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How to go from fearful to fearless when changing your life

BY HOWARD COHEN

Change. It's the 2008 mantra.

And at this time of year, with New Year's resolutions ringing in, many clamor for a new direction in their jobs, their relationships, their diet, their fitness, their spirituality. In short, their lives.

Change, however, is often approached with trepidation. Fear of the unknown. Breaking away from the familiar. Beginning a new venture.

But navigating change can be healthy -- even transformational, mental health experts say.

"It's a time to assess where [people] will get their greatest satisfaction," says Margaret Krigbaum, a Tucson-based master certified life coach.

Adds Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the self-help best-seller, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* (Ten Speed Press, \$18.95), 'I've been fired twice in my life -- well, they called it 'Let go' -- but it turned out to be a rare opportunity to right my life and set my life on a helpful path."

Change isn't going away, what with the economy demanding new skills and new ways of doing things. So, view it as a positive to play to your strengths, experts say.

"The world is going at such a high speed, what we'll be seeing is more people making these changes more often," says Dr. Gabriela Cora, president of Executive Health & Wealth Institute in Miami.

"We may see someone shifting every five years or sooner."

Local institutions, like Johnson & Wales University and the University of Miami, as well as life coaches and spiritual leaders, have noticed an uptick in people seeking new directions.

"People see me more as a pastoral counselor," says the Rev. David Richards of Coral Gables, who counsels people in his practice. "They bring in more practical questions: 'I can't find a job in my field, now what do I do?' I've had experience with a friend who started in academia and who wrote their Ph.D on *The Divine Comedy* and now he's a headhunter who left academia. That's not uncommon."

Attendance was up 12 percent this fall at UM's Bachelor of General Studies' adult education program. "In certain continuing education programs we've seen growth even as early as the fall before the real designation that we were officially in a recession," says Mary Ullom, associate vice president for UM's Division of Continuing and International Education. Also, more than three-quarters of accredited business schools nationwide have experienced an increase in applications.

"We're 100 applications ahead of last year and last year was a great year," says Debra Bartkowski, assistant director of admissions at Johnson & Wales. "If you're in the financial sector, do you really want to be there? There are those who always wanted to be a chef or run a bed and breakfast and we are the place for them."

The UM will begin a five-month coaching program in the spring to train people how to help others facilitate change. Class co-author Krigbaum says the goal is to provide people with coaching skills or to help them become professional coaches.

Change, after all, can be stressful.

"Change is scary and not everyone can do it but it can be an opportunity for growth," says Miami Beach psychiatrist Dr. Eva Ritvo and author of *The Beauty Prescription* (McGraw Hill, \$24.95). "It's hard to grow if you are staying in the same groove and pattern."

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Navigating change: Tips to guide you

- **“Understand what your strengths and gifts are in this world. The skills belong to you, not the job.**

“What is it that you are here to do? Ask friends why they are friends with you. They will tell you what your magic is.”

-- **Margaret Krigbaum, master certified coach, Tucson, Ariz.**

- **Think it through.** “Be realistic. If someone is a police officer and wants to become a judge, you'll want to know that there's a lot of stuff in between. Set plans that are doable.”

Realize that you are not alone. “As people look to the New Year, with a bad economy, it can be a good time to make changes. Everyone is hurting a bit, you're in good company. It's a good time to readjust yourself.”

“Reflect back on what helped you before and that will be a good way to formulate a plan in going forward. If the last time you were leaning on friends, do that again.”

-- **Dr. Eva Ritvo, author (The Beauty Prescription), psychiatrist at University of Miami and Mount Sinai Medical Center.**

- **“People who can match their passions and desires with what they really want to do will be ahead of the game and that will make it easier to make those big changes.**

That's why New Year's resolutions don't work. They say, 'I need to lose weight' but they are not convinced they really want to. They want to continue to eat that chocolate dessert more than really lose that weight.”

-- **Dr. Gabriela Cora, president of the Executive Health & Wealth Institute, Miami.**

- **“Be aware of the present.** Figure out what your goals are and jot down everything. You are making it a life plan, like a business plan. You can then find solutions for those goals.”

Realize that fear is crippling. “Worrying about something -- usually it's about what we don't know -- doesn't help us out. Sometimes it's as simple as getting up and telling yourself who you are that

brings a different attitude and makes you more self-confident. You'll carry a different energy and when people see that they want to be around that."

-- **Roberto Santamarina, lifestyle coach, Morphe Life, Miami.**

• ``**Catch up on your sleep.** People are just exhausted by the point they lost their job and they need to recharge their batteries."

Researching the job market makes sense. Researching *yourself* -- who are you and what do you really want to be? -- makes even more sense. ``Once you know the skills you are good at and enjoy, this points you in new directions."

-- **Richard Nelson Bolles, author, What Color Is Your Parachute?**

-- HOWARD COHEN

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