

## VIDEO 1: THE CHANGE PROCESS

This first video examines the nature of the change process.

This is an important topic because anyone involved in managing change needs to understand the process they're managing.

By the end of this video, I want you to understand what the change process looks like, why it says more about us as people than it does about change, and how it shows us the pattern for success. So, let's get started.

### **Looking Back**

We need to begin with a bit of history. People have handled change for thousands of years and, to be honest, we're pretty good at it. How do I know that? Because long before anyone studied history, modern humans had occupied and adapted to every continent except one – Antarctica. They learnt how to survive in the frozen lands of the Arctic circle, working out how to build their homes out of ice. They survived in the searing deserts of Australia and the Sahara, in the high mountains of the Himalayas and the Andes, and on tiny coral islands in the Pacific. People learnt how to adapt to huge changes in climate, topography, and access to resources. And they were settled in these areas long before European, Asian, or Middle Eastern explorers 'discovered' them.

Not only did people survive in these different places, they exploited and changed these places to make it easier for them to survive. For example, Australian aborigines used fire to change the landscape to make it easier to hunt. Not only do people adapt to their environment, they also make the environment adapt to them.

So, what does that tell us about ourselves? It tells us that, as a species, humans are very adaptable. We adapt to new situations and we shape things to suit us.

### **How Do People Succeed?**

But how do we do that? How do people adapt to change? Is there a common human methodology for succeeding at change, or does everyone have their unique, individual approach? In other words, are there patterns in how people succeed at change?

These are important questions because, if there are patterns in how people successfully approach change, we need to know what they are, and learn how to follow them.

These are the kind of questions that drove the first researchers to try to understand the change process. Now, to cut to the chase, there are behavioural patterns that deliver successful change, but they weren't at first obvious to the researchers. In fact, it took many researchers many decades to understand what the pattern looked like.

## **Behavioural Patterns**

So, before we look at what the patterns are, we need to understand that although this model is called a model of change, it isn't really about change. It's about people and the behavioural patterns that enable people to succeed at change. And the model doesn't mean that everyone follows this pattern all the time. There are many other possible patterns of behaviour that don't lead to successful change. For example, if you live by the motto, "If at first you don't succeed, give up" your behavioural patterns will not lead to successful change. You will be like all those people who make New Years resolutions and give up on them by mid-January.

So, we're going to look at the patterns that lead to success and, if they are real patterns, you might be able to recognise them. If you can say, 'yes, that sounds right', you have recognised the pattern, and that's a very good thing. Let's get started.

## **The Success Pattern**

Here's a quick overview of the success pattern of the change process. The change process consists of 5 steps and you can't succeed at change until you have completed Step 5. There are no short cuts. If you get to the end of Step 5 you will succeed – every time. You can move forward from Step 1 all the way through to Step 5. But, and here's the clincher, you can also get stuck on any Step and you can move backwards. So, that's a bird's eye view of the pattern, let's fill in the details of what happens in the 5 steps.

### **Step 1**

In some ways, Step 1 is more complex than the others because Step 1 can be the beginning of change, but sometimes it is also the end of it. Let me unpack that. I call Step 1 "Not Even Thinking About Change". In Step 1, you're not considering making any change about a specific area of your life. Let's say the area is a primary relationship you have with someone. If you're not considering you need to make any changes in the relationship at the moment, you're in Step 1.

Now, there are 3 reasons why you may not be thinking of making any change. One is that you're completely satisfied with the relationship and you hope nothing ever changes. If that feeling continues forever, you might stay in Step 1 forever. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. But suppose something is broke and needs fixing, but you're not aware of it yet. You might be living in a fool's paradise at the moment and one day you'll wake up and realise you need to make a change. If that happens, you'll likely move on to Step 2. But there is a third possibility. Suppose you already know what's wrong and you're not happy about it. But, for whatever reason, you're resigned to it now. Maybe you tried to change it in the past and it didn't work. It took so much out of you that you're afraid to have another go, or you just don't have the energy for that. This is what being stuck in Step 1 looks like, and it's not a good feeling. Sometimes people stay stuck in Step 1 forever, or eventually they may regroup and have another go at change.

## Step 2

Let's move on to Step 2. Suppose something happens that causes you to start thinking about making a change. Maybe you wake up one day and realise there's something about your relationship that doesn't work for you anymore. It doesn't make you happy and the thought arises that you might need to make a change. You are now in Step 2 which is called 'Thinking about change'.

In this step, you begin to weigh up your options. What exactly is the problem and what can you do about it? What options or alternatives do you have? How would you go about making the change? Would it be worth the effort? Would you have a good chance of success? What would happen if you tried to change and failed? What might happen if you don't even try? Do you have enough time and energy to put into the change? Would you have anybody to help you? These are the kinds of things you would weigh up in your mind. And where does all this thinking lead? It leads to one of 3 places.

It might lead to a decision for change. You decide you want the relationship to improve and you're prepared to do something about it. You make a definite commitment to take this further. Or, you might decide to go back to Step 1. You've looked at your options and you don't feel optimistic about success. Change would cost too much, be too difficult and stressful, and you don't have the energy for it now. It's easier to live with the relationship as it is. A third option is to get stuck in Step 2. You don't have the commitment to move ahead, but you don't want to give up altogether either. You'll just keep thinking about it. Some people stay in Step 2 for the rest of their lives – unhappy, unwilling to change, but very willing to talk about it.

## Step 3

If you make the commitment to change, you move ahead into Step 3.

In Step 3, you start actively preparing for change. In our relationship example, you might decide to find a counsellor to get some help. Or you might go to the bookstore and find some books on relationships. Or you may look for some YouTube content that would steer you in the right direction. You'll need to set aside some time for all these activities, and you might need to rearrange your weekly schedule to fit them in. If you keep moving ahead with this preparation, you might eventually get to the point of being ready to put the advice into practice. This means you're ready to move into Step 4.

But some people get stuck in Step 3. They read books, listen to advice from other people, and get confused. They want to move forward but they're confused and afraid of making the wrong decision. Other people get scared of what they need to do to move forward and put it all in the too hard basket. They decide it's all too hard to change and they'd better forget about it. Learn to accept how things are and be happy with that. And they go back to Step 1.

## Step 4

But for those who are ready to move ahead, they move into Step 4. Step 4 is where it really looks like you're changing because this is where you're doing new things. In our example, you're going to counselling and learning about your relationship and what you want. And you've embarked on some

important conversations with your partner. You're changing how you speak and the language you use. Maybe you're standing up for yourself in new ways or learning not to jump to hasty conclusions. This is not easy because you're working against old patterns and established expectations. You're trying out new ways of being and seeing what works and what doesn't. You make mistakes and live with the consequences. You learn by trial and error. Sometimes, maybe often, you wonder whether it is all worth it and whether you should quit. And again, there are 3 options. You can quit and go back to Step 1. Or you can get stuck – unwilling to quit but feeling very pessimistic about the future. Or, you can push ahead.

### **Step 5**

If you decide to push ahead you will eventually arrive at a place where the struggle is less intense. Somewhere deep inside a strength will emerge. You will not be making so many mistakes anymore. Your language will have changed. You will feel different and you'll want different things. This is what it feels like to be in Step 5. Your experience has taught you what works for you and what doesn't. You can still make mistakes, but they don't happen as often. If you keep moving forward, you eventually reach a place where going back to Step 1 is no longer an option. You don't want to be there anymore – never again. Your new behaviours and ways of thinking are established – they are your new normal. The new neural pathways are established.

But don't think there are no dangers in Step 5. You can still go backwards. You can even go back to Step 1. You might encounter a situation that discourages you so much that you can't cope with it. You give up. This may not be so likely in Step 5, but it is still a possibility. That's why I said at the beginning that Step 1 can be the place where change begins, or the place where it ends.

### **Review**

So, that's the change process. It consists of 5 steps. You can move forward, but you can also get stuck and you can go backwards. It's a learning process. It has a shape – the shape of how people succeed at change.

There are some things to note about this process.

### **Not Good at Change**

First, although humans might be adaptable, many individuals don't handle change well. They don't like it, find it stressful, and aren't very good at it. Why would that be the case? I think there are 2 main reasons for it.

First, although you might recognise the change pattern in the example of the relationship, most people are not consciously aware of this pattern. They don't really know how to make change happen – the fact that there are steps and each step has its own set of tasks, decisions, and dangers. And because they don't understand the pattern, they don't have any reference points to show where they are up to and what they need to do on each step of the journey. By helping people recognise this pattern, you give them this reference point and allow them to see the roadway ahead.

The second reason why many people aren't good at change has to do with a lack of change fitness. At each step of the change process there are 3 possibilities – to move ahead, to get stuck, or to go backwards. Which of these is the hardest to do? That depends on the situation but moving ahead is hard if you don't have much change fitness. The more change fitness you have, the easier it is to move forward and reach the end of Step 5. So, if you want to help people succeed at change, one of the best things you can do is help them develop more change fitness.

I know there are other models of change you might have encountered, like the Kubler-Ross model. The Kubler-Ross model is often presented as the model of the change process and you might be wondering how that model fits in with the one presented to you in this video. In the next video, I want to explore this question and help you understand how the 2 models fit together.