

# NAVIGATING THE WATERS: HOW TO BETTER EMBRACE CHANGE

By KJ Chong

We all carry an innate fear of moving from the known to the unknown. But change is inevitable in both business and our careers, so how we thrive depends on our ability to adapt. A framework to help us understand change helps us combat our fears and move forward, overcoming the status quo.

A source of inspiration comes from Greek philosopher Heraclitus, known for his doctrine that change is fundamental to the functioning of the universe: “You cannot step twice into the same stream.”

The meaning of this phrase is twofold. The first interpretation focuses on the stream itself, which is constantly changing as new waters flow through it. Like that stream, the business environments we work in are always in flux.

The second interpretation focuses on you. You are changed with every new experience you have, new knowledge you gain and new person you meet. Therefore, you are never the same person stepping into the stream.

## Environmental Change

Economics provide useful methods to understand environmental business change. First, Porter’s Five Forces is a model we can use to analyze the attractiveness of an industry by looking at five factors that drive a company’s competitive position: the threat of new entrants and substitutes, the bargaining power of customers and suppliers, and rivalry among existing competitors. Second, the famous SWOT analysis looks internally at the company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A run-through of both models helps us in-

house counsel predict what kind of legal and business issues we may face.

Once we identify important changes to be made, we have to communicate them to others. Here again we must consider the fear of entering the unknown. When we educate our colleagues about the benefits of a change, and the challenges we are thereby eliminating, we should also state what is being preserved. There is inherent comfort in knowing that certain factors will not be changing even while others are.

## Individual Change

Identifying how we personally have changed is trickier, since we do not always have the ability to see how we have evolved over time. Here are some practical suggestions:

### 1. Know where you have been

At the end of each week, make a one-page bulleted list of what you have achieved, what you are working on and what challenges you faced. When I made the switch from private practice, while I was delighted to not have to docket my hours anymore, I lost the data to analyze how my time was being spent. These personal reports have helped me identify where my time disappears and allow me to assess if my resources are being allocated effectively.

### 2. Know where you are

Talk with a mentor. Your mentor may be a trusted advisor and is not necessarily in a formal mentorship with you. It is important to cultivate these relationships. You can send a quick email to say hello, an article you find interesting, set up a phone call to chat or get a coffee together. Mentors also find it refreshing to assist others and see how far they too have developed, so the benefits are mutual. If you would like to expand beyond your circle of acquaintances, the CCCA has an excellent (free) Mentoring Program that matches more experienced in-house counsel with those newer to the profession. Find out more here: <https://bit.ly/2OZkZBJ>

### 3. Know where you’re going

Obtain feedback informally with internal clients—both those to whom you report and those to whom you may not report but often work with. You can frame your questions along the lines of “What should I stop doing?”, “What should I start doing?” and “What should I continue doing?” This strengthens your relationships and provides helpful objective feedback on your blind spots.

As we encounter change, our approach must be courageous. We will continually traverse different streams, each time becoming a different, better person in the process. The inevitability of this growth is not something to combat, but to embrace. ■



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