

THE TOP PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO CHANGE

*Essential Skills That
Put You On Top*

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DEDICATION

Tim

To my wife, Marla, the person most responsible for bringing stability and peace to what could have been a very chaotic and messy life.

Barbara

For the love of my life, my greatest supporter, cheerleader, and encourager, who helps me through all life's challenges and celebrates with me all life's successes. To Bob, a fabulous husband and a great man!

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
Section I. Challenge of Change	1
Chapter 1. Why Top Performers <i>Must</i> Know	
How to Deal with Change	3
Chapter 2. Change Choices	11
Section II. Surviving Change	21
Chapter 3. Change Dangers	23
Chapter 4. Increasing Your Luck during Times of Change . . .	39
Section III. Thriving in Change	47
Chapter 5. Adapting to Change	49
Chapter 6. Taking Charge	63
Chapter 7. Impacting Others in Times of Change	83
Appendix: Creating Your Personal Approach to Change	97
About the Authors	107
Bibliography	109
Index	113

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INTRODUCTION

We have been working in organizations for many years helping individuals and groups communicate better, build confidence, learn coaching skills, and manage conflict—just about any skill area that is related to human interaction, potential, and performance. Over the last several years we found that requests for workshops dealing with change and transition were growing dramatically.

We had been doing workshops on dealing with change for years and knew that this was a powerful topic for individuals and for corporations. However, we did not suspect the dramatic increase in need for training on this important topic. Change has become the way of the world and people were learning to deal with it or were burning out from feeling bitter and hurt.

A top performer must be a master at dealing with change. Research indicates that poor adaptation to change has many negative consequences for both people and business performance. Mergers are a great example of how poorly most people deal with change. Most studies suggest the 50 percent of all mergers fail. Additionally, only about 20 percent achieve the desired results of the merger. We believe that a large part of the failure is caused by the serious lack of attention to helping people deal with the psychology of change. So much money is invested in merging software systems, manuals, reporting hierarchies, and so on, yet the human element is mostly left to chance. This is deadly for a corporation. Frequently we have been brought in to help when the damage has already been extensive for the workers and the business.

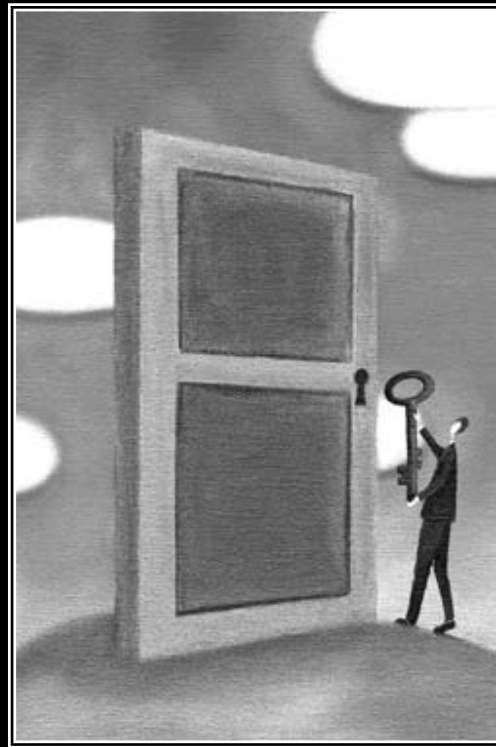
Top performers know that change can be dangerous if dealt with poorly. They also know that change is here to stay and that those who learn skills for dealing with change will have wonderful opportunities. Our purpose for writing this book is to help you seize those opportunities.

To do that we are going to cover important research about change, including the role of perceptions, choices, dangers, and individual differences. We are going to explore how some people get incredibly lucky when going through change while others suffer. Together we will examine how to adjust and thrive during times of change. We will also look beyond your personal growth to help you become a positive leader during times of change. Finally, we will end with a process for helping you develop your own personal change champion strategy. You may feel that the first two sections seem full of background and wonder when you are going to arrive at the how-to's. We hope you hang in and chew on the fundamentals. The how-to comes in the third section and will be much more powerful if you understand potential consequences and opportunities. We believe this background will give you the fuel to energize the how-to's. (Also note that to aid in the flow of reading, we will be using "I" when one of your authors shares a story, regardless of which author it is.)

Top performers know that change is the way of the future. Join this elite group by learning how to swim with the change and arrive at a destination that is far better than you could have ever imagined!

SECTION I

CHALLENGE OF CHANGE



CHAPTER 1

WHY TOP PERFORMERS *MUST* KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH CHANGE

“Nothing endures but change.”

—*Heraclitus*

How do you feel when something in your life shifts dramatically? People differ greatly when it comes to their reaction to change. Some people love it; they thrive on new opportunities and events. Other people hate the twists and turns of change; they are most content when everything stays the same.

What kind of person are you? Do you roll with the punches pretty well? Do you find that new situations and events bring variety and excitement? Or are you more unsettled by change? Perhaps transitions are difficult and you feel disrupted when your routine is disturbed.

If you don't know, think about how you felt the last time that you were surprised by an announcement of change at work, got a new project, or shifted to another boss. Did you find yourself thinking about the future and new opportunities, or feeling loss or fear over what changed?

Our feelings about change and our styles of interacting with it falls somewhere on a continuum. At the one end are the homesteaders. Homesteaders are the people who like to set down roots and stay in one place. They value consistency and thrive in a steady environment. On the other end are the pioneers. Pioneers feel restless. They like to explore. They travel light and prefer to move on to new places. Homesteaders and pioneers have different challenges and strengths. The United States was built by the positive qualities of both groups. Farms, businesses, and communities would never have been fully developed without the homesteaders. They are responsible for a lot of the enhancements that have been created in our world. At the same time, without the pioneers, we would not have sailed to the “new world,” explored past the Appalachian Mountains, crossed the Mississippi River, or climbed over the Rockies. Our pioneers discovered many wonders and opportunities.

Neither group is particularly better or worse, but they do tend to deal with change very differently, each with their own challenges and strengths. Pioneers look for opportunities and are flexible, but tend to get bored when everything stays the same. They sometimes create change when change is not needed. Homesteaders are patient and willing to persevere toward a goal, but struggle because they tend to resist change. Whether you prefer homesteading, pioneering, or something in between, change comes to all of us.

So, what is change? Obviously, change is something that happens, an event. However, change is also the evolution of events. All human history is the story of change. Even the very earth is constantly evolving. Mountains were once plains and deserts were once deep beneath the ocean. The earth takes millions of years to change, but human change happens quickly. And it is happening

faster than ever before. When it comes to change, these two things are true: change is inevitable and change is accelerating. Let's look at each more closely.

Change Is Inevitable

When was the last time you had a month where absolutely nothing changed in your life? If you look closely enough you will see that months without change do not exist. Unfortunately, we are in the uncomfortable position of having no control over the existence of change. It is going to happen whether we like it or not. Sure, we can impact on ourselves, our peers, and our circumstances, but we cannot freeze time. Ben Franklin said, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." To that we can add change!

Change Is Accelerating

The pace of change is also rapidly accelerating. Technological advances have dramatically increased the speed of our experience. Prior to the industrial age it took months and even years for people and information to travel. In 1804 it took heroic explorers Lewis and Clark two and a half years to travel from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back. Now travel from the Midwest to the West Coast takes only a few hours. Information travels even faster—in mere seconds—across the Internet. Some say we have gained more knowledge in the last century than all the previous centuries combined. The speed of information and the technology that provides rapid production and delivery of goods makes *everyone* as well as *everything* move faster. Change is moving so rapidly that several companies that we work with have spent thousands of dollars to train their people to effectively deal with change. Some are even including

questions in the hiring process to gauge how well potential hires deal with change. They know that change is the way of the future and that having workers who struggle with change is a serious danger.

For homesteaders and pioneers alike, constant and rapidly accelerating change is our reality and our future.

Change Is a Process

While change is an inevitable accelerating stream of events, it is also a *process*. The process of change is what people experience in response to events. Experts in business, medicine, and psychology have studied the process of change for decades.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was a pioneer in studying this process when she examined the stages of grief in the 1960s. Over the last forty years researchers and academics have further developed Kubler-Ross's theories. Key examples are the work of Dennis O'Connor and Donald Wolfe who in 1987 expanded the theory of change to include "stage of life" transitions. They described a series of five stages:

- 1) prechange stability
- 2) rising discontent
- 3) crisis
- 4) redirection and adaptation
- 5) restabilizing

Moving beyond individual changes, in 1990 researchers Dottie Perlman and George Takacs described the experience of organizational change as a process with ten stages.

Now, in just these three examples the change process is described as having anywhere from five to ten stages, and there are many more studies we could describe. Clearly, the information can

be more confusing than helpful. Our purpose is to make the academic research accessible and practical. To simplify, the range of research can be summarized in three fundamental change stages: shock, adjustment, and outcome.

Shock

Shock is the first response to the event. All changes bring a shock phase. Sad changes like loss or illness bring shock, and so do happy changes like a new job or promotion. Something has happened to startle us out of our routine. Shock is a natural and normal initial response to this shift.

Adjustment

During the adjustment phase we successfully or unsuccessfully adapt to the new situation. Frequently, we do both as we attempt to adjust our emotions, thinking, and actions to the new reality. This period is filled with conflicting feelings and multiple efforts to regain confidence and stability.

Outcome

Outcome flows from our choices and experiences of shock and adjustment. If we flounder during shock and adjustment, our outcome may be partial recovery or complete stagnation and more instability. However, if we create and pursue successful strategies, the outcome will be positive transformation, top performance, and victory.

Nobody can stop change, but we can influence the results. Some people will march through change, push through obstacles, and move directly toward success. Others will make progress, with struggles and setbacks along the way. Still others will become completely stalled or even regress during times of change.

The process is not fixed, but an outcome is inevitable. The potential outcomes of the change process are shown in Table 1.1.

Negative Outcomes	Positive Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Withdrawal • Stagnation • Failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiasm • Hope • Advancement • Growth • Transformation

Table 1.1: Negative and Positive Change Outcomes

Everyone responds differently to the challenge of change. Some stagger and falter and some use it as an opportunity to build and transform. Change will happen, change will require an adjustment process, and change will bring an outcome. Top performers impact the outcomes of change by understanding the process and finding the opportunities. What will be your outcome?

The Tale of Two Outcomes

A portion of our work is with individuals in the financial services arena. We were coaching several financial advisors in 2001 when the stock market took a beating. Our clients (and subsequently their clients) had gotten used to incredible returns on their money, and now they were losing money. Our clients were dealing with lots of change: bad markets, angry clients, and dwindling personal finances.

We want to briefly mention the stories of two of these individuals, Bill and Mike. Both of these gentlemen were very successful in their work, with similar incomes and clientele. Bill, however, was

not great at adapting to change. He started avoiding his clients and took a passive “wait and see” stance. When we tried to coach Bill to take a more proactive stance, he started canceling his coaching sessions and even withdrew from us. Mike also had the initial tendency to withdraw, but with some encouragement he started thinking more creatively during this challenging time. He viewed it as a time to build his relationships with his clients as well as pursue new prospects (wisely figuring that many other advisors were avoiding their clients).

Both Bill and Mike struggled for several years, but by early 2005 all of Mike’s work paid off. Over time, he dramatically increased the number of high-net-worth clients he served. He also maintained many of his top clients by empathizing with them through their frustrations and serving them as well as he could during the down years. In contrast, Bill lost many of his clients, did no new prospecting, and struggles to this day.

Dealing with negative changes can be difficult for any of us. In chapter 3 we will look more closely at change dangers. However, top performers know how to embrace and work through change to create opportunity and success. As you work through section 3 and the appendix, you will be able to join the ranks of these top performers.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The first step to becoming a top performer during times of change is to have insight into yourself. Do the following exercises to increase your knowledge of how you deal with change.

1. Briefly describe a significant change that you have experienced recently.
2. In what way did you handle this change like a homesteader?
3. In what way did you handle this change like a pioneer?
4. In general, what went well in terms of how you dealt with the change?
5. What could have gone even better?
6. What future changes are looming on the horizon?
7. What can you do to be better prepared for future change?