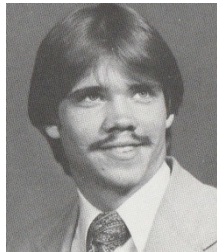


CHANGE:

Dancing with Uncertainty

Duane Trammell, M.Ed.

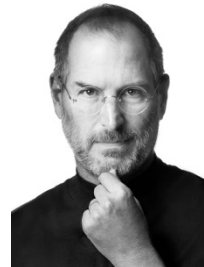
Forty-four years ago, when I was one of the editors of our high school yearbook, I wrote the words, “Change is the future’s way of creeping into our lives.” For a seventeen-year-old, it sounded like a profound way to start the pages of our high school year in review. In 1972, it seemed like the world was in a mess. Terrorism entered sports with the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes. The biggest political scandal in modern times, Watergate, was unfolding, which would lead to the resignation of President Nixon. The Vietnam War was still raging, and I was scared to death about the draft, which was still in place. All of these changes were disturbing.



Yet, life on other fronts didn’t seem as dismal to a high school student. Sneaking into the movies to see the R-rated “Godfather,” listening to Roberta Flack sing the number one song on Billboard—“The First Time I Ever Saw Your Face”—and the fact you could buy a brand new Ford Pinto for \$2,078...life seemed hopeful. And there was even

something new called Atari, allowing you to play a “video game” called “PONG.” These changes didn’t seem so bad.

Through the ages, many people have written on the subject of exploring changes in our lives. Robert F. Kennedy thoughtfully told us, “*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*” And more recently, Steve Jobs shared from his own experience, “*For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‘If today were the*

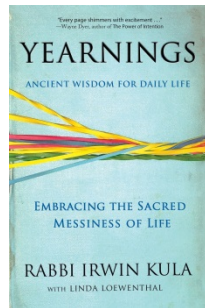


last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been ‘No’ for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.”

I have a dear friend Ginny Gilmore. Ginny worked in a national family business and then moved on to do other things with her life. One of those “things” was starting the Sophia

Foundation and creating a servant leadership movement in Wisconsin. She reads voraciously and sends me enlightening books. (Does that remind you of someone?) One of my favorite books that has helped me during this past 18 months is *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life* by Rabbi Irwin Kula.

When it became clear that Ann's cancer had progressed to a point that the treatments were not going to restore her life, a fear about the future set in. It was more than whether or not the company we had built together would survive, but it was also a fear about not having my friend with me each day...and could I overcome the tremendous sadness? In Rabbi Kula's book, he writes a chapter entitled, "Dancing with Uncertainty." I reread this chapter many, many, times. In it, he wisely tells us,

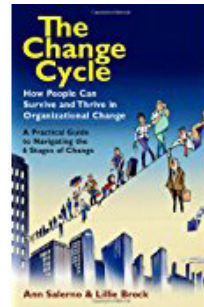


"The yearning for certainty—to grasp our future, to shape our destinies—is so powerful and so noble. We yearn to know that things will work out. We want to be assured that what we do will make our lives richer and the world a better place. We long for a pathway...But most of the time we create our own path simply by walking even when we have no clear idea where we are going. Of course, we all have delicious times of certainty, clarity, confidence, and purpose—more than most of us even recognize. But the uncertain times stand out because they are often so uncomfortable. They create anxiety, fear, and vulnerability. That's why certainty is so seductive. Our culture rewards knowing and makes not-knowing a liability; but about the important things in life, the opposite may

be true....Living the mystery means dancing with certainty and uncertainty."

Change is a broad and complex topic of exploration. Some changes are fun—moving to a new house or picking a new vacation destination or starting a new job. Other changes can be sad and anxiety producing—the diagnosis of a disease, the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a job. Some personalities thrive on change—if things stay too much the same they grow bored and unhappy; other personalities abhor change—life would be grand if everything DID stay the same.

In *The Change Cycle*, my friend Lillie Brock and her co-author Ann Salerno write, "Change is life and life is change. It just happens like the weather. Changes result from chance, choice, or crisis, and are generally unpredictable. But the process of 'how' we move through life's changes is predictable."



In our work through the years, we have helped organizations and individuals work through many changes—some of them organizational changes, some professional changes, and some personal family changes. There are tools and strategies that can help us make sense of how we respond to those changes. Our thinking preferences dictate how we understand change intellectually. We analyze change and seek facts; we plan and create processes; we talk it through with colleagues; or we generate new possibilities. Once we know what is going on in our thinking process, we have the ability to see those changes from different perspectives. We can "unstick" our thinking if we are struggling.

Another tool we have is the understanding that change is a predictable cycle, which we call “The Feeling Part of Change.” With every change comes some sort of loss. And with every loss, we experience the different stages of grief. Knowing where our feelings are can help us to get “unstuck” and move forward with the changes happening to us.

The physical effects of change are yet another area of exploration. We are fortunate in that our bodies have been created to endure change. We are survivors. Our bodies give us signals that change is happening to us. And the way we respond to change can either damage our bodies or ensure our good health. We have choices, even when it appears we don’t.

An often overlooked aspect of change is how we respond spiritually. What is our soul, our values, our faith telling us about the changes that are happening to us? Are we in alignment? Or is something off-kilter?

The larger changes in our lives require time and exploration. They require living with questions. They require listening to our intuition at a much deeper level. In our world of wanting instant answers, living with questions can be challenging, frustrating, and anxiety producing. But if we begin to think of this stage as “discovery,” we can find fulfillment in gathering different perspectives, garnering resources, and even asking for help when we finally begin to surrender to uncertainty.

Confession: I struggled with how to end this article on dealing with change. It would be easy to find a quote about change from a famous person and format it to look pretty and inspiring as the endcap. It would be even better if there was a profound answer that

would help everyone successfully deal with every change that comes their way. But what stirs in my own soul about dealing with change is ambiguity, learning to live with uncertainty, knowing there is a never-ending cycle, and how much we learn in the midst of coping with changes—whether good or disappointing. From having worked with hundreds of Clients through the years and personally experiencing many changes, what I see is that some are made stronger, better, more likely to serve others from those change experiences. And, unfortunately, some don’t survive change and are angry, bitter, depressed, or even immobilized. But in the end, the choice is up to each of us. One of my favorite quotes from my beloved late business partner and friend Ann is, “Life is filled with challenges that change brings. The question we must ask ourselves is: ***How can we turn this problem into an opportunity?*** For when we seek that answer, all kinds of amazing, exciting, and innovative possibilities come our way.”

May it be so for all of us.

Seminars and additional resources are available from Trammell McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at www.AMCA.com

Duane Trammell, Founding Partner and President of Trammell McGee-Cooper and Associates has been a writer, presenter, and thought-leader in the field of servant leadership since 1982. Duane’s first career was as a classroom teacher in a low-socioeconomic school when he met Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper and became business partners for 33 years. Duane has taken a special interest in writing, researching, and developing materials in servant leadership.

