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## Responding to Change:

### How to Live With (and Survive!) Uncertainty

*By Linda Vanderlee*

**C**hange... a coming together or a coming apart, self-initiated or self-imposed, desired or not. Every one of us has our own way of responding to change and the inevitable transition that accompanies it. We may ignore it, rage against it, succumb to it with a sigh, or even face and embrace it. Change triggers our emotional centre and often evokes a sense of fear — can I handle this?

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## Embrace the unknown —

Although I usually see myself as someone who likes change, I recently experienced one I didn't expect or welcome: a downturn in the amount of work I'm used to. The fear factor certainly raised its head. That great, gaping hole of uncertainty and the unknown loomed large and dark.

Fear can be an important and useful response in some situations. It keeps you from getting too close to the edge of a cliff when you're driving on some hilly road. It gets you to stop the car on the side of the road when you start to nod off. It makes you think twice about taking a job that doesn't match your skill set or interests.

In the context of responding to change, though, it can often be a red herring, a tactic to keep us from living life fully. In those situations, I like to think of fear as an acronym: False Evidence Appearing Real. It's a reminder for me to challenge my assumptions and beliefs, best done with someone else not so steeped in the emotions of the situation.

Few of us can truly know for sure what happens next, but we can listen attentively to ourselves and influence our response by simply adjusting our perception and our beliefs about what is, as well as what's next. Uncertainty has an equal chance of bringing us good things, resources, people who will be helpful, and opportunities that lead us closer to what makes our heart sing.

When something changes, how you approach this new reality will have a huge impact on how resilient you are. How many times have you experienced or heard a story about a layoff, a relationship ending, even

an illness that — having been painful and difficult — was ultimately a turning point that led to something positive? Change, both the invited and the imposed, offers us a chance to take stock of what is truly important to us. It's an opportunity to take steps that align with that.

What would happen if you were able to embrace that perspective — especially if it were based on reviewing your lived experiences of when you did "handle it"? I've witnessed countless individuals and teams do just that. In each case they were able to tap into a new energy source and an expanded belief system that allowed creativity and confidence to emerge, along with various coping and *thriving* strategies specific to them.

With uncertainty, we have choices. We can let fear close us down or make us run. We can succumb to the fear, deciding that the uncertainty we face is only going to bring doom and gloom. We can even pretend nothing is happening, ignore it all, and let the cards fall where they may. Alternatively, we can choose to embrace the uncertainty and discover ways, perhaps new ways, to live with this "what is." We can use our self-knowledge and our past experiences to balance that sense of fear with an attendant sense of excitement, possibility, and trust.

As for me, at the time of writing, the work slow-down remains pretty much the same. What's different is that my energy and creative ideas are flowing again. I believe this is because I let myself ride the wave of emotions, attend to my self-care needs, and reach out to friends and colleagues. I take the time to process and address my fears,

check out my assumptions, learn what I have to learn, brainstorm options and choices. I am noticing when my thinking and actions are counter-productive, and am mindful of choosing to think and act otherwise.

I'm confident in my ability to both survive this phase and make this a turning point opportunity. I'm ready to see and absorb what is indeed perfect about this situation: for me, it's an opportunity to take a creative sabbatical; to focus on exploring visual art, writing, and music. It's a time to slow down, spend less, and enjoy the fruits of my labours. It's a time to create more community and partnerships in my life. I am looking forward to seeing what unfolds. I trust that it will all work out.

**HWO**

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Despite the uncertainty, despite that sense of fear, we can take charge of our responses and influence the outcomes. Try this next time you're facing the unknown:

- ▶ Acknowledge and feel the fear, and listen to what you need.
- ▶ Recognize and act on your need for extra self-care, paying attention to what you require to be healthy — in body, mind, emotion, and spirit.
- ▶ Reflect on who you are, what you have learned about yourself, what beliefs are helping or holding you back, and apply that knowledge to your current situation.
- ▶ Take the time to envision the life you want to create — what you want to be, do, and have — and, with that awareness and clarity, be open and present to the opportunities as they appear.
- ▶ Ask a paradigm-shifting question like "what's perfect about this"?
- ▶ Choose to accept support and help (from people, books, courses, etc.).



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