

To Fear Change Is To Fear Life

We all wish for stability, for life to slow down. To fear change transforms life from something exciting to something terrifying. Find author Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

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If we can recognize that change and uncertainty are basic principles, we can greet the future and the transformation we are undergoing with the understanding that we do not know enough to be pessimistic.

- [Hazel Henderson](#), English television producer, futurist, author (b. 1933)

Every living thing finds life dangerous. Every living thing becomes food for other living things. Those that do not become food for other as prey or fodder become food for microbes and other life forms after they die.

Those at or near the top of the food chain tend to be in the latter group. We humans, with few natural enemies, tend to die for reasons that have nothing to do with predators.

Yet so many of us act as if we have something to fear at every moment of our lives.

Caution and the fight or flight response and its attendant physical stressors are built into us from birth. Fear is not. Fear is learned. In nature, an animal in fear tends to soon become lunch for a predator. We humans experience fear and its consequences differently.

Some kinds of fear result from unfortunate events in our lives. In my case, I fear heights (acrophobia) and closed-in spaces (claustrophobia) as consequences of seeing many movies, as a young child, that intentionally made viewers afraid as a form of thrill. The producers of the films set out to create shock in viewers. Indeed, it's what most kids my age wanted when we watched a film. The producers did not intend to develop phobias in their viewers. But they did in some.

Some kinds of fear are taught. They might be taught through role modeling by a parent ("my mother hates spiders and I do too"), by a teacher ("you don't want me to send you to the principal, do you?"), or by another person known to the one developing the fear ("Wait till your parents get home").

The colour-coded risk alert levels broadcast in the USA after 9/11 accomplished absolutely nothing in terms of preparing citizens for a possible attack by terrorists, but "amber alert" notices from the White House built fear into the hearts of people, of others who were "different" in appearance or in the way they speak or dress ("You don't see anyone from Sweden becoming suicide bombers"). This in a country that for a very long time claimed to be a melting pot of cultures, where everyone could mix freely and join into one nation in the process. Fear taught by the nation's leaders brought that claim to an end.

Those who fear seek stability. They want the same weather at the same time each year, which can't happen any more, if it ever could. They want stability in their family life, which is awkward with over half of marriages ending in divorce and grown children moving to all parts of the world for work in their specific fields. In fact, a fearful parent is more likely to cause other family members to want to get away from them.

They want stability in their jobs, which is nearly impossible in today's economic climate. More than anything else, they want to avoid change. To a person with fears, change means instability and instability ramps up their fear level.

Yet change is not just a major factor in today's world, it's critically important and inevitable. It's even part of nature.

It's possible to overcome fear, as many can attest as they have had to do so to survive. An overcome fear hides in the background, the way alcohol does to a recovering alcoholic or casinos and lotteries do for a recovering gambling addict. In the background it doesn't impact daily life. It's tolerable.

Fear of change is much more difficult to conquer. In many societies, such as the USA, fear has become a cultural

norm. How do you overcome a cultural norm? The same way the US tackled the problem of tobacco smoking, reducing adult smoking from around 75 percent of adults to just over 20 percent (including the major smoking group teens).

As Hazel Henderson said in the quote that began this article, people must be taught that change and uncertainty are normal. That means, as is the case with most teaching, these lessons should be taught to children (whose lives change frequently anyway). They must also be taught how to cope with change. That means they must know what to do when something major happens in their lives over which they have no control. That means planning ahead and having coping skills.

Children need stability as much as adults. They must have stability in some parts of their lives. But they should be taught how to cope, what to do, where to turn, who to ask for help, if unanticipated change strikes them suddenly.

As grown adults, we can learn to cope by planning as well. If your parents are alive today, it's highly likely that they will die before you do. What plan should you have, at least emotionally, for that? Your spouse or a child could die in an accident any day, or from terminal illness in the near future. What would you do then? These are problems most people would rather leave until the last minute, until they happen. Then their impact can be tragic, such as a fear of commitment to someone who might die.

We know that birth and death are part of life, even though either can come unexpectedly. But "unexpectedly" means major change. If you lost your job, what plan would you put in place so that you could get back on your feet as soon as possible? If your home burned so badly it was no longer habitable, what would you do?

Being prepared for life's possible emergencies means you can cope. Coping means less chance of emotion turmoil, including fear or turning to unhealthy alternatives such as addictions, bullying, depression, thrill-seeking and cutting of social connections that brought love into your life. When your life is upside down and inside out, that's when you need love more than ever. Do you know how to handle the love relationships in your life so that they do not get destroyed when another part of your life implodes?

Change and uncertainty are inevitable, but that doesn't mean we can't prepare for them. When these events trouble you most, you need those who love you to depend on. Having no one to fill that role can be devastating.

If you do not have anyone who loves you unreservedly, this would be a good time to learn how to develop that kind of relationship. Social skills are learnable. You can learn them by reading or taking courses.

No one's life is easy. The ones who survive best are those who prepared for downturns ahead of time. They do not become emotionally destroyed. They put their plan in place. They know how to cope.

Bill Allin is the author of ***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a guidebook for parents, grandparents and teachers who want to help children grow and develop so they know how to cope with the most important things that happen in their lives.

Learn more at <http://billallin.com>

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