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How to navigate change

Charlotte Housden is a Chartered Coaching and Occupational Psychologist with a consulting practice where she manages coaching and leadership development programmes for international organisations, as well as coaching senior executives and people at crossroads in their careers.

By Charlotte Housden



As alumni of Aston University, we're justifiably proud. Aston has global reach, attracting students from Canada to India and Nigeria to Vietnam. People who want to study Accounting or Marketing, Psychology or Vestibular Rehabilitation; by the way that's a therapeutic approach that alleviates dizziness, imbalance, and vertigo and if there are any VR alumni reading this, hello.

Despite our different backgrounds, locations and interests, as alumni we all have one thing in common – change. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus wrote that, "everything changes and nothing remains still" - which was no doubt true in 500 BC but even more relevant today. Whoever we are, wherever we live, whatever our career path, we all need to navigate change, from the tiniest shifts every day, to the biggest upheavals that can last years.



As we all know, change can be hard. I think this is an odd thing, if you contemplate it. We have plenty of opportunities to flex our 'change muscles' every day but despite the constant practice, we're not that good at facing up to it. Even professionals who manage change for a living can find it tough. I should know. I spent decades as a consultant running change management programmes for clients yet I don't find it a walk in the park either.

When it comes to making shifts our intentions are often good. We start early, setting goals in January. But by February we've already drifted back to our old ways. Sometimes the issue is the starting point. Where to begin? Often, it's because we lack the patience to stay the course; at one level we know that change doesn't happen overnight, but we still hope it will. We're often drawn to claims like *Get Rich in Four Weeks! Develop Amazing Abs in Three Days! Lose 100 pounds in an Afternoon!*



Throughout my career I've been fascinated by how we deal with change. Why some people seem to navigate it easily whilst others stumble and fall. But maybe that comes with the territory – I am a psychologist after all, having studied BSc Psychology at Aston (1988-1992), then an MSc in Occupational Psychology. Over the last few years I've also stretched into executive coaching and now additionally support organisational leaders to navigate change in their careers and lives. When I reflect back over the 30 years of my career, the topic of change has been a constant.

How people deal with change is therefore a question I am always exploring. So, I ran a research project to delve into more detail and during 2019-2020 I interviewed 108 people from 27 countries, who were all making shifts in their lives, from tiny pivots to full-on transformations.

This is what some of them discovered during the process:

"I've become a lot more patient... if you met me even a few years ago, I had a plan. I had a plan which had a date on it and I was driven."

"If you're feeling discomfort at work, it's generally a reflection that a value is being threatened, tested, challenged."

"I suppose I don't have to conform anymore... Now I openly make excuses about being a bit random. About being a nonconformist, about being an outsider. And it's almost like that has become my new currency."

"I'm learning to trust my gut a lot more."

"I feel a lot more optimistic about things... I have such a different, more positive attitude."

When I analysed the research data, I found that similar themes kept popping up. I started to write these into a [coaching blog](#) and posted hints and tips every week for 18 months. People seemed to find these useful and asked for more, so I turned the blog into a book called *Swim Jump Fly: A Guide to Changing Your Life*. I'd like to share what came up in the research with you too.

Therefore, over the summer I'll be writing a series of six articles where I will reveal more about what actions the interviewees took to help themselves. Every two weeks between July and the end of September I'll post ideas, along with exercises to help you manage your own shifts, from changing your job or career, improving your fitness, working on new relationships or de-cluttering your house or life.

Stay tuned for the next article where I'll be focusing on the goal for your change project: knowing the purpose and why you want to achieve it, along with being clear about where you want to end up.

Charlotte Housden is a Chartered Coaching and Occupational Psychologist with a consulting practice where she manages coaching and leadership development programmes for international organisations, as well as coaching senior executives and people at crossroads in their careers. To find the book search for *Swim Jump Fly: A Guide to Changing Your Life* on Amazon or visit the [Swim Jump Fly](#) website, or contact Charlotte via [LinkedIn](#) or ch@charlottehousden.com

Cartoons and illustrations by Private Eye cartoonist Simon Pearsall who created 100 original images for the book.

Discussion

What would you like to say?

