The Gift of Change
by M. Parker Anderson

I’m getting it now, but it sure did feel as though it was a long time in coming. For me, any internal conversation about change, whether personal or professional, always starts with my eyes tightly closed, wrapped in a big, soft, cuddly towel, and a very hard swallow, that both tightens and releases every muscle in my face and, seemingly, entire body. It is in that very instant, that I both know and feel, a major life-altering change is about to occur or erupt in my life.

I remember that day when major change started for me. It was not yet of seismic proportions; however, I knew it was going to be a major change. I have such a vivid memory of this day because in many ways I was living my life on cruise control. Not bad, some might say, seeing as though everything was seemingly in order in my life. I had a good job, a wonderful place to work, and colleagues I enjoyed generally surrounded me. So, overall things were going well for me. Even though there was a multitude of change occurring in and around my workplace and in other parts of my personal life, I was handling all of these changes.

Nonetheless, I was aware that change was happening both in me and around me. Somewhere deep inside of me, there was this tickling awareness that all of the external changes occurring around me connected to the internal, personal changes occurring within me. In other words, the external changes were propelling the internal changes along. I knew that regardless of what changes were going on around me, either with friends going through their own transitions, or neighbors moving, or remodeling projects that seemingly would never finish, or new, vague, on-the-job requirements or directions, none of these were as great as the huge tidal wave that was brewing within me.

I knew that when life-altering changes occurred all other changes appeared small. Interestingly enough, as large as my own personal changes seemed, others, including friends and family, and the people I worked with, may not have realized that I was experiencing a major life-altering transition. Often the people you work with, and even the family and friends you love so much, may think you are going through just another every day change. They may not realize that you are going through a major life change. Also because of the way human nature is they may actually think that what they are going through is far more important than whatever you are going through. More often than not, they are totally unaware that you are about to be swept into shore by one huge wave and where, when, or how you land is not at all certain.

Answering the call

It was during such a moment when I knew that I would change from the comfort of a job that I loved and offered me tremendous growth opportunities, to a “follow your passion” experience of being of service and fulfilling my heart’s desire. Yes, I was going to give up the prestige of working for a national organization and strike out on my own.

My drive, my commitment, my mission, and purpose were to be true to myself. The question I had to answer was, “Does this feel right in my heart?” If I could answer “yes” then I knew I was following my own yellow brick road. “Yes!” I would say over and over again. The answer was yes but still the questions kept coming. My mind would block what was in my heart and start asking a hundred and one questions, such as, “Could I uproot myself?” If the answer to the question was “yes,” then along came another in a series of different questions. I was looking for any way to block or derail my forwarding action so that I would be lead to silence the increasingly louder “yes.” Should I uproot myself, my family, from the safety and security of what was known, to venture off, into a follow your dream adventure? Methodically, over and over again, my mind kept saying “NO” but my heart kept shouting, screaming from deep inside an abyss, “Oh yes.” “Yes,” felt so far away, it was hard to hear, especially...
when the “NO” was coming with such force, clarity, and apparent logic. The question I really needed to ask became was this logic, or was it fear and doubt that held me back from hearing the steady reverberation of “yes”?

**Following your heart**

In the past, I would probably not have said that change was a gift or something to look forward to. Of course, like others, I had heard the Chinese saying that change is an opportunity, but when it happens like a tidal wave, I’m hardly the one to suddenly stop and say, “Hooray for me, I’m riding the W-A-V-E of opportunity.” On the contrary, I probably, like so many others, thought, “Oh no, not another change, not one more tidal wave.” But if change is an opportunity, I would have to know, trust, and believe that in saying “yes,” I was giving my heart the gift of chance.

It took me time to realize and acknowledge that my little shouts of “yes” were all about me living out my passion and heart’s desire. I just kept hearing a tiny, little voice that would get joyously happy when asked, “Is this what your heart wants to do?” Slowly, but also suddenly, a recurring “yes” dislodged from somewhere deep inside of me. The silent echo of “yes” turned into a booming refrain that even my own organized, structured mind could no longer ignore. Yes, came again and again. “Yes” was the answer to each question, each and every doubt. With each voicing it continued to resonate more loudly. Finally, I was left with no choice. I stilled the questions and accepted the yes. It was then that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was on the path to following my heart and accepting the “gift of change.”

**Everything is subject to change**

In both my personal and professional life, change is always present. For as long as I can remember, change has been always all around me: change in standards, change in title, change in diet, change of mind, change of office space, change in hair color, change in directors, change in duties and responsibilities, change of address. Change was always everywhere. Frequently, it seemed as though every time I turned around there was one more change occurring. Just as I was getting comfortable, familiar, at ease, here comes change once again. Change has a way of feeling like a disruption, a break in the habitual, the familiar, and even in many ways, as a physical disconnect, with the what, who, and where we are in life.

There have even been times when I viewed change as a personal assault to my well-being, stature, or pride; and therefore, I thought I should play victim, feign indifference, or magnify both my hurt and dismay, as if this would somehow lead to a different result. One way or another, I just can’t stop change from coming into my life. There’s no use in trying because the law of the universe says that every action creates a reaction and so it is with change.

**A matter of choice**

After having gone through so many senseless scenarios of injured pride or rightful indignation, I realize now how little these tabloid dramas actually either helped me or changed the impending result. Amazingly enough, these dramatic scenarios of whine and complain regularly play out in our day-to-day lives and show up in the workplace, in relationships, and in informal interactions. In the past, I have seen, experienced, and unfortunately at times actively participated in the “come on and join me as we . . . mount a search and destroy (get them before they get me) mission, or the familiar sabotage, shock, and awe (kill them with kindness) campaigns or the who blinks first (let’s just wait them out) game.”

These scenarios, campaigns, and mindless games do not serve us, nor do they contribute to our achieving magnificence in our lives. These negative activities do not allow us to meet the high standards or expectations we have for ourselves in the workplace or in our personal lives. So much energy is directed toward negative thinking that, in the end, does not help us to create for our own benefit a positive energy flow. Our energy would be far better directed in a search for ways to accept change, to welcome change, in the way that works best for us. We get to choose how we are going to be when change shows up in our lives.

**In search of the perfect gift**

Often, when we search for a gift to give a friend or a graduate, we may know exactly what we are looking for. On those occasions it is pretty easy to walk in the shop or get online and find the perfect gift for your friend or colleague. On other occasions, we may not be able to think of or find exactly what we are looking for. Even when we have all that is needed to find and get the perfect gift; the right or special occasion, money to buy the gift, an ideal place to shop, we still cannot find or figure out what would be the perfect gift. So we begin to search. We search in books and magazines, talk to friends,
go deep into our memory bank to see if we can come up with ideas for the perfect gift. All of this takes time because we so want it to be a special gift, a perfect gift.

The gift of change is very much like this search for the perfect gift. Sometimes we can feel it coming and we can just accept it however it shows up. At other times, we may have all that is needed for change to occur and yet we see change as an inconvenience, an intrusion into our lives. What would change be like if we accepted it into our lives? There can be the feeling of discomfort, disequilibrium, and upheaval that can stir within you, similar to when you are buying a present for someone and you know it is not the right one or you are just buying for the sake of buying, rather than it being the perfect, most suitable gift item for them. Inside there can be a nagging feeling of despair or of deep resistance.

As I said earlier, I remember this all happening with me, because things were rolling along nicely. There I was quietly going to work, doing my job, performing my duties. And yet all the while, deep inside, no longer dormant, was the beginning of a personal, life-altering volcanic eruption. I didn’t recognize it at first because the changes all felt so external to me. What I didn’t know then, but do now, is how much those external changes were revving up my personal internal change. It was as though the right hand was washing the left, or was it the other way around? I didn’t know the answer to that question but I did know that once again major change was taking place in my life and this time around, I could look upon the change as a gift.

So I resorted to doing what one does when in search of the perfect gift. I went on a mission to discover and learn about the disequilibrium that was taking place in my life. I was not going to push it away or resist its coming. I was not going to make it a chore but a fantastic shopping spree for the perfect gift. It was up to me to choose which it could be, chore or shopping spree. I set out to discover what change was all about. I went back to school, I read books, I searched articles and newsletters, and I talked with friends and experts. I went back to what was familiar for me. I went into my memory bank and brought forward the familiarity of being coconaled, nurtured, and supported. After all, I was in search for the perfect gift.

My personal search

In my personal search to accept the gift of change, I recognized that it was important to show up each and every day as though what I wanted to happen had already happened. In other words, I had to bring to whatever I was doing, the best job, the best attitude, the best self-motivation, all so that I would know that I was contributing to me in a powerful way. The more fine tuning I brought to different situations, the more I found others would contribute generously to me. I could not act as though I was a lady-in-waiting, for change to take place, someday, out there in the future. No, I had to live and act as though in this very moment I was giving the very best of me.

With this in mind, and to achieve my personal best results, I developed a three-step strategy of: acknowledging change, accepting change, and responding to change. What I recognized is that I had to go through each of these in one way or another in order to achieve the favorable results I was searching for; results that allowed me to be magnificent in my own way.

■ Acknowledgement of change — The ongoing nature of change means that it will occur all of the time. There are times when you don’t even realize that a sequence of smaller changes occurring in your life have resulted now in one major life-altering change. So I have found it important for me to acknowledge both the major and minor changes of life as they happen. Paying attention and being a constant observer for the large and small events helped me to acknowledge change as it began.

■ Acceptance of change — Inside of recognizing or acknowledging that change is happening, I allowed myself the safety of being with the change, accepting the change, however it occurred. Change can feel scary, and, sometimes, it can feel like too much, too soon, and much too often. On the other hand there are times when change can feel exciting and welcome, and it isn’t happening fast enough. Regardless, of how change is happening, aim to acknowledge the change and to honor whatever you are feeling in a space of gratitude and acceptance. This can include prayer, meditation, a gratitude list, or just saying a verbal thank you throughout the day. I know that I search for ways to show gratitude and acceptance.

■ Response to change — My response to change is seeing through to the other side of change; living as though what I want has already happened. My response to change, emerges from the five “C” words of: courage, commitment, connections, comfort, and celebration.
Courage — It takes courage to go through change particularly when it is a life-altering change. There is the need for courage in just acknowledging change and in finding ways to be grateful, when so much of what is going on within the change can feel topsy-turvy or even catastrophic. Allow yourself the freedom and have the courage to hear the yes that may lie dormant inside of you. Find the courage to both ask and answer the question, “Is this what my heart wants to do?” Responding to change requires courage and it also requires commitment.

Commitment — Change does not mean being stuck or committed to the way things always have been or the way you wish they would be. On the contrary, commitment is about being dedicated to doing the best with what you have. Not whining or complaining but being the best that you can be in all that you do. So if there is a new boss on your job, commit to working with them, to the fullest extent possible. If you have had your position changed, commit to making your new position as great as you can. Commit to doing your best while you are in the midst of change and upheaval. Commit with the same intensity, energy, and positive outlook as when things are going your way. Responding to change requires courage, commitment, and it also requires connections.

Connections — An important part of responding positively to change requires us to think or consider our relationships. Connections need to be made with people who will support us through the change. We don’t need friends or supervisors who try to impose change on us or tell us how we should adjust to change. We also don’t need friends or colleagues who are just going to recruit us into sabotage communities or whining armadas. Learn that you may need to sever some of your past relationships, as you go through major changes. Unfortunately, there are actually times when some people just hold you back and keep you from living your life in a positive and favorable way. Our relationships and connections should surround us with individuals who will support, guide, and be patient with us, as we move through the cycle of change.

There are even some instances where we may realize that we need to re-connect to ourselves. Our lives get so busy and we are doing so much every day, for so many others, that we forget who we are and what we really want to do with our lives. Connecting back to ourselves helps us, allows us, to hear what our own hearts desire. Even while we are going through our tidal wave of change, there is one thing that I suggest understanding: our friends and colleagues can be far more patient with us when we consistently try to do our best and stay away from whining and complaining. Responding to change requires courage, commitment, connections, and it also requires comfort.

Comfort — When accepting the gift of change I find that it is important to look for ways to comfort yourself. My journey always carried me to spas, or other retreats, regular manicures and massages, trips to the beach, or reading a good book in bed. I found all sorts of ways to treat myself well or to give comfort while I was in the midst of change. Search for new ways and familiar ways of taking a comfort break. Responding to change requires courage, commitment, connection, comfort, and celebration.

Celebration — In every step along the way toward the manifestation of change, I found ways to celebrate my life. I lit candles, bought new make-up, learned new yoga positions, went out to dinner, went to work early, took long lunches, bought flowers, and I found all sorts of other ways to celebrate my life of change. Change was being welcomed at every possible opportunity. Responding to the changes in my life required celebration and that is what I did.

The ultimate gift of life

Now that my major life-altering change has happened, I continue to look forward to the next series of changes that will inevitably come. For now, I sit smiling, thinking of the courage, commitment, connection, comfort, and celebrations that are yet to come. My personal efforts will continue to tap into answering the question “What does my heart want me to do with this next change?” Discovering the answer to that question is where the opportunity lies in change.

Like any very special gift that we may want, desire, or long for, it often feels as though we are waiting forever, for the day to arrive, when it is finally in our hands: that moment when we hold the token with joy, cling to the bauble or trinket, and prepare to savor the delicious moment of both giving and receiving. As I embark on my new career, it’s been a long time coming and I am prepared to savor each moment and to look for the “yes” in my heart. And so it is with the gift of change, the ultimate gift of life.