

It is with mixed feelings that I write this article since it means not just the end of year for me, but a change in a life pattern I've set up for myself. It doesn't matter that I see it as a positive change... it's still a change and for most of us change is hard. As a result I decided to write this article on the topic of change – why is it so hard and how can we make it easier?

Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better. **Sydney J. Harris**

What is change? According to my dictionary change means to make different; or to enter upon a new phase. Most of us recognize it as a natural process resulting in movement and growth. Sounds positive enough... so why do we resist it? I've come up with the following list:

Reasons people resist change

Safety, familiarity and control – people need to feel like they have some control over their lives. This feeling of control comes from predictability something you lose when change is in the air. Our sense of safety is tied to our sense of control. When things are familiar they feel comfortable to us. Change can mean giving up (or modifying) that which is familiar and safe.

Personality – some of us are naturally resistant to change. You'll know if someone close to you is this person because even at a young age she will get upset when you suggest minor house renovations, traveling to new places or anything that disrupts her daily routines.

Change involves risks – Trying something new is risky. It might move us forwards or it might move us back. Losing face is not easy for any of us especially if our decision to change was public and/or opposed.

Can't teach an old dog new tricks – Habits make our days much simpler to deal with as they allow us to go on autopilot for at least part of the time. Change often forces us to learn new habits. Anytime we try something new it feels awkward for the first little while. If we keep practicing it gets easier and as time goes on it becomes second nature. Many of us give up the change in the awkward phase. *A very slight change of our habits is sufficient to destroy our sense of our daily reality, and the reality of the world around us.* George Moore

Someone else is pushing the change; People will embrace change once they decide it is necessary. On the other hand, if people don't believe a change is necessary they will dig in their heels and fight you all the way. It is very common for a person to decide someone else needs changing (or fixing) and then try to force it. Unless they convince them of a need it won't happen.

Personal investment – the more people have invested in the past the harder it will be for them to change. If you've put 20 years into a project it's going to be a lot harder to walk away from it than if you've been at it for 2 months. Many of us resist change because it means we have to modify those things we have taken the time to learn. It's not easy to accept that you must change something you've invested so much in.

Resistance to change is not a bad thing. If we didn't resist it at all we'd be changing our mind constantly. Picture a puppy running towards you one moment then stopping to sniff the ground... chase a butterfly... bark at a tree... staying focused is not his strong point. Resistance to change is what keeps us focused and on task. Of course refusing all change can make life boring and repetitive so one does have to be careful.

Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.

Karen Kaiser Clark

So how can we make change easier? Here are a few ideas...

- When making a change, be honest and open about why (even to yourself). Make a list of reasons to change and (if it makes sense) take a look into the future. i.e. what will it look like if I/we don't change?
- Recognize that change is a process (not an event) and can only happen over time. Be supportive while the process is happening and focus on effort rather than results.
- Work in bite size pieces. If you bite off more than you can chew you'll likely want to spit it out before you've really tasted it. Start small and work your way up.
- Allow others as much input as possible into decisions around group changes... empowered people are less likely to dig in their heels and can have some great ideas to share (be careful not to ask for input on things you're not able –or willing – to bend on).