

## Growing with Change

By Jim Clemmer



Change happens. And while we can't control much of the world changing around us, we can control how we respond. We can choose to anticipate and embrace changes, or resist them. Resisting change is like trying to push water upstream. Generally we're quick to point to others who resist change. It's much harder to recognize or admit to our own change resistance.

Some people call change "progress" and celebrate the improvements that it brings. Others curse those same changes and wish for the good old days. Same changes, different responses. The choice is ours: We can be leaders, or we can be followers.

### *Embrace Change*

To embrace change, we need to concentrate on five areas.

**1. Focus on a vision.** Our vision or imagination guides everything we do. Helen Keller once said, "Nothing is more tragic than someone who has sight, but no vision." We can't leave the incredible magnetic power of vision unharnessed. Our thoughts often pull us toward the reasons why we can't succeed, rather than the many reasons we can. To increase our effectiveness, we need to consciously attract into our lives what we truly want. We need to ensure the picture of our future is what we prefer, not the dark images of our fears, doubts, and insecurities. Personal, team, or organizational improvement starts with "imagineering."

We find what we focus upon. Whether I think my world is full of richness and opportunity or garbage and despair — I am right. It's exactly like that because that's my point of focus. Our vision is led by a set of core values. Without a strong set of core values, passion is weak and commitment is soft. We're more likely to lead ourselves from the outside in, rather than the inside out. Core values provide a

context for continuous growth and development that takes us toward our dreams. Our core values project forward to become our vision. How we see the world is what we project from ourselves.

**2. Choose your outlook.** We reach another milestone in our growth when we accept responsibility for our emotions. We choose to lose our temper. We choose to become jealous. We choose to harbor hatred. It's much easier to give in to the Victimitis Virus. It's less painful to believe that anger, jealousy, or bitterness are somebody else's fault or beyond our control. But that makes us prisoners of our destructive emotions. We hold grudges, let resentments build, and become cynical. We stress ourselves out. We stew in our own deadly juices.

Holding on to destructive emotions is slow suicide. Studies show that stress from negative emotions presents a more dangerous risk factor for cancer and heart disease than smoking cigarettes or high cholesterol foods. We must take responsibility for our actions in response to circumstances for which we are not responsible. The only thing we can control is ourselves, so when we choose our thoughts, we are choosing our future.

**3. Seek authenticity.** To create something we must be something. For example, becoming a parent is easy; being one is tough. We can't teach our kids self-discipline unless we are self-disciplined. We can't help build strong teams unless we are strong team players ourselves.

This timeless principle applies to every facet of our lives. We can't help develop a close community if we're not a good neighbor. We can't enjoy a happy marriage if we're not a loving partner. We won't have a supportive network of friends or colleagues until we're a supportive friend or collaborative colleague. David Whyte writes, "All things change when we do."

The big (and often painful) question is: What do I need to change about me to help change them? Instead of just wishing for a change of circumstance, I may need a change of character. Good intentions are useless if they stop there. One big difference between most people and authentic leaders, is action. Real leaders make it happen.

**4. Commit ourselves with discipline.** A key difference between real leaders and those who struggle to get by, is self-discipline. As Confucius wrote, "The nature of people is always the same; it is their habits that separate them." Successful people have formed the habits of doing those things that most people don't want to do.

Good and bad habits are tiny, daily choices that accumulate. Like a child that grows a little each day, our tiny choices accumulate without much notice. By the time we realize we have either a good or a bad habit, the habit has us.

Most of our daily choices are made automatically without even thinking about them. To change our habits, we first need to be aware of them. Then we need to work backward from the habit to the daily practices that form it. To change the habit, we need to change those practices.

Still, if discipline is a key to success, the fact is that most people would rather pick the lock. Less successful people can't pass up instant gratification in favor of some prospective benefit. It's much easier to live for the moment and let tomorrow take care of itself. But it takes discipline to forego the immediately pleasurable, for an investment in the future.

Discipline means having the vision to see the long-term picture and keep things in balance. A Chinese proverb teaches: "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow." We all want more patience — and we want it now! Most of us would like to be delivered from temptation, but we'd like it to stay in touch. Discipline is what keeps us going when the excitement of first beginning a task is long past.

**5. Continually grow and develop.** Most people see others as they are; a leader sees them as they could be. Leaders see beyond the current problems and limitations to help others see their own possibilities. It's a key part of their own growth and development.

We continue to grow when we help others grow and develop. The cycle of growth and development has two parts, and the first is our own growth and development, since we can't develop others if our own growth is stunted. These two parts depend upon and support each other. We develop ourselves while we're developing others. By developing others, we develop ourselves. It's a growth cycle that spirals forever upward.

Another part of the growth process is seeking to be more effective. As the pace of change quickens, it's easier to fall into the trap of confusing busyness with effectiveness. Like the wood-cutter who's too busy chopping to stop and sharpen his ax, we get caught up in a frantic pace that may be taking us to the wrong destination. Reflecting on our progress is as rare as a proud man asking for directions. But to be more effective, we need to step back, take time out, and assess our direction. It will help us grow and keep up with change.

### ***Making Choices***

Change forces choices. If we're on the grow, we'll embrace many changes and find the positive in them. It's all in where we choose to put our focus. Even change that hits us in the side of the head as a major crisis can be full of growth opportunities — if we choose to look for them.

Many people who have weathered a serious crisis, look back years later and point to that event as a significant turning point. Most would rather not go through that pain again, but it was a key part of their growth.

Crisis can be a danger that weakens or destroys us. Or crisis can be a growth opportunity. The choice is ours. Whichever we choose, we're right about that crisis. We make it our reality.

The point is, change is life. Successfully dealing with change means choosing to grow and develop continuously. Failing to grow is failing to live.

***About the author:***

**Jim Clemmer's practical leadership books, keynote presentations, workshops, and team retreats have helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide improve personal, team, and organizational leadership. Visit his web site, <http://www.jimclemmer.com> for a huge selection of free practical resources.**

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