

Who Moved My Cheese?

By Pat Smith, March 28, 2010

Based on ideas from the book by Spencer Johnson

The book *Who Moved My Cheese?* is about change. And how we respond to it. The book was published in 1998 and was a hit with managers in the business world, who deal with change all the time.

Here's a brief summary.

Once upon a time there were two mice: Sniff and Scurry. And two littlepeople, the size of mice: Hem and Haw. They all lived in a maze.

Every morning the two mice and the two littlepeople would put on their jogging suits and running shoes, leave their homes, and race out into the maze looking for their favorite cheese. Some days they were successful, and some days they were not. There were a lot of dead ends. One day, all four found their own favorite kind of cheese at the end of one of the corridors, at Cheese Station C (*C for Cheese*).

Now life was easy. They no longer had to search down dead ends of the maze. They went straight to the corridor that led to Cheese Station C. "There's enough cheese here to last us forever," Hem said. In fact, to make life even easier, Hem and Haw moved their homes to be closer to the Cheese. And then they did not have to get up as early to get there. They started sleeping in. They even put some pictures of Cheese on the walls. One said, "Cheese Makes You Happy."

Sniff and Scurry did not change their routine. They did, however, inspect the area around Cheese Station C to see if there had been any changes from the day before.

One morning when Sniff and Scurry arrived, they discovered there was no cheese. They weren't surprised because they had noticed the supply had been getting smaller. They did not overanalyze the situation. The problem and the answer were both simple. The situation at Cheese Station C had changed. So, Sniff and Scurry decided to change, too. Off they went in search of new cheese.

Now Hem and Haw arrived later at Cheese Station C, because they had slept in, and were unprepared for what they found. And between the two of them, here's their response. "What! No Cheese? No Cheese? No Cheese? Who moved my Cheese? It's not fair!"

Of course, they did not think the Cheese block had gradually gotten smaller. No. No. They were convinced someone had moved it.

So you see where the title of the book comes from. It's about change. And their response to it.

The response of Hem and Haw was understandable. Cheese made them happy. And now the source of their happiness was gone. Finding more Cheese was going to be tough. So, what did they do? They kept looking around Cheese Station C to if the Cheese really was gone.

In other words, they kept doing the same thing but expecting a different outcome.

They just sat there, waiting to see what would happen, thinking that sooner or later, whoever took the cheese would have to put it back. After awhile, their home was no longer the nurturing place it had been. So Haw sometimes thought about exploring the maze. But that involved Uncertainty. Risk. Possibly even making a fool of himself. And maybe there was no more Cheese out there. Even if there were, there was no guarantee they would find it.

But what they would do if they weren't afraid?

Meantime, Sniff and Scurry explored the maze looking for New Cheese and finally found it: At Cheese Station N (*N for new*).

Eventually, Hem and Haw decided they had to start searching the maze again. They realized that "If You Do Not Change, You Can Become Extinct". And they vowed that if this ever happened again, **they would get out of their comfort zone and adapt to change sooner.**

It's about change. And their response to it.

What they found was that searching the maze wasn't as bad as they'd feared. They were taking control, rather than simply letting things happen to them. They were moving beyond their fear, and they felt free. They finally realized that the Cheese had slowly been disappearing all along. (p68) Maybe noticing small changes early would help them to adapt to bigger changes that might come. They realized that in the future, **they should expect change and look for it.**

And they found New Cheese at Cheese Station N.
Thank you! Thank you! There is a god!
That's the end of the story.

But you know what? Sniff and Scurry and Hem and Haw, all had to be ready to change quickly. Because they keep moving the cheese.

Ok. Get ready! They're going to move the cheese again.

It's about change, and their response to it.

Let's look at some aspects of change in the context of the cheese story.

FLIP CHART

We will put the answers on a rough scale from lo to hi.

Change Scale: lo _____ hi

- First, did the change ***matter, have an effect***? YES, it was a BIG change. It changed their lives.
How much did it matter?
Effect: lo _____ X __ hi
- Was the change ***good or bad***? BAD, they lost their food. How bad?
Badness: lo _____ X __ hi
- Was the change ***active or passive***? PASSIVE, they did not initiate the change. It happened to them. “Change happens.” No control.
Passive: lo _____ X __ hi
- Did it happen ***suddenly or take some time***? SUDDENLY, one morning their cheese was there, the next morning it was gone.
Suddenness: lo _____ X __ hi

Note in this example, “hi” means “not desirable”. But that is not always the case. Suppose you bought a ticket for the lottery and you won big! Now, that’s a surprise. A good surprise.

What about the **response** to change?

The response depends on the nature of the change.

- If the change has little or no ***effect*** on us, we may not respond at all. We may not need to. If the change has a big effect, well, we can just let it happen or we can do something.
- If the change is ***good*** for us, then we welcome it. And we may even act to enhance the change. If the change is ***bad*** for us, we may become anxious. Stressed. We may act to prevent the change or mitigate the effects of the change.
- If we ***initiated*** the change, then we are probably looking forward to it. We feel like we have control, or some degree of control.
- If we have ***time*** to adjust, then that makes us less anxious. If the change is sudden, then we must act quickly. We don’t have time to make a considered decision.

In the book entitled *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*, Chip and Dan Heath describe three necessary ingredients for a successful response. And I put them in the form of questions.

1. How well do I **understand** the need to make an adjustment? *Does it make sense to me? That's the mental side.*
2. Am I **motivated** to adjust? *Well, how much does the change matter to me? That's the emotional side.*
3. Is the **path** for adjustment clear? *Do I know what I need to do? That's the situational side.*

One problem with change is how it comes upon us. We like to feel we have control of our lives. Not everything, of course, but the main aspects. Change disrupts that control.

And we often think of change as an *event*. And it may be. It may happen suddenly. Of course, it may take place over time. But certainly our response to change is a *process*.

Why? *Our initial response may be an event, if we have to react suddenly. But after the initial event, it often takes time for us to adjust. So our response is a process.*

-----Haiti-----

Think about the recent earthquake in **Haiti**. It was an event. It happened suddenly. It had a big effect. It was bad. The residents had no control over it.

The initial response had to be quick, within a few days, to dig through the rubble to save lives. Then the need for medical care, food, and where people would stay temporarily were addressed. Now the long term effects are seen. The response and adjustments to those effects will be lasting.

----- Reverend Becky Edmiston-Lange -----

Many of you were here for the service on January 10, led by Reverend Becky Edmiston-Lange. The topic was Turnings. The turning of the year from 2009 to 2010. The turnings of our lives and how our lives changed in the last year.

Think back to those changes. The changes we remember most are those that matter, the ones that have a big effect on our lives, the bad as well as the good.

Now focus on one of those changes. Just one.

Did the change **matter**?

Was the change **good or bad**?

Was the change **active or passive**?

Did it happen **suddenly or take some time**?

Now, think about your response. Are you still responding? Still adjusting? Is there a ripple effect to other parts of your life? Do you need to respond to only one thing or several things?

-----UU's-----

One of the things UU's champion is social justice. In the 1800's we had many leaders advocating for the abolition of slavery, advocating for women's rights and for workers' rights. I'm giving a service in a few weeks on Margaret Fuller, who was born 200 years ago. She was one of those Unitarian social activists.

Reverend Lewis B. Fisher was the dean of the Universalist seminary at St. Lawrence University nearly a century ago. He described religious liberalism's flexibility. "Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer...is that we do not stand at all, we move."

Back then, Unitarians and Universalists wanted to change the world! And they did! And today, we UU's still want to change the world!

Change the world. That means we want the world to change. That means we want others to change. We want others to change to our way of thinking. We want others to change. Are we also willing to change?

Is change in others ok? But not for us?

We want to change the world. Sometimes the world changes us.

-----at this church---chairs-----

Even small things can affect us. If we have a few more people here in a Sunday service, do we notice? I think we notice new faces. That's good. If we have fewer people, do we notice? Do we notice who is missing? Do we notice if someone has not been here for awhile?

Many of you sit in the same place every Sunday during the service. Maybe even in the same chair. You like it there. You're usually sitting by the same people. You feel secure. Safe.

Have you ever come in and found that someone was sitting in your chair? What's your reaction? It's annoying, right? *Who's that sitting in my chair? Who moved my cheese?*

That's happened to me. So now I have to find another chair. Now I'm looking toward the lectern from a new place. It's a small adjustment, but uncomfortable none the less. And I've noticed that when the situation changes, I have to change, too. Ommagosh. **I** have to change!

What about a bigger change? I remember the wedding of Liz Davidson and Jim Glatz a few years ago. I walked into this room, *this room*, and I was totally disoriented. All the chairs were facing the east wall, not the south wall, as they are facing now. My reaction was, "*Who moved my cheese?*" Wow! I felt like a stranger. I was uncomfortable. It did not feel like my church. **My church**. Someone had rearranged the chairs in **my** church! I had to sit in a strange place. By a **stranger**. Well, I got over it. And it was a wonderful wedding.

-----if we are in charge -----

You've heard the expression, change happens. Or a variation of that expression. Well in the cheese story it's true. And in the lottery example it's true. And in the earthquake example it's true. Passive change. It happened. And even in the rearrangement of the chairs, it's true. From my perspective, it's as if the chairs moved on their own.

And that's the case with many articles and books about change. But that's not always the case.

Sometimes we initiate the change. We are in charge of the change. And that makes a difference in our response to it.

And change isn't always about something bad or even uncomfortable. It could be good.

----- *HD radio*-----

Some change I look forward to. I couldn't wait to get my HD radio. It was given to me almost two years ago by my daughters as a Mother's Day present. At my request, of course. My KOHM radio listening capability and choices doubled, literally overnight. Now there's a third channel, and KOHM radio is now Texas Tech public media.

----- *baby*-----

What about this change? How long would we stay with a job if we got a new boss who summoned us in the middle of the night for administrative duties? What if the boss spit on us? We would probably resist this change.

Now, what if the so-called boss was a baby, who summoned us in the middle of the night for administrative duties, such as feeding and diaper changes, and spit up on us? Well, this is a massive change we don't resist. We welcome it, especially grandparents. We even volunteer for it! We volunteer for this huge, disruptive change!

-----*this church*-----

What about this church? *Our* church? *We* are in charge of *our* church. *We* make the change.

- *We* volunteered to write a Vision. It's printed on the back on the Order of Service.
- *We* volunteered to write a Mission. It's also printed on the back on the Order of Service.
- *We* volunteered to identify goals to set a long-term strategy. The Dream Team put together the details, and a report was written and distributed last March.
- *We* must continue to volunteer, to take charge, to carry on.

So, how can we *do* that?

So, how can *you* do that?

How might you Be The Change, as the quote from Mahatma Gandhi says in the Opening Words? Or how might you respond to change that's an event in your life? What might you do?

Well...

- You might *change your consumption habits* to be more environmentally friendly by making one change a month in what you eat or buy (or don't buy): certain food, clothes, cleaning products.
- You might *take an action to further social justice cause(s)*, such as working with St. John's United Methodist Church in their organized effort to address the homeless problem in Lubbock. We had a discussion after church a few weeks ago, and we will have a Dialogue Forum on it April 25.
- You might *practice active compassion* when someone is faced with loss. We've had several deaths in our congregation in the last few months, and we've had an outpouring of compassion from so many of you.
- You might *add one volunteer action at church*, such as participating in a work day as several of you did yesterday, or teaching Children's Religious Education.

Our mailing for the Stewardship Campaign included a Volunteer Form. Did you fill it out and turn it in? You know, stewardship is not just about money. It's also about time and talent. And I bet you have both time and talent! Do you also have interest and energy? Those are important, too.

Change can be good or bad. It might matter, it might not. Change may just happen; or we may initiate the change. It may come upon us quite suddenly, or we may see it coming for a long time.

On the back of our most recent newsletter, Dr. Lauren Artress says

We are longing to contribute creatively to our society, to help heal the planet. This is not a job-training issue, it is a soul-level issue.

ENDING

"...when we change what we believe, we change what we do." p65

"...the biggest inhibitor to change lies *within us*, and ...nothing gets better until *we* change." p71

I quoted Mahatma Gandhi in the Opening Words, "You must be the change you want to see in the world."

So,

Let us, you and me, be the change.

*Let us, you and me, take charge.
Let us, you and me, shape our future.*

This is one of the magnets on my refrigerator. It says, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it!"

So let us, you and me, invent the future!

President Obama just this past Thursday said, "Our future is what we make it."

Our future is what we make it.

Your hereafter is the here and now.
This is not a dress rehearsal.
Today is the first day of the rest of your life.

Go for it!

Go for the change!

Let's you and me change the world!