

Will you swim, jump or fly?

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By Charlotte Housden



In the last [post](#), we covered why you might want to make a change in your life and where you'd like to end up once you've hit your goal. In this one, I'll help you think about the size of your shift and how well that fits with your views about change. Word of warning, it takes more concentration if you're aiming for big change and you're also risk averse!

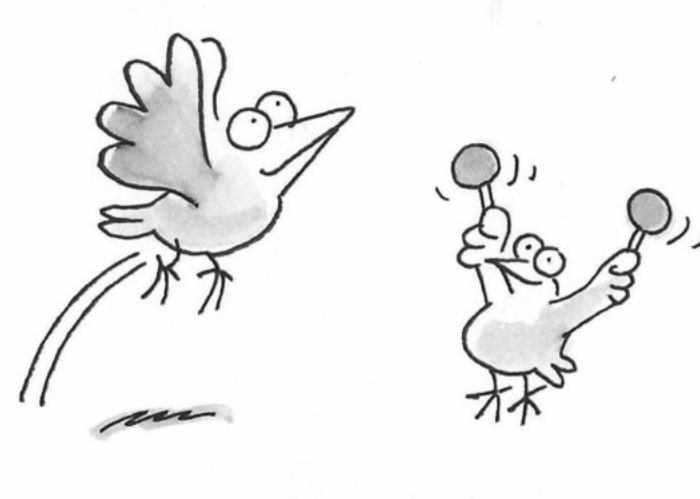
When you're contemplating (or working on) a change it's important to understand how far you need to travel to achieve your goal. Sometimes you'll just need to tweak your routine, switch up your exercise regime a little, or take on a new side project at work.

Other times you might need to make a radical change – moving to another country, re-training in a new profession, or leaving a relationship you've been dedicated to for years. Being clear on the size of your project is an important step in successful change. It will help you prepare for action, be more realistic about how long it will take and, ensure you have the resources to get there.

You may remember from the first [post](#) in this series, that I interviewed 100+ people going through change in their lives and that I wrote a book based on this called, *Jump, Fly: A Guide to Changing Your Life*. In the book, I use a metaphor for the size of a change project: swim – if you're moving to nearby waters, jump – a bigger move either physical, or metaphorical, and fly – if you end up a long way from where you started – an opportunity for reinvention.

I use this next exercise with coaching clients to help them to reflect on the size of the change they want to make. Why not ask yourself these questions to help you tackle your own project:

- How far do I need to travel to make this change successful?
- Is it a few tweaks here or there? Or a further distance? Or do I need a total change?
- Think about the metaphor of movement. Which of the three sizes of change best fits the goal I set for myself? Is it incremental and small movements (swim), a larger change (jump), or do I want to end up somewhere completely different (fly)?

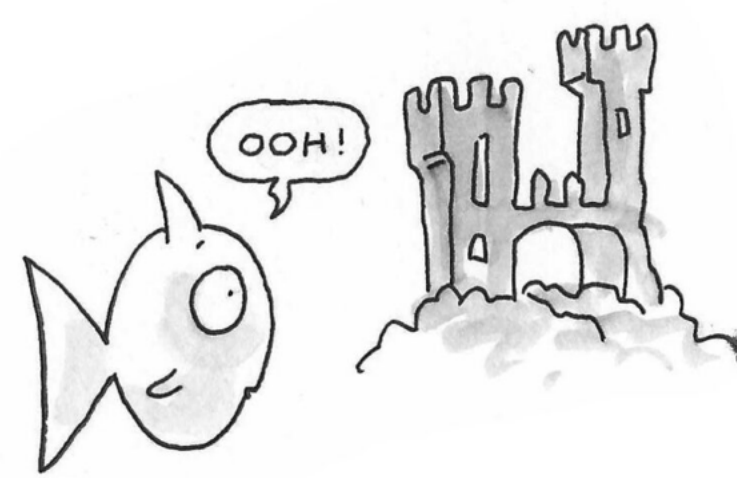


Next, it's useful to understand your comfort with change. If you tend to be more risk-averse, you may find it harder to work through a radical shift. On the other hand, if you enjoy changing things around, you might find small iterations don't cut it for you. To bring this to life I use three animals in the book. Hopefully, these are self-explanatory since a fish swims, a grasshopper jumps and a bird flies! These three animals represent how you deal with change and your comfort with change. Why not ask yourself:

- How do I tend to approach change? Do I often feel anxious/am I a little risk averse?
- Am I a little bolder/can deal with change more comfortably?
- Or do I enjoy taking risks and like to make big changes in my life?
- Now go back to the metaphor of the fish, grasshopper and bird. Which of those fits you right now? Fish (tend to prefer incremental and small change), grasshopper (comfortable jumping a bit further) or bird (delighted to be flying into something completely new).

Finally, we'll compare the two – the size of the change you want to make and whether this fits your current risk profile. If there's a gap between the two, then there are steps you will need to take to make your change project easier to manage.

Sometimes these two aspects fit well – for example, if you like change and your destination is quite far away (metaphorically or literally). But at other times there can be a mismatch. Let's say you are more risk averse, but you want to change your physical and mental health, exercise, and your diet. The disconnect between your expectations, and your desire for change, will create a challenge.



If this is you, then you may need to be patient – stretch out your timeframe or reduce the size of change you want to make, perhaps making one or two small moves at a time. Radical change can take place, it just needs to be through small actions. As they say, a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

Or perhaps you like change but the shift you need to make needs to be more subtle, requiring smaller moves. Maybe you tend to throw yourself in and overreach, acting quickly, travelling far. Perhaps on this occasion, you need more time to reflect, pause and reassess. This will help you to be more flexible in the way you tackle change.

Finally, I'd suggest you ask yourself these questions so you can discover how well-matched your shift project is to your personal approach to change.

- Is this change project more of a swim, a jump or a fly for me? How far do I need to travel?
- What is my general comfort with risk? Do I tend to be more of a fish, a grasshopper or a bird?
- How does my risk profile fit with my change project?

For fish:

- Am I a fish that needs to fly? This might feel uncomfortable at first. However, some fish can fly short distances, they just need to take breaks in between. Ask yourself: How could I break my project down into smaller 'swims'?

For birds:

- Am I a bird that needs to jump? That might be frustrating as you'd like to take to the wing. However, there are some birds that spend much of their time hopping on the ground. Ask yourself: what can I learn from them? What can I do to develop more patience? How can I slow my steps down so the changes bed in?

For grasshoppers:

- Am I a grasshopper that needs to either fly or swim? There are grasshoppers who do both. However, they need to take breaks by going back to jumping once in a while. What can I do to be more patient, or what can I do to speed up? Perhaps I need to break the project down into smaller junks or perhaps work on my courage and take bigger risks.

That's it for the second step in successful change navigation. The next post will be about getting clear on the specifics of your shift.

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?

