

COACHING: IT'S ALL ABOUT CHANGE

BEFORE HE BECAME President, Barak Obama spent months building his campaign around one concept: change. All across the country, huge crowds gathered to cheer and wave signs linking Obama's name with change. Soon his political rivals picked up the theme, and debate swirled about which of the candidates could best become an agent of change. On election night, when the outcome was clear, the president-elect and his family appeared before more than a million hometown supporters in Chicago and announced that "change has come."

Politicians are not the only agents of change. The work of coaches is all about change. These are people who encourage, guide, and walk with those who want their lives to be different. Coaching empowers people to find new jobs, work through transitions, improve performance, build better relationships, make wise decisions, transform companies and churches, and reach new spiritual levels. Coaching is about setting vision and reaching goals. When coaching is successful, it's about bringing and maintaining change.

But coaching is more. It also helps people determine what needs to stay the same in these times of constant flux. Coaches encourage others to stake out their core values, established strengths, lasting relationships, basic beliefs, and ethical principles that remain firm and give an anchor to their lives.

Coaches are both change agents and constants agents. They help people see what needs to change and what needs to remain constant and unchanging.

—RICHARD J. LEIDER, career development coach, author of *The Power of Purpose*

Let us begin with the obvious: Change is difficult. Walking with people through change can be challenging and often draining. Bringing change that persists is even harder. Most people resist even when they see the need for change and believe that it has to occur. Several years ago, a routine physical examination revealed that I had significant blockage in the arteries surrounding my heart. Overall, I was in great health. I worked out at the fitness club almost every morning and had no noticeable symptoms. I had never been in the hospital, except when I was born, but three or four days after the doctor's diagnosis, I was wheeled into the operating room, where I had a quadruple bypass. Later I learned that in the United States alone, about 600,000 people have bypass surgery every year and 1.3 million have angioplasties. Before leaving the hospital, almost all of these patients are told that they need to make changes in their lifestyles, eating, and health habits. If they make these changes, there is a high probability that they will recover completely and live longer than if they fail to change. These people, me included, have each been faced with a life-or-death choice: Change now or die sooner.

If you were faced with this choice, would you make the changes? Most heart patients begin the change routine enthusiastically, but according to research summarized in Alan Deutschman's book *Change or Die*, only one person in ten actually makes lasting changes.¹ "Some 90% of heart-bypass patients can't change their lifestyles even at the risk of dying. No wonder changing people's behavior is the roughest challenge in business."² It also is a difficult challenge in politics. And it's tough in coaching, counseling, ministry, training programs, or the efforts of people to change their own eating habits, spiritual disciplines, addictive behaviors, abusive actions, and perceptions. And it can be difficult to make changes in our minds. If we stop learning, for example, the brain's ability to change slows down. When we don't work at mental rejuvenation, there is a 50-50 chance of senility by the time we reach age eighty-five. "While the issue for the heart patient is 'change or die,' the issue for everyone is 'change or lose your mind.' Mastering the ability to change is a necessity for health."³

As a coach, think of yourself as a change assistant and a change initiator. You assist people to accept change, but you also gently encourage them to make changes, even when changing is uncomfortable. Some time ago, one of my friends wrote an article stating that coaches are experts in understanding and bringing change. When I asked what made him a change expert, my friend did not have an answer. He had never studied change or even read a book or article about how we change and why some people resist change. Before we try to facilitate change in our clients or start referring to ourselves

as change experts, it can be useful to dip briefly into the huge body of research and publications that enable us to understand what brings and what undermines lasting change.

Some of these research findings are fascinating and very practical. For example, when change is introduced more gradually and set in the context of the familiar, it gets a better reaction and is more easily accepted. When it comes too quickly and when it is too disruptive, change is more likely to be resisted. In his book *Leading Change*, James O'Toole contrasts Franklin Roosevelt with the Communist party leaders of the same era.⁴ Roosevelt succeeded in his radical reforms because he set them in the context of traditions, systems, and beliefs with which people were familiar. The Communist leaders, in contrast, tried and ultimately failed to impose a drastically new system that was foreign to the traditions and values of the people.

Many years later, another Communist leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, had a courageous vision for change, but he too was less successful than he might have been. This was not because he ignored the beliefs and concerns of the people but because he failed to develop a cadre of disciples who could champion the need for change and put Gorbachev's creative new ideas into practice.

Under threat people resist, cling to what they have and are,
and become more fixed in their ideas and feelings.

— C. H. PATTERSON, professional counseling pioneer

Christian coaches are best able to help people through change when threat can be reduced, the change process is not rushed, there is respect for traditional values (especially biblical values), the client or protégé feels support in making change, and there are practical guidelines on how to make things happen.

FACING CHANGE

The way people respond to change puts them in one of these four categories:

- *Innovators* are those who value change and try to make change happen.
- *Embracers* thrive on change and accept it enthusiastically, sometimes without much thought.

- *Acceptors* usually resist at first but eventually go along with the change, sometimes because they have no alternative.
- *Resisters* try to protect themselves from the change or prevent it from occurring. These people may not notice the change, deliberately ignore it by pretending that the changes do not exist or are of no importance, or be so overwhelmed by the prospect of change that they push it from their awareness. Some may deny the need for change and stubbornly refuse to budge.

Depending on their personalities and past experiences, most people lean toward one of these four categories. Consider the battles that have taken place in some churches over the topic of music. When a new style of music is introduced into the worship service, this usually is the work of innovators. The embracers jump on board enthusiastically, but the resisters soon appear as well. Their unwillingness to go along with the change may be based on good arguments, but the resistance also can stem from discomfort, feelings of being out of control or threatened, or a desire to maintain the status quo. Acceptors more often take a wait-and-see attitude before going along with the change. Sometimes they do so reluctantly.

Despite the differences in personalities and past experiences, each situation shapes how each person handles change. I like to consider myself an embracer and a change innovator, but there are some changes I accept reluctantly and others that I resist. I discovered this about myself when we moved after more than twenty years living in the same house. I knew we had to do it, but I resisted leaving the old house even though the decision to move made good sense and had been made voluntarily. After we got settled in the new place, I accepted our new home enthusiastically. During that time, a change embracer and innovator (me) temporarily was a resister before becoming an acceptor. Would my responses have been different if we had been forced to move because of a fire or foreclosure?

Often we tend to resist change because we fear the unknown, are unsure of ourselves or our abilities, and cling to the good parts of what we have enjoyed. Sometimes, like Peter stepping off the boat, we doubt God. Dealing with change successfully requires authenticity . . . being honest about how you feel and not stuffing the emotions that accompany change.

— JUDY SANTOS, founder of Christian Coaches Network

If you or a coaching client unexpectedly loses a home, job, or good health, you are more likely to experience or encounter resistance, at least initially. It happens to us all at times. When change smashes into our comfortable worlds, we respond by denying what has happened or trying to ignore or stop the change. If change is dropped into an organization, including the place where you work or worship, some people will use change-resister talk, which is summarized in table 3-1. It is only later that one is able to accept what has happened and respond accordingly, sometimes with the help of a coach.

It should not be assumed that clients can be talked out of their resistance with a few words from the coach. People who resist might even want change to happen, but they might have fear of the unknown, anxiety about letting go of what is old and familiar, or an unwillingness to take risks. At times there is insecurity about the possibility of losing relationships or not being able to cope with the new situation. Resisting change, therefore, may be a means of protecting oneself against the unknown.

Coaches or other change agents must be aware of these insecurities and resistances so clients can go through the process of facing and adapting to change realistically. Without this process, coaching clients are likely to return to their old ways of doing things whenever they reencounter the pressure to think or act in ways that are new.

Table 3-1

CHANGE-RESISTER TALK⁵
<p>How can you tell when a person is resisting change? Listen to their talk. They may use phrases such as the following. Try to respond with words similar to those following each phrase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "It seems risky." Most change is risky. But if there are no risks, there is no progress. Maybe the risk is worth taking. And what are the implications of not taking a risk? ■ "We've never done it this way." Sticking with the old way can put us in a rut and squelch some better things that could happen. ■ "Doing it the old way has worked fine in the past." Relying on past success is a great way to prevent change, encourage complacency, lead to irrelevance, and stifle future success. ■ "The old way is more biblical." That is a cliché statement that may be hard to defend. And the new way can be biblical as well, maybe even more so.

- “What if we fail or it doesn’t work?” That is a risk you have to take if you are to reach goals and move forward. Ask any Olympic athlete. They all train and compete knowing that they might fail. But they move forward anyway.
- “Somebody will criticize.” That’s true. But in time you may get more criticism if you stay entrenched, and you might even end up condemning yourself if you don’t have the courage to step out.
- “I’m too old.” That was one excuse that Moses never used. Nobody is too old to learn new things unless they convince themselves that age is a barrier.
- “We don’t have the training or competence.” In some cases that will be true. So what can you do to get the training? If the answer is “realistically, nothing,” then think what you can do within your current level of competence.
- “I don’t feel it is the right thing to do.” But we can’t base our lives solely on feelings. Often this statement is another way of saying, “I’m scared,” “I don’t like being out of control,” “I’m afraid I won’t be able to handle it,” “This is threatening and uncomfortable for me.” Coaches need to listen to these resistances and discuss them fully before progress can occur.

HOW PEOPLE CHANGE

Most often we don’t change until the benefits of going through the change are greater than the benefits of staying where we are. With the recovering heart patients that were described earlier, keeping their old lifestyles was easier and more familiar than making changes at a post-surgery time when everything seemed fine. These men and women were not greatly inclined to make changes in their eating, exercise routines, or lifestyles because their health was good and making changes did not appear to have any immediate benefits.

Most of the people who come voluntarily for coaching are motivated to change. They are not held back by the issues that people bring to counselors: troubling events from the past, inner turmoil, or disabling emotional problems. More often, coaching clients are getting along fine but in some part of life they are stuck. They might want to change, but they don’t know what to do or they fail when they try something new. These are people who can benefit from the services of a coach to guide the change process.

In his study of those heart patients and others who seemed unable to change, Alan Deutschman concluded that there are three approaches to

change that are often used but rarely work. These might be called the three Fs: facts, fear, and force. Each may bring immediate effects, but permanent change rarely comes solely because people are given *facts* like the heart patients received before leaving the hospital. *Fear* does not work either. There is little value in threatening people in the hope that this will bring about new behaviors. Few drinkers are inclined to avoid alcohol because somebody has tried to scare them into sobriety by showing pictures of people killed as a result of drunken driving. Perhaps least effective is trying to *force* change in people who don't want to change. If you want to coach people through change, don't rely on facts, fear, or force.

What can we do instead? What is most effective in bringing change? Deutschman calls these the three Rs: relate, repeat, reframe. First, good coaches need to *relate* to their clients in ways that build emotional relationships, sustain hope, and inspire. Every dieter knows that losing weight is easier when there is support from a community or an individual who serves as a role model and encourager who believes that the client has the ability to change. Cheerleading can be helpful.

Many executives [and others] stubbornly resist change until they form a new relationship with someone who can inspire and teach them about new ways.

—ALAN DEUTSCHMAN, author of *Change or Die*

Second, for change to occur and stick, there must be something more than words from a teacher or coach. There must be *repetition*. “It takes a lot of repetition over time before new patterns of behavior become automatic and seem natural—until you act the new way without even thinking about it. . . . Change doesn't involve just ‘selling’; it requires ‘training.’”⁶ This has implications for coaches as well as for our clients. If you want to change in ways that will make you a good coach, you need to practice, master new habits, learn new skills, and keep coaching. By repeating the basics again and again, new coaching skills are formed and beginning coaches become good coaches.

The third key to change is to *reframe*. Most counselors are familiar with this concept. If you take a photograph and put it in a different frame, everything can look different. In coaching people to change, they need to see their current situations in a fresh way. That's part of what happened to me when I turned sixty and thought I was too old to do anything effective from that

point onward. My coach challenged some of my perspectives about my age group and helped me see the potential and possibilities I could have as a person who is over sixty. This was more than positive thinking. It involved looking past the age biases that I was carrying and seeing my stage in life as an era that would be filled with new opportunities and fresh ways to continue my career and mentoring activities. It was not until I started writing this paragraph that it dawned on me that I changed because I reframed my views about my age, all helped by the guidance of a coach.

According to Deutschman, change comes when we “relate, repeat, and reframe. New hope, new skills, and new thinking. . . . That’s all the theory you need to get started” as a change agent and as a coach.⁷ Undoubtedly, change is more complex than avoiding facts, fear, and force or introducing the three Rs.⁸ But the three Fs and Rs can be an easily remembered foundation that coaches can keep in mind as they work with clients.

PHASES OF CHANGE

Of course, many changes occur naturally and without any conscious effort. Consider a ritual that happens every spring. Male frogs sit around ponds and lakes, singing their unique love songs, hoping to attract a mate. The evidence of their success is seen when long strands of jelly-like eggs appear on the water surface and soon change into tadpoles swimming in the pond, feeding on algae and other tadpole delicacies. In the days that follow, a remarkable change takes place. First, tiny legs appear and the tail shrinks and disappears. Before long, the creature becomes a frog that grows in size and strength to await next year’s “rite of spring.” Similar transformations occur when tiny caterpillars hatch from eggs, grow rapidly, and then form a chrysalis that later splits open so that a beautiful butterfly can emerge.

Every grade-schooler learns about these changes in nature, and most learn the word that describes them: **meta-mor-pho-sis**. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines *metamorphosis* as a transformation, a striking change of appearance, form, or structure, “especially by supernatural means.”⁹ A quick Internet search will show that the word is used in music, architecture, literature, geology, and even therapy to describe significant change for the better. Centuries ago, the writer of the biblical book of Romans used the Greek word *metamorphosis* to describe a transformation that comes from God to those who allow him to change their thinking and character: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world,” wrote Paul the apostle; instead, “let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then

you will know what God wants you to do and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.”¹⁰

Perhaps with these examples in mind, some coaches have built their whole approaches around what they term *transformational coaching*.¹¹ Sometimes coaching does result in changes that are as radical and transformational as the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly or a tadpole into a toad. At other times the process of coaching is less life-changing, especially when the person being coached seeks help to reach specific goals, get unstuck, resolve a conflict, or make a decision. Even when their issues seem to be of minor significance, however, many coaching clients experience a striking transformation—a significant and lasting change for the better. When this coaching is guided by the Holy Spirit and done with a desire to have God lead in the process, coaching truly is metamorphic.

Several years ago, a group of researchers set out to determine how transformational and other changes occur. The researchers were not focused on coaching, but their findings have significant application to anyone who wants to change or help others change. By studying people who sought to free their lives from harmful habits, the research team identified six distinct phases that most people go through as part of the change process.¹² Think how these can apply to you and to your clients.

In my own informal observations of clients over ten years,
all have passed through each of these phases on their
way to long-term change. Knowing the phases has helped me
and other coaches understand where a particular
client is today and where the client needs to go next.
Each phase provides both the learning and the motivation
to propel them into the next phase.

— DANIEL WHITE, author of *Coaching Leaders*

1. Precontemplation. This is the time when people are not considering change and usually have no awareness that change might be desirable or needed. At this stage, few seek coaching on their own, although some may be referred by another person—for example, a supervisor. This is a time when there may be denial that change is needed or fear of facing a situation that needs to be altered. The coach needs to build trust at this point, give reassurance,

and help the potential client see the need for change.

I once was asked to coach two executives who had enrolled in a leadership training program. These were competent and creative leaders who were successful in their careers and had no pressing motivation to be coached. One of the executives never made a connection with me. The other agreed to participate as part of the leadership training, but he had nothing in his life that he especially wanted to change. That is where the coaching started. We spent time talking about where he was in his life and his leadership. There would have been no purpose for coaching if he had concluded that he was completely satisfied with where he was. After one or two sessions, however, my new client and I developed a productive coaching relationship that lasted for several months. It began when he completed the simple Graph of Life inventory that appears in appendix A. This triggered thoughts in his mind about how his schedule was out of control and he did not know how to take charge of his overly busy lifestyle. My client recognized that this was preventing him from being a better leader. When he made this realization, he already had moved to the second phase of change.

2. Contemplation. Coaching usually starts at this stage. It occurs when people recognize that change might be needed and beneficial, even though they are not completely committed to doing anything different. Often this is when fear of change begins to surface. The person grapples with whether he or she wants to make the effort to leave the old ways and move to something that is new. Coaches can listen and understand these struggles and this resistance, ask probing questions, and explore the reasons for changing or not changing. Coaches or other change agents can show optimism at this phase. Sometimes it is here when coaches try to stimulate a vision of what can be possible. It is here, as well, when there is an effort to instill hope.

3. Preparation. At this stage, people have decided to take action and make changes, although they might not yet know what action to take. This is a planning stage that involves actively identifying goals, determining what actions can be taken, and getting information. In one of my coaching classes, a student expressed a desire to get into a regular exercise program even though she had little interest in sports and hated going to the gym, especially by herself. Together we explored ways in which she could get exercise that might be enjoyable and sustainable. She mentioned some friends who went hiking for a couple of hours every weekend. In the preparation stage, the student talked about how she could connect with her friends, walk with them on one or two of their hikes, purchase the needed shoes, and get this activity onto her schedule. On paper this may look simple, but it was a huge step forward for

a person who had wanted to get into an exercise program for months but had not known how to proceed. The coaching brought a plan to help the student reach the goal, and a coach who could hold her accountable for following up on the strategy.

For major changes to occur, this preparation can be time consuming. Often this also is a time of excitement and enthusiasm mixed with fear and insecurity. Most of us have had the experience of deciding to start something new, getting everything lined up to move forward, but experiencing increasing insecurity and inner doubt or turmoil as we approach the time to start. At this stage, the coach keeps people on target and helps them make decisions for action that are wise, realistic, and consistent with their personalities and values.

4. Action. This is the process of building on the preparation and actually starting something. Often this begins with enthusiasm, but the realities of doing things differently can arouse second thoughts, feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and tugs to return to the old and familiar behaviors. I see this every January in the fitness club where I work out. New people start the year with determination to lose weight or get in shape. At last they are taking action. Some even hire a fitness trainer to help them develop new exercise routines. As the winter drags on, however, the crowds in the gym begin to thin. Old habits resurface. It becomes easier to miss the daily workout. The pressures of living squeeze out what started so positively. During this action stage, coaches can give support and encouragement, especially near the beginning when the new behaviors are not established. Coaching clients may need repeated reminders of their goals and their reasons for making changes. This reminding and encouraging may be of special importance if there is a relapse and the client reverts to the old behaviors.

5. Maintenance. Eventually, people get into the new behaviors. New habits or ways of thinking get integrated into their lives. But the new ways of doing things are weak in comparison to the old behaviors. Much of this can be explained neurologically. When behavior is repeated over the years, neural circuits form in the brain, and impulses normally travel over these well-developed highways. When we try to change habits, we are introducing new cerebral pathways. The brain knows that something is wrong and tries to go back to the established circuits. Tell the human brain what to do and it automatically pushes back.¹³

Encouragement, persuasion, and incentives can support the new behaviors, but changing a hardwired habit or way of thinking requires a lot of repetition and attention. These changes rarely persist if they come only from the urgings of others. “Behavior change brought about by leaders, managers, therapists,

trainers, or coaches is primarily a function of their ability to induce others to focus their attention on specific ideas, closely enough, often enough, and for a long enough time.” To change behavior, “focus on identifying and creating new behaviors. Over time these may shape the dominant pathways of the brain. This is achieved through a solution-focused questioning approach that facilitates self-insight, rather than through advice giving.”¹⁴ The neural pathway redirections also are more likely to occur if the individual consistently puts his or her attention on making the changes. “Attention continually reshapes the patterns of the brain. . . . People who practice a specialty every day literally think differently, through different sets of [neural] connections, than do people who don’t practice the specialty” or keep focused on making the changes.¹⁵

6. Termination. At this stage, the new behavior or thinking is well established, so coaching is no longer necessary for the change that was desired. In coaching it is helpful to remember that some clients might be involved in making more than one change at a time. As a result, several of these phases may be in operation in the same time period as different goals are being reached.

The coach maintains the patience to allow the client to move through each stage, knowing that the client’s ultimate success will be better ensured if each stage is addressed fully according to the client’s needs.

—PATRICK WILLIAMS and DIANE MENENDEZ,
coauthors of *Becoming a Professional Life Coach*

BRINGING CHANGE THAT LASTS

Have you ever gone to a conference, been inspired, purchased resources, and left with high expectations for doing things differently when you get home? Perhaps your good intentions have led to some brief temporary changes but then you face the pressures of things that need to be done. Before long your resolutions for change have been buried under a pile of other responsibilities, and soon the conference becomes only a memory. After conferences, only a small percentage of the participants actually make changes. This has led some people to question the lasting value of conferences, sermons, or even coaching, especially when these experiences provide information and inspiration but have no clear follow-up guidelines or goals. It is easy to make decisions to

change, and it is easy to make short-term changes, but it is much tougher to make changes that last.

Psychologist Jeffrey Kottler had seen this in his own life, so he decided to get away from his routines for a while and do an in-depth study on what brings change that sticks. As a therapist, he had watched many people in his counseling room who determined to do things differently and failed. Some of these people had not been motivated to change, despite what they said, so there was nothing different. Others encountered obstacles that blocked their movement forward. Sometimes Kottler's counselees did not believe that change was possible. They lacked encouragement from others, concluded that it was better to stay with the status quo, and abandoned their efforts to forsake old behaviors and do things differently.

To research and write about these issues, Kottler temporarily moved to Iceland, where he could have time for uninterrupted study. He did not understand the language and had no friends in his new community, so he had to make changes in his attitudes and lifestyles if he were to adjust and have a productive study time. Kottler learned to make needed changes in his own life, wrote an engaging book about change, and was able to identify a number of guidelines that can bring lasting change in others. Each of these guidelines can be useful for coaches as they work with people who want to make changes that last.¹⁶

1. Commitment. This is “the single most important ingredient” in bringing lasting change. Commitment is related to how badly the person wants to change and how motivated he or she is to work at maintaining the changes once they occur. Change will last when the person expects to change, is confident that he or she will change, is willing to do whatever is necessary to bring lasting change, and is in this for the long run, not just for the short term.

The possession of the skill of overcoming resistance to change is what separates the mass of individuals with good ideas from the few leaders who are able to implement them.

— JAMES O'TOOLE, author of *Leading Change*

2. Attainable goals. Nothing “dooms change efforts more than setting goals that are unrealistic and impossible to reach.”¹⁷ Attainable goals are specific rather than vague. They persist longer if there can be consistent and accurate feedback on one's progress.

Every coach has seen clients who decide to make changes but fail to follow through. Resolutions, including New Year's resolutions, can be lofty and inspiring, but they often fail because there is no realistic plan for turning the resolutions into achievable goals. How, then, do we help clients turn mental resolutions into lasting tangible results? Determine precisely what needs to be done and when, where, and how, this will be carried out. "Dozens of studies have shown [that] when people took the time to visualize exactly when and where they would do what they needed to do, they met their goals."¹⁸ It can be helpful, too, if the people who want change are willing to state publicly what they plan to do and indicate who will hold them accountable. Public awareness and peer pressure are great motivators. It helps, as well, if the person who wants to change surrounds himself or herself with people who are encouraging and motivated to be achievers. Indifference in others can be contagious. Enthusiasm in others can be highly motivating, especially when there are specific goals to be achieved.¹⁹

3. Relapse prevention. In any change, relapse is common. Overall, there are three ways to identify and prevent relapse.²⁰ First, encourage coaching clients to identify high-risk situations and learn how to deal with the temptations. Second, figure out what coping skills will enable a person to avoid the problems. Third, help each client develop a lifestyle that reduces the possibility of temptation or returning to the old behaviors.

4. Practice. When a new behavior is practiced to the point that it becomes automatic, there is increased probability that it will persist.²¹ These practice sessions are most effective when they resemble the actual situations in which the behavior is to be used. Every year in December and January, American football teams play their championship games. Some of these games are played in covered indoor stadiums where the temperature is warm and comfortable, but others are in frigid outdoor stadiums. Practice for these games is most effective when it occurs in settings that resemble the real weather conditions the players will encounter later.

5. Expectations. It should not be surprising that lasting change is most likely to happen when people expect to change and assume that the change will last. Try this as a test sometime. Ask a coaching client to use a scale of 1 to 10 to rate the likelihood that change will persist (1 means that it is largely unlikely there will be lasting differences; 10 means that change is almost absolutely certain). The higher the rating, the larger the likelihood of success. See if this applies in your client. When there is great expectation, there is less relapse.

6. Support systems. The maintenance of change depends, in large part, on whether or not there is a partner or support system to give encouragement

and accountability. The most effective support systems are the ones available when needed. They are supporters who identify and celebrate short-term wins on the way to reaching larger goals.

Without sufficient wins that are visible, timely, unambiguous, and meaningful to others, change efforts invariably run into serious problems.

— JEFFREY KOTTLER, author of *Making Change Last*

7. Divine intervention. In addition to Kottler's conclusions, Christian coaches recognize the awesome power of God to bring lasting change that might never come otherwise. The apostle Paul prayed that "from his glorious, unlimited resources [God] will empower you with inner strength through his Holy Spirit."²² This is the strength that brought radical and lasting change in Paul's own life. He recognized that human effort could be of limited value but that we can do everything with the help of Christ, who continually gave us the strength we need²³ and the wisdom to coach people for lasting change.

CHANGING PETER

Some of the most powerful and instructive examples of lasting change are found in the Bible. Consider Simon Peter, who is one of the most interesting case studies of change in the New Testament. Knowing Peter's future and seeing his potential, Jesus called him a rock, but the disciples might have called him a flake. He was impulsive to the point of jumping out of a boat in a storm in the middle of a lake. In Gethsemane, he was quick to start swinging a sword against the well-trained Roman soldiers. Peter was the one disciple known to challenge Jesus, announcing confidently that he would never deny the Lord regardless of what Jesus predicted. When it came time to wash the disciples' feet, apparently Peter was the only one who said no. In the courtyard, he buckled under the accusation of a lowly servant girl and later, after the Resurrection when Jesus was extending his forgiveness and giving Peter future instructions, the disciple seemed more concerned about what would happen to John. Peter had not learned that making comparisons can be one of the most self-destructive things any of us can do.

But we don't read very far into the New Testament book of Acts to see that something happened to Peter. Following the disruptive events that had

shaken his life, Peter the resister had made significant changes. The timid disciple warming himself by a fire in the High Priest's courtyard had become a powerful and courageous orator. The impulsive young fisherman had become the rock that Jesus predicted. The insensitive, seemingly self-centered Christ follower had become the mature, compassionate, Christ-honoring apostle-leader who endured suffering and encouraged the persecuted church with supportive and sensitive letters.

What changed Peter? Second Peter 1 gives us some answers. Peter was changed by a *Person*. He had been changed by his time with Jesus, perhaps without even knowing that the change had taken place. The influence of Jesus is mentioned three times in the opening two verses of this part of the Bible. Peter also was changed because of the divine *power* (see verse 3) that came upon him as he stopped resisting and allowed the Holy Spirit to lead in his life and give the strength and wisdom available to all believers. In addition, Peter became aware of God's *promises* (see verse 4) of divine protection and direction. Surely these sustained him in times of difficulty when he might otherwise have been tempted to return to his old patterns of behavior.

If we read through the book of Acts or through Peter's epistles, we see that Peter also had *passion*. His unswerving determination to spread the good news kept him focused and consistent as he helped lead his fellow believers through the changes that shaped and sometimes threatened to destroy the early church. Peter had a God-given *plan* (see verses 5-9) for strengthening people and preventing them from being ineffective and unproductive despite the change they encountered. And in all of this, Peter had a healthy *perspective* (see verses 12-15). He knew that his life would not go on forever, but he determined to be faithful and productive as long as he had energy and the opportunity to serve. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and looking to his future both on earth and in eternity, Peter overcame his resistance to change.

Coaches help others do the same. We have seen that dealing with resistance may be a common coaching challenge, but you also will encounter embracers and innovators who need coaching as well. These people are eager to make changes, but sometimes they fail to realize the negative impact of their strong opinions and enthusiastic but self-defeating actions. They need to see the importance of introducing their changes with less gusto, more sensitivity, and the expectation that things may take longer to implement than they would like.

Christian coaches are best able to help people through change when threat is reduced, the change process is not rushed, there is respect for traditional values (especially biblical values), the client or protégé feels support, and there

are practical guidelines on how to make things happen. This is illustrated in another event in Peter's life.

After Jesus returned to heaven, the Christian message spread and the early church was growing, but only among the Jews. Perhaps there were few of these young believers who thought that the good news from Jesus could be for Gentiles as well as for Jews. So apparently God decided to be the change agent for their thinking. He worked with a Gentile soldier and Peter, who was both a believer in Jesus and a practicing Orthodox Jew. The events recorded in Acts 10 and 11 were more significant than a change in habits or behavior. God was initiating a major paradigm shift that would change the world forever. Consider how God worked a cataclysmic change that came through two humble men. This gives us a model for bringing change especially in groups.²⁴

Start where people are and don't be reluctant to start small. An angel came to Cornelius. A vision came to Peter. Both men were receptive. Both were men of prayer. Both were open to new possibilities, although neither was expecting what followed. If you know Bible history, you will remember how God used such individuals as Abraham, Nehemiah, Esther, Mordecai, Jonathan, Joseph, and a host of others. Most rose from obscurity to become leaders God used to bring change.

It is often easier to change something small than to make a big, dramatic change. A bigger change often is not only harder to make but might create severe disruptions in areas other than the ones that need to be changed.

— BILL O'HANLON, author of
Change 101: A Practical Guide to Creating Change in Life or Therapy

Let people ponder and challenge the idea of change. Peter was so perplexed by the vision that he resisted but God repeated the message.²⁵ Change is more likely to be resisted if objections are ignored or minimized. God dealt directly with Peter's objections.²⁶ A few days later, Peter was in the role of convincing the people who had gathered in the home of Cornelius.²⁷ Once again, God showed his approval.

Don't rush the process. It could be argued that the events in the lives of Peter and Cornelius moved quickly, but it took a while for the believers back in Judea to accept the idea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. Peter was criticized for his actions, and he needed time to explain the situation to

the skeptical Jewish Christians. As they saw the evidence of what had happened, their objections were answered and they began praising God for the changes.²⁸

Every coach, progressive leader, forward-looking pastor, and other change agent knows that change is rarely accepted as quickly and easily as the believers in Jerusalem appeared to agree with Peter and the people who had accompanied him to Joppa.

We return, then, to where we began this chapter: Change is difficult. Walking with people through change can be challenging and often draining. But coaching is all about change, and few things match the fulfillment of seeing another person catch a new vision, be willing to change, and take action to move forward.

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So . . . sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails.

—MARK TWAIN, author