

# Manage “Change” & Harvest Opportunities

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Change is a facet of life that is accepted or rejected in a variety of ways. Some people readily adapt to change and often thrive on it. Others may not even recognize that things are changing around them until it is specifically pointed out to them. Still others accept change only if they are warned in advance that it is coming – and then reluctantly. And finally, there are those who will hold on to the status quo as long as possible.

Our experience has shown that one’s personal acceptance or rejection of change is directly tied to one’s ability to deal with uncertainty in their life and still feel a sense of control. The question everyone must answer, “Do you want to lead the inevitable changes that you will face in the future (cause), or are you willing to be swept up by them (crisis)?”

There are three distinct types of change that you might encounter in organizations today. The first type is *Evolutionary* change. Evolutionary change is initiated to gain incremental improvements in programs, processes, or structures. Examples include:

- Efforts to keep up with the competition.
- Minor tweaks in an organizational structure.
- The introduction of new products and/or services.
- Personal performance improvements achieved through attending a workshop or training session, etc.

The second type, *Revolutionary* change, reaches the next order of magnitude and is progressively more difficult to accept by the masses. It includes changes that must be made by organizations if they are to survive in the marketplace. Examples include:

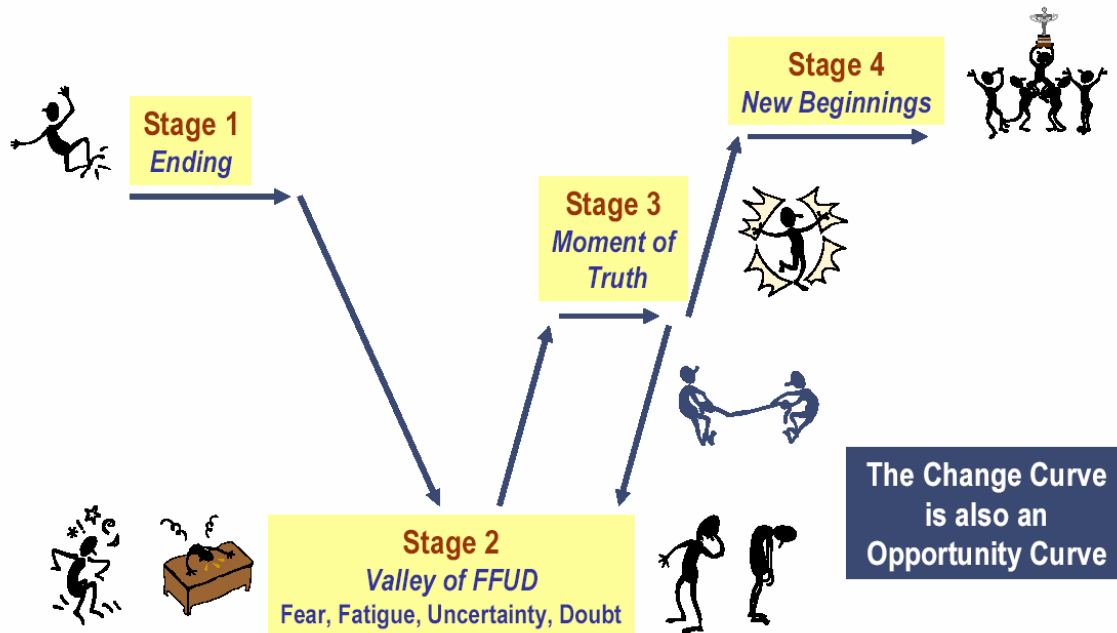
- A change in a market forecast precipitated by altered supply.
- Lost market share.
- Demographic shifts.
- A cash flow reduction.
- Right-sizing initiatives.
- Outsourcing initiatives, etc.

Finally, there is *Chaotic* change. This is the type of change that no one can predict. Examples include:

- The stock market crashes.
- An acquisition or takeover by a competitor.
- A terrorist attack.
- Major defalcations.
- Accounting misrepresentations or errors.
- Overnight product obsolescence, etc.

Regardless of the type of change you may encounter, it is important as a leader to always help your associates navigate through their personal change curve. Our rendition

of the change cycle has been adapted from the work of William Bridges. As we see it, this cycle has four distinct phases.<sup>1</sup>



**Stage 1 – The Ending:** This stage signifies that an area of our life is about to end – for good or bad, depending on one’s personal view. It means that we are about to undertake a change that either we ourselves initiated in hope of improving our position in life, or one that was thrust upon us by an outside force (another person, the organization, the economy, etc.). The positive aspects of this stage are characterized by optimism, excitement, anticipation, boldness, and enthusiasm. The negative aspects are represented by worry, anger, belligerence and shock.

**Stage 2 – The Valley of FFUD:** FFUD is our acronym for fear, fatigue, uncertainty, and doubt. These characteristics can make cowards of us all. They can invoke distraction, defeatism, desperation, victimization, and a sense of being stuck in a place with no way out. Overcoming the mental and emotional obstacles in Stage 2 is critical to our success. We do this by using our critical thinking skills and taking one step forward at a time.

**Stage 3 – The Moment of Truth:** Once we move through Stage 2, we begin to experience some of the results we are searching for. If we accept these results in a positive fashion, we can transition ourselves to Stage 4. If we view the results as a one-time occurrence or don’t deem ourselves worthy enough to move on, we will slip back into Stage 2.

<sup>1</sup> The Change Curve as represented here is adapted from the book *INSIDE OUT – Using Classical Children’s Stories for Personal and Professional Growth* by Myron J Radio and Rod N Johnson (Beavers Pond Press, 2003).

**Stage 4 – The New Beginning:** This final stage is characterized by transformation, a sense of accomplishment, gratitude, and increasing hope for future success. In organizations, “The New Beginning” simply becomes the way we do business.

Evolutionary change will closely follow this four-stage curve. However, when people are exposed to revolutionary and chaotic change, they may move instantly into Stage 2. If this occurs, it is the leader’s responsibility to provide certainty and steely calm to the situation. This will enable your associates to move through the change cycle successfully and with less stress.

Implementing major change initiatives requires one to adjust their thinking pattern or mindset in order to navigate the change curve smoothly. When we change the way we think about a given problem, a change in our behavior and/or action will more naturally occur. Recognizing and rewarding behaviors (either positive or negative) in the change initiative will help drive performance toward forward.

Once a Change has been implemented, the optimum means to sustain the momentum is to:

- 1) Measure results and publish the findings, and
- 2) Reinforce positive behaviors whenever and wherever they are encountered.

It is important to stress that leaders should be prepared to assist their team members through various change phases by being visible, supportive and leading by example. When the fear of change can be reduced, the overall objectives will be achieved sooner and in a more complete and integrated manner.

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As president of **The R Group** Myron J Radio helps organizations *build high-powered teams and develop the people within them*. **The R Group** offers a complete range of Change Management, Human Capital Management and Workforce Assessments, Workshops and Advisory Services. For more information see <http://www.the-r-group.com/> or call (703) 476-5575