

Shift HAPPENS!

Rolling With Life's Transitions

by: MALAYNA DAWN

Let's face it: there is no escape from change. We may try to kid ourselves into believing otherwise, but life is really a series of transitions. You'd think childhood—with its growth spurts and grade levels, falling teeth and raging hormones—would have drummed this into our heads. But once we've passed that stage we seem to think that we've reached the destination of adulthood, where we will remain with only huge events like marriage and children to mark the passing of time. The truth is, however, on any normal day, we all make transitions. They may be between roles, like from student to employee, or between attitudes like from a demanding customer to a caring family member. For those of us with international backgrounds, this may include additional shifting between languages, accents or culture-appropriate behavior. In any case, rarely do things really stay the same for very long.

SO WE HAVE TWO CHOICES:

Fight a losing battle against change, expending our energy, and exhausting ourselves so we aren't able to respond well at all. (Unfortunately, unlike working out, we are unlikely to look and feel better afterwards); or

Ride through the transitions like we're on a roller coaster, laughing and screaming with the thrill of surprise drops and turns. Since few of us can sustain such high levels of excitement, we can just chuckle, shrug and say to ourselves a phrase I learned at a motivational seminar: shift happens!

The magic of this phrase is twofold: first, it sounds shocking. People think they've misheard you, or are just sure you've used bad language. But while we can enjoy the play on words, it rings with a more positive message in our brains than the often heard version. It reminds us, at least at the subconscious level, that it's not as bad as the other phrase would have you believe. It's just that changes are part of life, transitions are necessary, and we may as well roll with them. When we accept this, we've made an attitudinal shift for the better.

This handy phrase has been embraced by all types of organizations from business to spiritual to geologists making a pun about tectonic plates. It's a good pun too, because when we brace against it, change can feel like an earthquake that can shake us to our hot magma core. Since our response to change is just about the only thing we can control, making the shift from resistance to acceptance helps us to maintain the awareness necessary for making good decisions.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

Charles Darwin

HERE ARE TWO SCENARIOS TO ILLUSTRATE THE POINT. YOU DECIDE WHICH SOUNDS MORE FUN.

You're back from a long trip and drive to your favorite smoothie place, only to find it's not there anymore. Do you:

A Throw a tantrum in the parking lot, arriving at your next destination angry and smoothie-less,

B Call a friend on the cell phone to bitch and moan while driving—a dangerous combo, or

C Do the "shift happens shrug & chuckle," ask someone where to go instead, and arrive peacefully with a smile on your face and a smoothie in your hand.

You go to park your car in the usual spot and find that it's the work site of several burly city workers who have left no other spots available in the area. Do you:

A Start a fight with the burly men to vent your anger, perhaps arriving at the hospital rather than your chosen destination,

B Drive around angrily, wasting gas and grumbling about being late, finally arriving in a mood so terrible everyone wishes you called in sick, or

C Do the "shift happens shrug & chuckle" and spend your time making up an amusing story to share with everyone. You arrive with a smile on your face, and somehow, magically, a smoothie in your hand.

Answering A or B in either or both of the above scenarios tells you that you might benefit from learning to roll with the changes. Hopefully this illustration allows you to see that you have a choice about how you respond to change, and some choices are more fun than others. If you answered C to both, congratulations! Now it's up to you to spread the word and help others achieve the light feeling of adaptability and joy you have discovered. You might even consider it a form of enlightenment.

If we can look at life as a journey with twists and turns along the road, rather than a rush to get to a destination to stay changeless forever, we're more likely to enjoy the trip and even enjoy all the shifts that happen along the way.

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