

When CHANGE Isn't a CHOICE



BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

Sooner or later, all of us will face setback, disappointment and loss. Some call it resiliency. Others simply refer to it as bouncing back. It doesn't matter what you call it or when it occurs. The ability to thrive in the face of adversity is crucial to a leader's success.

Here are seven ideas to help you respond.

Accept reality and the grief that goes with it. Dan O'Brien and Dave Johnson were locked in a much publicized battle for the Gold Medal in the Decathlon event at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. That changed when Dan failed to qualify for the team. Dan said, "I remember feeling really alone, with nobody to turn to." Sadness, anger, and confusion are all normal emotions in response to a loss. The more devastating the loss, the more intense the emotional response. To move forward, we must acknowledge both the new reality and our feelings of disappointment and grief.

Recognize the challenges.

Disappointment and setbacks amplify the normal challenges associated with change. Uncertainty about the future only makes it more difficult. There will eventually be a "new normal." But in these days of instant everything, it is important to remember that lasting change rarely occurs easily or overnight. If it did, how many of us would choose to wake up tomorrow with something different about our appearance or circumstance?

Take stock. There is a tendency to believe that everything changes when one aspect of our life changes. Make a list of the things that have and have not changed. Define what is over and what isn't. There is no denying the feelings of devastation that come from a loss or setback. But an objective look at your resources, options and reality can help set the stage for moving forward.

Tap into your support system. "I get by with a little help from my friends." The words of songwriters Lennon and McCartney ring true more than ever when dealing with setbacks. Surround yourself with family, friends and resources that will provide support and encouragement. Most importantly, ask for help when you need it. A source of assistance could be standing next to you and never know it.

Explore a different future. We often define ourselves by our past rather than our potential. Arthritis prevented Anna Mary Robertson Moses from doing the needlework she loved, so at age 75 she began painting. Twenty-six years and approximately 1,600 paintings later, Grandma Moses had become one of America's most acclaimed artists. Disappointment and loss creates the chance to ask new questions that lead to unique opportunities.

Take baby steps. Many people thought television personality Deborah Norville was washed up at age 33. She had risen

almost overnight to become co-host of NBC's Today show, and just as quickly she was gone. Norville became depressed and non-functional. Her first step toward regaining control was getting out of bed and taking a shower. One shower led to the resolve to do it every day. That turned into getting dressed and going outside. A year-long stint in radio provided the confidence to retry television, which ultimately led to a revitalized career. As the adage goes, "How does an ant eat an elephant? One bite at a time."

Celebrate success. There is a cultural tradition of celebrating milestones. We celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, the end of the year and retirement. So here's the question – why wait? Look for every opportunity to celebrate behavior that moves you toward your new beginning and the milestones you achieve along the way.

We do not always get to choose what happens. We do choose how we handle it. In the end, may we all echo the words of Grandma Moses, "I look back on my life a good day's work, it was done and I feel satisfied with it. I made the best out of what life offered."

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