

Can You Spare Some Change?

Helping clients move beyond the fear of pain

By Melanie DewBerry-Jones

What creates and sustains change? What keeps us, or others, stuck in patterns that are no longer desired? As coaches, we are in the business of change; we could be called *change-makers* because at the base of each goal, every vision and all desires is one certainty — to attain it, change is necessary.

Why is change so hard for certain people? Why do some of us seem to glide through it while others grip, white knuckled, at the thing or situation they wish to drop? And what brings real sustainable change — not that temporary thing that looks like change but eventually fades away?

I have posed these questions to clients, friends and audience members at speaking events. Their responses were interesting but provided me few clues to understanding the

resistance to change. The standard answers were: “I’m scared”, “It’s too hard”, “I don’t know what my life would be like if I did change” and, my favorite, “others won’t like me if I change.” I have finally arrived at an answer and, I believe, a solution to accessing real change.

Fear of pain

At an event a while ago, I was working with a woman in her mid-fifties who appeared much older. All she wanted was to live peacefully alone in her modest home. She was single, but her adult son, his wife and their two children were living with her. Every weekend, an ex-son-in-law dropped off another grandson. Her answer seemed simple enough — tell the adults they have to leave, and see her other grandson when it works for her. As I looked into her eyes, it was clear

to both of us that she wasn’t going to do any of the things she wanted to do. When I asked, “By when will you talk to your children?” she replied, “I don’t think I will.”

She finally confessed that she couldn’t stand the thought of her children being mad at her for taking her life back. “After all,” she said, “I’ve always been there to do whatever they need. They won’t like me changing now.” Not giving ourselves what we want is like being thirsty and not drinking water.

There are as many kinds of fear as there are people. But when you boil all those fears down, what is left is the ultimate fear, the one we would do anything to avoid, the fear of pain. We don’t change because we are not willing to be with whatever pain, or painful story, we think we will have to feel.

Often, the pain clients think they will have to live with is

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much deeper, longer and more agonizing than what really occurs. What’s crazy-making about these discussions of fear and pain is that our clients are *already* in pain. Though they may be desensitized to their current pain, that doesn’t mean they aren’t suffering — and paying a hefty price for it.

It is within our scope of ability to assist clients to distinguish the difference between an illusionary story and a real experience. It can be a matter of collecting evidence. Clients may have a ton of evidence for the illusion, but while they wade in the waters of illusion they drown out the evidence of their own reality of prior success. Most people have a previous experience of confronting fear and change, but are they using that positive evidence to compel them forward?

Staying with the pain of change is the definition of courage. The word courage comes from a French word that





means to “be of heart.” Change is to be led by the heart. When I have asked clients to stay with the pain and to report on it, the reports have been amazingly similar — it wasn’t nearly as bad as they had thought. One client stated, “Being with the pain was like stubbing my toe. At first I’m shocked, then I feel the pain, then I realize it’s subsiding and then it’s done. Maybe I limp for a moment or a day or two, but then I’m walking just fine and I forget all about the pain.” Another, more humorous client reported, “Hey, I didn’t die or implode, cool!” Cool indeed.

Force vs. power

I knew a runner who could easily run eight miles a day, but ten miles would wipe him out. To reach the ten-mile mark he would summon up his human will and push right through his exhaustion, ignoring the pain to reach his goal, very proud. Reaching those last two miles felt as though he was running against the wind — nature’s resistance. This *pushing-through* is also how he made changes in his life; he would summon his pure will, and fear be damned — just do it. This kind of success felt hard, and sometimes the changes he’d worked hard to make just didn’t take. He would then give up because he had already tried really hard and it didn’t stick. Thereafter he associated change with being hard and painful, and his successes were about fifty-fifty.

The force of will, pushing through, is collusion between the mind and body that they are what makes us successful in life; only they induce change. The setting for real change cannot be sustained on the back-and-forth wavering ground of the body and mind. This is one of the biggest obstacles in change, believing that empowerment can

come from anything but pure power. Change *is* sustainable — when it comes from something more powerful than the force of human will.

Real change happens when it is motivated by something more compassionate and honest than force. Force is external and by its nature will always be accompanied by resistance. Force looks for permission, either from the ego or from others, for existence. The biggest liability of force, or the human will, is that it is based in the personality. The personality is about as superficial as one can get. Established on myopic perspectives and desires, it manipulates its own self-worth to satiate childlike fancies.

Power, however, is an internal strength. Power does not seek permission; it is in alignment with Self, and thus decisive. The depth of power goes beyond momentary wants and desires, and seeks long-term positive effect. Unlike force that must be summoned like a genie in a bottle, power and strength are cultivated. We must be present, in today’s reality rather than yesterday’s illusionary story, in order to connect to it. If the mind is the machine, then the soul is the mechanic that makes it all run smoothly. Power is grounded by the soul. Internal power takes a desire further than change — it transforms the person making the change.

Strength moves us out of fear-based thinking into courageous response. As we attend to the soul, learning to be of heart rather than pushing will, we come to learn that practice really does make perfect — perfect evidence of our capabilities when we put our soul to it.

And so it is! ●

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