about the science and predictability of change, there is still the mystery of intensity when it comes to individual reactions. A change that might rock one person's world can be a speed bump to another. Each of us experiences change with our own scoreboard correlating to where we are on our path through life. And this variability extends to companies—collections of individuals—as well. It is amazing to be in one workplace where productivity might decline simply due to the distraction of a new food-service vendor, while at another company such

a decline would only result from layoffs or similar major change.

In the pages ahead, you will encounter many different examples of workplace change. Some we might call “change bombs”—devastating losses to companies and individuals: a plant closing, a product recall, workplace violence, executive corruption. Other changes might seem trivial in comparison, but as we suggest above, almost any company change can have real impact, and depending on certain factors (management style, workplace culture, change track-record), it can seriously affect morale—to the point where what would appear to be a “small” change can give rise to employee anger, blame, resistance, and lethargy.

In a way, organizational change brings a set of dynamics akin to family or relationship dynamics: little things can become big things over time; employees have “long memories.” If management is cavalier in making changes that impact employee convenience (parking, food, dress code), when it comes time for a company to initiate a major change, reaction will be partly predicated on employees’ prickly memories of what has come before. The bottom line? The price of frequent, chaotic, or mismanaged change can be high. Change management requires care; no change is too small for skilled handling.

We wrote this book for anyone charged with communicating, carrying out, integrating, or simply dealing with a challenging work transition. We focus on the *human* perspective. We take as seriously as we can everything that comes into play during a change at work, not only company rollout strategies and management-employee

relations but also the effects on people's work performance, schedules, interactions with colleagues, energy levels, morale, and life at home.

A change at work is like throwing a rock into a lake—there will be ripples, and often they extend into your non-work life too. We try to never lose sight of the fact that the separation between work and home can be narrow, often very narrow. Happily, in helping you better deal with workplace change, these pages teach lessons that carry over into your nonwork life—a positive not only for you and those close to you, but also for your company or organization. Fewer ripples at home mean fewer at work—and of course the reverse is also true.

## **The Challenge of Change**

Why is organizational change so difficult?

Because teams, departments, sites, mom-and-pop entrepreneurial businesses, companies small and large, school systems, governments, and global organizations cannot effectively transform unless their workers and members are committed to the change. This holds true whatever the impetus, crisis, challenge, or well-constructed strategic plan, whatever the rewards of success or consequences of failure. People must buy in.

No matter the value or process employed to make the change, there will be unforeseen implementation issues and underlying dynamics created by the workplace environment and the organization's communication style. If change is initiated in a decree from the top brass and the news then makes its way down through the ranks,

what we call the “they factor”—*How did they decide?*, “*How do they know?*”, *They have no idea*—can arise among employees and lodge a stick in the spokes of the transition.

Another challenge stems from the gap in change-assimilating between those company leaders who conceived of the change and those who one day learn about it. Execs and upper management can be significantly further along in The Change Cycle than those at the employee and lower-management levels who are suddenly mandated with “making it happen.”

When change is initiated within the workforce itself, it has a different set of implementation issues. By and large, these issues work themselves out more quickly, and the change impacts service and product quality standards for the good. Communication is more relevant and timely. There’s more ownership of the need to change, which leads to superior identifying of problems and solution-creating, a circumstance less prone to the-old-way versus the-new-way struggle some top-down decisions create.

Supervisors and managers are the most important link to the potential success of any change, because it is up to them to carry the ball for the ongoing communication after the initial announcement. Successful strategic initiatives and organizational change require above-average attention and commitment to communication, above-average leadership and management skills. Executives, managers, and supervisors must be willing to go beyond job and industry know-how to valuing learning and excelling at people skills—aka communication skills—in order to successfully facilitate and manage the ongoing

changes at all levels within any organization. This includes being willing and able to look forward with fervor to what might be.

The first and most significant issue is this: managers and leaders must be willing and able to manage themselves. Individually, they must take responsibility for how they tend to react in changing environments. In dealing with change, managers and leaders must address their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors before they can address anyone else's.

Often workplace higher-ups say things like, “We have to beat this thing.” Or, “Change or die.” Or, “We gotta swim with the sharks.” These types of comments are indicative of the survival mentality common in the early stages of change. “Can you swim with the sharks?” should not be the focus or concern. “Can you swim at all?” is the issue. If yes, teach others. If no, grab your floatie and jump into the water—we can change that.

## **The Pull of the Past**

One of the reasons people find change so hard is they have never been taught to understand the emotional and cognitive challenges that change creates. The latest brain science and cognitive psychology studies continue to point to *memory* as a key indicator of how we will react during an unfolding change situation. Whether you are reading this book as a worker, manager, or leader, you probably don't need research to persuade you that unresolved thoughts and feelings about “how some things were handled” in previous company changes are a significant reason employees can

have a hard time believing or trusting their employer when a new change is introduced. Our recollections of unfortunate or difficult past changes can insinuate themselves into our general outlook and cause skepticism, cynicism, bitterness, and other states not conducive to workplace concentration and performance.

Memories have a dramatic impact on how we interpret what is or might be happening to us and why. And even if the memories aren't actually resourceful—meaning there is no close connection between the past change and the one you are experiencing now—the brain has a way of editing, reshaping, and generalizing the “historical” information, calling it useful and sending it to you anyway. You then try to superimpose it on the current situation as if this could be the key to solving your issues or problems. The good news is, it could be valid and helpful information that gives you direction. The bad news is, it could turn out to be a distortion or generalization that takes you down the wrong dark alley.

## **The Role of “Schema”**

Human beings have always had a complicated relationship with change. Is it good? Is it bad? The combination of our memories and the power of our personalities (whether we motivate ourselves with new challenges or a need for security) is what pushes or pulls the change to the good or bad side of the line. Just why is our memory so powerful a driver of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors? Because as humans, we first view change—whether we categorize it as good or bad—as something



that can cause loss of control. This provokes primal fears, even turning it into a survival issue: fight or flight. And if that sounds a little dramatic for everyday workplace change, it remains true that the brain runs all new experiences through its self-protection circuit, trying to determine if it should send some fear or loss signals to get your attention.

Studies show that when we find out something novel is on the way—a new boss, an altered industry requirement, a changed product line, a reorganization—the brain begins searching its memory banks for clues about what might be forthcoming.

Somewhere in our brain is the memory of every experience, emotion, and feeling we have ever had. Labeled *good* or *bad*, *easy* or *hard*, *try to forget*, *try to remember*—they are all in there. Like the stuff in our garage, we can't seem to find resourceful past information when we need it. At times, our memories can be faulty, and we remember things as better or worse than they actually were. Sometimes this distortion can be an advantage, providing confidence to take on a challenge. Other times it is a distraction, a deterrent, an obstacle, even a source of damaging (mis)information.

Consider the following example. A change initiative is announced: as part of a new reporting system, the sales force will have to immediately begin coding orders by region and customer instead of date. If the system implementation has been going well, people are likely to believe that this step will also go as planned. If the system start-up has been a rocky road, additional steps will be construed as potential problems as well. If there is no history

to the start-up, then we revert back into our memories to a time we experienced something similar—not necessarily the same, but akin to what we perceive or interpret is happening now. If that memory is positive or resourceful, we are bent in that direction. If not, we are more likely to project the past frustrations, disappointments, and resentments into the present.





Cognitive psychologists call this *schema*, and it is the brain’s way of looking for patterns so we can find and act on similarities. One of our central missions in this book is to help you become aware of your work and change schemas, and to show you ways to productively reshape old schemas and create new ones that have improved utility.

### **Note from Lillie “If the Shoe Fits”**

As mentioned above, both our memories and our personalities have a critical bearing on how we feel, think, and behave in change. Our dominant personal tendencies and communication styles surface as we move through the six stages of The Change Cycle. This helps account for the differences in shades of emotion and in the amount of time it takes people to move through the stages, even with core commonalities in the ways we all process change.

In the Personalities in Change chart on page 13, we map out four distinct personality types and suggest the kind of shoe this person “wears” as he or she journeys through change. Take a look and see if you recognize

## Personalities in Change Chart

Shoe	Description	Strengths	Challenges
<b>Hiking Boot</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conscientious—sometimes at own expense</li> <li>• Builds consensus</li> <li>• Works hard to produce what co-workers need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Durable; labors through distractions</li> <li>• Values high quality</li> <li>• Desires the simple truth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neglects own concerns</li> <li>• Fears being inadequate</li> <li>• Under-uses influence</li> </ul>
<b>Cross Trainer</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charming, visionary, persuasive</li> <li>• Adaptable</li> <li>• Appreciates people and solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative and optimistic</li> <li>• Decisive</li> <li>• Positive influence on others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulsive</li> <li>• Lacks follow-through</li> <li>• Often critical of others</li> </ul>
<b>Flip-Flop</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values diversity, loves a challenge</li> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Easy-going and fun-loving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cares about relationships</li> <li>• Team Player</li> <li>• Spontaneous and eager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes on too many projects</li> <li>• Avoids conflict</li> <li>• Takes things personally</li> </ul>
<b>Wingtip</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs full picture to move forward</li> <li>• Plays by the rules</li> <li>• Uses internal criteria to determine “the truth”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thorough and investigative</li> <li>• High attention to standards and details</li> <li>• Analytical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hesitant to ask for help</li> <li>• Need lots of proof</li> <li>• Difficulty hearing other points of view</li> </ul>

yourself—in part or in full. Also, I hasten to point out that each of these personality types, each “shoe,” has particular life and workplace strengths. But no matter which shoe you think fits, you’re not simply at its mercy. There are things you can work on, refine, improve. You can make the most of your particular strengths, and team with people who bring other strengths and skills to the table. In looking at this personality chart, you can begin the work of self-awareness and self-knowledge that is so vital to progressing through The Change Cycle.

P.S.: Just in case you’re wondering whether Ann and I have done our own self-assessment with help from this chart, the answer is yes. One of us is a perennial cross trainer, the other splits time between being a hiking boot and a flip-flop, depending on the weather.

## **The Change Cycle**

Hoping to find answers to our many questions about the human experience of change, we have traversed up and down the stacks of more than one research library. Albert Einstein said, “If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn’t be called Research.” We found plenty of data—mountains, even—from fields such as psychology, neurology, physiology, even physics. A lot of it was interesting, much of it even fascinating, but the technical language and detail made it less than fully useful for the average change sufferer. So we cut, pasted, and condensed our findings into the more easily understood and practical Change Cycle model. You are very welcome!

When you look at The Change Cycle model, located on the inside cover, you'll notice it is a circle. This represents the true cyclical (versus linear) nature of each change we experience. In the outside ring are the six sequential and predictable stages of change. The names of the stages (Loss, Doubt, Discomfort, Discovery, Understanding, and Integration) indicate the primary experience of that stage. The inside pie pieces list the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors most associated with that stage. The point is to progress from stage to stage in order to eventually integrate the change experience.

Notice that The Change Cycle uses the colors of a traffic light to signal that the stages mirror the actions we often take at traffic lights. For example, we put ourselves at risk if we don't stop at a red light, just as we do if we fail to stop and deal effectively with the experiences of Stages 1 and 2. The yellow light means caution, and some of us take that to mean slow down and stop, while others hit the gas and speed through. There is no wrong answer here—what do you do at a yellow light? In yellow Stages 3 and 4, caution is in order, and it determines how we experience the challenges of motivation and making choices. At a green light, we move through freely, with little risk. So it is with green Stages 5 and 6. At this point, we should be able to move more easily as we fully assimilate the change and complete the cycle.

We do know that when confronted with change, everyone goes from stage to stage in order. The Change Cycle model is the map that depicts our human experience of each stage of change. This is to say that change is an experience that activates a whole series of predictable

and sequential responses as the brain works to equip us to make good choices and sound decisions for the new experience. What we do not know is how long a person may spend in each stage, or how intense the experience might be. None of the stages are considered “good” or “bad,” and there are skills that a person can develop to help progress through the stages. And oddly enough, you never need to “like” the change to advance all the way to Stage 6. Understanding how each stage works helps you distinguish the change forest from the trees—a big-picture view that can get you from bitter to better, or from wherever you are emotionally at journey’s start, to the end.

## The Six Stages

### **The Red Stages: Loss and Doubt**

*Why do so many of us have a seemingly instinctive resistance to change?*

That was one of the questions that led to the work that anchors this book. In the beginning, we were looking for solutions to ease the stress and loss of productivity caused by corporate change: mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, and the like. What we discovered early on was that people react and respond to change not as employees, managers, spouses, siblings, partners, friends, parents, but rather as human beings. And there are commonalities—essential human patterns—to the ways we react.

Two more questions at the start of our “change curiosity” were:

- Are there common triggers that interfere with people’s ability to understand and to take action concerning the changes they face?
- Could a more systematic approach to dealing with life’s changes assist people in how they manage variables and how they act during a transition?

The answer to both questions, we found, was yes.

When working with organizations in the midst of change, it is common to hear employees at all levels wishing another part of the organization would “get fixed” and that the change process would be smoother, easier, better. Managers want workers fixed, employees want management fixed—you get the picture. The bottom line is that every level of an organization can become more change-resilient, just as every individual at every level can. As human beings, we are self-correcting, once we know the way.

Self-correcting up to a point, that is. There are reflexes and nonconscious concerns—the triggers mentioned in the bullet point above—that come alive during a change situation, no more so than right at the beginning. The good news is, the more you know about these triggers—the things that impede acceptance and understanding of a change—the faster you can get out of the first two stages, *Loss* and *Doubt*, and the more freedom you create for yourself to act in a way that moves you through the change process.

But at the outset—when the change hits—you actually don't want to try and “move” too much or even “do” too much. You might move (some even run) in the wrong direction. You've barely begun to process the new information, and your decision-making mechanism—your compass; your inner GPS—is not yet sitting squarely in its housing. Hence the “red” stages—red as in stop sign, as in the color of the traffic light. Your work-life has just changed. Life has just changed. Don't try and run the red. Decelerate. Press the brakes. Stop at the intersection. Look left and right. A change can put you in a “fight or flight” mode. You want to do neither.

The light is red. Wait till it is safe to go.

### **Stage 1: Loss to Safety**

We arrive in Stage 1 because our work-life has become different in some way. Maybe something is lost—a job, a promotion, a client. Maybe something is new—a boss, a project, a transfer. Change is standard equipment in any of those scenarios. The primary experience of Stage 1 is loss of control. And either consciously or nonconsciously, our thoughts become cautious; we experience feelings of angst, maybe even fear. Our behavior gets paralyzed.

Even a perceived “good” change, if it is of significant scope, can evoke these responses. This first stage can be a difficult one, because like driving in fog, what you know about the road ahead is equaled by what you don't know, and yet, for your own safety, you have to keep moving. It is important to acknowledge, not ignore or deny, your



losses and concerns. Your priority in Stage 1 is to find personal safety—to regain a sense of control.

Key questions to answer: “How am I going to be affected?” “What’s the worst that can happen?” “Can I handle that?”

### **Stage 2: Doubt to Reality**

Stage 2 finds us experiencing doubt and a disquieting sense of uncertainty. Doubt is the brain’s way of slowing us down, even stopping us from taking action, until more relevant information is gathered. Doubt often triggers defensive behavior as a way of maintaining control. This can lead to varying degrees of resentment, skepticism, and resistance that are counterproductive at best and in some cases even harmful. Stage 2 can cause you to ignore the obvious and only see the picture your way, causing you to defend your view of the situation as if it were The Truth. Job 1 in Stage 2 is to move past fictions and step into reality.

Stage 2 can be dramatic in organizational change because emotions run high, and anger, accusations, and varying levels of mistrust surface to drive and distort communication. More often than not, there will be a sizable number of people within the organization who will use blame and who will fight to prove that “their way” or the “old way” is still better. They argue, lobby, protest. But change is not fair, even if we beg, demand, plan, or wish it to be. Stage 2 is the soapbox for organizational change complaints, home to currently running soap operas like *The Change and the Restless*, *All My Changes*, and *As the Change Turns*.

## **The Yellow Stages: Discomfort and Discovery**

As in the world of your commute or drive to the grocery store, the color yellow in The Change Cycle means that you should exercise a little caution. You're not on the open road yet. It's not time to click on cruise control. You've got traffic, a cross street, a car waiting to turn left in front of you. Whether you're a "step on it" type behind the wheel or someone who slows down when you see yellow (you know who you are!), in the world of work changes, beating the light is not really an option. There's a limit to your powers of acceleration.

Nor would you want to floor it, even if you could. You're still getting your bearings, you don't quite see the way clear yet. There's still some mental fog.

Better things are ahead, but you're not quite sure how to get there yet.

### **Stage 3: Discomfort to Motivation**

Stage 3—*Discomfort*—is characterized by anxiety, confused thoughts, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Together they add up to sluggish behavior. Here, we wait while the brain works to assimilate—to organize, categorize, and put language on the new change picture.

We feel informed but disjointed, and there is a natural tendency for productivity to drop and for even the normally well-organized person to become absent-minded, lethargic, "off their game." This can be a frustrating stage because by now employees have clarity about the change and what it will ultimately mean for them. Absenteeism is often high during this time. Planning for

this predictable “slow-down” period is imperative, a smart investment for any organization.

To break through, to move forward, in Stage 3, you need to decide on small steps to take and make a concerted effort to reengage your motivation and keep it sustained.

Those who can’t find motivation? They may stall, even backslide. They’ve entered . . . “The Danger Zone.”

#### **Stage 4: Discovery to Perspective**

Issues in the first three stages were “problems to solve.” Here in Stage 4, *Discovery*, there are “solutions to implement.” Perspective—moving beyond constrictive thinking—is the reward in this stage. Your energy comes back. Your concentration returns. Your challenge is to take the created options, and make choices and decisions about the next best steps. A broader vision, a renewed decisiveness, bring a sense of control and optimism.

In Discovery, you learn to entertain opposing views as a way to widen your work and life lens. You search out optimal choices, eyes on both present and future.

#### **The Green Stages: Understanding and Integration**

*Understanding* and *Integration* are what you have been moving toward, the reason for your work of self-understanding and self-assessing. Understanding will have you doing some calm looking back at your change experience in order to glean insights to use down the road. That’s not all that happens here, of course, but it is part of it. The

Integration stage is where wisdom comes into play, and you find yourself looking into the future of your work and life with a cheering clarity of vision.

In these last two stages, you place a few final pieces into the change jigsaw puzzle and all at once you are looking at the complete image. No more hesitation or cautious looking left-right as the light is green and you zoom onward.

### ***Stage 5: Understanding the Benefits***

As we identify the benefits of the change, both short-term and long-term, our behavior becomes more insightful—and more pragmatic. We feel we finally have a good understanding of things. We've learned what it takes to make this change work, we've learned about ourselves; we've learned lessons that will be of use in the next work or life change. In this heightened "learning mode," we find ourselves wanting to take in as much newness, as much information, as we can absorb, both at work and outside work. We're confident. Productive.

To move on, we reflect on the deeper meaning of the change and the change process.

Are we "happy" in Stage 5? We might be. It depends on the change. As with all of the stages, this one can involve things we wish were otherwise. And of course some changes will never be completely reconciled, neatly packaged, or fully accepted. At times, crisis, chance, or nature force us to endure events that cannot be "managed well"—in any way—by anybody. Layoffs, downsizing, mergers, transfers, bankruptcy, project failures,

burnout—and that is just at work. Change is not always easy or pretty. Life is a messy, mysterious, eventually fatal business, yet in Stage 5, we accept and understand that, like it or not, somehow we go on.

### **Stage 6: Experiencing Integration**

Here we fully integrate our change experience into our life—at work and at home. Emotionally, we experience empathy and often find ourselves freely offering assistance to others who may not be as far along in the process. We feel a renewed confidence in our ability to flexibly adjust to the next round of changes life will bring. In Stage 6 people speak of having crisp focus and feeling contentment. Stage 6 challenges include avoiding ego and complacency, and elevating understanding into wisdom.

You've gone from “survive” to “thrive.” You have insight into the ramifications, consequences, and rewards of the change—and you can clearly assess past, present, and future.

When whole organizations can consistently move to Stage 6, they are successful beyond the marketplace. They count—to their communities, their customers, their vendors, their stakeholders. “The Change” isn't a big transition anymore; it's simply the *status quo*.

When people can consistently move to Stage 6, they deepen their change resiliency, they're flexible through uncertainty, they move closer to their larger work and life goals.

The Change Cycle Stage Profiles chart on page 25 captures the essence of this stage—and the five that came before it. Use it for a quick and concise guide to The Change Cycle basics.

## **Change 101**

Change comes in all shapes, sizes, and intensities. It happens to all of us. Sometimes it sneaks up on us, sometimes it hits us over the head, sometimes we are lucky enough to choose when and how it happens. And it always happens. Growing up, we all needed a Change 101 class. This book is that class. No spitballs.

## The Change Cycle Stage Profiles

Change Cycle Stage	Objective	Challenge	Key Question	Exit Strategy
<b>Stage 1: Loss</b>	To acknowledge losses and concerns	Channel fear into appropriate action	What is the worst that could happen?	Create <b>safety</b> for yourself and the organization
<b>Stage 2: Doubt</b>	To face reality by letting go of fiction	Manage anger, both passive and aggressive	What are the facts and who can give them to me?	Seek valid and accurate <b>information</b>
<b>Stage 3: Discomfort</b>	To breakthrough instead of breakdown	Take small steps despite frustration	Which steps can I take to expedite a breakthrough?	Focus on finding the <b>motivation</b> to keep yourself moving
<b>Stage 4: Discovery</b>	To gain perspective that comes from looking at all sides	Consider productive options without getting stuck	How can I determine the next best step to take?	Make <b>decisions</b> that reflect my ability to see the best options
<b>Stage 5: Understanding</b>	To grasp the meaning of this change in a deeper way	Enjoy greater understanding while knowing that you are not finished yet	What have I learned that can increase my productivity?	Identify the <b>benefits</b> in order to begin integration
<b>Stage 6: Integration</b>	To make the change a natural part of your life	Create stability while warding off complacency	How can I help those who are not as far along?	<b>Integration</b>

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