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MENCONNECT

Information Tailored for Men

How to Avoid Being a Victim of Change

By Dr John Ashfield

Adjusting to the pace of change in modern life can be difficult enough, but what is demanded of us after a disaster is in a whole different league. A range of involuntary changes are foisted on us with the potential to produce all sorts of reactions in us such as feeling powerless, angry, anxious and perhaps mentally overloaded and even somewhat 'paralysed'.

The world as we know it has changed, and we are faced with the considerable challenge of making the transition into a different future, and having to make lots of decisions that will determine the shape of our future.

It goes without saying that we need first to have a clear and calm head to attempt this transition, and we may need to seek advice and support in a way we've never had to do before. This will invariably require us to be flexible, creative and open - and maybe to a degree that is a bit challenging for us.

Without realizing it sometimes, we can become rigidly attached to certain ideas, assumptions, routines, familiar patterns and conventions – in the hope of maintaining life in a certain unchanged form. But is this good for us? As H.L. Mencken once said: "It is the dull man who is always sure, and the sure man who is always dull."

In the process of trying hard to maintain the status quo we can unwittingly imprison ourselves within our own insecurities, retarding our growth in resilience and our capacity for much needed new thinking.

And let's not overlook that coping with change and transitioning to something new, always involves some degree of loss (as the old gives way to the new) and consequent grief – grief that we must experience and deal with, not merely deny. Life simply can't progress or flourish

otherwise.

Yes, this is all a very ‘tall order’ and it requires every bit of grit we can muster to get life on track – well a new track anyway. And we must make ready for the journey, by taking care of ourselves in ways perhaps that we have paid little attention to before, and by avoiding some things that are creeping into our lives that are unhelpful, like using too much alcohol, eating poorly, and not staying in good physical shape – all of which will likely have an impact on our mental health.

Making sure we get enough rest and exercise (most importantly that isn’t associated with stressful work), that we manage stress through recreation and calming activities, and pay attention to our relationships, all are essential for coping and resilience.

Of course change can turn out to be a real tonic. It can lift us out of a rut and present us with an opportunity to experience living more fully and humanly in the present moment: where we taste, see, hear, feel, and experience things with a whole new interest and intensity; things previously neglected or overlooked.

Perhaps the most important strategy for coping with change is to get back to our core values, and to focus on the people and things of most importance to us. We may need to become far less attached to the material things that are increasingly so subject to change - and that are so easily lost; instead, focusing more attention on cultivating whatever can nourish a stable sense of wellbeing, a sense of belonging, of caring and having others care about us.

Properly nurtured, these things can provide us with the dependable inner resources to help keep life hopeful, meaningful, and functioning in perspective. They can provide us with “psychological buoyancy”, a place to go when we need to “catch our breath”, and the emotional resilience to avoid being intimidated or overwhelmed by change now and in the future.

Country and Outback Health, is providing free and confidential counselling services in response to the Pinery fire. Contact: **(08) 8209 0700**