

Transformational Change is a boutique consultancy specialising in helping business and business leaders manage change



Conquering the personal journey of change

By Nicole Perry

Embracing change can be as delightful as savouring a smooth glass of red wine or as bitter as the sharpness of a sour lime. I recently experienced both ends of the change spectrum when I embarked on a bicycle ride from Bangkok to Phuket for charity.

I discovered the power of positive thinking, the invisible barriers we place around ourselves and the freedom to achieve our deepest desires if we choose to do so.

Let me take you back to where it all began, more than 12 months ago now.

Late last year my partner publicly volunteered me to join him on a bike ride to raise money and awareness for the charity he created, a charity which supports the children

living in Thailand who were orphaned by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

Are you ready to change?

The significance of this friendly “volunteer” was that I didn’t ride bikes, I didn’t even own one. In fact the last time I had been on a bike was when I was in pigtails and from memory, it didn’t take me long to fall off it.

So right then and there, in front of a room full of people, all eyes watching me, I realised my journey had begun. My life was soon to be changed.

Now I have run many change programs of various size and complexity and I know that the chances of success increase when a company is open and

accepting of change. I also know success follows when people are personally ready to meet and embrace the challenges of change.

I did my readiness assessment... a quick scan to check the climate provided the first seed of doubt that I didn’t have what it took to complete something of this size and magnitude.

How disruptive will this change be? Okay that’s easy – big!!

How much change is already occurring? Can you handle more change? Everything is changing at the moment – anything else feels a little too much.

Do you believe this change will benefit you? Hmm do I have to..?

You need to believe in what you are trying to achieve

Thanks to my loving partner's public declaration, the compelling need for change had been created for me. I was now officially part of the bike ride, the biggest bike ride I have done in my life.

Knowing I would try and wriggle my way out at the first chance I could, I went back to my desk and sent an email to everyone I knew announcing my challenge and anchoring my commitment. I needed to publicly sponsor this loudly and proudly to ensure I had enough incentive to follow through. And true of any change project, my sponsorship and public endorsement was critical to creating change.

Having garnered loads of support and encouragement from friends and family I felt the first bubble of excitement build of what may lay ahead of me.

One step at a time

Now my commitment was in the public domain and I had secured support, it was time to turn my words into action. However, it wasn't long before my initial burst of energy faded and the realization of the effort involved started to seep into my thoughts and blacken my once buoyant mood.

In change programs this stage needs to be handled carefully or else it can derail projects early on. After the initial announcement with bells and whistles, the hard work begins and can seem overwhelming for those unless this is broken down into bite sized pieces.

780km felt big, it felt overwhelming... just like implementing a new business model across an entire franchise or adopting a new CRM system for your business. By starting small and identifying quick wins you will gain momentum and confidence from those around you and yourself.

So I started my training regime. Looking back, my first ride was not the most intelligent move – it definitely wasn't a quick win.

I rode 40kms under the hot Aussie sun in the middle of the day. This would have been fine for someone who was accustomed to riding, but for a novice who hadn't been on a bike in over 20 years – it was quite unnerving.



My bum ached after the first ten minutes and my legs moaned. Ten kilometers before the end, I started to feel shaky, a little queasy and concerned. And this was without the heat and humidity of the Thailand climate. I was dehydrated, disillusioned and dreaded my decision.

In my eyes, I had failed my first test. The enormity of what I had agreed to sat heavily with me – my confidence was dented and I was scared.

Change will involve emotions - understand people cycle through many of these

The voice of fear often quiet at first began gnawing away at my self-belief and offering me every reason to quit. "What if I fail?"; "What if I let people down"; "What if I am not good enough?"; "How am I going to perform against the other riders?"; "What if I don't make it the whole way?"

People fear change and the unknown. It is much safer to remain in your comfort zone, in a place where you are successful and feel good then to venture out and explore the unfamiliar.

And to me, my life without a bike ride was looking mighty attractive right about now.

Change can be unnerving for people when it is complex and vague. Unspoken fears lie at the heart of most people's objections. Recognising and managing this is key to keeping change alive.

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Uncovering what is causing people to resist can provide valuable gems and can significantly enhance your change program. Allowing people the space to acknowledge them is a powerful tool indeed and crucial to shifting behaviours. By listening, and I mean truly listening, to others leaders can really begin to demonstrate leadership and derive value from change programs.

For me, it took a while to speak my truth and voice my fears. When I did, I got bucket loads of support. And that is just what I needed to keep me going.

Getting back on that bike again took a lot of convincing from my partner. And for a while I wasn't a willing participant. That's when I created my next coping strategy. This was as cunning as my first and even more covert. I had embraced the wonderful world of denial.

You see, I thought if I didn't think about it and avoid talking about it I would no longer have to deal with how scared I felt about what I had committed myself to. I had no confidence in my ability and I had no inclination to explore what that meant on any level. Something that I see a lot of during restructures.

As the weeks crept into months and the months started to fly by, the day of departure drew closer. Two weeks before we flew to Thailand I began my last ditch attempt to "get fit quickly". I had succumbed to the realisation my bike ride would be tough and each day

that I trained was not about excelling in the ride but reducing the amount of pain I would be feeling.

The day arrived before I knew it and I was lying on a bed in a dark room in Bangkok thinking – my god... it's here. I remember getting dressed in my padded bike pants and cycle top for the first time telling myself – “each day is one day closer to the end.” My lack of confidence still sitting heavily on my shoulders.

Experiencing success breeds confidence and confidence, success

The air was a cocktail of excitement and anxiety the first day on the bike. There were 17 riders from various countries and backgrounds, all joined by a common goal, and most meeting for the first time.

Sitting on the bike for the first time, I felt awkward and nervous. Like learning a new skill, what initially feels strange and uncomfortable, with practice transforms into easy and effortless behaviour.

Once I jumped on the bike and clicked over a couple of kilometres, I got use to changing the gears and the position of the seat. I soon discovered it wasn't as hard as I first expected. It was actually going to be a lot more enjoyable and right then and there I felt my body relax and my mind start shifting.

Overcoming barriers

So we were off and running. Day one had been fun, lots of laughs and much easier than the monster I had created in my mind. Day two was

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blissful, riding beside long stretches of beautiful unspoilt beaches – truly magnificent stuff. Day three proved to be a crucial turning point on the journey - it was the first day we faced hills.

It was a tough day and one we all faced as individuals and together as a team.

I remember seeing the first hill descend upon me and thinking – now the hard work begins. I have never really been a huge fan of Anthony Robbins. I respect the amazing work he does and acknowledge the life changes that have occurred for people who have attended his seminars. It's just that I don't resonate with his particular style.

Regardless of my feelings towards him, it was on the second hill that I found the Anthony Robbins within. I felt the ground lean toward me and my legs strain with each pedal. I dug deep and focused all my energy on pushing to the top. I repeatedly told myself that I was capable, that it was achievable. I pushed just that little bit harder, it hurt that little bit more but I kept going.

Reaching the top was an exhilarating feeling. Coming down the other side to see other hills directly ahead of me was not. I heard my mind immediately kick in... “it hurts”; “just stop”; “this

Hands Across the Water - the charity we were supporting through the bike ride.

Photo of the gorgeous children who live at the Baan Tharn Nam Chai Orphanage in Khao Lak, Phuket.



is too hard". And right then I made a choice. I chose to believe that I could do it, that I was able. I had made it up one hill, I was going to make it up the next.

Lesson number one: by changing my perception, I changed my experience.

The power of positive thinking

Making it over those two hills to the water stop was the win I needed to fuel my engine and keep me fired up. I reflected on how that small success boosted my confidence and set me in a positive frame of mind. If I had approached that hill thinking I was not going to make it, feeling beat before I had started, that climb would have felt longer, harder and near impossible.

In change projects there are many hills to climb. Being confident and tackling each head on with a "can do" attitude can make the difference between delivering value or losing ground.

As a change agent or as a leader in a business, you have the choice to demonstrate courage and resilience through your positive attitude. This is one of the most powerful ways to encourage support and confidence amongst your peers and team.

Realising your inner strength

Once I realised I could push further, harder and faster than I initially expected I found new territory within. I was cycling up hills at 30km/per hour, I was riding longer distances in shorter times, I was doing 130km days and feeling invigorated. I was really enjoying this bike ride.

I broke through the walls I had constructed around my capacity. I started valuing my ability and opened the door to rediscovering parts of myself I had previously hidden. How wonderful I thought, how empowered it felt to achieve something I believed was way beyond my means. Now it wasn't as though other people kept telling me I couldn't or I shouldn't. The only handbrake I had, was the one I personally applied.

Each day from then I felt more confident and stronger on the bike. I approach hills and strong headwinds with enthusiasm and vigor. I felt more alive and excited about how I could use this sense of enthusiasm in my everyday. I realised that I had been approaching life with the handbrake on.

Lesson number two: you are more capable and more competent than you believe yourself to be.

We're all in this together

The last day of the ride was the shortest day. It was also mentally the toughest. We were facing our first mountain and had to cycle uphill for

4kms. It was steeper and longer than any of the other hills we had conquered.

The support and encouragement that came from the group was amazing. The fast riders who made it to the top waited and cheered everyone else up the hill. Others rode side by side supporting and motivating each other. There is much to say about how much strength exists within the invisible bonds of a team. Cycling that mountain on your own would have been a much lonelier and tougher experience.

Tackling challenges as a team and supporting each other lightens the load. Whether it be in change programs or personal relationships allowing others to support you or asking for help when you need it will carry you further than if you go it alone.

Growth through change

So 780km later and I truly feel like a changed person.

What an amazingly powerful and moving experience. I had a absolutely fantastic time and rediscovered parts of myself that I had lost.

I reconnected with the beauty in nature and the ever vibrant human spirit that powers us all on.

Most importantly, I learnt that change is a powerful teacher. It is always with us and it is our choice how we submit to its demands. We can choose to embrace it with a youthful inquisitive nature or we can resist and block it from a place of fear and concern.

Imagine – what would you do if you knew you could not fail? What would you change?

For more information on change please visit the Transformational Change website

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