

The Six P's of Change

“If you're in a bad situation, don't worry, it'll change. If you're in a good situation, don't worry, it'll change.”

—John A. Simone, Sr.

Introduction

How much can sudden change affect you? Consider a lesson learned from a most unlikely event, the 1986 World Series, the championship of baseball.

The Boston Red Sox were playing the New York Mets in game six of the World Series. The Sox were perpetual also-rans, but they were up three games to two this year. With just one more win, they would earn their first championship in 68 years.

On this night, the Sox were playing the Mets in New York City. The Mets were also anxious to win, for they had not brought home a Series championship in 17 years, not since the “Miracle Mets” had won in 1969. After nine innings, the game was in a 3-3 tie. Boston took a 5-3 lead in the top of the tenth inning. In the bottom of the tenth, the Red Sox relievers struck out the Mets' first two batters. With only one more out, the Red Sox would win and break their long losing streak.

However, Gary Carter was the captain of the Mets and the team's spiritual leader that year. Carter hit a single to left field. A rally ensued, and soon the score was tied in the tenth inning. But, remember the Mets already had two outs. A simple out, just one more, would mean more innings and the Red Sox having another chance to win the game.

The Mets played Mookie Wilson. He hit a routine ground ball to veteran Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner. The Boston fans were relieved. Buckner was sure to get the ball and tag first, leading to the eleventh inning and another chance at the game and the championship.

However, the usually reliable Buckner was playing on two bad ankles, and the unexpected happened. He dropped the ball. The final Mets runner came in, and the New Yorkers won the game, 6-5. Boston and New York played a seventh and deciding game. The Mets won that one, too, 8-5, beating the Red Sox for the world championship.

In the meantime, NBC was covering the collapse of the Red Sox World. The ratings for the series were just okay... until that last game. When the Red Sox and Mets played the seventh deciding game, the ratings were huge. More than half of all the TVs in use that night were tuned to baseball. Nearly five times as many viewers watched that game than were watching Monday Night Football, the perennial leader for Mondays in the fall. This timeframe was often referred to as “sweeps,” a time when viewership and consumer response were tallied and assigned. So NBC used their huge ratings to set their advertising rates for the next few months. Such huge viewership was a windfall for them.

So Bill Buckner, an otherwise exemplary player, saw his team lose a coveted World Series title because of his error. He didn't live down that mistake for years. On the other hand, NBC benefited greatly from that event, despite never having such a plan. Change simply happened to the network.

Such is the nature of sudden, unexpected change. It can bring you fortune as it did for NBC. Or, it can darken your life for years as it did for Buckner. This one game serves as just a small example of change that occurred in the 20th century.

Consider the shifts that have occurred in the world since 1900. People once lived primarily on farms until industrialization brought about the new concept of a job. For the first times in many peoples' lives, they traveled away from their homes to work for somebody else and receive money in exchange. That money created an entirely new standard of living, which begat increased consumption, which begat the need for increased manufacturing, which begat even more new jobs.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, horses were common on city streets. In fact, there were so many of them that their waste was everywhere, and, when they died, their abandoned carcasses were often left to rot, creating a public health hazard. In the 20th century, automobiles became the most common method of transportation, creating a different but equal threat to public health as emissions were linked to respiratory diseases. Over time, with our need for oil to power our mechanical vehicles, there was a major shift in the world's economies. More and more money began to flow to oil-producing countries.

In other advancements, modern research on antibiotics began in 1909 for the treatment of syphilis. Antibiotics advanced later in Britain with the discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming in 1928. But as these new drugs became more

powerful and effective in killing previously deadly diseases, they also led to the evolution of bacterial strains, even more dangerous and virulent. In the same time, the world saw the massive rise of communication media, evolving from radio and television to cell phones and personal computers. The proliferation of these gadgets created more information and disseminated it more widely. Yet paradoxically, fewer people were actually speaking to each other, as eyes and ears tuned to devices rather than people.

Is this too big a picture, too much to comprehend? Let's narrow the focus to just a previous generation or two. After our grandparents or parents lived through World War II, they began to live through an unprecedented economic expansion. As the United States' economic competitors were generally knocked out by the war, this country had virtual control of the world's markets to itself. As U.S. companies grew richer, they often shared the wealth with their employees in the form of lucrative benefits and healthy union contracts. (The union negotiators of one world-famous industrial company admitted to me that lush union settlements were common in those days because it helped avoid the strikes that would slow down the delivery of products.) Layoffs were also uncommon in those days. On the other hand, if a person lost a job other companies usually could use their help. After retirement, many companies gave their employees pensions that carried them and their spouses through their golden years. The new middle class standard of living that was created in the early part of the century spread.

Now fast forward to today's world. The healthcare plans of most companies require a co-pay from the employee — if there is healthcare at all. Pensions are unusual; if you are lucky, you get a 401k with some sort of match. Companies think little of cutting back benefits or laying off employees to save costs in an uncertain world. Uncertain? Did I mention that American companies have many more competitors today? And that these competitors outside the U.S. usually are not bound to union contracts or minimum wage, advantages leading to much lower operating costs. This makes it tougher for U.S. employers to compete, so they must cut staff and reduce budgets.

In the course of my career as a professional communications expert, I have served corporations, organizations and individuals who needed to communicate, and deal with, change. Though the changes I communicated were not so wide-ranging as I described above, my messages always seemed to follow the same format:

1. Here is the world to which you are accustomed.

2. Here is the new world.

3. Here is the way you and I will deal with those changes.

When you consider all the transitions I have seen over the decades of my working life, whether they include the highs and lows of the economy, the fall and rise and fall again of manufacturing, or societal and cultural evolutions, I certainly have had much to ponder. Yet with all of the turmoil I have witnessed, you might think that I have become jaded about stability in this world of ours. You'd be mistaken; ultimately, I am an optimist. For example, I love every New Year, not for the parties, food or drink; instead, I see every New Year's Day as a time for renewal and reflection. One thing I can count on each New Year to bring is change, and I always hope and pray that change will be positive. But, changes like those described above come in many forms, often heart-rending and difficult. They can be divisive between you and your loved ones. On the other hand, they can also offer new and unforeseen opportunities, and they can change your outlook.

Despite my optimistic nature, I often find myself looking over my shoulder, suspecting that I could face very new, very un-positive circumstances in my life. Simply put, I have come to expect the unexpected. And, such an expectation is not a bad thing. In fact, I heartily recommend it, as expecting and accepting help us become the beneficiary of change rather than the victim of it.

This book allows me to share many perspectives from my career as a "change agent." I cite my own life experiences and those of others. My approach to this subject is organized according to a set of principles I call The Six P's of Change.

Step 1 — Develop the **PERCEPTION** that change is a reality. Nobody is immune from change. I was not, although I was born into an America so fortunate that we all began to think that trees could grow to the sky. But I learned to recognize that change is inevitable, a theme that has become my life philosophy. Once I recognized change's inevitability, I lived my life accordingly, not in a constant state of paranoia, but, rather, in a state of preparedness.

Step 2 — Gain the **PERSPECTIVE** that change is often neither all positive nor all negative.

I have come to believe that the “good old days” are usually replaced by a set of good new days. Change is not automatically all good or all bad. It often depends on what you make of it. Positive change is bound to bring you good fortune if you are prepared to let it do so. Negative change is more difficult, but even that may be a catalyst for renewal or advancement if you turn that change to your advantage.

Step 3 — Learn the art of **PROGNOSTICATION**, which is all about predicting the future the best you can before the future happens to you. Through awareness, education, and an alert attitude, you can learn to foretell change to some extent. There are experts out there who provide you with all the information you need IF you take the time to listen. Did you ever notice that some things seemed obvious in retrospect? (“Oh, I should have known that you were planning a surprise party for me!”) That’s because we realize the signs were there all along. We can learn to read many of those signs earlier and be that much ahead of the game.

Step 4 — Practice **PROACTIVE PREPARATION** for whatever you see is coming down the road. Once you have a sense of changes that may be coming down the road, it is important to assess your preparedness to face them, whatever those changes may be. This is where your imagination can fly. For example, if things start to look shaky in your workplace, picture yourself as your own corporation — (YOUR NAME), Incorporated — an organization with a mission, a market, and profit center. To determine how competitive this new corporation will be, you must assess yourself honestly and thoroughly. Looking internally, what are your strengths and weaknesses? Looking to the outer world, what opportunities and threats lie ahead? If, in a different scenario, you show signs of change in your health, it is time to see your physician, get the diagnosis if there is one, and then plan the steps that will get you in the best form possible.

Step 5 — Develop **PLANNING** — a step-by-step strategy that will meet your defined goals. Once you have assessed your skills and the external factors that may affect your future, it is important to take your thoughts and create a plan of action. You will learn about plans that kept the rich and famous as rich and famous as they were before they faced their own life-altering changes. In fact, many of them took calculated steps to surmount the odds they faced, and they thrived in the face of adversity.

Step 6 — Implement **PERFORMANCE** of your plan, executing all of its elements superbly. Writing down a plan is one thing. Bringing it to fruition is

another. You must get into the mental discipline that is necessary to execute your plan and make it a reality. Yes, William Arthur Ward, one of America's most quotable and notable inspirational writers, was correct when he said, "If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it." Unfortunately, imagination and dreaming are not enough. Many people read Mr. Ward's quote and stop there, rather than following steps toward attainment. The most important of our tasks is execution. We will discuss this notion later in the book.

The end of every chapter contains *An Intermission for Your Transition* — exercises that help guide you through your own experiences. They are designed to help bring your deepest thoughts to the front of your brain, where you can deal with them more effectively. In doing so, you can begin to build a plan that can either help you deal with immediate change or create a longer-range plan that will prepare you for transitions down the road

Okay, let's go. It's time to start your engines and head toward your first P.