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Personal Excellence

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JK Rowling
Author

**Overcome
Bad Habits**

**Fringe Benefits
of Failure**

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"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Sharlene Hawkes, Former Miss America,
award-winning ESPN broadcaster



Grow or Die

Overcome four barriers.



by John Baker

THE OPPOSITE OF GROWTH IS not the status quo—it's death: if you're not growing, you're dying. Even if you could miraculously hold everything steady, your value proposition degenerates due to the unyielding forces in a competitive marketplace.

The miracle that stimulates growth is change. Change is the sharp stick that moves you out of your comfort zone, and forces you, as George Lucas would say, "to do dangerous and scary things." Change creates opportunity for growth. But why do you resist change so much? Why is it that when change happens, often your first reaction is to dig in your heels?

Some people don't react this way. These people consistently find winning strategies during times of uncertainty. They see change not as a threat, but as an opportunity—not full of peril, but full of possibility. These people avail themselves of change, taking advantage of new opportunities that emerge in evolving times. And they do this by asking better questions of themselves.

Instead of asking defeating questions that start with negativity, such as, "Why is this happening to me?" they ask empowering questions like, "What positive things can I do?" Instead of asking, "Why change the status quo?" they ask, "What's right about this change?" Instead of asking, "What has been lost?" they ask, "What's been gained?" Instead of asking, "What will this change do to me?" they ask, "What can I do with this change?"



Overcome Four Barriers

Asking yourself constructive questions allows you to overcome four barriers:

Barrier 1: Fear. New things threaten both old practices and tightly held beliefs. When you feel threatened, you feel fear, which affects you physically

and emotionally. And, if you perceive the change as personally targeted, your sense of fear magnifies. Peter Senge said, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed." Once you feel the "victim" of change, your perspective becomes narrow, self-centered, and self-absorbed: *This change is all about me.* In this state of mind, your response to change is often irrational.

But fear can be managed. Using reasoning skills, positive self-talk and other support systems—encouraging friends, supportive family—you can achieve your goals despite the presence of fear. You need to think your purpose or die. With your new mindset, fear evaporates and a new energetic focus on innovation emerges. To confront fear and overcome the first change barrier, ask yourself: Why fear change if it leads to success just around the bend? What are my talents, strengths and contributions that survive the change?

What value can I add? How can I be of service to someone else?

Barrier 2: The "What If" Game. When things begin to change, you waste much time looking back and reminiscing around "What if . . . ?" What if I hadn't made that terrible career move? What if I had gotten my degree? What if I invested in better ventures? What if I had been a better parent or spouse? The "what if" game is like a big penalty box, paralyzing players from moving forward and taking action. To stop playing this game, fill your mind up with forward-looking, solution-centered questions. What positive effect on my life does going back to school deliver? What favorable outcome would result by committing more time to an important priority? What resources are available to me? Where do I go for help? Where

can I help out?

Barrier 3: Labels. So you've lost your job and you're no longer the VP at Widget Inc. Your role has been outsourced. Your corner office is gone. Your secretary is gone, too. You feel defeated by the events the world has thrown at you. But wait: You're not your job. You're not the corner office, or the title on your business card, or the plaques on the wall. These are just labels. You were an effective, happy, productive person before you acquired these accoutrements—and that hasn't changed. You still have skills and



experience that serve you well. Your labels control you like a dog tethered to a tree: It's easy to confuse your reality with the length of the leash. Let go of the labels and be the CEO of your life. Ask yourself: What are my core competencies and how can they serve someone else? Where do I find value in life, and where do I want to

spend time? How do I enhance my existing talents and be more useful to others?

Barrier 4: Lack of focus. Change clouds perceptions like a suddenly shaken snow globe. It seems that a clear course of action is needed, but swirling information and too many variables confuse the situation and push resolution just out of reach. Establishing an action plan is a great strategy during times of change, but oftentimes, poor execution hamstrings our best planning. The problem: not enough focus. Focus means having greater impact on fewer things. You can't execute without focus. Those who survive change know that to deliver on essential goals; you have to decide to fail on non-crucial tasks. Ask: Where am I going to fail in order to maximize my chances of winning? What is imperative? What do I absolutely have to do to succeed? What is the very first thing I need to do? When do I need to get it done?

When change happens to you, the questions you ask yourself are as important as the answers you seek. Some folks ask themselves, "What's to become of me?" Those who are successful ask, "What will I become?" PE

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ACTION: Ask empowering questions.