

Dear Change: It's NOT me, it's YOU

by Hannah Thomas

The Hamster Wheel

Change. Repeat. Change. Repeat. Change. Repeat.

As innovators and process improvement champions, any opportunity for change is exciting. When you get *that* call; when leadership is ready to tackle *that* process, it is thrilling. The ability to bring the people together who do, supervise and benefit from the work to make that process better IS AMAZING and I LOVE IT!

That being said, as a change champion I never thought that I would want to hit the brakes as hard as I do right now. When we focus on a single process, change is hard, but the end goal is usually in sight (if we scoped it right). Change during a pandemic is continuous with no end in sight and it has affected every aspect of life, personally and professionally. Talk about the worst scope creep ever. Heck, we didn't even have time to scope this, we just reacted with change. I realize that sounds gloomy, but without that comforting light at the end of the tunnel, this is where I am at!

Stand Still

Many of you, like me, have been pushing through these changes. Tackling them using known tools, some trial and error, but still forging ahead with the hope that the changes will slow or stop so that we can catch our breath. While doing this, we have been celebrating the new opportunities, clinging to memories of what normal used to look like, and bitterly accepting the things this virus has forced upon us. All the while, we continue to run on the wheel of change.

I have read many articles and blogs about the fatigue that so many of us have experienced during this time and I can say with confidence we need to get off the hamster wheel and stand still for a moment... or three. When we run and run and never stop, we not only get tired of running, depleting our tank, but we lose sight of the reason we started running in the first place. We are no longer changing for the better. We become tired, irritable, numb, a little lost, lonely... the list goes on and on. So, I challenge you to get off the continuous change cycle that currently has no end and stand still.

Get Your Footing Back

So, this is not one of those pieces where I am now going to tell you to snap out of it. If it were that simple the internet would be blowing-up with steps to quickly conquer change fatigue. Instead, I am going to ask you, the innovators, the agents of change, the problem solvers to hit "pause". I realize that in your professional life you may not have that luxury, but "pause" is not an all-encompassing proposal.

For example, I was in a funk and realized that my routine was no longer working for me, but against me. I had started running on a hamster wheel and stopped looking for ways to improve my routine that would help me mentally, physically, and professionally. I was just running as all this change continued to happen to me. This environment had created very thin barriers between my personal and professional life, making it difficult to figure out why I was so fatigued. Only after taking the time to "pause" and reflect, was I

able to pinpoint purposeful and necessary change in my routine. "Welcome back." I cautiously told myself.

The funk shifted; I started to feel like I was working towards something. I re-evaluated what I considered healthy boundaries, and I had to finally and truly let go of the things I cannot change or control. I struggle with that last point on a daily basis, but I no longer act like it is not there. Hitting pause and taking a moment to reflect has empowered me and helped me with my change fatigue- allowing me to get to a place where I can face the next challenge.

No "I" in Team

Through these changes, emotions, and seemingly paralyzing moments it was easy for me to alienate, and start to self-seclude. Allowing for a moment of pause created the space for me to recognize the amazing supports that surround me, dispelling my belief that I was on an island. I spoke with my friends, family and peers about my fatigue and, spoiler alert, I was not the only one feeling the funk! With that clarity I was able to find a light in the dark tunnel, just not where I initially was looking for it.

Pull Over and Fill Up

Change will continue to happen to us, but with a supportive team of people we can choose to find clarity and purpose in it. Let's give ourselves and those around us the opportunity to pause and reflect. When our tanks are empty it is impossible to give our families, colleagues and customers our best. Get off of the hamster wheel; pause, reflect, set-up realistic boundaries and then re-engage because we know that the changes will keep coming and we want use our skills to make sure they are for the better!