

When You're at the End of Your Rope, Let Go!

by Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

Several years ago, I went on a weekend spiritual retreat. I had avoided going on this retreat for two years. Instinctively I knew I would be challenged about my need for control, so I avoided the inevitable by not going. I entered that retreat thinking to myself, "Patti Hathaway, you have really got yourself together. You have built a successful business. You have a wonderful husband and two adorable sons. You have managed your life well. What if you get challenged on this control issue and let go? What if you let go of managing your life and you lose everything you have worked so hard to gain? Could you live with yourself if you lost it all?" Those thoughts terrified me. Still I went.

For most of the women on this retreat, it was a simply positive mountaintop experience. As a result of my faulty thinking, I spent most of the weekend in the valley fighting for control over my soul. Could I give up that control? Near the very end of the weekend, I finally learned how to let go, to let God take over the reins. It did not come easily or without a lot of personal pain. But what I did experience was a tremendous sense of relief, release, and peace.

To Control or Not to Control

I learned an important lesson that weekend. Giving up control isn't just a one-time event. For each of us in a change situation, dealing with our control needs will be ongoing. Organizational change is about what we control and what we don't control. It is about a struggle every single day to focus on the right things. Each of us can be a winner in change and feel a sense of personal power if we focus on certain things.

The Winner's Grid

There are basically three things we can focus on in change situations: (1) The things we *Can Control*, (2) The things we *May Have Influence* over, and (3) The things we *Cannot Control*. The Winner's Grid provides a map for taking more personal power in change situations. There are two ways we choose to act when it comes to the things we **Cannot Control**:

- (1) **Just do it!** by taking action on those things; OR
- (2) **Let it go.**

In change situations, we primarily tend to focus on the last category: **Cannot Control**. Here are some examples of things that might belong in the Cannot Control category: company profit and loss; the market/economy; policies and procedures; management decisions; staffing levels; our supervisor (although I coauthored a book entitled *Managing Upward* so I disagree with this one); the business plan; time; the future; the weather.

	Can Control	May Have Influence	Cannot Control
Just Do It!	Game Face	Cheerleader	Hanger On
Let It Go!	Armchair Quarterback	“Boo” Bird	Graceful Exit

If you are taking action in areas you cannot control, you will feel frustrated and angry and become like the aging athlete or **Hanger On**. Hanging on is a term used in sports for athletes who hang on beyond the time they really should have retired. It happens not only in sports, but even in the workplace. We hang on to old vendettas, hang on to the old way of doing things, hang on to the fact that we cannot control certain things but we sure are going to try. As a result, we become angry, frustrated people. We are angry at the system. We are upset with the organization. We are frustrated with our boss. We're carrying a grudge against our co-worker. We're angry because we've chosen to hang onto things that we have no control over.

You can gain release and relief if you let go of situations and circumstances over which you have no control. You will experience firsthand the relief of a **Graceful Exit**. I had to learn to take a Graceful Exit at the retreat and let go of the supposed control I had over my life. What does the word "Exit" mean? It doesn't mean to jump the organizational ship, although I think in some cases that may be the best choice if a person cannot let go of the things they don't control. What is meant by *Graceful Exit* is to let go gracefully. To "let go" of the areas over which you have no control.

The word "grace" is not used much in our vocabulary. Grace means "reprieve; a temporary exemption." Grace must be given by someone, it cannot be yanked from them. When we take a *graceful exit*, we voluntarily give up that which we cannot control. We need to learn how to *gracefully exit* and let go. In order to move into the future, we need to let go of the past. What have you been hanging onto? What is something that you need to gracefully exit out of in your job? You can't move forward into the future if you're still hanging on to the past.

It's like blowing up a balloon and then letting it go. When you release a balloon, you release and relieve the pressure. The same thing can happen at work when we recognize what we don't control and let go of our desire to control it. With organizational change, as with my control concerns at the retreat, it will probably be an everyday struggle for us to let go. Our challenge is to only "own" and take action on those things that we can control.

*Excerpted from the book **Untying the 'Nots' of Change Before You're Fit to be Tied**. Patti Hathaway, CSP, **The CHANGE AGENT**, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*