A person with long hair

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Loving Change

March 13, 2021

Well, hello friends.

I hope you’re having an AMAZING week.

Mine has been super busy.

It seems that our Texas Snowmageddon last month is the storm that keeps on giving.

Because as I drove up to the house a few days ago, I suddenly realized that the front row of my landscaping that had lovely (and might I add NEW) green shrubs in front of the house had shriveled up and died.

Apparently, while some of the plants down here might be tough enough to tolerate 100-degree heat for months on end, when forced to endure 5 days of near zero temperatures, it’s a whole other thing.

So when I saw those dead shrubs that were flourishing just a month ago, I remember frowning and thinking “how…annoying.”

And I got out of the car and kind of marched over to them and just stood there staring at them for a bit.

Like that was going to cause them to start living again.

Hahaha

This sent me go on a weeklong journey that took me from feeling super annoyed and irritated to now, just a week later, kind of excited about the possibilities.

So, what changed? I mean, I still have dead bushes. I still must invest money in something I feel should still be alive.

What changed was how I chose to think about it.

I just decided to stop my inner whining about them being dead and to just decide what to do now.

That sent me on a fun little tour through Pinterest and Houzz and some of my favorite decorating magazines.

And before you know it, I’d stopped feeling annoyed at having to make an investment in something I didn’t want to change. To instead, feeling excited about being able to add some extra pizzazz to the front of my house.

As I thought about that mindset journey, it made me think of how we handle change within our careers.

You know how it works.

Things are going along great. Everything’s clicking.

We like our job.

We’ve got our fun work colleagues.

We love our boss. The company. Our benefits.

And then boom.

Out of the blue, something happens and suddenly, everything changes.

Maybe our boss leaves.

Or we get re-orged.

Or laid off.

Suddenly, what was great is now uncertain.

We can feel out of control.

Or victimized.

Or angry.

Or scared.

And for the most part, navigating through that change is something we must do on our own.

Sure, some bosses may try to help.

You might have some supportive colleagues or friends or a spouse who will lend an ear.

But coming to grips with change that you didn’t want or expect is up to you.

And I can show you how to work your way through it faster. So you go from dreading change to actually…love it.

So, let’s dive in.

Like I said, when I realized the front landscaping had been destroyed by the cold weather, I was kind of pissed.

The house is about a year old and we were busy dreaming of some fun upgrades to the backyard. Like maybe installing fold back doors and a pool and pergola.

Trust me, my plans did NOT include redoing the perfectly fine landscaping out front.

And at first I was ticked.

As I started combing through Home Advisor and Thumbtack, looking for a good landscaper I just kept thinking “I don’t have time for this”, “This is super annoying” and “I liked the front the way it was.”

Yes, my inner voice can be a little whiny.

Hahaha

But seriously. You know how it is. You have the things you WANT to do and then now you’ve having to deal with the things you HAVE to do.

So annoying.

Or is it?

I was irritated by having something to deal with that I wasn’t expecting.

And annoyed at the storm that had caused it all.

Super helpful being irritated at a storm, right? And one that has been over for a month.

Hahaha

Our brains are so helpful sometimes.

And it wasn’t until I started exploring potential replacement designs that my feelings started to change.

I went from looking at potential landscape architects to browsing Houzz, Pinterest and even Zillow to look at some design alternatives I could share with them.

And in an instant, I went from irritated to inspired.

Why?

Because in my exploration, I moved from irritation that the storm had ruined my landscaping to excited about the upgrades I could made and the impact that would have on the house and on ME every time I drove or walked by it.

Now, you might be thinking, so what? You just got over it or worked through it.

And on some level that’s true. But the interesting part is how quickly it happened.

As someone who’s long managed people in my career, I can recall other leaders talking about their employees and saying things like “so and so is just not that flexible” or “so and so is such a no person.”

It’s like they thought people just either are or aren’t good with change.

I’ve never felt that way. Because early on in my career, I got exposed to a management consultant view of the philosophy behind how people process through change.

And it’s always fascinated me and once I understood it, I made the decision to always embrace it.

I might not like it. I might initially feel the stab of uncertainty or panic if I sense it might impact me in a way I wasn’t expecting.

By my expectation of myself is that I am always proactive in exploring the possibility that change presents.

And when you combine this change management model with some of the mindset techniques we work with in our coaching practice, it can literally turn you from someone who DREADS change. To someone who LOVES it.

And in my view, there is no skill more critical in today’s business world.

Learning to not just “roll with it” but to understand “how to feel comfortable exploring or engaging with the potential of the change” is HUGE.

Learning how to lead yourself through it is critical.

I know you may not believe that yet but stay with me.

So first I want to walk you through the change management model. Let’s make this interactive…so take out a pen and paper and draw a long vertical line and then a long horizontal line that crosses it. You’ll end up with four boxes (or a two-by-two matrix…as consultants call it).

In the upper left box, write “Denial.”

In the lower left box, write “Resistance.”

In the lower right box, write “Exploration.”

In the upper right box, write “Commitment.”

These four boxes, when you go from upper left to lower left to lower right to upper right outlines the journey, we take from the moment something big or unexpected happens to when we develop a level of acceptance or comfort with that thing.

So, the basic premise is that when a big, unexpected (and something your brain might interpret as “dangerous or unwanted” new thing happens, most of us find ourselves in “denial” in the upper left.

This is caused by the thoughts we’re thinking, which are probably something like, “oh crap” or “this can’t be happening” or whatever.

A thought like this will cause you to feel “shocked” or “disbelief” or whatever.

And when you feel shocked or disbelief, that might cause you to maybe gossip with your co-workers or family to discuss how shocking or unexpected the whole things is.

So that’s what happens in the Denial stage.

When it comes to unexpected change, some of us spend a VERY long time in the denial phase.

But eventually, we move to the next box, which is called Resistance.

We get to resistance because at some point, we can no longer deny the change is happening.

Like if we lost our job, we have to deal pretty quickly with the fact that we no longer have a paycheck coming in and most of us need to fairly quickly decide what we will do about that.

We are faced with the reality of it and that is what pushes us into Resistance.

But in resistance, we’re still not happy with the change.

In resistance we’re deep into victimhood, fear or anger and sometimes cycle between the three.

It might be because we’re blaming someone or something specific for foisting the change off on us. So we cling to those negative thoughts and emotions because on some level, resisting the inevitability of the change feels oddly comforting. In a negative way.

Assigning blame can falsely feel empowering when we’re scared. In an odd way it’s soothing. But it NEVER serves us.

Resistance of any kind never serves us. It only keeps us stuck and living with negative emotions that kind of make us feel ‘icky.’

But the people we love will usually re-assure us when we’re in this resistance stage. They might even hop on the blaming bandwagon because it makes them feel like they’re somehow providing you comfort.

While we always move out of resistance physically as we all eventually have to “live the reality” of the new thing. Mentally, we can stay stuck in resistance for years.

Ever know someone who 10 years later is still bad mouthing their ex?

Or an ex-employer?

Or a former boss?

Those folks are stuck in resistance.

But for those who move themselves out of resistance, they do so by choosing to move into the next box in the lower right called “Exploration.”

This box is ALL about the possibilities.

And you get there asking yourself possibility-oriented questions like “what if” and “how can I?”

By doing this, you’re inserting yourself into the change that’s happening an exploring the ways that it “might serve you.”

You’re proactively looking for how to make it work FOR YOU instead of AGAINST YOU.

And when you’re actively thinking in this way, it’s a very short journey to get to the final stage which is in the upper right box called Commitment.

When you get here, you see it. You get how the change is working FOR you and now you’re living it.

When you understand that this is how your brain processes through sudden and abrupt change – a change you probably didn’t drive – it can literally transform you.

Why?

Because it gives you the power to “see” where you’re at in dealing with that thing.

Whether you’re processing through it in a helpful way or are stuck in either denial or resistance.

For years, I’ve committed to myself to proactively move myself in to Exploration as soon as possible.

And I do this by asking myself questions like:

“How can this serve me?”

“What can I learn from this?”

“How can this be a great opportunity?”

By doing this, you can instantly shift yourself into the Exploratory phase. Now granted, at first, you might not stay there. It’s quite common to vacillate between Denial and Resistance and Exploration.

But if you practice asking those questions often enough, eventually, you will start seeing the possibility and believing that the change CAN serve you.

And when you do this, you’ve just built probably THE most powerful skill set when it comes to your long-term career.

Companies look for people who are flexible – especially these days.

These people tend to get promoted more quickly.

They tend to be higher achievers.

They tend to be people others want to work with.

Why?

Because of how they’re thinking. They are not stuck. They are not whining or complaining or living in angry victimhood.

They don’t have time. Because they too busy exploring and ideating and changing things.

When you get good at this purposeful shift into Exploration, everything changes.

You begin to see change as your friend.

And so even when something happens that jars you a little, it doesn’t take too long to begin exploring how it might actually be a good thing.

That’s what happened with my dead shrubs in front of the house. As soon as I began asking myself how I could do something more exciting with the replacement landscaping, I got inspired.

Granted, I think the inspiration is going to cost me a bit more than I expected to spend. But it’s going to make me so happy every time I drive up to the house.

And happy is always a good thing.

The next time something unexpected happens – or is rumored to happen – think about this change management model. And start playing with asking yourself those empowering exploratory questions. And watch how your brain will come up with the most AMAZING answers.

Because when we ask ourselves the right questions, amazing always follows.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.