

October 2014

## Good News for a Change

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### Recommended Citation

Shoaf, Eric (2014) "Good News for a Change," *South Carolina Libraries*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 10.  
Available at: [http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scl\\_journal/vol1/iss1/10](http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scl_journal/vol1/iss1/10)

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# Good News for a Change

## **Abstract**

Technology, user needs and expectations, and the evolving role of the library in society are all driving a pace of change not seen previously in the library world. As library workers confront this environment of flux, many seek to understand the change process and their response to its pervasiveness. This article adapts a model of change developed in a different sphere and proposes its use in the library environment in order to assist library workers and provide a process that can alleviate some of the stress of change.

## **Keywords**

change, library environment, library employees



## FEATURED ARTICLE

# Good News for a Change

By Eric Shoaf

In order for libraries to evolve, organizations and staff must change. There is much in the library literature about understanding the change process, but sometimes a different view can come from an unexpected place. For example, psychologist James Prochaska from the University of Rhode Island, along with two colleagues, studied the behavior of cigarette smokers and created a successful model of change process to help them stop. Their published book about the change process entitled *Changing for Good* (Prochaska, Norcross, DiClemente, 1994) has been reprinted many times. It develops their theory of a change model that can be applied to anyone facing change in their work and environment. A close look at the book reveals a wealth of applicable material for organizational change. It is surprising that no one has applied these principles to institutional organizations, more specifically libraries, before now. The content and principles related to issues of smoking cessation, as set forth in *Changing for Good*, can be applied to any change individuals want to make, and they are directly applicable to the changes library workers face as their organizations evolve in response to changing expectations of their constituent user groups. Although the book was published two decades ago, it remains an important work that is still in print, was recently cited by a doctor in a major newsmagazine (*Oz*, 2012), and is featured on a popular medical website (WebMD, 2000).

### **Make no mistake about it**

Change is well upon us. It has enveloped the library profession and will soon spit us out the other side. We all saw it coming and now we're kicking and screaming, our jobs turned upside down. First it's the technology, coming quickly

and endlessly. Then it's the hardware and software, updated a little less frequently but still often. Next it's library vendors and their products, each needing to be evaluated based on how they fit with the library's mission. Finally, it's our constituency which has radically different demands and expectations now than from ten years ago. It isn't that libraries were not prepared for change, it's just that the change has been so rapid, dramatic, and unending. Libraries have reacted, and some are experimenting with new organizational structures that are flatter and place more emphasis on collaborative administration. It's hard for institutions to change rapidly, and it is especially hard for people, the library staff, to change. It takes work and leadership that is sensitive to staff needs during transformative periods, but change we must.

Tools for dealing with change exist in a variety of formats and settings. There are any number of books on the subject, and many organizations have entire departments in their human resources function that are given over to helping staff prepare for or adjust to change. There is advice for us as we cope with change, not only in our work environment, but also in our personal and family life. As mentioned above, the most enlightening book on change that is geared to smokers wanting to quit, has far broader possible applications and will be examined more closely as a model for dealing with change in libraries.

### **The only thing that doesn't change is the fact that things change**

This statement assumes that library administrators and managers understand change. Unfortunately, it isn't always the case. In *Changing for Good* the authors create an excellent model for change which is outlined below. Several points bear scrutiny. For

example, the authors find the change process doesn't simply begin with a person deciding to change. Rather, change occurs over time in a series of six stages. Interestingly, more time is spent preparing for change. Action doesn't come until step four. As noted, the book *Changing for Good* was originally written to help smokers who want to quit, but the underlying approach to change can be useful for library staff coping with organizational change.

*Note, this section adapted from Changing for Good by James Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente, (1994). New York, NY: William Morrow.*

**1. Pre-contemplation** – Library workers at this stage usually have no intention of changing. They may hear about changes coming but feel they won't be affected. They may be resistant or feel demoralized by possible outcomes represented in change. Pre-contemplators can progress toward change with help, and can often be moved to the next stage as the circumstances around them evolve and the change draws closer.

**2. Contemplation** – Workers here understand that change is coming and that they will be affected. However, they may be struggling with the causes or wonder about possible solutions, and they may be far from making a commitment to action. Some staff members may get stuck at this stage of knowing they need to change but not quite being able to jump to the next stage. It becomes important for leaders to clearly communicate clearly the reasons for the change and to provide some opportunities for staff input. The goal is for staff to understand and, hopefully, buy into the change.

**3. Preparation** – Here workers have passed the time of thinking about change and what it means. They understand the reasons for change and how it will affect them, and they have been able to provide input to help guide the change. They are making the final adjustments before they begin to change their

behavior. Indeed, they may have already instituted a small number of behavioral changes. There may be goal-setting discussions or action, but mostly staff are planning, developing an approach, and mentally engaging the coming change. Each of the first three stages are pre-action, yet each is important in its own right and should not be rushed. At the same time, some staff will need to be helped along more than others.

**4. Action** – Many are surprised that action is actually the fourth stage in the change process. The action stage is where overt activity is begun to modify behaviors and surroundings. However, action should not be confused with progress. It is equally important that the mental issues addressed in earlier stages continue to be reinforced. Also, action is not the end of the change process, no matter how much progress is made.

**5. Maintenance** – At this stage the process is rolling along, but there is a danger of relapse. Maintenance efforts are aimed at consolidating gains, staying mentally engaged, monitoring goals, and continuing the specific action efforts that characterize Stage 4.

**6. Termination** – This stage may be exclusively for the smokers to whom Prochaska's book is directed. Most of us in libraries never reach this step, simply because change is a constant. For most involved in the change process, maintenance is the final continuing stage. One might better consider the change process as a circle that moves back to the pre-contemplation stage once maintenance is achieved. While change doesn't end, certain programs, re-organization, new procedures, or processes do become fully integrated in time. Also plans can be terminated or modified while change processes continue. Additionally, some degree of recognition is important in the completion of any endeavor. Change can be celebrated even as maintenance continues.

## Application to library organizations

Application of these concepts to library organizations takes some planning. Some workers will naturally be resistant to change, even when they understand intuitively that it will happen regardless of their behavior. The key is getting them to internalize and accept the change, to have them own it and work toward it. This means, at the very least, getting library employees involved in the change process (Shoaf, 2001). This involvement can include working groups, over-sight committees, teams, task forces, or meetings where input is encouraged and considered. Another requirement is leadership. As noted above, best results come with library workers mentored and facilitated toward thinking about change during stages 1 and 2. Levels of assistance will have to be adjusted for individual differences and all supervisors will need to be adept at guiding such change. Updated library leadership skills are a must (Shoaf, 2004), and managers have to recognize the steps in the change process and be able to monitor and assist at all junctures.

**Stage 1 & 2:** The contemplation and pre-contemplation stage is characterized by the understanding that change is approaching. Signals can vary. It may be the discussions and site visits leading to adoption of a new online cataloging/circulation system. It could be budget reports indicating less money for new acquisitions. Perhaps a new department or academic discipline is being added to the undergraduate curriculum. In the worst case, library budgets might be reduced sharply, forcing difficult decisions about services. The key is that staff become aware of the external forces driving change and begin to ask themselves how it will affect them personally, their interactions with other staff, their immediate working group (Rana, 2010).

**Stage 3:** The preparation stage is the time when library staff should have become engaged in the change process. They know it is happening and they know why. It is important

that they have input into the planning process here to help internalize the change (Cripe, 1996). This step may be more important than any other as it sets the tone for the action steps which follow. Inclusion of staff at all levels in working groups that are planning for change may be the most active and beneficial way of creating opportunities for change preparation. As staff are involved in these groups, they have a way to express their ideas and concerns, and the nature of group work means they must reflect on the approaching changes and come to terms with how it will affect the organization and themselves personally. Finally, front-line input is always helpful as it leads to better decision-making, because these workers have intimate knowledge about user needs and practices that may not be apparent to those higher up on the organizational pyramid.

**Stage 4:** As noted above, proper preparation means that many workers are able to move seamlessly to the action stage. In some cases where the earlier stages have been drawn out over long periods of time, they may welcome that the change has finally arrived (Drucker, 2005). While there will always be early adopters who welcome change, and those properly prepared who are able to embrace the change with relative ease, so also will there be a group who struggle even after the first three stages of the process. It is important to move them along at this point. The pace of change is such that organizations cannot always wait for those who need to catch up. A full spectrum of motivational tools are available to assist with this. Many are already well-established in libraries, others available online are newer and geared to the present environment. The important thing is that the action must progress and that all library workers know this is not the end of the change process. Our fast-moving technological climate means that targets are generally moving. In this environment, change is not an end in itself but rather a permanent manifestation of our daily work.

**Stage 5 & 6:** These final stages may appear to be holding positions. But maintenance can be thought of as moving back to the contemplation and preparation stages, because change is steady and often comes in rapid bursts within today's library organizational environments. Technology drives many of these changes, but budgetary resources, user expectations, and external forces also play a part. It means that in an environment of constant change, library workers are always cycling between stages 2 and 6 of the change process. They are either contemplating or preparing for a change, or in the midst of taking action, or they may have a breather in a brief maintenance stage, but then it is time to think about change again. As previously noted, the termination stage is seldom reached for library employees. Maintenance becomes the final stage in a circular path that leads to more change over time. Thus the work of changing for good becomes constant.

### **If you aren't moving ahead, you're falling behind**

Library workers can use an approach to the changes they face in their organizations and in the profession. While there are always a few early adopters, many of the rest struggle with how to confront these changes. A better understanding of the change process outlined in *Changing for Good* (Prochaska's Stages, 2007) as applied to libraries is a place to start. This understanding will help managers plan for change and plan for preparing library employees for change.

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