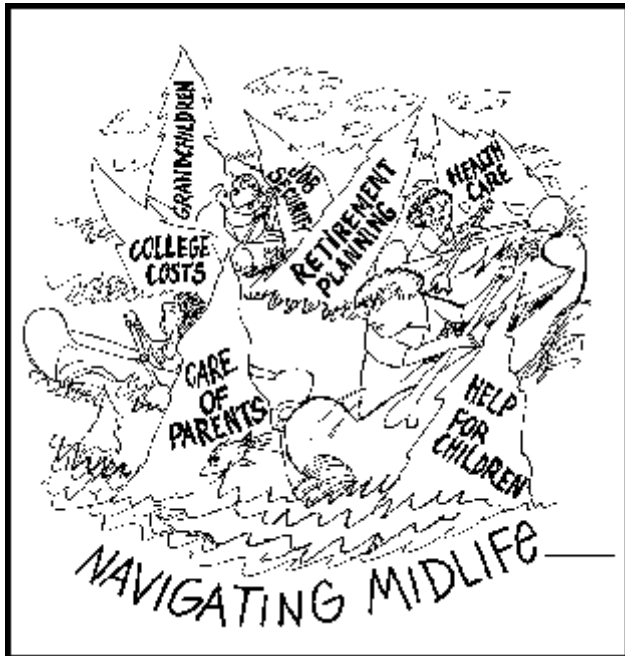


Navigating Midlife



A SERIES DESIGNED TO MEET THE CONCERNS AND NEEDS OF OUR AGING POPULATION



Coping With Change

You may not realize it, but you are very experienced at handling change. Everyone has dealt with at least one of these: the birth of a child, a young adult moving away from home, a marriage, a death, or loss of a job.

Change is what we are about! We have experienced more change in this decade than in the last 30 years...and more technological change than in the last 100 years. We need to develop an attitude of choosing to change. We need to learn to love where we are now. Not always be waiting for "everything will be better when..."

Resistance to Change

There are four reasons that we resist change according to the book, *Take This Job and Love It!*

The first is that your sense of security is disrupted. We don't know what to expect next. Sometimes the thing that appears to be the worst thing that ever happened, later is something for which we are grateful, for example being fired from a job can lead to a wonderful new career path.

Secondly, we are reminded that our power is limited. Change makes us feel like we are not "in control."

The third reason is that we doubt our ability to get through the change process.

Finally, because change may cause you to have to do something new or unfamiliar, people resist these changes so that they do not look and feel awkward or incompetent.

Resisting change is part of human nature. Transitions are accompanied by feelings of grief, anger, and loss. Keep yourself focused on the direction that you are going, not what you are leaving behind.

People deal with two kinds of change: the kind that we don't choose and the kind of changes that we consciously make. Changes that we would not choose would include the death of a spouse, your spouse leaves (and you wish they were dead!), or a friend or mentor moves

away. We choose to do things like taking an exciting new job or marrying a wonderful person.

Interestingly, both types of change are equally stressful. According to a scale that measures the impact of stressors, marriage ranks as the second most stressful life transition. Divorce ranks number seven; being fired is number eight and retirement is number ten.

Responding to Change

While we don't always have control over the changes we must face, we can control how we choose to respond to change. Liz Curtis Higgs, an author, public speaker, and encourager, has found that people "weather" change based on one of four different personality types.

Eleven percent of people fall into the "sunny" personality. These sunny people are outgoing and will talk to anybody. This is the only personality type that likes answering machines because they instruct you to "talk" at the beep.

Sunnys are emotionally demonstrative. They are either up or down with no middle ground. They are also story tellers. These are the people that can turn a five minute trip to the convenience store into a 6-hour mini-series.

A sunny personality's initial response to change is panic, and they will talk about it to anybody who will listen. By talking about it, they begin to digest it and finally, will embrace the change with humor and acceptance.

Cloudy personalities account for 17 percent of all people. They are very serious, deep, and thoughtful. They also want all the details and prefer it in writing.

Their response to change is to analyze it thoroughly before forming an opinion. At first, change will make them unhappy, but because they like to be a team player, they will accept it but not necessarily like it.

Three percent of all people, are strong willed, have an opinion about everything and want it THEIR way. These we call "stormys." They are natural leaders and can walk into any small group and within 15 seconds nominate themselves as president. They call themselves assertive; others may call them something else (!!)

A stormy will handle change in one of two ways. If they did not initiate the change, they will take credit for it. Or they will oppose it vehemently and will try to stir up mutiny. They only handle change well if they agree with it; otherwise, they go down fighting.

The fourth personality type represents 69 percent of us. A "foggy" person is low key, easy going and never ruffled. They are not boring, but are the steady, go-with-the-flow types. They are the peacemakers.

Their attitude toward change is "why sweat it?" They may be smarter than the rest of us. They realize that some of the things we fear about change will never happen; some of the things that happen will be for the better; and change often takes longer than we expect it will. Change is going to come whether you choose it OR choose to fight it.

You may recognize yourself in more than one of these descriptions. You can be "partly sunny and partly cloudy" or any other combination. You may even have conflicts within yourself.

Coping Mechanisms

What coping mechanisms have you found helpful in dealing with change? When people are asked to think back to how they coped with changes in their lives, they often name these factors:

- v support of family and friends
- v their faith
- v counseling
- v their work, whether paid or volunteer
- v humor

As people reflect on ways they dealt with change previously, they can utilize those same strategies for dealing with anticipated change.

Regardless of where you find strength to deal with change, laughter should be an underlying theme. Laughter does not mean that you are ignoring the problem. Laughter means that you are aware of it and you are going to park it over here for a minute and get what you need in laughter so that you can handle the problem with maturity and wisdom.

You can handle any change that "THEY," or life, or the government, or your family throws at you if you laugh through the process.

References

Higgs, Liz Curtis

Jaffe, Dennis T. and Cynthia D. Scott.
(1988) *Take This Job and Love It*.
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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Admin. And Director, OSU Extension TDD no. 800.589.8292 (Ohio only) or 614.292.1686.