



WHY YOU NEED TO CHANGE

BY BOB KODZIS

~ *“We know what we are, but know not what we may be.”* ~

– William Shakespeare

It's time for a change!

If you agree with this statement, go ahead and make a change. It will undoubtedly do you good. However, if your first inclination is to argue against the need to change, read on. This Quest is for you.

If you've built yourself a comfy little straw house of everyday patterns and habits in your professional life, the gale winds of change are getting ready to huff and puff and blow your career down.

Whether you love it or hate it, change is inevitable. We've known this since 480 BC when the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “Change is the only constant.” He probably had no idea how timeless and profound that observation was when he first shared it. It's as true and relevant today as it was then ... maybe even more so.

No profession (or living being) is immune to change. Creative careers are particularly susceptible. They survive, thrive or take a dive depending on how each professional confronts the issue of change.

To deny the need to change is like denying the need to step off the train tracks when there's a train closing in. It lacks common sense, and the impact is neither gentle nor pretty. Our choice as creative professionals is pretty straightforward. We can choose to be voluntary victims of change, embracing it passively and out of necessity, or we can become champions of change, steering our professions and our industries where we know they need to go. It should come as no surprise that I recommend the latter. In 23 years of creative endeavor, I've learned that the only way to master the rules of the game is to rewrite them on a regular basis. It's not easy, but it provides for a much more interesting and exciting ride.

~ *“Nobody likes change except a wet baby.”* ~

– Anonymous

Challenge or Opportunity?

Change is both a challenge and an opportunity; a friend and a foe. It's a double-edged sword that, if mastered, can carve a path to the top of your game. Yes, change often comes with pain. As creative professionals, we need to get over it. Someone very profound once said, “Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional!”

When I think of the hardship that accompanies change, I am reminded of the old story of the caterpillar and a butterfly. It puts the relationship between change and pain into perspective.

A caterpillar was admiring a butterfly fluttering over his head when he called out to her.

“How do you become a butterfly?” he asked.

“You have to die,” she replied.

“You have to die to become a butterfly?” He asked, greatly dismayed.

“Well, it feels like you are dying,” she said, “but you're actually on your way to becoming something much better.”

Then she flew away.

“If we wait for things to break, we will be too late.”

The message is simple: We have to face up to the challenge if we want to reap the benefits. We cannot soar unless we are willing to let go of the safety and comfort of the tree. That requires a commitment to change ... and a bit of courage.

~ “If you don’t ask, ‘Why this?’ often enough, somebody will ask ‘Why you?’” ~

— Tom Hirschfield, physicist

Change before you must

Several years ago, I had the pleasure of listening to Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric share his 10 secrets for a successful business and career. They were all brilliant in their simplicity. One of those secrets has since become a guiding principle in my life: Change before you must.

This simple phrase has served me well in more ways than I can count. It’s not just an idle piece of rhetoric. It’s a commandment. Change before you must. Learn a new skill before it’s required. Lead, don’t follow. Choose a new direction before the road ahead forces you to turn.

Change before you must.

There is great power in those simple words. But don’t confuse simple with easy. Mastering this talent takes a lot of practice and constant effort. It’s a worthy venture. To the brave and persistent go the prize of lifelong buoyancy on the stormy seas of change.

~ *Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.* ~

— Leo Tolstoy

Hijack your autopilot

In the blue jungle, comfort and complacency are quicksand. Your autopilot is a boa constrictor squeezing the life out of your career. Habits and predictable patterns are a choke-chain on your creative potential. It’s time to step up and shake them off.

If you want to liberate your creative potential, hijack your autopilot and approach all of your creative challenges with a “live mind.” This term was first introduced to me by a man named Ed Cunningham, a Sa Bom Nim (master instructor) in the Korean martial art Tae Kwon Do. Ed was my first karate teacher as a young boy.

As he attacked me with his hands, feet and various blunt instruments, he would challenge me to stay in the moment and not allow my mind to rest or to wander. “Keep it active and alive,” Ed would say as he hurled his knotted fists at my head. “Assume nothing. Notice everything. Respond decisively and forcefully to anything that threatens your well-being. Don’t hesitate ... act!” Failure to do so often put me on the receiving end of a swift kick in the head. After a few of those, I learned.

Ed’s lesson holds value well beyond the boundaries of Tae Kwon Do. It shouldn’t take a kick in the head to get us to wake up and actively steer our projects and our careers. The options before us are limitless if we don’t box ourselves in with standard and rote responses. Rip out your autopilot and fly live.

If it ain’t broke ...

When things seem to be working just fine, we have an inclination to leave them alone. We obey the lazy handyman’s mantra, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” What a pile of thick-sliced baloney that is.

Traditional painting styles were quite effective and art well collected when Claude Monet decided to take a different path and create impressionism. Steve Jobs didn’t wait for defects in CD music technology before launching a team of big-brains to create the iPod. Steve Bezos wasn’t responding to problems with ill-functioning books when he led the effort to create the electronic reading device, Kindle. In all of these instances, the creative geniuses were all tinkering with stuff that seemed to work just fine.

If we wait for things to break, we will be too late. For leaders in the creative world, the rule is, “If it ain’t broke, break it and make it better.” Try it. Maybe the next great breakthrough will be yours.

We’ve always done it this way

The poorest excuse to keep doing the same stuff over and over again is, “We’ve always done it this way.” As soon as I hear those words, I know that something needs to change. It brings to mind the story my mentor used to tell about a newly married young couple who were preparing their first holiday meal together. The young husband was dismayed when he watched his love take a butcher knife and lop off several inches from each side of the holiday ham. “Why are you cutting off the ends of that beautiful ham?” he asked. “This is the way my mother always prepared the holiday ham.” She replied. So the young man calls his mother-in-law on the telephone and asks, “Mom, why do we cut the ends off of the ham?” “That’s the way my mother taught me.” She answered. So the young man waited until the



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~ *“In art, all who have done something other than their predecessors have merited the epithet of revolutionary; and it is they alone who are masters.”* ~

— Paul Gauguin

Spark a revolution

Sometimes evolution is not enough; we need to initiate radical and immediate change. Sometimes our best option is to start a revolution. I'm not suggesting you form a junta and initiate a bloody coup. The kind of revolution I'm recommending doesn't require violence, just sudden, radical or complete change.

Nothing is more liberating than abandoning conventional thinking and moving full steam ahead in a completely different direction. Try it. Select a rule or two that make no sense or that restrict your creative potential. Then completely reject them. Almost immediately you will see new doors of opportunity open before your eyes. Of course, the real revolution starts when you muster the courage to walk through those open doors.

Revolution is not for the faint of heart or for those who lack stamina. It takes an original vision, courage and commitment. It also takes a boatload of energy because you spend a great deal of time and effort swimming against the conventional current. Don't let that deter you. It will be the most exciting swim you've ever taken.

~ *“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”* ~

— Pablo Picasso

Change or be changed

Everything changes. That's a given. But you often have the choice to change on our own or be changed by the circumstances that surround you. You can be a passenger on that bus or you can be the driver. I'm suggesting you take the steering wheel. Don't let the talk of radical change scare you away from changing your ways. There are many other “re” words, less intimidating than revolution, that can guide you on your path to positive change; words like refresh, rejuvenate, rethink and even renaissance. Pick one and get started. It's OK to start small, but start somewhere and start now.

It's time for a change! ■

Until next time ... stay inspired!

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next family reunion and knelt down beside grandma and asked, “Grandma, I must know. Why do you cut the ends off the holiday ham before you cook it?” “That's easy,” the old lady replied, “the pan is too small!”

It's time to take stock of the habits we have that have outlived their usefulness in our lives. If you cannot come up with a better reason for doing something than, “we've always done it this way,” it's time for change.

Of course only you can decide what form of change is needed. But one thing is certain, either you choose or the world will choose for you. Failure to change means failure ... period.

~ *“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”* ~

— Charles Darwin

Start your evolution

Darwin defined evolution as the process of continuous change from a lower, simpler or worse state to a higher, more complex or better state. Who couldn't go for that? The most successful creative professionals I've worked with are in a constant state of evolution. It's never a question of whether or not they will change, but in which direction and for how long. These pros never question reality or lament about the way things should be. They accept reality as it is and then alter their plans and develop their skills accordingly.

Evolutionary change is almost always gradual and always purposeful; usually in response to an environmental demand. To make good use of this universal form of change requires that we pay attention to what's going on around us. It also requires that we respond quickly and definitively. If you are not evolving, there's a good chance that you are on your way to extinction. If you don't believe me, ask the dinosaurs.