

Ch-ch-ch-changes

Our favourite insights for coping with uncertainty and change



Even in ‘normal’ times, life as an artist or creative freelancer or entrepreneur can feel like it’s full of uncertainty, and that we’re constantly battling with change. Some of that change is in our control, but often it’s not. Where’s the next commission or gig coming from? How am I going to deal with this new deadline the client’s imposed?

But it’s fair to say that Covid has upped the stakes exponentially for all of us. Even now, uncertainty is the only certainty many of us have got, so it’s really important that we learn to make friends with change and uncertainty – or at least not treat them like an enemy we need to battle on a daily basis.

Ask yourself ‘what’s the worst that can happen?’ and work from there

Change is scary because it takes us into the unknown, which for many of us can be a scary place to be. Lots of people we asked said that they found it useful to think it through, and – we know this may sound counter-intuitive – imagine all of the possible different outcomes, including the worst thing that could happen and the best. Once you’ve written those down, you can start to think about what things would be like in that scenario, how you’d cope and what you’d do. This kind of scenario plan gives you back a sense of control, which really helps. **To help you do that we reached out to our community and with them created a crowd-sourced treasure trove of tips with how to cope better with change. We hope they’ll really help if you’re finding it hard to cope with change and/or are feeling a bit out of control and overwhelmed.**

Choose curiosity over fear if you can

A personal favourite of ours here at the hub, what with one of our key values being curiosity!

Loosely translated, the Chinese word for crisis is composed of two characters; the first meaning danger and the second opportunity. In the same way, we like to think of curiosity and fear as two sides of the same coin, and that in any difficult or uncertain situation there's the potential to view things either through the 'lens' of curiosity or of fear. Easier said than done, we know, but we've found it really helps to get curious about a situation ('So, this is unexpected. OK, what can we do in response to it, working with what we have? Where might that take us? Oh... that could be exciting...') rather than stay stuck with fear (Argh. Our order book has emptied overnight. We're going to go under.).



Think about the last time you smashed it!

Another great one when you're worried about your ability to cope is to think about the last time you were faced with some new big change and smashed it, or at least got through it ok. If you're stuck, ask a friend, colleague or even family member about when they remember you doing this. Trust us, this is a great way to build up a little bit more confidence. And it also helps you to remember the skills and resources you have that you can draw on – a key component of being resilient in the face of change.

(Want more on how to build your resilience? We have a whole module on that [right here.](#))

Ask yourself how much you can control?

Now this one is a real life saver. When a big change occurs – you know, like when a global pandemic turns your entire industry upside down, and you lose pretty much all of your work – one thing that can really help dial back your stress levels is to focus on the things you can actually control. And that's because shifting your focus to the things you can control really helps you to put things into perspective. It's also the first step towards getting a plan together that covers those things, which then in turn can do wonders to unlock your motivation and take some positive action. It's a great chain reaction!



Accept and reframe

You'd think accepting you don't have control over somethings would be the opposite of helpful, but in our experience that's often not the case.

If you're dealing with change that's beyond your control – say a client has pulled a big contract at the last minute, or your landlord is putting up the rent for your studio – it can really help to get a bit reflective.

Accepting that this particular change is out of your control, and choosing to get comfortable with it (ok, maybe not comfortable, but at least resigned to it!) is way more sensible and way less energy-draining than waging an unwinnable war with it. And once you've raged the inevitable rage, made peace with the change, then maybe you can even start to think about this as an opportunity to grow or make a change yourself. You might have to fake it till you make it, but switching your thinking from dwelling on the downsides to looking for an upside is where it all starts...

Find the positives, celebrate and give thanks for them

Now we know this is a tough one. And it's definitely not something you can do in that first stage of reeling from shock from the change, or while you're still raging that inevitable rage about the injustice of it all. However, if you can focus on finding some positives about the change that can really help. So that client we mentioned has pulled that contract... maybe in between following up with clients who could potentially fill the gap or move their work forward a bit you can finally get round to those website tweaks or the studio clear out you've been meaning to do for ages? Maybe it's a chance to actually work on a new business development strategy?

It doesn't matter how big or small the wins are, if you can spend some time finding some, you're on your way. And once you start acting on them, experience tells us that you'll feel a whole heap better.



Take action (to solve your problems)

So, we've kind of covered this already, but for us it's so key that we wanted to give it its own moment in the spotlight! Taking an active approach to responding to the change you're going through, building on the things we've just mentioned, setting some achievable goals and taking action towards them really helps. For us, it gives us motivation, a sense of control and of moving forward... all crucial things.

To do it, the chances are you're going to need to don your problem solving hat, maybe adopt some real lateral thinking, ask advice, reflect on all your super powers and other resources you have. But that's where all of the other goodies in this toolkit can help. Maybe check out our [resilience resources](#) for instance, or our [It pays to be a SWOT exercise](#). There are loads of resources to help you!

Manage your stress

As we talk about in our [Can You Handle It?](#) video, stress can really impair your ability to cope with change as it narrows your focus, and can stop you doing the lateral thinking that you might need to draw on. So, improving your ability to handle stress will go a long way to helping you deal with change.

You might already have some go to stress busters, but if not why not check out the [5-4-3-2-1](#) or [High 5](#) exercises you'll find in the [Stress and Anxiety](#) section of our toolkit. You could also take a dive into our the top [Stress Busting and Anxiety Beating Tips](#) we gathered from our community.



Ask for help

We might be amazing creatives, but we're also human beings who are bound to feel overwhelmed in the face of change that feels really big or when there's simply too much change all at the same time. This is exactly when you need to ask for help! Most of us have different friends or colleagues who are good at different things and in different situations. So the first step is to work out what help you need... what would make you feel better. Maybe it's more than one thing. Need some practical advice? Work out who can give you that. Need a diversion? Who'd be good for that? Need someone who always knows the right questions to ask? Then turn to someone who fits that bill. And then reach out. As the wise horse in Charlie Mackesy's **'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse'** says, "Asking for help isn't giving up. It's refusing to give up".



We really hope you'll find these favourite insights of ours useful. For more on how to cope, do check out all the other goodies in the [coping with change and uncertainty part](#) of our Balance toolkit.