

Why do we struggle with making changes?

So what is it about changing our circumstances that presents us all from time to time with concern? The answer is a simple one. We tend, as a general rule, to build our lives around the familiar and that doesn't really matter if the familiar is something that is essentially good or bad, for us. Any movement away from the familiar can raise issues, makes us anxious and can elicit a stress response making us stick to what we know even though what we know isn't doing us any good.

There are two particular areas of contention in the quest to manage change successfully; the first of these is recognising the role that resistance and reluctance play in change management and the second is actually knowing the difference between the two.

Our connection to repeated patterns of behaviour can help as well as hinder us along the journey of moving from A to B and the clients connection to resistance and reluctance whilst complex, often offers a sense of protection for them. Both resistance and reluctance in fact, are easily recognisable to the client; they (the client) instinctively know if they want to do (say or believe) something or they don't.

It's important to remember that the ability to recognise and then admit something can be miles apart on the continuum of successful change outcomes. To help the client I ask one question, "do you think you probably will or you probably won't...?" A simple way of helping the client to remember the difference between these two words is to say that when they (the client) is reluctant to do something they probably in the end will do it and when they are resistant they probably in the end, won't!

*Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) site four common causes of resistance to change. They are summarised here in no particular order of importance as: *1.Parochial self interest, 2.misunderstand and lack of trust, 3.contradictory assessments and 4.low tolerance to change.*

Whilst these areas have organisational change in mind they can equally be applied to the reasons why change might not occur in the coaching relationship or other relationship; after all, it's not the bricks and mortar that change but the thinking of people working within the confines of the bricks and mortar!

1. *Parochial self interest* suggests that we unwittingly seek to protect the status quo as the client may be moving away from a situation they might not be entirely happy with but that they are nevertheless used to dealing with.

Looking at this in terms of rudimentary psychology and understanding behaviours there is an understanding that we (people in general) are drawn to living our lives in patterns as these patterns help us to make sense of our individual worlds. Breaking routines can render us fearful and in worse case scenarios, inert. The patterns that we form are hardly ever in isolation of those we have around us so the change may influence how we feel about others in our family, our friends or partners. The thought of having to deal with this encourages the client on a subconscious level to resist the commitment to change itself.

Both recognising and dealing with the comfort zone that the client is in has crucial importance on any aspects of lasting change as the client rather than moving through a cycle of self-development gets stuck in reliving experiences. *'....discomfort as your friend'* (*Greene and Grant, 2003) suggests that there are those of us who like to think that our *comfort zone is a place of 'stability, safety and inertia...'* but really the comfort zone is a frame of mind. It is simply the meaning we give to the familiar!

The reasons why a client is unable to commit are often complex and need to be treated carefully and respectfully as well as assertively, in order to reach successful and fulfilling resolution.

2. Misunderstanding and lack of trust is about the client resisting change because they do not understand the reason behind the change. This can be linked to the value the client places on trust itself. The client may not trust their coach; because its early days of the relationship, they may not trust the person that has requested their attendance for support if it is not a direct self referral or they might not trust their

own judgment. There will undoubtedly be many reasons why misunderstanding can take place and this again will have an effect on the coaching relationship.

3. *Contradictory assessment* refers to the way in which we perceive and evaluate both the benefits and cost of change. For example something that is viewed as a challenge to one person may be viewed as fearful or threatening to another. This is important to remember in the coaching relationship as it refers back to the earlier discussions around the wants and needs of the individual allowing them to make the decision about what they feel is not working successfully in their lives and then working on this area.

4. *'Low tolerance to change* is about *our ability to cope with change, to face the unknown and to deal with uncertainty'*. Buchanan and Huczynski suggest that *we each have ideas about our '... abilities and our strengths.....'* *we often doubt ourselves and create safety mechanisms that help us to remove '...ambiguity, uncertainty and anxiety....'* which can all be signs and symptoms of a reactive response to the stressors born out of fear of changing our routine and structure; our patterns.

Knowing this information can be really useful to the client. What I mean by this is, simply knowing that they are not being awkward or unreasonable but reacting in line with what is expected when dealing with the mechanisms and mechanics of change can be very reassuring for the client. Every effort should be made to encourage understanding as well as deliver on end goal outcomes as by maximising understanding we enable clients to learn constructively from their experiences in a multi dimensional and fulfilling way.

For more information on working on personal change needs, contact me on
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*Reference information available on request.