

Are you adept at adapting?

by David Bowman, Human Resources Expert

The toast “May you live in interesting times,” has been offered to good friends for hundreds of years. However, never have times been more interesting than now.

Interesting, yes; comfortable, perhaps no - at least for many of us - because today, the word “interesting” often is equivalent to the word “change.” And, there are some who are not comfortable with change.

Nevertheless, change is all around us, every day. Without warning, all manner of change occurs. We can wake-up to find our savings or investments wiped out. Our employer could go belly-up overnight, or almost without notice a merger could take place and we’re “downsized” out of work. Worse yet, in the blink of an eye, political terrorists could kill many of our friends or family, as well as destroy our entire local, and even national, economy.

Of course, not all change is bad. It can be wonderfully pleasant as well. A short-term stock investment could skyrocket in value due to a buy-out announcement. Modern medicine could save the life of a loved one. We “could” win the lottery (somebody always does, and it certainly changes their lives)!

Interesting times? Yes! Comfortable times? That may depend on how adept we are at adapting to change.

Well, how can we cope, even survive, in these interesting times?

I’ve found the people most adaptive to change are often entrepreneurs. Either as independent business people or corporate executives, they react quickly to change and adopt a “what’s next” mentality. They seem to have certain attitudes and behaviors that allow them to “roll with the punches”

and take advantage of changing situations. When change occurs, whether good or bad, they nearly always land on their feet. For them, change truly is “interesting.”

Well, you may ask, “what are these characteristics that allow entrepreneurs to adapt so well to change?”

Common among most is a keen awareness of what’s happening around them, as well as a tolerance for risk.

For example, when entrepreneurs sit next to a stranger in an airplane or a waiting room, they usually engage that person in conversation. They are frequent “networkers” and attend gatherings of all kinds, intermingling readily with friends and business acquaintances. Their curiosity and probing of others can uncover endless opportunities.

Creating and implementing new ways of doing things is usually a



focus with entrepreneurial personalities. They often are more interested in the future than in the present or past, particularly if it promises better methods and more positive results. New challenges are always an interest; “perspīgacity” is their watchword (perspiration, spirit and sagacity).

In short, they have an awareness of when change may occur and what its consequences may be. They plan for this and quickly take advantage of changing situations. When unforeseen roadblocks surface, they find ways around them. The process may involve people they know and/or methods they’ve discovered. But always, they enjoy the challenge. And, one thing’s for sure; they rarely give-up.

Entrepreneurs also have a tolerance for risk, since adapting to change may involve failure. When things are “stuck” in place, they often will take action, any action, just to get things moving again. If a wrong choice is made, the result can be a disaster much worse than being “stuck.” But that’s the risk they take to hopefully gain reward.

Often called expeditors, entrepreneurs sometimes are impulsive and less cautious than they might be, which can have negative results. But entrepreneurial quick-footedness often “dodges the bullets” of misfortune, causing these folks to come out smelling like a rose. Clearly,

they view the world as a place where greater risk offers greater reward.

To some, this entrepreneurial profile might seem as uncomfortable as change itself. Certainly the world contains all types and kinds of people, and I’m not suggesting we all turn ourselves into entrepreneurs. However, if we want to better cope in these times of change, an awareness of the attitudes and behaviors of those who handle change successfully might be useful. And, by adopting some of them, as many as is comfortable, we might survive change more easily.

For example, there are some simple steps we can take to overcome the obstacles of change, and turn them into opportunities, just like entrepreneurs do.

First, gain an awareness of what’s going on in your immediate world. Try to anticipate change before it happens, and have a plan to take advantage of new situations and opportunities. For sure, don’t put your head in the sand and pretend change won’t happen and/or it won’t affect you. That’s a recipe for disaster!

Second, list the barriers (changes), both internal and external, that you feel will stand in your way to whatever you wish to accomplish.

Third, ignore internal barriers. Self-created doubt and an, “oh, it’ll never work,” or “oh, it won’t happen to me,” attitude can disappear when exposed to the light of

reality. Bring these up and out, so they can be dispelled by looking at them logically and talking about them with family and friends.

Fourth, with a can-do attitude, actively try to lessen obstacles thrown at you from other individuals, organizations and the world in general. Some of these may be the barriers you’ve listed above. With a willingness to find positive solutions and/or outcomes, try to compromise and find ways around problems or situations brought about by change. The key is to never just give-up on a situation without pro-actively trying to manage that situation to your advantage.

Fifth, be willing to go out on a limb occasionally, and notice I said occasionally. I’m not suggesting we all become speculators, but when change comes, hunkering down may not be the best thing to do. Take a chance on change. It’s not always a bad thing. Indeed, by stretching and occasionally taking a slight risk, the rewards can be considerable.

So, let’s all understand that change is irreversible. We can hate it and try to ignore it. Or, we can do what entrepreneurs do, and stay aware of what’s going on in the world around us, anticipate and plan for change, meet it head-on and figure out how to make it work for us. In short, we can either be victims or we can prosper.

The choice is ours. **MAR**

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