

“Change is the status quo” notes my colleague, Gwen Morgan. Most people however, yearn for comfort and stability free from upset and disruption. Our brain cells are wired for repetitiveness: once we have established a habit, we no longer have to think about what to do. Change requires a rewiring of brain pathways; altering our behavior can be unsettling. Resistance is the natural response: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Change is here to stay, regardless of inevitable resistance. Let’s find ways to partner with change, rather than feel at its mercy.

1. **Who likes change?** What percentage of us embraces change immediately ____? Slowly adapt and change ____? Take a “wait and see what’s in it for me” approach ____? Dig in their heels and refuse to change ____? Dr. Neila Connors in *If you don’t feed the teachers, they eat the students* provides stunning statistics on these questions.
2. **Baby steps.** Try this: Clasp your hands together, interlacing your fingers the way you usually do. How does that feel? Now, separate your hands. Clasp them together in a different way, interlacing your fingers differently. How does this feel? If a small change like this feels uncomfortable, imagine our discomfort at major change.
3. **Rewiring the brain.** A new brain neuron can take 8 weeks to grow and stretch out through its ganglia to make connections with other brain cells. If you studiously re-lace your fingers in a new way every day for weeks, you could rewire your brain to accept new behavior. If you broke the wrist of your favored hand, you would experience this rewiring as you learn to write anew.
4. **Resistance to change.** Humans are adept at resisting change. Remember a two-year old’s favorite word: “No!” We say “no” to innovations through our words and our actions. For example, a leader may declare her program to be a “zero tolerance for gossip” zone. Staff members may smile and appear to agree. They may even sign an agreement not to gossip. The next day, they gather in cliques and keep the gossip mill grinding. Can we change this resistance?
5. **Neuroplasticity.** Remember when scientists confirmed that the human brain develops most rapidly from birth to three? That was good news for babies, but not great news for adults. Adult brain development appeared to be static. Recent studies by neuroscientists have blown holes in that assumption. We now know adult brains can develop, thanks to the “neuroplasticity” of our brain cells. Our brain pathways can change at any age. Can you recall a time in you adult life when you learned something new, and changed the way you see things?
6. **Dynamics of change** The person who initiates change is usually enthusiastic and committed. A legislator who introduces a new bill is thrilled. Those affected by

the new legislation are less excited. They feel imposed upon, not consulted, and demeaned by the process. What can we do to make sure that others are as excited about the change as the innovator?

7. **Buy in requires due process.** Ask your colleagues for their feelings and ideas on a change you want to make. Be open to altering your innovation to take their needs into account. Let staff know how valuable their input is. Commitment to change will replace resistance. Employees will take ownership of the change, because it has become their change. Due process (notice and right to a hearing) not only informs people of change, but provides a process for them to shape the change. By engaging others, you gain their buy in and advocacy.
8. **Grant me the serenity.** Even with buy in, innovators still cannot force another person to change. In the serenity prayer, who can we change? As Viktor Frankl said: “The last of the human freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances”.

9. Predictable stages of change:		An easier way:	
Denial	Action	Honesty	Freedom
Isolation	Acceptance	Ask for help	Calmness
Guilt	Anger	Ownership	Clarity
Despair		Faith	

10. We do not have to change the world by ourselves. Others are waiting for us to ask for their help. Consider your support system: Who helps you keep your sense of humor and cheers you on in hard times? Who challenges you to face the things you prefer to avoid? Who celebrates your accomplishments? **Fill in the chart below with names of folk who support you.**

Personal life	Professional life	Community
----------------------	--------------------------	------------------

**Unconditional
Support/love**

**Challenges you
To be the best
You can; to confront
Your “demons”**

**Celebrates your
Success**
