

Time to Make a Change?

by Mike Hawkins

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If you could change one aspect of your life, what would it be? What would you change if you had the time, money, self-control, courage, ability, or whatever resources were required? Or think about it this way, what annoyance or issue might you be complaining about that you would like to eliminate? Stop, close your eyes, and think about it for a minute. Dream for a minute. Would you change something to do with a relationship? Learn a new skill or improve your ability? Stop a bad habit? Pursue a new role or job? Start a new initiative at work, church, or in the community? Start a business, write a book, or go back to school? Get treatment for a physical ailment? Move somewhere? Make an employee change? Upgrade something? Downsize?

If you're like most people, you've been thinking about learning, starting, stopping, or doing something for a long time. A current situation might be okay but isn't as good as it could be. Yet, it has been easier to do nothing than to step out of your comfort zone and take action.

Or maybe your current circumstances are great and there is nothing to change. As the cliché goes, "don't fix it if it isn't broken." Enjoy yourself. Don't create problems that don't exist. There are enough challenges in life already. There is nothing inherently wrong with doing the same thing with the same people in the same place for a long time. If your circumstances and habits are good for you, good for others, and taking you in the right direction, keep doing them.

However, if there is something you think about often that creates a lot of negative thought, that consumes a lot of your energy, or continues to be hard to deal with, maybe it's time to take action. Maybe waiting isn't the best solution. Consider that you may be too comfortable, patient, passive, accommodating, or agreeable. That you need to be more assertive, proactive, or intentional. You may need to address something that has been creating the undesirable circumstances. Or you need to change a circumstance that you have control over. Or you need to do something for someone else.

For whatever change might be on your mind, have you given thought to not only the change, but what is required for you to take action? Have you thought about what needs to happen to move you from thinking to doing? Do you need to research alternatives? Do you need to create a plan? Seek advice? Or do you need to wait until circumstances change or get worse? Or until the benefit of the change increases to the point it justifies the effort? Or do you need to be honest with yourself and confront the possibility that you prefer to do nothing until the change is forced on you?

Change is hard. It requires learning or doing something new which can be very frustrating. It requires giving up something or doing without which is rarely enjoyable, even when what you are giving up is frustrating or unhealthy. Change involves breaking habits which is especially difficult when habits are deeply embedded in your daily routine or subconscious. Habits are networks of neurons in your brain that allow you to do things without conscious thought. Change requires that you compete with these established networks. You must give conscious and focused attention to resisting that which seems natural. You must exercise self-control. You must do something new repetitively until it creates a new network. With your attention being a finite resource, change then becomes especially taxing when you have little time, other distractions, or several other issues to deal with at once.

Consider that a crisis, such as an economic downturn or the coronavirus pandemic, provides a unique opportunity to make a change. Maybe a once in a lifetime opportunity to go somewhere, learn a new skill, or do something different. Since a crisis forces change anyway, you might as well benefit from it to the extent you can. You might as well make a change that not only deals with the crisis but makes you a better person and puts you in a better position when you come out of it. As the British prime minister Winston Churchill said "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

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If you're contemplating a change, here are a few questions to challenge your thinking in terms of if the change is right for you or not and how to make the most of it:

- **Evaluate your motive.** Is your desire honorable? Is your need worthy or should you change your need instead of trying to fulfill it? If the driver behind your desire was printed on the front page of a newspaper, would it reflect favorably on you?
- **Understand the source.** Is the change you desire being influenced by you or caused by something else that is more deserving of your attention? For example, do you need to deal with a controlling nature, negativity, or insecurity before turning your attention to what others are doing that bothers you? What are the influences within your control you first need to address?
- **Consider the simple first.** Before pursuing a difficult or complex change, is there a simple solution available? Might you simply talk through something with someone? Apologize for something? Forgive someone? Let something go that you've been ruminating on for too long? Or stop pursuing something that isn't realistic or a good fit for you?
- **Seek advice.** Before making a change, particularly a big one with a significant impact or substantial risk, get counsel. Talk to wise, experienced, logical, and respectable people who know you and your circumstances well.
- **Reflect on what you have.** Are you giving equal attention to what is working and what you have as to what isn't working and what you don't have? Is your unmet need sufficiently greater than what you currently have?
- **Know the impact.** How does the change impact you as well as others? Is the change appropriate for and beneficial to everyone? If you only benefit slightly while others are disadvantaged in some way, is it really a good idea? Or if the benefit will only last briefly? How will the change impact other activities, plans, or circumstances that are important to you over the long-term?
- **Understand the costs.** Have you analyzed the resources you need? Estimated the costs? Analyzed the logistics? Do you own or have access to the resources you need to accomplish the change?
- **Understand the effort.** How significant are the obstacles you may encounter? What is the level of effort and time required? Are you being realistic about how much time you and others can give? How much disruption, distraction, or distress it will cause?
- **Do your homework.** Have you researched alternatives? Identify at least a couple of alternatives to evaluate in addition to doing nothing. Be openminded to new approaches and solutions, especially if you are planning to take the same approach you've taken before which created the very circumstances you are trying to change.
- **Conduct a trial.** If possible, can you test your idea before fully committing to it? Is there a way to get experience or knowledge through a pilot, prototype, temporary assignment, or volunteer effort?
- **Expect difficulty.** What habits will you have to resist or change? What self-control or courage will you need? How will you deal with the discomfort when it arises? How will you handle any temptations to revert back to your prior circumstances?
- **Create a plan.** What is your roadmap? When is the right time to make your transition? Craft a plan with key milestones, actions, and dates. Include actions that deal with anticipated obstacles and temptations.

After answering these questions, hopefully you have certainty in whether or not to confront a circumstance and perhaps pursue a long-needed change. When finished taking action, you might say "wow, that was hard" but also "that was absolutely the right thing to do."

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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