A sudden, unexpected event happens that forces us to change how we work, to adapt the way we think of our career aspiration and our life.

A change in the workplace policies or practices, a change in the relationship we had with our boss or our co-workers or a shock to the overall business from a competitor or other outside forces.

These days, it feels like there is so much unpredictability and change that we feel blessed and grateful if we can go one day without a dramatic change in our lives.

**Complexity leads to change**

Over the last few years, what I have learned is that disruption in the workplace has become more common as our world gets more populated and global.

The world is getting more complex as we evolve, not simpler. Due to greater complexity and uncertainty, businesses are under severe pressure from customers, competitors, government regulators and the general public.

In science the term for this is entropy, which I’ve talked about in a previous post. The more people we have in the world taking various actions the more complexity, uncertainty and disorder we get.

Imagine a household with parents and one child. Then imagine a household with parents and three children. Chaos!

Things don’t get simpler. They get more complex.

**What it means for learning to adapt to change in the workplace?**

Get used to it! It means that we all have to be better at adapting to change in the workplace if we’re to survive, grow and succeed in our careers and our lives. Standing still makes us feel stuck and uneasy. So, buckle up!

**Here are some tips on how to adapt to change in the workplace:**

**1. Let go of how good it used to be**

Yes, it used to be better back then. Customers, colleagues, bosses and the whole workplace used to be nicer, kinder and sometimes even more fun. We lived in simpler times.

For many of us, it doesn’t feel that way anymore.

Subconsciously sometimes, we continue to hang on to the story in our head of how good it used to be. And that is what holds us back from learning to adapt.

For years, I worked really hard for this one boss I had. He promised me the harder I would work for him, the greater the rewards he would bestow upon me. A promotion,
bonuses, new opportunities, etc. But amidst one of the big change we had in the company, he left.

Poof.

Along with my hope for a better career track, he vanished retiring into the sunset. I felt robbed and couldn’t let go of those promises made to me. Shocked and disappointed, I wallowed in pity at the bad hand I was dealt.

Holding on to what was owed me got me nowhere but more grief. But once I let it go by stopping myself from thinking about it, I began to feel lighter. It’s not easy but it’s crucial and needs to be done if we’re to adapt in this new world of uncertainty and change.

Let go. Let it all go. Let go of the old promises, the way we used to work, the people we used to work with and the kind of workplace we originally signed up for. Let it go because that workplace doesn’t exist anymore.

It’s not doom and gloom either. Some of the best opportunities in life are presented to us when we open up to change.

2. Accept

“Change is not something that happens to us. Change is something that is happening all the time.”

Oh…it just happened…oh…it happened again…and again…oh there it goes again…ooh change just happened again.

Change is constantly occurring whether we are aware of it or not. And to think that we are in a static mode and then change happens is not true.

From the leaves of grass growing slowly centimeter by centimeter to seeing our kids grow ‘all of a sudden’ to noticing that wrinkle on our face in the morning mirror, we see change happening all around us but often fail to notice it because we are wrapped in the day to day.

By learning to ACCEPT that change as a natural law of life, we can begin to adapt more quickly as it creeps into our workplace. Acceptance gives our mind certainty that we often crave during times of turbulence.

Accept that our workplace will have lots of change. Might get a new boss. Might have to move to a different location or a department. May have to do more work that we may not be trained for.

Just as the Earth moves slowly forward day by day, accept that change in the workplace is inevitable. Don’t run away from a natural occurrence of life. Accept it. Once we do, there’s nothing holding us back.

3. Think in YES's not in No's

When a radical change happens in the workplace, it’s easier to think, “Well, I’m not doing that. It’s just crazy.”
It can be difficult to shift our thinking at the drop of a hat. We’re not light switches who go from one way of working to another at the flick of a switch. It does take time. What helps is to have a mentality where we think more about the possibility than impossibility.

Some years ago, I worked with this one colleague who would always say, “Well, I’m not sure that’ll work because…”. Every meeting, every discussion, every new opportunity he would essentially say, “No.”

It’s not that he was a pessimistic person. He was trying to be helpful with all the knowledge he had. But saying no all the time, got us nowhere. And sitting still in times of change and turbulence is just not a good idea.

We lost so many opportunities for our business because we couldn’t get him to agree with us on projects. The result was eventually, everyone moved on and went around him. He lost a lot of earned respect that he had over the years and eventually left the company in a bad situation. Whether he was right or wrong is not really the point because no one really knows. But what’s important is that in times of change, we don’t get stuck standing still.

People want to grow, improve and move forward. By saying YES, we’re helping everyone move forward.

**Tweetable:** No matter the outcome, it is the feeling of moving forward that gives us great hope for the future.

4. Set new goals and go after them

When there’s so much change in the workplace, it feels as though there is no direction. We get lost because we throw out the old playbook. We lose purpose when we have no clarity of focus, making us feel as though anything we do is pointless.

By setting a clear new goal for ourselves, we can bring about a wonderful new mind shift that helps to direct our energy that is often wasted in so much workplace change.

During my company’s massive change, I felt overwhelmed and lost. Each day I would walk into work, I would think it was my last because of so much uncertainty about my job. All the overthinking I was doing made me feel stuck because I had no control. So one day I decided to take back control and identify one thing I wanted to achieve in my job in one year. It didn’t matter anymore if I had a job in one month or not. I wanted to get this goal done – hook or crook.

That one singular goal helped me move forward through all the chaos and change that happened in my workplace. While other colleagues were so busy trying to figure out who to align with or gossip about who knows who, I was busy working on what I could control – my actions towards my goal.

Having something specific to work towards can be a powerful way to re-energize a stagnant workplace.

**Tweetable:** *Without a clear purpose, the mind will wander often into a useless place*
5. Focus on controlling your own actions

Each day there will be ups and downs that are going to be out of our control. The boss changes her mind about the major project that we’re working on. Your workplace experiences a major public problem that affects everyone’s morale.

Stress and anxiety often arises from these uncertain situations because we feel as though we have no control. We try to control our colleagues, our boss, our customers and the outcome of an argument. But the reality is that the only thing we can control in a changing workplace is our own actions.

During my days of dealing with uncertainty at work, I felt stressed the moment I would leave the house to go to work. There was a lot of talk about our company in the media, a lot of disruption by competitors, by lawsuits and the changing nature of our business. With each new event, I felt less in control because it felt as though whatever I did could not meet the monumental task of helping my company’s future.

I was so concerned about all these huge things that I neglected to act on the smallest things in front of me. But as I slowly learned that all these distractions will appear often constantly, I began to focus on the work I could control.

We cannot control anything except our own actions. Allowing ourselves to be pulled into our work focusing on specific tasks we can do, gives us great happiness, fulfillment and meaning. Effort has the possibility to breathe fresh air into a stagnant life.

Tweetable: “Our actions create our new future.”

6. Let in fresh air

There’s a feeling of isolation that comes from trying to navigate a changing workplace. People around us share less information. Our boss may not communicate as much as he used to. Colleagues and co-workers are keeping their head down. Not having someone to talk to openly can be difficult because everyone is worried about what the change will mean to them. This social isolation can lead to baseless paranoia. It makes us worry and feel anxious when there might be nothing to really worry about.

One powerful way to help us deal with change and adapt to it more quickly is to get an outside perspective from friends or people outside our workplace.

Calling people in our network, meeting new friends or family members or even going to a conference or a seminar can be great to bring a fresh perspective.

Taking a friend out to lunch during times of great change in my workplace was great for me because it broke up my day and the often negative thinking that accompanies intense change. Stepping out for fresh air and having a pleasant conversation about non-work related issues helped me to get a reality check.

Sometimes a conversation led me to realize that my workplace wasn’t that bad because change was happening everywhere! Other times, I would get ideas and advice on how to deal with certain issues.
Speaking with others allows us to break the negative pattern in our head from all the confusing messages we get at our workplace, boosting our spirit, our resiliency tools and our energy.

The one thing

If there’s one thing to remember as we deal with and learn to adapt to change in the workplace it is this: As our body changes with time, so can our mind. We just have to be open to new thinking and new ideas which allow us to grow, progress and find fulfillment in our work.

Tweetable: “You are capable of adapting to anything – you just don’t know it yet.”