

Career Ambitions

Understanding the change curve

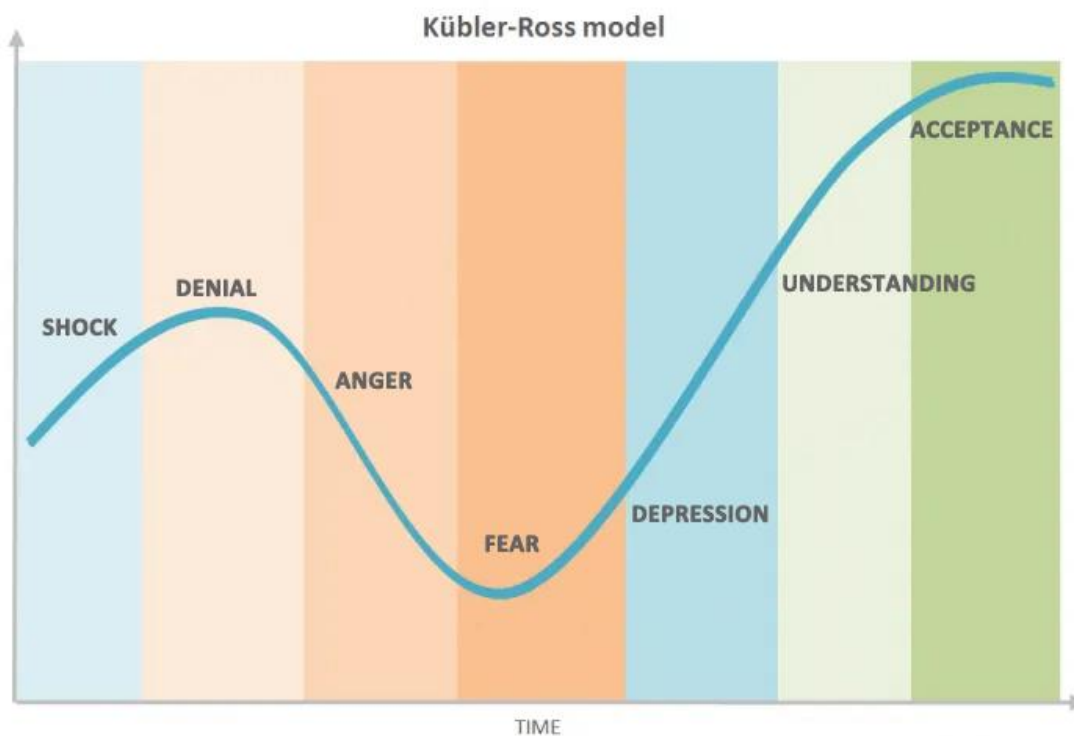
Even for the most positive of people, change within their career can be a very unsettling experience. This can be a change of management or organisation, a change of responsibility, a demotion, a pay cut or redundancy.

Many people experience a range of emotions and we liken this to the Change Curve, a model used in *On Death & Dying* (1969) devised by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Her focus was on the emotional journey that people can have when dealing with death or bereavement. This model has since been adapted to understand our reactions to sudden change, including that which impacts our working lives.

What is the change curve?

The Change Curve is a model mapping the stages on how we often respond to major change. The stages of the Change Curve are:

Shock → Denial → Anger → Fear / Bargaining → Depression → Understanding → Acceptance



Graphic adapted from cleverism.com.

How can the change curve help?

The Change Curve acts as a handy guide if you're struggling to cope with the loss of your job, but it's important to remember that it is a guide only. Everyone is different. It is important to understand that the grief cycle stages are a framework and are not linear (follow one after the other). People's reactions to change are unique to them – the transition between the stages is like water flowing down a stream, meandering slowly or gushing rapidly; going round and round in a whirl-pool or stagnating. We have seen people stagnating and stuck in 'anger' for years. We have also seen others go straight to the 'acceptance' stage the day after they've been laid off.

Understanding that it is perfectly natural to go through a range of emotions at this difficult time can be comforting. Going through this traumatic period needs time to heal and is just as vital as the physical healing of cuts, bruises, and broken bones.

The stages of the change curve

Stage one: Shock

The first typical response to major loss is shock. This initial shock, while frequently short lived, can result in a slow-down and loss of productivity. The shock is often due to a lack of information, a fear of the unknown, a fear of embarrassment, anxiety that you've done something wrong.

Stage two: Denial

After the change is announced, people often enter a state of 'denial'. During this time, we may actually feel quite buoyant and energised. "This isn't really happening to me"; "it won't affect me"; "it's a storm in a teacup". People can refuse to accept what is happening, burying their head in the sand. This can be at a conscious or unconscious level and is a defence mechanism that is perfectly natural.

Stage three: Anger

Self-doubt may start to creep in, and we start to wonder if it was our fault, or if we were somehow to blame. We may feel angry at the organisation or with the Government or Banks because the recession or uncertain political times have caused the job loss. Focusing the blame on someone or something allows a continuation of the denial by providing another focus for the fears and anxieties the potential impact is causing. Often the people who suffer at this stage are those closest to us. It is critical to get through this stage so it doesn't negatively impact on our health, relationships and success with interviews.

Stage four: Fear / Bargaining

Fear can disempower us, causing us to lose our confidence and settle for less than we deserve. This stage can involve attempting to bargain with HR or Management to change the decision; or we may negotiate – often to our detriment – which rarely provides a sustainable solution.

Stage five: Depression

A feeling of grief or sadness is a very natural response when people have gone through losing their job. It's not surprising – our workplace can represent a sense of belonging, it is our community, our friendship group. It also represents structured normality. This low stage of the change curve is pivotal to not get stuck in. Ideally, we need to make this stage as short-lived as possible by learning the natural process for coping with sudden change.

Stage six: Understanding

Enough looking back; it's time to look forward and think about what we're going to do next. Once we reach an objective understanding of our new situation, we are ready to start building our confidence and taking back control.

Stage seven: Acceptance

Acceptance is a broad indication that we now have some emotional detachment and objectivity. This is where things start to improve, as we begin to fully accept the changes that are taking place and start to look forward. We recognise that the old life is over and we need to take steps towards beginning a new life. After the initial feelings of negativity, many people reflect that the change was the best thing to happen to them.

How to identify where you are on the change curve

If you have recently been affected by sudden change in your career, do any of the stages above sound familiar? Where do you think and feel you are along the curve?

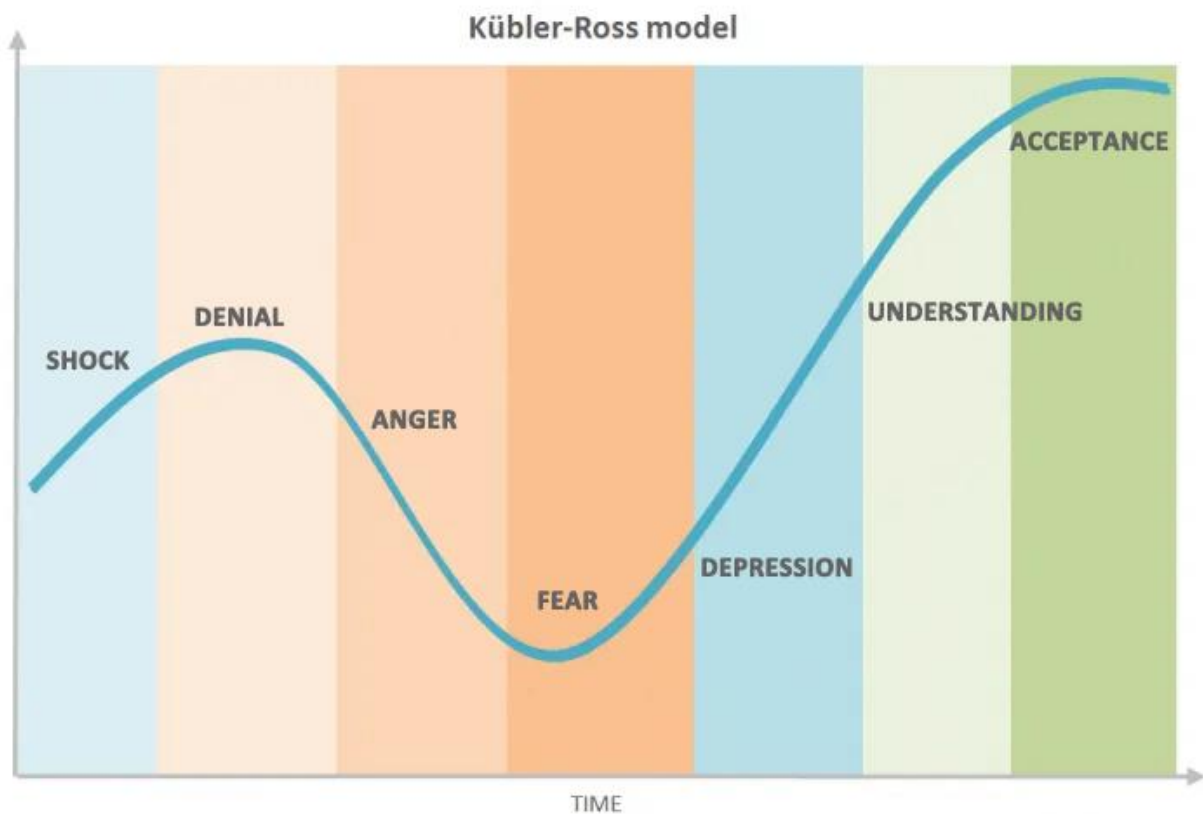
Change curve exercise: Part one

The purpose of providing you with the Change Curve information is that, with understanding, you can move yourself along more quickly to the 'acceptance' stage and be ready to progress your career forward.

Take a look at the faces below:



Which of these emotions do you think most applies to your current situation? If you had to take the face from above that is most like you, and plot it on the change curve below, where would you be? Mark it on this diagram:



Graphic adapted from cleverism.com.

Change curve exercise: Part two

Now complete the exercise below to confirm where you are on the change curve. Score each of these statements 1 to 5, 1 being untrue and 5 being very true.

The reality of the situation hasn't sunk in yet	Shock and Denial	
I feel angry about the change	Anger and Bargaining	
I am depressed about the situation	Sad and Depression	
I want to move on and take action	Acceptance	
I don't want to think about the change	Shock and Denial	
I am fuming inside about all this change	Anger and Bargaining	
I feel hopeless and don't know what to do	Sad and Depression	
I keep thinking of new opportunities	Acceptance	
If I carry on as normal the issue will just go away	Shock and Denial	
I'll change and do anything they want me to do	Anger and Bargaining	
I am very upset about the change	Sad and Depression	
I've a lot more energy now I am dealing with the change	Acceptance	
I'm sure this whole thing will blow over	Shock and Denial	
I'm sure that they can change the decision	Anger and Bargaining	
There is a sense of grief and loss	Sad and Depression	
The change was inevitable which I accept	Acceptance	

Now, add up how many points you've allocated to each of the following categories:

Shock and denial	Anger and bargaining	Sad and depression	Acceptance and understanding
-------------------------	-----------------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------------------

--	--	--	--

Which one have you scored highest? This will indicate where you are on the Change Curve at this moment in time. Realising where you are in this grief process should help you to deal with those emotions, and to know that it's normal to react to change in this way.

Top tips for dealing with change:

Wherever you are on the Change Curve, here are eight suggestions to help you deal with the change you are going through and get to the 'acceptance' stage.

Grab a pen and fill in the boxes! Write down what actions you think you can do to climb the curve and speed-up your progress towards the 'acceptance' stage.

Give yourself some time to reflect on the change. Write down in factual terms below what the change is, and if you are unsure, find out. It's important that you have all the facts.



Remember times when you have overcome adversity in the past, and note below how you did this successfully.



See if you can reframe the situation. What could be positive about this change? e.g. On one of our redundancy programmes, a client was very angry about her redundancy. Through coaching, she realised that she hadn't enjoyed her work, and this gave her the opportunity to find a career that she would enjoy!



Make sure that you continue doing the things that you enjoy. You are more likely to cope with the change if you have continuity in other areas of your life. Note down five things that you enjoy doing - and when you are going to do them.



Ask yourself what the real cause of your emotion is - be honest with yourself.



Be active and eat healthily. It's easy to let things slide when you're feeling low - but keeping moving can help your emotional wellbeing and improve how you're feeling. Instead of writing anything in this box, put down your pen and go outside for a quick walk!

Think of 10 things that you can do to move forwards, and how you could action these.



In a few days time, come back to this and repeat the Change Curve Exercises, both Part One and Part Two. Are you still at the same stage of the Change Curve? If so, it's time to start actioning some of the tips you wrote in the boxes above!

Change could change your life, for the better!

Change is tough, but it doesn't need to last long or be detrimental to your career. In fact, for many people change is the opportunity to improve their work situation and it can fling doors open wide. We will leave you with a little inspiration from a few familiar faces...

When Walt Disney was young, he was fired from a newspaper because he "lacked imagination and had no good ideas". Then in 1927 he was told by MGM Studios that a giant mouse on screen would scare women... and we all know what a global star that little mouse (and Walt Disney himself) became!

Steven Spielberg KBE was rejected from film school not once, not twice, but three times in his youth. He persisted, and is now commercially one of the most successful filmmakers in the history of Hollywood.

We all love them, but their first record label didn't! Having recorded 15 songs, Decca Recording Studios wrote off The Beatles, saying "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out. They have no future in show business." How wrong they were.

If you're facing change or have been recently made redundant, give me call (01223 633535) or send me an email (support@careerambitions.co.uk) as I would love to help. There are places on the Change Curve that may seem scary and never-ending, but with the right support we can embrace change and find a positive outcome.