



CHANGE HAPPENS

Changing Your Mind Changes You
H B Gelatt

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind. William James

Today's generations seem to have missed or forgotten William James' great discovery. Changing one's mind today may not be a crime, but it isn't very highly regarded. When John Kerry was running for president in 2004, he was called "wishy-washy" because he changed his mind more than once. When Hilary Clinton was running for president in July of 2007, she was called a "flip-flopper" because she changed her mind about the war in Iraq.

In a book about George W. Bush by Robert Draper, published in September 2007 called Dead Certain, it was said that the president "confronted the history of his time with dead certainty." It seems that to be president in this country requires someone who never changes his/her mind.

This essay supports and promotes mind changing; it is part of my Process of Illumination. All of my POI essays have promoted the idea that to be dead certain is not good strategy in today's world of "white water change," while to be open-minded is good strategy because change often results in learning or unlearning. Some say the very purpose of living is learning. But mind changing is not popular strategy.

Each of us at some time has made up our mind and then changed it. But we don't seem to want to ... or to admit that we did. Human beings are called the "believing animal". Obsessed with finding explanations, we develop beliefs about ourselves and the world and then cling to them tenaciously, even if they lead to harmful behaviors.

For example, smoking, obesity, and problem drinking can lead to chronic illness and premature death. Yet 20% of Americans smoke, 30% are overweight, 15% are binge drinkers. And many people continue to engage in other harmful patterns of behavior --- jealousy, dependency, anger, violence and withdrawal that are destructive to their significant relationships. I believe people don't change their behavior because they don't change their beliefs.

Changing Your View Changes You

*When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.
Change your thoughts, change your life. Wayne Dyer*

To me, Wayne Dyer's quotes above and William James' opening quote are saying that changing your view changes you. The reason to change your view --- is to grow, develop, and to learn. *You can't grow clinging to the status quo.* To change your view means to change your mind, your thoughts and beliefs about you and how you experience your world.

In her 2006 book, Mindset, Carol Dweck argues that beliefs about self and the world not only contribute to and change personality; they underlie adaptive functioning in school, work and relationships. Her research shows that people have two mindsets about self-theories: a fixed (unchangeable) mindset and a growth (malleable) mindset. She says people with a malleable mindset value learning and growth and engage in increased effort and strategies for change; they are resilient.

Change can happen to you. Change can happen by you. You get fired or you quit your job. Your house burns down or you remodel your current home. You win the lottery or you stop buying tickets. You can't always control, or even predict, the changes that happen to you; but you can control the change of view that happens by you --- you can change your mind, you can change



the way you see change --- if you want to...

Can a Person Change What They Believe?

"How many counselors does it take to change a light bulb?
It only takes one, but the light bulb has to want to change."

The above is one of the change-a-light-bulb jokes going around years ago during my career in counseling psychology. It was funny but it also made an important point. You can't change someone else who doesn't want to change. What about changing you? Can you change yourself if you don't want to?

When some people are dead certain and don't change their belief, is it because they can't change it or because they won't change it because they don't want to? It is well known that certain deep-seated, well-established beliefs are difficult (maybe impossible) to change. They resist most change efforts. If such beliefs are indeed impossible to change, it may be impossible to change the direction the world is heading.

But because change does happen and because some people do change what they believe, I am proposing a change of mind strategy for those who are open to the possibility of "altering their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."

Become as Capable of Change as the Environment (A three part strategy)

We are so concerned about change, we even pray for a change strategy.

God, grant me...The serenity to accept those things I cannot change

The courage to change those things I can

And the wisdom to know the difference. Serenity Prayer

Most people don't interpret this prayer to mean "the courage to change my mind." I recommend the following mind change strategy, my modification of the Serenity Prayer.

Have the **wisdom to know that change happens**, although you won't always know when or how. And realize that you don't always know what you can and cannot change. Could you learn to be comfortable with this wisdom of not knowing?

You know that change keeps happening, but you also need to recognize that change itself has changed. Today change is more rapid, more complex, more turbulent, and more unpredictable. So be aware that change happens, it happens rapidly, and it is different than ever before. This is "change wisdom".

Have the **courage to embrace change**... because change and creativity are two sides of the same coin. Change is one of the biggest causes of creativity and creativity causes change. Learning involves change. Do you see change as something to fear, to avoid, to deny, to control, or to respect and make use of?

The minute you make up your mind that the way you see change makes a difference, it will make a difference in what you believe about changing your mind--- changing what you believe, changing you. When you believe it is going to rain, you carry an umbrella, in order to participate in the rain. When you believe in the possibilities of change, you embrace change, in order to participate in the possibilities. That's how you become as capable of change as the environment.

Have the **confidence to create change**. To the satisfied, change is threatening; to the timid, change is frightening; to the confident, change is challenging. Are you satisfied, timid, or confident?



Although most people favor creativity and learning they are ambivalent about change. We seem to be confused about the way we see change. Change isn't usually a personal goal of many people; people even often resist change. And yet, change is seen as a good thing --- for other people. As Dilbert points out: *Change is good, you go first.* If you have the confidence to create change, you will go first.

Reflective Illumination

*"I've found that I can only change how I act if I stay aware of my beliefs and assumptions.
Thoughts always reveal themselves in behavior."* Margaret Wheatley

Change Happens presents a change of mind strategy to help you deal with constant change. A malleable mind helps you be capable of changing your mind and changing you.

Here is a bonus reflection on change:

A Buddhist approaches the hot-dog vender and requests: "Make me one with everything." But when the Buddhist gets his abundant bun and gives the vender a twenty-dollar bill, he gets no change. When he asks for it the vender tells him: "Change comes only from within."

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