

Embracing Change: In Podcasting & Beyond

by Chelsea Pegues

When we first start podcasting, we're often on a mission to change something, to make an impact. We want our show to focus on a main interest, and branch off from there- sparking lively discussion, engaged guests, and cultivating a community of listeners who will support us and help our vision grow. Hopefully, within a few years, we will be able to see the change we set out to make reflected in a tangible way. Perhaps we'll have a website, be able to do live shows, monetize the podcast and give back via charitable donations, and so on. That's the dream, right?

And then, when you become a little more settled into the podcast community, you start realizing what works and what doesn't. This might apply to recording equipment, co-hosts, the platform you're using, or the format of your show. It could be that sponsors are not as easy to attain as you'd hoped. It's time to start analyzing how exactly you may need to pivot. This is precisely the point where it can become tough for so many of us, especially when this means reaching out for help. Because as humans, it's almost like we are hardwired to fear change. Why is that? In essence, this should mean that you see opportunity in adversity. That does sound daunting, though- at first. Herein, let's touch upon why we should embrace the process of change; and how it helps us not only as podcasters, but in life.

First, what does it actually mean? Change is a modification to your environment, situation, or mentality that challenges your existing paradigms. In other words, the way that you think it's going to- or should- be, whatever "it" is (a podcast, a relationship, a project). You're organizing your experience around this preconceived notion, and if it doesn't work out the way you intended, you're likely to get upset and feel discouraged. This is because we naturally prefer the known, even if it isn't in our best interest in the long run. To that end, it's very rare that we can decipher what will turn out to be ideal in our future. The only thing we can really rely on, to be honest, is that things will always change, whether we accept it now or later. If you're working on this aspect of your behavior, a great exercise would be to look back at pictures of yourself over the last 2-5 years. Even in that small window of time, look at what's changed- and maybe you didn't even notice!

Primarily, people have a tougher time with transition because we're naturally unsure of the unknown. Think about the changes which have occurred in your life, good or bad (a marriage, a divorce, a move, a baby, grief). They've probably all caused some amount of stress and concern. Change may also make us realize how little we trust ourselves; we're not sure if we're going to be able to handle the transition. For example, when you have to learn a new technology, new information, or a process, it's usually anxiety-inducing to a degree. Even when you first learned to ride a bike as a child, or how to swim, there was always uncertainty: "What if I fall and get hurt?" "What if I can't stay afloat?" Into adulthood, as you learned procedures which were new to you in every workplace you secured, there was most certainly a piece of you that was worried you'd fail. These feelings are widespread in almost all of us. It's a part of the human condition. However, let's flip that on its head for a moment and look at it another way: you have no reason not to trust yourself. You've made it this far in life on your own capabilities, skillset, drive,

and focus. Every time you've "failed," or made a mistake, you've learned exactly what not to do the next time. Sure, we've all had those cringey moments when we're certain that "embarrassment" will be listed as our cause of death- but it wasn't, because you survived. You changed- into a better version of yourself who (perhaps) now knows how to ride a bike while making a spreadsheet and tagging someone on Instagram about it. So, trust that whatever mess you think you're making is not a mess at all- you're creating a new you. Believe her- she's got your back.

To paraphrase Forbes Business Council, "it's important to recognize that growth and progress often come from stepping outside of your comfort zone. Markets, technologies and customer needs are constantly evolving. If you want to stay competitive and relevant, you need to be willing to adapt and evolve as well. This means being open to new ideas, taking calculated risks and experimenting with different approaches." Adjusting to unfamiliar situations, demands, and switching roles is daunting; but to embrace change, you need to see things in a positive light and know you are capable of anything. Having the right perspective will become easier. Seeing it as an opportunity and being receptive to new ways of doing things can actually be a really fun, creative experience. The idea you brought into this realm was worthy of you sitting in front of a mic every week and talking about it; now that you have your feet wet, it's the perfect time to think of ways to make it better. Something that your audience can't get enough of, and certainly wouldn't want to be without. You know, some of us may scoff at the notion of "vision boards" or Pinterest layouts to inspire (and the ever buzzy-buzzword: manifest). Yet they exist for a reason, and millions of people swear by this method. Not to say that following the crowd is the way to go, but maybe there is something to this? Give it a try! Some of us may recall how much fun it used to be to clip through old magazines back in the day and collage the walls of our room with outfits, celebrities, musicians, and quotes that inspired us. Essentially, kids of the 80's and 90's were the original vision-boarders. Let's bring that back! After all, having fun is the easiest way to stimulate our artistic flow and gather some new ideas.

Even when you're not certain something will work, making a play for it is so much more satisfying than letting an opportunity pass you by. Podcasting has been around since 2004, although it really gained serious traction only about a decade ago. Since then, the landscape has evolved rapidly, and continues to do so. And more and more, hosts are multi-tasking. Perhaps you offer a service or product that you've shied away from offering directly on the show because you didn't want to appear to be "pitching" your audience. It could be time to change that; see how you can integrate this into your show in a way that feels authentic to you. And vice-versa: if you have a personal website, LinkedIn, etc., you should be promoting your podcast and your services there as well. Conversely, if you don't yet offer a product or service to your podcast audience but you have ideas for a course, workshop, or community space, now is the time to start fleshing that out. Test your idea on friends and family and ask for constructive feedback to see if this is something you'd like to pursue in alignment with your show.

This will also make talking about it in your episodes feel a lot more natural and like less of a sales-pitch. Which is another aspect to consider- perhaps your messaging could use a refresh, and there are some new topics you can address on your show this year. It can take a year of podcasting (or better) before a host can feel comfortable digging deeper and addressing the crux of an issue they care about (relationships, trauma, socioeconomic environments, and so forth). It's a lot like making it past the small talk at a party and transitioning into the conversation where you feel you're getting to know someone. Your audience wants to know you better; don't shy away! Remember, when you had the idea for your show, you were probably excited about the notion of community. You wanted to share your message with like-minded individuals

and build a safe space where all are welcome to take part in the message, ideas, and/or culture you're creating with your show. Don't lose sight of that. Instead, think of change as a way to renew your excitement about this experience.

When you find yourself fearing the unknown, you need to remember that the tools to conquer this are already within you. Look back at the resumé of your life and examine everything you've already conquered. Consider the hardest things you've endured. Reflect on everything you've learned, all the new skills you've amassed or adventures you've been on that have helped boost your confidence throughout the years. What are the best pieces of wisdom you've gained along the way? You should, no matter what, be proud of yourself for what you've done so far. After all, there was a period before you started podcasting. No one knew your voice, your opinion, your perspective- and now you are out there for the world to hear! That's a big deal. So, after you take a moment to sincerely congratulate yourself, think about how to re-frame your fear of the dreaded change. Let's say it's just an "excitement-inducing opportunity," to borrow a phrase from therapist Terri Cole.

As you move forward, focus on the fun part: what do you want to change and why? How is that going to help support you and your bigger goals- and what are your intentions for this new year? However you get there- don't be afraid. At this moment, it's just you competing to be a better version of yourself; so, no matter what, you've got this!

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