

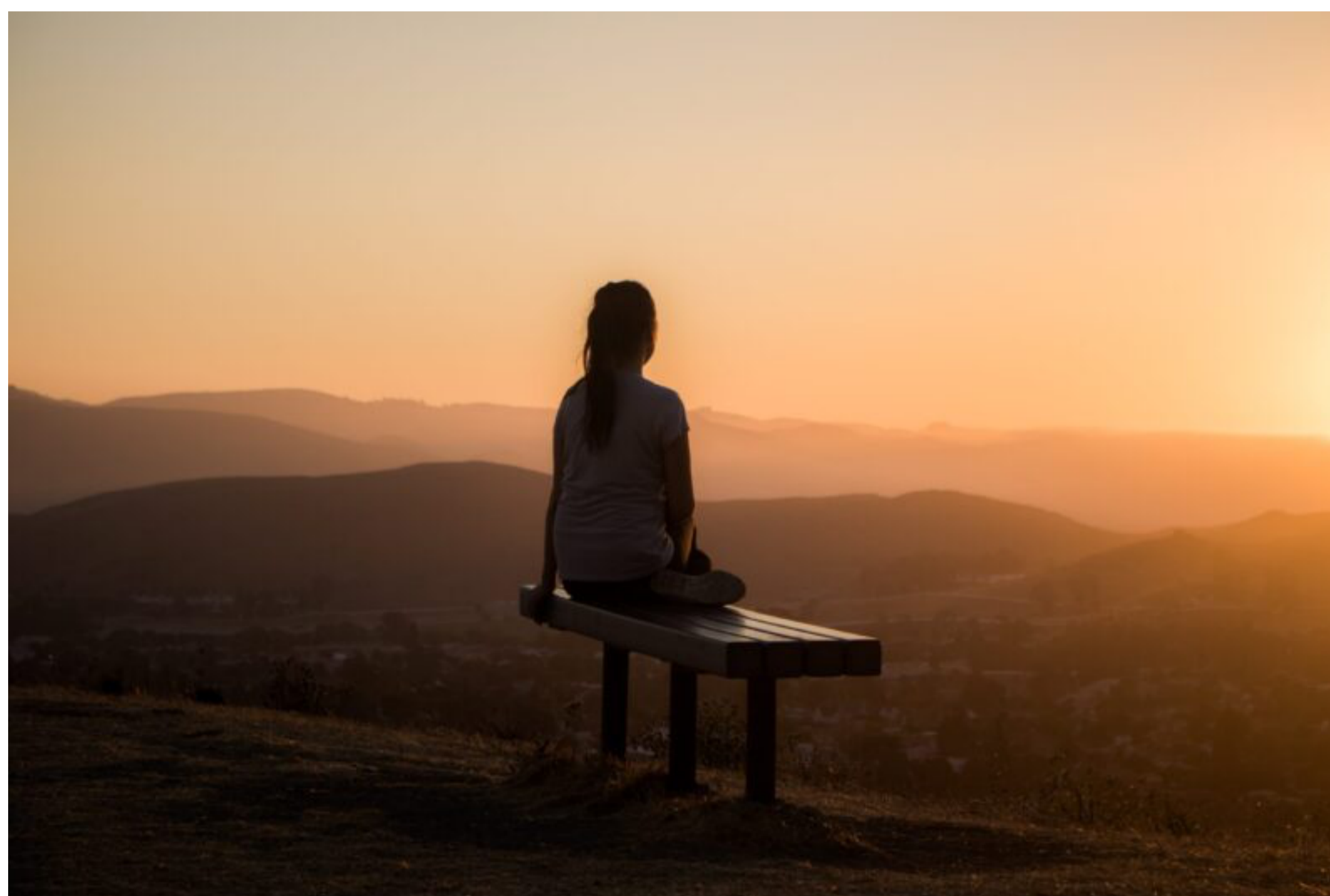
Article Psychology

0

# The why and where of change

Charlotte Housden is a Chartered Coaching and Occupational Psychologist. She runs a consulting practice focusing on coaching and leadership development programmes for international organisations, coaching senior executives in their roles, and helping others at crossroads in their careers.

By Charlotte Housden



Being a [psychologist](#) means I'm fascinated by how people deal with change. I'm a consultant and coach, so much of my work is focused on helping individuals manage shifts in their lives. But why do some people find it easy and why do some find it hard? What is the secret sauce of success? During 2019/2020 I ran a research project to find this out. I interviewed 108 people who were switching careers, moving locations, getting married (or divorced), dealing with illness, or working on their fitness.

I identified a number of actions that helped or hindered their progress and wrote these into a weekly [coaching blog](#). Later, I wrote them into a book called *Swim Jump Fly: A Guide to Changing Your Life*. Over the next few months, I'll be sharing these with you, including exercises to help you manage your own shifts or changes.



One key area that came up was clarity of goals. Focusing on **why** we want to change helps us understand our motivation and gives us the impetus to get going. Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher who said having a **why** means we can bear almost anything. Focusing effort on those things brings us meaning and purpose and makes for a better life.

*"There were always stories of partners having heart attacks when they weren't expecting it. And people collapsing on the stairs because they'd worked too hard... [I thought] This is madness. We're killing ourselves. Why are we doing this? And for what? For money?"* Participant quote on the **why** around her career change.

This is an exercise I offer clients so they can focus on their **why**. First identify a change you'd like to make (or are making) and then ask yourself:

1. What is so important about working on this problem? What is my motivation to shift? What are the benefits? What will I also lose if I make these changes?
2. What led to this situation I am in/what maintains it? What are the consequences (positive and negative) for me, and others, if I stay where I am?
3. What might motivate me to shift? Visualise your life in a year when you've made this change. Then also imagine what it will be like if you haven't been able to shift.
4. Now focus on your confidence about making this change. We'll use a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 10 (extremely confident). Ask yourself, how confident am I that I'll be successful? What made me choose that number? Reflect on what might help you move closer towards 10.
5. Then ask **why now**? If this is long-standing issue what is different this time? Why is it important to work on it now? Ask yourself what you have tried so far? What helped or didn't help? What has shifted since then? You might like to read the *Am I ready for change* questions on the [swimjumpfly](#)

*"I need to fight my way back to things that resonate with me and things that I feel have value. And suburban life is what I would have always dreaded. It isn't a surprise that it doesn't float my boat. It doesn't give me the variety that I need."* Participant quote on **why** he wanted to move location.

The second theme that came up in the research was being clear about our destination. Knowing **where** we want to end means we will head in the right direction. In the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Alice discusses the topic of **where** with a talking cat:

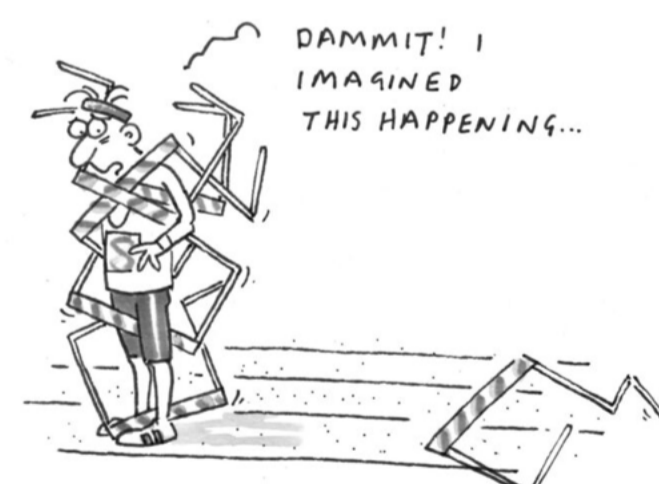
*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"*

*"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,"* said the Cat.

*"I don't much care where—"* said Alice.

*"Then it doesn't matter which way you go,"* said the Cat.

You can think about **where** as the way you might feel, think, or behave once you've reached your destination. It can also be more of a general direction of travel, rather than a specific endpoint. Athletes think about **where** when they're preparing for a competition. They use visualisations and imagery, running through the race, and imagining where they will end up. Research shows that imagining actions means we're more likely to complete them. Conversely, if we imagine failure and obstacles, we doubt ourselves and then may well give up.



Below is an exercise I use with coaching clients to help them reflect on their **where**. You might like to try it too:

- 1) Visualise your **where** (your destination) by playing a show-reel in your head. Where are you, what is going on? What can you see or hear? How are you feeling? What is different or better? Create a clear image of your new self in the future.
- 2) You can use the *Miracle Question* to help you think through your **where**. This question invites you to imagine that as you sleep, a miracle happens. The things you are trying to change have magically taken place. Ask yourself, how would you know that this miracle has happened? What would be the first sign of change? What has shifted in your life?
- 3) It's helpful to think about the external **where** too – what others might see. For example, if you wanted to increase your confidence, how would that manifest itself to the people around you? Would it be a healthier you who is able to play with your kids? Or would it be joining the five-a-side on a Saturday morning? What would be different?
- 4) Finally, it will help if you set goals for yourself so you know when you've reached your destination. You will also be more likely to hit these if you can measure your progress. Using the acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-based) can help with this.

That's it for the first step in successful change navigation. The next post will focus on the size of the change you want to make vs. your comfort with change and whether there is a fit between the two.

Charlotte Housden is a Chartered Coaching and Occupational Psychologist. She runs a consulting practice focusing on coaching and leadership development programmes for international organisations, coaching senior executives in their roles, and helping others 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. You can contact Charlotte via [LinkedIn](#) or [ch@charlottehousden.com](mailto: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?

