



# How to Deal with Big Life Changes

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**B**ig life changes can be positive or negative, expected or unexpected. We often mark our lives by acknowledging big changes: graduations, weddings, housewarmings, deaths, divorces and retirement. However, big life changes can induce a great deal of stress and discomfort, even when we're the ones initiating them. We should be aware of the effect that these changes will have not only on our own lives, but also on those around us. Some people can readily embrace change, but others dread disruption to the status quo.

In "The Book of Tea," Kakuzo Okakura states, "The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings." We know from an evolutionary perspective that species that adapt to their changing environment survive, while other less-adaptive species do not. Humans are no different. In order to thrive in our constantly changing environment, we must be capable of readily adapting to change.

Resistance to change is often based on the uncertainty associated with it. However, fearing change can cloud your objectivity and prevent you from trying something new. Here are some strategies we've used to squelch anxiety when embarking on a major life change.

- 1. Do your research.** Make the new situation as familiar as possible. If immersing yourself in the new situation is not realistic, use reputable online sources to gather information. Speak to your trusted advisors and to those who know you well. Envision yourself in the new situation, and try to determine if it feels like an improvement over your current one.
- 2. Involve family members in the decision.** Most big life changes will affect your family members. Make sure that those affected are on board with the change. Not only do you need their support, but, if they're resistant to the change, understanding the reasons for their resistance will help confirm whether the change is the right decision for you and your family. If you're still convinced it's the right



decision and that you need to move forward, understand that your family members are dealing with a big change that they don't perceive as desirable.

- 3. Make yourself do it.** The anxiety associated with a change will not go away until the change has been made. No amount of contemplation or research will completely stave off your anxiety because the anxiety is created by all of the unknowns. In order to completely alleviate the anxiety, you must find the fortitude to forge forward and address any new change-related challenges as they arise. You may need to relinquish some control and put your trust in whatever has led you to this moment. In other words, you may have to take a leap of faith.
- 4. Expect unexpected emotions.** No matter how excited you are about a change in your life, you might suddenly find yourself immersed in sadness. Any change involves some loss. If nothing else, you're giving up what you previously had to get something better. Allow yourself to grieve the loss. It's real.
- 5. Create a new "normal."** When your routines are disrupted, you can lose your sense of well-being. You may need to establish a new "normal" for yourself. Create a schedule, and use your calendar to organize your day. Since you're already undergoing one big change, try to postpone any other big decisions or changes until you're back on solid ground.
- 6. Support yourself from within.** When feeling unsettled, it's more important than ever to eat healthfully, get enough sleep and exercise daily. At times of deep uncertainty, ask yourself, "Where are my feet?" and make sure that they're firmly pressed against the ground. Take a moment, and remember to breathe.

Since change is unavoidable, the best we can do is to deal well with it. Remember — it's all in the rebound. ♦

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