

## How to Handle Change

Change is rampant and constant in the corporate world. The best way to cope is to leverage your innate talents.

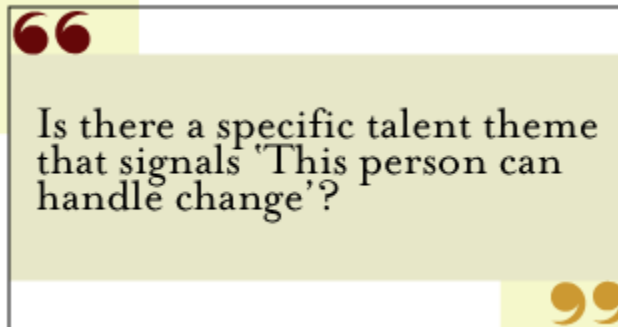
*by Brian Brim*

It's been said that one of the few certainties in life is change. This is absolutely true in the business world. Roles change, pay changes, teams change. Companies go through mergers, grow dramatically, or close their doors altogether. The question that businesspeople must ask themselves isn't "How well do I handle change?" but "How can I handle change successfully?"

Most people approach change by gritting their teeth and hoping for the best. But there is a better way: You can use your talents -- who you naturally are -- to cope with change.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder -- a Web-based talent assessment -- measures people's talent in 34 themes and reveals their five most dominant themes. It helps people understand that they have the greatest potential to grow and

succeed by leveraging their areas of greatest talent. And the better that people



“  
Is there a specific talent theme that signals 'This person can handle change'?  
”

understand their talents, the more effectively they can take control of the situations with which they are confronted.

So what about change? Is there a specific talent theme that signals "This person can handle change"? The answer is no; there is no "change" theme. In fact, research reveals that the extent to which people are successful in applying their talents depends on "identification of talent, integration into how one views himself or herself, and behavioral change," according to The Gallup Organization's Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., and Jim Harter, Ph.D. Ultimately, it is up to each person to take ownership for how he or she can use his or her themes to tackle a situation.

### **Low in Adaptability**

To illustrate this point, let's take a close look at Tim, a seminar leader. Three of Tim's most dominant themes are Focus, Discipline, and Maximizer. (See the "*Now, Discover Your Strengths* Book Center" in the "See Also" area on this page.) The combination of these three themes means that Tim is potentially someone who stays on track, is highly organized, and tends to apply very high standards to his work. Tim's Discipline contributes to these facts about him: His office is absolutely immaculate and highly organized. He irons his jeans . . . yes, his jeans. When he stays in a hotel, he makes the bed. And he leaves a note for the maid explaining his actions: because he wants it made a certain way.

According to Tim's responses to the Clifton StrengthsFinder, Adaptability is the theme in which Tim is least talented. People who are particularly talented in Adaptability tend to willingly respond to the demands of the moment, even if it pulls them away from their plans. In contrast, people like Tim who are less talented in Adaptability may find it much more difficult to "go with the flow."

Asking someone like Tim to cope with change by drawing on his Adaptability talents is a bit like sending a thirsty person to a dry well. When faced with change, Tim is far better off leveraging his more dominant themes because he's much more likely to use them effectively.

So how does a person this organized and in control deal with change? Well, recently, Tim was asked to teach a management seminar to 10 government employees at a national park visitor center. This particular visitor center is a large room with stuffed and mounted animals on the walls, along with hundreds of other plant and animal displays. Tim was told that the visitor center couldn't close during the training, but he was reassured that his session would not be disturbed because this was typically a quiet day.

Things didn't quite work out as planned.

For starters, within the first 20 minutes of Tim's session, a grandfather and grandson came into the center to look at the displays. The grandfather, who was evidently hard of hearing, spent about half an hour discussing the displays with his grandson in a rather loud voice. Eventually, the gentleman fell asleep in the back of the room while his grandson built things out of sticks and pieces of leather.

Shortly after that, a series of forest sounds began to pour into the room through the loudspeaker: howls, bird calls, you name it. Tim was informed that this system couldn't be shut down.

And last but not least, a park maintenance worker accidentally started a grass fire near the parking lot, and half of the attendees in Tim's session were called away to put it out. When they returned 30 minutes later, they smelled like burning leaves. (Apparently, when park employees say they have a fire to put out, it isn't just a figure of speech.)

So how did Tim, so low in Adaptability, work through all of these changes? He called on the same themes that make him so well-organized and in control. Tim says that relying on his Focus was the key. When he realized everything around him was falling apart, he zeroed in on what was most important: the participants.

"I knew I only had four hours, so no matter what happened, I had to do the best I could for my clients," Tim says. "I decided that my Focus talents would keep us on track, and my low Adaptability would not get in my way. I used my Discipline during those short chunks of time to reorder what needed to be accomplished based on who was in the room. My Maximizer talents also kicked in and said, 'I am going to make this class great no matter what! I am not going to teach an average class!'"

### **Making a plan, then working a plan**

Tim says that he would not want to teach in an environment like this on a regular basis. "I know who I am, and dealing with this type of situation day after day will eventually take its toll," he explains.

Tim's long-term success depends on his ability to "make a plan and work a plan." But because he knows his talents, and because he knew this was a temporary situation, he could stay focused in spite of the chaos and lead a successful seminar. Before knowing his greatest talents, Tim says, he would have had a much less successful outcome -- and he would have been much more stressed in that classroom.

Tim's story is instructive for anyone, regardless of their top talent themes. The key to handling change is to stay focused on using your talents rather than just gritting your teeth and hoping for the best.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder and the 34 StrengthsFinder theme names are protected by copyright of The Gallup Organization, Princeton, NJ, 2000. All rights reserved.

---

Brian Brim is a Global Program Leader for The Gallup Organization.

[Learn More >>](#)

---

At the **Summit on Hiring and Developing Great Managers**, Brian Brim, a leader of Gallup's ongoing research into great managers, presents Gallup's most current and valuable discoveries on how great managers create great workplaces -- and how the most well-run companies attract, select, develop, and retain great managers.

To learn more about the summit or to register, visit the [Summit on Hiring and Developing Great Managers](#) page at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) or contact [Mary Penner-Lovci](#) at 212-899-4890 or [Amy White](#) at 609-924-9600.

---

---

Copyright © 2005 The Gallup Organization, Princeton, NJ. All rights reserved. Gallup®, A8™, Business Impact Analysis™, CE11®, Clifton StrengthsFinder™, the 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder theme names, Customer Engagement Index™, Drop Club™, Emotional Economy™, Employee Engagement Index™, Employee Outlook Index™, Follow This Path™, Gallup Brain™, Gallup Consulting™, Gallup Management Journal®, GMJ®, Gallup Press™, Gallup Publishing™, Gallup Tuesday Briefing®, Gallup University™, HumanSigma®, I10™, L3™, PrincipalInsight™, Q12®, SE25™, SF34™, SRI®, Strengths®, Strengths Spotlight™, Strengths-Based Selling™, StrengthsCoach™, StrengthsFinder®, StrengthsQuest™, TeacherInsight™, The Gallup Path®, and The Gallup Poll® are trademarks of The Gallup Organization. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. These materials are provided for noncommercial, personal use only. Reproduction prohibited without the express permission of The Gallup Organization.