

Change is Here to Stay

By Molly Ranns

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once wrote, “Change is the only constant in life.”¹ Since Heraclitus lived around 500 B.C., this statement has been relevant for centuries and seems more pertinent now than ever before. The year behind us, for example, has forced us to change in ways we never thought possible and now 2021 continues with the same demands. Considering that everything we experience is a result of change — a change in weather, seasons, feelings, technology — I ask us to consider why we continually protest and even resist it.

Change can be scary; even good change can cause stress. Perhaps our response to change, not simply the change itself, is most pertinent to the outcome. The legal profession has been asked to shift and adapt in so many ways since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interactions have transitioned to FaceTime interactions. From depositions to hearings to overall remote work, lawyers have been called upon to keep the profession moving forward and provide an invaluable service but do it in a way that has never been done before. Then the question becomes, have you approached change with flexibility or rigidity?

Some would say the ability to be psychologically flexible and shift one’s mindset or behavior when personal or social functioning is compromised is a key component to mental health.² The ability to be

flexible in the face of change helps us maintain balance, whereas rigidity in one’s thinking can lead to stress, anxiety, and even depression.³ The pandemic has forced many people, but specifically those in the legal profession, to catch up to technology and implement new ways of functioning.⁴ Though some pandemic-forced changes have been frustrating, isolating, or even limiting, many have proven to be an enhancement or improvement from old ways of functioning. These changes that have made life easier or more efficient give us a choice — we can carry them into the future or continually resist them while insisting on returning to the ways of the past.

Understanding that *change is the rule and not the exception* can help us adjust to life accordingly and move through it with ease.⁵ We often hear that resilience can protect us from depression and anxiety, improve one’s ability to cope with life’s stressors, and help us adapt to difficult situations.⁶ Resilience can be defined as the ability to rebound after crisis or return to a higher state of functioning due to having learned what can be done to avoid or mitigate stress.⁷ With that definition of resilience in mind, we could infer that resilience is, in part, effectively welcoming change. The more we learn about resilience, the more potential there is for applying it to everyday life.⁸

Those who view change as an opportunity, engage the support of others, practice patience, and display optimism are said to possess characteristics of resilience.⁹ There’s no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating. Resilience tells us, however, that it is possible to take the positive changes which have occurred from last year’s devastation — a more flexible work schedule, utilization of a more global and diverse workforce, stronger family connections, heightened awareness about the impact of crisis, a greater connection with nature — and learn from them. As we recognize that change is here to stay, here is how we can embrace it:

1. **Take small steps.** Avoid getting overwhelmed with the end goal and visualize small, baby steps instead. Doing that provides a greater sense of control. Look at the big picture and then work backward. How can the task at hand be broken into smaller, more easily accomplished objectives? If faced with a need to change jobs, for example, simply start by updating your résumé. Taking care of this small step doesn’t carry the pressure of landing a dream job or even starting the application process. Conquering smaller tasks makes embracing change much more manageable.

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2. **Anticipate setbacks.** Sometimes, we need to go backward to move forward. Think about taking a leap over a large puddle. You don't jump from where you stand; you take a couple of steps back to get a good running start and gather momentum. Just as success is not always linear, embracing change requires flexibility in the way we think.
3. **Leave your ego at the door.** Often, the biggest roadblock to embracing change is us. We resist it by focusing on personal, emotional downsides — fear of failure, worry about others' perceptions, anxiety about the outcome not living up to expectations. Stay in the present moment and accept that these difficult feelings are a part of the process. Learning to tolerate and accept distress can guide one to successfully coping with change.

Embracing change is a survival skill and one that is vital to success. By taking small steps, the risks of failure are lessened.¹⁰ If the small step works, take the next one! Recognize that sometimes we must take a step back to move forward. Don't let fear bog you down. If adjusting and embracing change proves difficult, reach out to the SBM Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program to find out what resources are available to you. ■

3. *Id.*
4. Harrar, *What has COVID-19 Taught the Legal Sector?*, Lawyer Monthly (April 1, 2020) <<https://www.lawyer-monthly.com/2020/04/what-has-covid-19-taught-the-legal-sector/>> [<https://perma.cc/9V9X-Q6BQ>].
5. Brenner, *The Nature of Change, Finding the predictable in the unpredictable*, Psychology Today (May 6, 2011) <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/201105/the-nature-change-0>> [<https://perma.cc/4VXC-JYU8>].
6. *Resilience: Build skills to endure hardship*, Mayo Clinic (October 27, 2020) <<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/resilience-training/in-depth/resilience/art-20046311>> [<https://perma.cc/UQU2-BHQ4>].
7. Swenson et al, *Stress and Resiliency in the U.S. Judiciary*, ___ ABA J of the Professional Lawyer 1, 28 (2020), available at <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/journal-of-the-professional-lawyer-2020.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/C9L3-NC3S>].
8. Riopel, *Resilience Skills, Factors and Strategies of the Resilient Person*, Positive Psychology.com (February 11, 2021) <<https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-skills/>> [<https://perma.cc/WT98-W5FS>].
9. *Id.*
10. Roth, *How to be Successful by Embracing Change*, Entrepreneur (August 11, 2015) <<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/248977>> [<https://perma.cc/CBC7-5NFY>].




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ENDNOTES

1. *Who Said "The Only Thing Constant is Change"?* Reference (March 24, 2020) <<https://www.reference.com/world-view/said-only-thing-constant-change-d50c0532e714e12b>> [<https://perma.cc/GZB3-CYEG>]. All websites cited in this article were accessed March 22, 2021.
2. Shpancer, *Psychological Flexibility: A Core Mental Health Asset* (September 2, 2019) <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/201909/psychological-flexibility-core-mental-health-asset>> [<https://perma.cc/V742-U4PX>].

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