

ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS AND
CHANGE YOUR LIFE
By Arlene Harder, MFT

CHAPTER ONE

What Do I Know About the
Process of Change?

Nothing in the natural world remains the same from one moment to the next. Everything is dynamic, continually changing whether we want it to or not, whether we are a willing participant or not. We are part of that world and our lives can *expand* in response to the changing moods of each season, or we can *contract* by resisting the change we have been invited to make.

Three Paths to Change

Our lives change for three reasons.

The first, which we experience from time to time throughout our lives, comes from being *pulled* by the invisible force of biology and life-cycle stages to be a different person than we were before. A baby learns to crawl, walk and run because she is hardwired to move through those stages. In adolescence we couldn't ignore our hormones and the changes they bring if we wanted to. And the inevitable act of falling in love dramatically expands our view of life in ways we could not know without that experience. Courtship, marriage, birth of

children, the launching of grown children, and the onset of old age each present us with different opportunities to evolve, grow and develop.

Not infrequently, when we have been inspired by a new vision of who we can grow to be, and what the world

ASK YOURSELF ABOUT CHANGE

What is the most significant change I have made in my life?

Did the impetus for that change come from a push from someone or the pull of inspiration and developmental change? or was it the result of emotional and/or physical pain?

can become through our efforts, we are *pulled* to change. For instance, it is hard to read *Paradigm Found* without feeling compelled to make a genuine difference in the world by following our passion, just as the author, Anne Firth Murray, did when she founded The Global Fund for Women.

Sometimes, though very seldom, we change because we are *pushed* by someone to become a different person than we've been. If that person is our boss, and our job depends on changing some habit or characteristic of our personality, the odds that we'll

modify our behavior are fairly good, provided we're not asked to make *too* significant of a shift in how we see ourselves. In some cases, it may be easier to find another job than change long-ingrained patterns of behavior.

Think about it for a minute. How often have you been successful in causing another person to change through nagging, pleading, cajoling, demanding, beseeching, and otherwise shoving them in the direction of change you wanted them to make? Not often, I would guess. I've certainly done my share of nagging, and even though I'm convinced the changes I want others to make would be good for them—and would definitely make *my* life easier—they resist. I've tried the push approach. It seldom

works.

What *does* work is the third reason we change, *pain*. Both psychological and physical pain encourage us to work toward relieving our discomfort and can come from many sources. Your factory is outsourced and takes your job with it. Your spouse announces he is leaving for someone else. You've been given a diagnosis of a serious illness. Your business partner's drinking has escalated. In all of these cases it's no longer possible to continue living as you have been.

Some of us are very good in putting on blinders, of course, and in ignoring a situation that would drive someone else up the wall. Yet we all have a breaking point. That's why the questions in this book are designed to help you no matter whether you are pulled or pushed to change direction, or whether discomfort you have tolerated until now has become too painful to ignore.

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The Chemistry of Change

All change takes place in the brain, a soft four-pound organ that is the control center for how you live. It is the most complex machine in the universe with an incredibly linked network of 20 billion neurons connected to an average of 10,000 other neurons. If you could take it apart, you'd see an amazingly intricate network of trillions of synapses, or neuronal connections, that looks not unlike some vast multi-level spider web. It is estimated that the possible number of on/off firing patterns, as chemicals are passed through synapses between one neuron and another, is ten times ten one million times, or ten to the millionth power!

We only use a small fraction of those potential connections, of course. In fact, we tend to use the same groups of neurons

over and over, routing old thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, emotional reactions, and beliefs back and forth within the same pathways.

This coordinated pattern allows us to make sense of the thousands of experiences we've had over the years. If every single thing that happened, every word we heard, every picture we saw, every body sensation had to be analyzed and processed from scratch in order to understand it, that would take a very long time, even given the speed with which neurons fire. It's much more efficient for the brain to assign meaning to an experience and create a belief or filter through which the next experience can be accepted or rejected as true and valid.

Soon our *beliefs* (the thoughts we experience when certain neurons are "turned on") cause us to *act* (the body's response in word and deed caused by the firing of other neurons con-

ASK YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR BELIEFS AND OPINIONS

- Do I believe that what I know now is all I need to know to live my life well? Why?
- If I believe there is more for me to learn, am I willing to find a way to learn it?
- Do I often believe I am "right" and want others to *know* that I am "right?" Why?
- If someone believes deeply in something that is much different from my version of "truth," how willing am I to consider the possibility that he or she might know something I could learn?
- Am I willing to question my most cherished opinions?

nected to our “belief neurons”) in ways that give us *consequences* we have come to expect (and which we then interpret in ways that reinforce our beliefs!).

However, what happens if the “consequences” resulting from our actions are *not* consistent with our beliefs? Unfortunately, most of us, in order to maintain our internal status quo, tend to *interpret* what we experience in ways that correspond most closely to our beliefs. Since we all wear colored glasses (some darker than others), it is not surprising that the world appears tinged with the same hue.

Unfortunately, the cyclical reasoning of “belief-actions-consequences-belief” leaves little room for maneuvering or being open to new beliefs, which results in the creation of a “comfort zone” in which we operate on autopilot. This allows the brain to do what it’s always done, sending the same, or similar, thoughts down the same pathways. True, the cycle keeps us on a merry-go-round, but it’s the merry-go-round with which we are most familiar. As long as things are sailing along smoothly, we don’t see reason to get off.

However, when we’re in pain, or when we’ve been pushed or pulled in such a way that we feel we must change our lives,

IMITATE A CAMERA

Become an objective observer of what is, just as a camera sees without making a judgment that what it sees is good or bad. Practiced frequently, this perspective can help you see things in a new light and open you to new beliefs. Further, it can give you an inner peace that is hard to achieve when you are constantly judging and evaluating everything you say and do—and everything others are saying and doing.

the brain will have to switch off some of the connections it's been using to keep old pathways functioning and build new ones. When we can turn off enough of the old connections tied to old beliefs, we allow new neurons to fire, which allows the brain to switch on its "genetic machinery" (the ability of the body to create proteins for building new neurons), which causes the brain to change internal connections. Through this turn-off-old and build-new process, our brain's biochemical environment builds new interconnected pathways.

The *willingness* to see things in a different way (to try on a new, clearer set of glasses if you will) "turns-on" neurons that can allow us to interpret our experiences in new ways (i.e., create a new belief about life), which then allows us to act in a way in which we *expect* to get different results and discover they *are* different. Over time, we change our lives by changing the chemical functioning in our brains.

Fortunately, one way you can influence the formation of new pathways is to ask yourself questions. As I noted in the introduction, questions require you to shift from a passive mode to an active mode of thinking. If your brain needs to answer a question that lies *outside* its normal reasoning path, it can't continue using synaptic connections along the *old paths*, as it does when we operate on autopilot and the road to new ideas is blocked. By asking yourself the questions in this book, you are giving your brain new experiences. True, the questions themselves may not be earth-shattering, but in attempting to answer them, you are giving your brain permission to switch off autopilot thinking and lay down new neuronal connections that will, step-by-step, lead to the change you want in your life.

This gradual building of new pathways, leading to new beliefs, leading to new behavior, leading to new results is the

consequence of what some people call “Kaizen” steps. Kaizen is a Japanese word that comes from two ideographs, the first of which represents change and the second goodness or virtue. It is based on the observation that, with few exceptions, great inventions and great change don’t arise suddenly out of thin air. Rather, they are the consequence of many quite minor steps that, added together, achieve an impressive goal. You can think of these kaizen steps as small “first-order changes” that incrementally move you toward a significant goal.

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First-Order and Second-Order Change

You may not have heard of “first-order change” and its companion, “second-order change,” but you’ve often observed this phenomenon with water.

A pot of room-temperature water placed on the stove will gradually get warmer until it boils. Likewise, a tray of room-temperature water placed in the freezer can gradually get colder in an ice cube tray until it freezes. The change from room-temperature to almost boiling and from room-temperature to almost freezing are “first-order changes.” The water hasn’t changed its fundamental qualities. It is still something we call “water,” only warmer or colder than it was. The change is incremental. It’s not unlike changing your house from muted to bright colors by painting one room and then another, or losing one or two pounds a month until you’ve reached the weight you want.

In other words, we experience first-order change when we transition in a *linear* progression to a different way of being in the world over a period of time—by doing something more or less than we had done before, by doing it faster or slower, or by accomplishing it with greater accuracy. To become a

different person through this kind of change, we need to follow the road of practice and reinforcement with steps that are tangible and measurable. Gradually we change the brain by turning new neurons on and abandoning old ones. In an organization or family, first-order change allows individuals to get used to one change before they are asked to accept another.

Often we make such gradual progress that we aren't aware we're really changing until one day we meet an old friend we've not seen for a long time and he or she says, "Wow. You've really changed. When I last saw you, you wouldn't have had the courage to do that [WHATEVER IT WAS THAT YOU JUST DID]. What made you change?" You aren't likely to respond, "Oh, I've just been making first-order changes." Yet as you think about it, you realize that you have gradually gained confidence to do something that would have been totally out of character to your old self.

ASK YOURSELF ABOUT CHANGE

When have I made a significant change in my life by moving steadily, but slowly, toward a goal?

What did I learn from that experience?

Second-order change, on the other hand, is what happens to water in the moment between almost-boiling to boiling, and from almost-frozen to frozen. This is not a small change. It is radical, a major paradigm shift, liquid to vapor, liquid to solid.

This kind of *nonlinear* approach to change is sometimes, though not often, observed in organizations (and with an occasional person). It happens when they shift from one way of being in the world to another through a transformation that occurs in less time than a first-order change might take. For this kind of change to occur, however, we need to think and feel very differently in a short period of time

so that we can behave differently in a significant way. This requires a major rewiring project in the brain and happens far less than we'd like.

Instant success is the American ideal and if we don't change quickly we are disappointed in ourselves. It is possible, of course, that you may be suddenly inspired by a speaker or preacher or author, and when something "clicks" you may see things in a totally new light, a complete transformation of thought that translates into a consistent new action and new perspective. However, if you're hoping for a fast and extreme make-over, you might be disappointed, especially if you're waiting for a bolt of inspiration that can take you from who you are, and where you are, and set you down in another place as a totally different person.

In other words, let's imagine you want to no longer be depressed, or you want to no longer feel you have to control everything. As noble as those goals might be, you aren't going to go from depressed to outrageously optimistic in one day, or from being someone who always argues with your partner to someone who can always keep your cool. It just doesn't happen that way.

It happens like this. You begin by choosing a do-able goal that is heading in the direction you want your life to move and you do it. A Kaizen step. Then you choose another do-able goal and do that. Another Kaizen step. And so it goes.

Then, although you may not notice the specific action you took that caused the *final* transformation, one day you will be pleasantly surprised to discover that your life *is* different, fundamentally and completely different, than it was before you started on the first step toward change.

You may still get depressed once-in-awhile, or you may sometimes get upset over something small, but for the most

part you've arrived where you were heading, happier and less angry.

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*From the Land of Wish-and-Want
to the Land of Will-Do*

It may be a long time before you take enough Kaizen steps to get to where you want to go. But it can also be a long time from when you first recognize the need for change before you actually take the first step. For example, for years I've wanted to create a visual metaphor that illustrated this observation. Then one day I awoke with a picture in my mind that I've turned into an Internet animation called "Getting Through the Gate to Change." This is how it goes.

Imagine that the "comfort zone" I described earlier when talking about the brain is located somewhere in the middle of a place we'll call the "Land of Wish-and-Want." Here you are fairly contented. If there are problems on the horizon, you're largely unaware of them or give them little thought. At the moment you have no intention of changing your behavior. Why should you? So far you've adjusted your life to accommodate the minor ups and downs of life. Why should now be any different?

Eventually, however, you can't avoid the pressure of "something" that is trying to push you in a new direction, although at first you may not know the source of that "something." Or it may be that you are experiencing emotional or physical pain and realize life is not as cozy as you thought it was, or "should" be. If the force driving you out of your comfort zone is inspiration, you may not hesitate to move toward an ideal of how you can make life better for yourself and for others. If someone is pushing you, you may *temporarily*

shift your attitude or behavior, but there's a good chance you'll find a way to return to doing things the way you've always done them. For that you can thank the ease with which the brain uses old pathways and needs encouragement to create new ones.

In the case of physical pain or disability, there is obviously lots of motivation to find a way to make yourself feel better. If you're dealing with emotional pain, however, you will usually begin by *wishing* your distress, whatever the cause, would go away, or that *others* would do something different so you don't have to. For a period of time you remain hopeful that things will magically improve on their own as you attempt to adjust to the current situation.

When things get worse, or at least no better, you become convinced that the situation should change—somehow. But just as wishing and *hoping* don't make things better, thinking they *should* doesn't help either. You begin to suspect that change may actually require some effort on your part. So you tell everyone that you *want* things to change and *intend* to take action soon. Now you're getting serious. You're not quite ready to make a definite commitment to take a specific action. But you're talking yourself into the courage you will need if you're to explore what you must do for things to actually change.

What is important to note, however, is that it isn't until you reach the point that *you're willing to do whatever it takes to reach your goal* that you begin the first (kaizen) steps that move you closer to success. It is as though you go through a series of preparatory steps in the "Land of Wish-and-Want" before coming to a gate in a wall that separates these preparatory steps from what I call a "Land of Will-Do." In passing through the gate to change, you reach a tipping point when change becomes possible. That is when enough neurons have been "turned on" so that your brain can create a sufficiently efficient

pathway for the belief that life *can* be different and that new behavior will result in new consequences. Only then can real transformation take place.

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The Hero's and Heroine's Journey

One of the best ways to describe such transformation is through the story of a "hero's and heroine's journey." According to thousands of legends, myths, and fairy tales, this journey of change begins simply enough.

The potential hero or heroine, like Harry Potter in all his adventures, or Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, or any figure who eventually becomes a hero or heroine, begins as a regular person who moves through ordinary days in an ordinary life. Well, Harry's not exactly a "regular" person, but he lives an ordinary, if unhappy, life.

Things are humming along relatively smoothly, deep in the comfort zone, when something dramatic happens. A tornado. A visitor from another dimension. A wizened old lady with a secret. A rider on a white horse. A challenge from a stranger. A threat to the community. Whatever it is that happens, potential heroes and heroines are put in a position where they *have to make a choice* as to whether or not they will respond to what is called the "call to action," which is also referred to as a "call to adventure." I prefer the term "action" because that's what has to happen if your life is going to change, although you may certainly experience the process as an interesting "adventure" at some point along the way.

An excellent explanation of what happens in the first part of a hero's or heroine's story is given by the scholar Joseph Campbell in his well-researched book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*:

This first stage of the mythological journey . . . signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown.

To give you an example of this kind of change, later in the book you will meet Roger, a young man who lived in the Middle Ages and became a hero by accepting the call to action. I am sure that if you think of yourself as you follow his story, you will notice that you, yourself, are somewhere along the path of this journey, perhaps already in a “zone unknown.”

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Leaving Home With a Backpack

Another metaphor may help explain why it is often difficult to take the steps necessary to get to, and through, the gate to change. You see, all of us are born into a home fashioned from our parents', or other caregivers', dreams, traditions, beliefs, education, and experience. The foundation for this home was built by the culture in which our parents grew up and the age in which they lived. Not knowing anything else, we accepted our lives as the way things should be. Even if there was discord in our family, it was home. It was familiar.

No matter what kind of atmosphere we experienced in the homes where we began our lives, each room had windows facing one direction. North. South. East. West. And while corner rooms might provide a view in two directions, our parents, like most people, tended to use some rooms more than others and to like the view in only one or two directions. They encouraged us to like that view of life as well. This doesn't mean that what our parents were looking at was wrong, it was just limited.

When we went outside, even though our horizons were

expanded, we were encouraged to focus on some parts of the world to the exclusion of others. So we were taken to some places and not others. We attended one church but not another. We went to one school rather than another. We played with one group of children and not another. This selective experience of the outside world didn't seem at all unusual. Our parents' beliefs about the world seemed to work for them. Why shouldn't they work for us?

When we ventured farther out into the world by ourselves, our parents tried to make certain that we would continue to accept their ideas on how we should live. They did this by creating a "container" into which they stuffed all their beliefs, injunctions and instructions. I think of this container of parents' dreams and goals as an invisible, highly stretchable "backpack" we carried with us wherever we went as children—and continue to carry today.

In this backpack we could find our parents' rules for how to treat others, the kind of education we should have, the religion we should follow, the foods that are best for us to eat, the books we should or shouldn't read, the kind of job that will allow us to reach the potential our parents saw in us, the kind of friends we should have, and the kind of person we should marry. Feeling unsure of yourself? Just look inside and there you'll find the answer, the "shoulds" and "oughts" we carry in the back of our minds.

Of course, as we went out into the world, we came into contact with relatives, neighbors, friends, preachers, teachers, pundits, experts, celebrities, and even authors of self-help books, who added their opinions to our backpack. This is how you should vote. This is what you should wear. These are the charities you should support. Everyone is only too willing to tell us how to change the way we live if we are unhappy, and how to live even if we are happy with our lives. Accepting

someone else's opinion without careful examination adds more weight we have to carry.

Not only is our backpack filled with the opinions and exhortations of others, we, ourselves, add to it with every experience we have, every possession we buy to which we are attached. We make certain to include our failures, resentments, regrets, guilt, fears, the memory of traumas and the residue of illness. On top of that, we also place our dreams, accomplishments, some self-assurance we've picked up along the way, values we try to live by, skills, accomplishments, and strengths, all influenced by our temperament.

Unfortunately, we've come to believe that the contents of this backpack define us. By claiming that what we believe, what we own, what we say, and what we do is our "identity," we attempt, unconsciously, to guarantee our place in the world. And there is no greater proponent of this perspective than our ego; for the function of our ego is to protect us and our identify, which the ego believes is determined by the contents of the backpack to determine what that identity will be. The ego makes certain that the pronouns of "me," "mine," and "I" are sprinkled liberally throughout our conversations. Consequently, the contents of the backpack are important to our ego.

But what happens when we no longer can stay in our comfort zone, when we find ourselves on a path to change and aren't sure what to do next? What happens when the weight we are carrying becomes too heavy? Perhaps then it is time to sort through the backpack and explore whether the admonitions we've been carrying around all these years still apply to our lives.

Is there a way we can discard some unusable items in this heavy piece of the past and replace them with a new perspective

that more accurately reflects our current situation? Yes.

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A Room With a View

Let's use another metaphor to describe how you can create new pathways in your brain, keep the best from your past, move out of your comfort zone, take a few kaizen steps, and move toward a new future.

Imagine that in the house or apartment where you live today you discover a door you've not seen before. On the door is a sign that says, "SILENCE WHEN ENTERING THIS PLACE OF CREATIVITY AND CHANGE." You're not sure what you'll find when you open the door, but you turn the knob and see a staircase leading up to a small room with clear windows facing in every direction. Because you've been reminded to be silent, you discover it is very quiet in this room with a view.

In the center is a swivel chair where you can sit most comfortably and look out toward the world as it is today, and how you imagine the world might be in the future. Best of all, there is a table where you can open your backpack and some shelves where you can sort the load you've been carrying for such a long time.

As you place your backpack on the table, you look out the windows, taking care to look in every direction. That is when you notice two things you never noticed before. First, you realize that everyone and everything is connected with everyone and everything else, including you. Then you notice that every person has a backpack. Before now, when you have met these people on the street, their backpacks were invisible, just as yours was. You knew you had a backpack because you could feel the weight, but you thought you were the only one

burdened by the past. Now you see that everyone carries a load. Some people are so weighed down they can barely move, and even drag a heavy trunk behind them. Others seem to have had the courage to clean out their backpacks as they got older. They now manage to carry only a small knapsack or fanny pack, and move with grace and ease as they go about their day.

The idea that you might reduce the weight you've been carrying excites you as you unzip the pockets in the backpack and lay out the contents one by one. This should be easy, you tell yourself. *I finally have a place where I can let go of what I don't want and keep what I do.*

Unfortunately, your ego has come into the room with you. It keeps whispering in your ear, despite the sign requesting silence. It wants to remind you that your identity is tied up with all the things you've stuffed into your backpack. Thus, if

TAKE ACTION

Bring A Metaphor To Life

A "room with a view" is a mental space you create in your imagination. To translate that idea into reality, it greatly helps to have a physical space where you can reflect on your life, tap into your imagination, bring up experiences of the past, and project into the future in your mind's eye.

To make this a place where you can comfortably ask yourself questions, bring into this space items that add beauty, serenity, joy and peace. Be sure to include something in your favorite color and some paper where you can draw when you are inspired or write down your thoughts so you can more easily remember what your true self would have you know.

your ego has watched you place great importance on material wealth, it will make certain you don't discard anything that would decrease your possessions. If your ego has watched you achieve social prominence, it will make certain you remember the importance of your position in the community. If your ego knows you place great value on your opinions—or whatever else your ego clings to in declaring your importance in the world—it will make it difficult for you to throw out anything that might conflict with your long-held views. Sorting through the backpack will not be easy with the ego around.

That is why, to make the most of the opportunity this room provides, to learn how you can connect more easily with the people you see from this special place, and to step into the future with fewer encumbrances, you'll have to nudge the ego aside. To do that you will need to express your "true self." This is your essence, the most elementary and distinctive part of who you are. It has been called by many names; the "life force within," the "wise self," your "true identity," your "intuition," your "soul." I will refer to it in this book simply as the "true self." Whatever you call it, it is from within this calm place that change and pure creativity takes place. From this center you experience what it is like to go beyond "doing" and "having" into simply "being."

It's to be expected, of course, that when you listen to your true self your ego will initially be thrown off-balance. It won't know what to do with instructions for living in which you are not identified by your possessions, power, opinions, etc. You will need to make choices from your true self many times before the ego will relinquish the control it has wielded for years.

When it does let go, as it must if you frequently return to this room with a view, you will discover that it is within your true self that your "will" resides. You will need this inner

“resolve” to sustain the energy it takes to reach a goal. Later, in Chapter Six, you are asked to call upon this “will” to discover whether you are ready to step through the gate to change and do whatever it takes to reach your goal of making a significant change in your life.

Further, as you continue to visit this room of change and creativity, as you pay attention to the quiet voice within, you will learn how to embrace qualities of the human spirit that are needed to reach your goals in life—patience, joy, gratitude, serenity, tenderness, tolerance, forgiveness, courage, to name only a few. In Chapter Seven, you will have a chance to learn how you can use these qualities every day.

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You Know More Than You Think You Do

When you stand on the path that lies between now and the future, when you imagine your problems will be solved, you may have only a vague idea of how to move down the path, through the gate, and into the future. You aren’t even sure how to begin.

Fortunately, however, you’re not as clueless as you think you are, for you’ve already made hundreds of choices that have changed your life. Some choices have turned out well. Others haven’t.

In reading this first chapter, I hope you can see how the process of change has applied to your life in the past, and to the possibility of a new life in the future.

As you continue to read, and to consider the questions in this book, I am sure the answers you give can help you be more fully in touch with your true self. Carefully considered, they will help you know the direction in which you want your

life to change. Then you will be able to set, and reach, goals that are most consistent with the essence of who you are, with what you want to get out of life, and what you want to give.

BEWARE THE CRITICAL SELF

If you are trying to get in touch with your true self to solve a problem and the answer you seem to hear comes in the form of a strong and critical "should," be careful. If it feels as though your "inner advisor" is a parent who is scolding you for not knowing how to do something it thinks you "ought" to have known how to do (even though you haven't been taught how to do it), that's not your true self. The answers a genuine inner advisor gives are loving and kind, gently leading you to a solution that is best for you and others.

If you want to change your life, reflect on this question from Chapter One:

- *What do I know about the process of change?*

