



Got Change? Understanding the five stages of change will help you thrive.

By Greg Bell, speaker and trainer

“Change is inevitable; it’s direction that counts.” Gil Atkinson

So you’ve got it all figured out and life is going along great. Then you’re caught off-guard – there’s a shake-up at work, you have to move into a new home, or the baby arrives.

Now what?

Let’s face it: the world has changed. With the pace of technology, even change has changed. Change is the only constant, and to thrive in times of change, we must learn to embrace it.

Dealing with change is vital to your personal and professional success. Preparing yourself for change may seem like an impossible task, but by understanding the five stages of change, you can create a solid change management strategy and maximize your effectiveness and that of your organization even during tumultuous times.

Awareness of these stages will also help you understand how your staff or team members process change, and what stage they may be in.

Stage 1

Commitment or Acceptance. Change can either be an internal commitment or an acceptance of external factors requiring change. In this stage, resistance is at its peak. Denial, anger, and blame are often in play. Sickness, sadness, and mourning are also frequent reactions. Feelings of loss are common.

What To Do. Relax, or did you forget already that you knew some type of change was coming? Remember, the only constant is change. Re-group and stay committed to what matters. Find out as much as you can about what to expect now that things have changed. This will help you manage your expectations. Check your assumptions, too – ask lots of open-ended questions and listen to the answers. (Avoid “why” questions, which can cause unnecessary defensiveness. You are on a fact-finding mission about this new change in your life and how it will shape your future. Keep on point and stay focused.)

Stage 2

Pain or Discomfort. We often feel at our worst during this stage. There are periods of hope and despair, confusion and adjustment as we struggle to come to terms with the change. We begin to search for meaning.

What To Do. Step back to get perspective. Be patient. Do things to release your stress, such as exercising. Breathe. Know that this stage will end, too. Remember that you are in control of your emotions. Do not let them control your behavior or actions.

Stage 3

Power. We begin to identify with the “new” way or with the change. In fact, we may find ourselves enthusiastically embracing it – which we couldn’t have imagined in Stage 1!

What To Do. Acknowledge yourself for having come this far. Celebrate your accomplishment, but keep in mind that you are still in the process. Maintain balance and focus.

Stage 4

Harmony. We are fully functioning with the new direction and ready to move on.

What To Do. Rest...but be ready. Remember, change is inevitable.

Stage 5

What’s Next. Be prepared. The next change is coming. There is a reason that most car accidents happen close to home -- because we can get complacent. By anticipating change, we can avoid feeling blindsided by it.

What To Do. Proactively predict and prepare for what might come your way. The more you can understand about what happens during change, the easier it is to go through it. Embrace change, because it’s here to stay.

Tips to remember:

1. Each stage of change is temporary, although we have a tendency to remember the pain and discomfort stage the most.
2. You may slip back to an earlier stage.
3. Find support – mentors, colleagues, other resources, etc.
4. Build in time for rest. Recovering from change is just as important as weathering it.
5. Don't expect people to move through the stages at the same rate.
6. Know you’ll get through it! You have gone through these stages before in some capacity: learning to drive, to operate a computer, etc.
7. At stages I and II, people need the most support.
8. Once you’re comfortable with the change, anticipate future needs.
9. Remember what’s at stake. Why is it important to weather this change well?
10. Review what you learn.

This article was written by Greg Bell J.D. of GregBell Consulting. Visit the website at: www.gregbell.net for more information.