



Relationships *The Adlerian Team*

The Cycle of Change

By Sue Smarkala

As we move into November, and the temperatures get chillier, change is all around us. The busyness of new schools, new classrooms, learning the ways of a new teacher, new classmates, is beginning to settle a bit. Our work life has geared up after summer vacations, and our lives are full with many activities. How can we look at all the change that we and our families are experiencing, and appreciate that change is a process rather than a myriad of individual events?

A helpful model to consider when facing changes in any area of our lives is the 4 stage "Cycle of Personal Change". The model consists of "Letting go", "Living with the question", "Exploring new beginnings" and "Looking back to recognize that you have moved forward".

Letting Go

In new beginnings there is often a need to let go of old beliefs and ways of doing things. Attending school full time may be new to your child. Learning subjects within a semester system may mean big changes for your adolescent. A newly organized workplace is a big change; new staff members may be learning their way around their workplace. Previous learning and experiences provide an important foundation on which to build new understandings and choices. And, sometimes, old ways need to be put aside for new strategies and outlooks. It is often not easy to put aside past ways of doing things, and yet, you may need to let go of old ways of doing things, acknowledge the loss of using that skill set, and build new skills. For instance, if project work is swamping your student's time, what old study habits are getting in the way? If a new employee's work productivity is slowing client delivery, where is the opportunity for change? Recognizing that something is no longer working is the first step toward moving forward.

Living with the question

If past ways of handling school are not working, what does your child need to do? What does your work colleague need to do to satisfy client needs? Those are the questions to examine. It is perfectly reasonable to not know the answer. Letting the question hang in the air for a while helps to settle any emotion around it and to look for new approaches, rather than acting on the initial reaction. The "I hate math, can I drop it?" question can be considered for a few weeks. Making a snap decision may not be the best course of action. Fully understanding the question and its possibilities gives everyone time to consider options. While not knowing may be an uncomfortable stage; it is a very valuable stage. It helps everyone to think about the question from a variety of angles.

Exploring new beginnings

Here you ask the "what if" questions. You and your child, or work colleague, can brainstorm to develop a variety of possibilities. You can encourage doing research and talking to others. As you look at the situation, considering it from many angles, this allows everyone to become more comfortable with the idea of making a change. You see that there are multiple approaches. Also, what is it that might have to be unlearned? It is here that you can open new doors for consideration, broadening the scope of possibility. As well, it is great modeling for the future. You are helping them to build their change 'muscles'. Nothing is so evident as change. Comfort with change is a very important life skill to develop.

Looking back to realize you moved forward

As you move through these stages of change, you are moving forward. You both have a better understanding of the options available. You know the pro's and con's. You and your child/children have spent time discussing some important issues about the school year. You and your work colleague understand the workplace expectations and capabilities better. You are supporting them to develop their skills for discussion, their abilities to determine options and their awareness that change is an important and common aspect of life. As you appreciate and celebrate the choices made, you honour a process of thoughtful choice.

It is helpful to reflect on which of the 4 stages has your focus and energy. You may end up spending more time in one stage versus another. Remember you are in a process which takes time and leads to skill building and effective communication.

School is a very important place of work for your child. The learning accomplished there includes both subject matter and life skills training. Children are learning essential life skills - how to manage their time and resources. In the workplace, everyone wants to do the best job they can. All workplaces need to manage change in a proactive, optimistic fashion. With this model of change, you can support people in your life as they cope with change, plan for change, and experience success.

Positive Change: Leader as Coach

Adapted from: Braham and Wahl's *Be Your Own Coach*

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