

Making the most of LIFE CHANGES

You don't just have to survive life changes – good and bad – you can learn a number of techniques and tips to thrive on change, as **Nicola Rayner** discovers...

"No-one ever told me that being engaged would be so hard," confides a friend of mine. "It's meant to be the happiest time of your life and everybody expects you to be this wonderfully radiant bride-to-be, but the worst thing is that no one ever talks about how turbulent a time it can be. It's a very well-kept secret."

When I got engaged in December I was ill-prepared for the complete rollercoaster of emotions that followed. I felt exhilaration and joy, of course, but other feelings came floating to the surface of my consciousness, such as fear that I wouldn't get it right, sadness that my father, who died when I was a child, wouldn't be there, and a whole host of other complex emotions and memories.

We all know that change, when it comes as divorce or bereavement, can be traumatic.

But even "good" changes – moving house, starting a new job, getting married or having a baby – can cause an enormous amount of upheaval. We are comfortable with the familiar and, during times of change, the old life we are leaving behind can seem appealing because it is safe.

Sandra Hillawi, international teacher in energy psychology and author of *The Love Clinic*, tells me it is normal to feel conflicted: "There are happy things about going forward, but there are things you will be letting go of in your new life and it might be good to do some releasing about that."

Heart coach Cate Mackenzie agrees: "You're not just saying goodbye to old relationships, you're saying goodbye to being single, and you're saying hello to being joined with someone, whatever that means to you... It's a risk getting married," she concedes, "because there's no guarantee it's going to work – but then there's no guarantee a career's going to work. What do you do? What's your alternative: do a job you dislike?"

It could be that the difficult emotions we experience at times of change are a way of signalling that we need to pay attention to some things from the past, do some clearing out and say some goodbyes. To this end, I



thought it would be a good idea to prepare for my life change, not just in terms of a physical detox of the type that brides-to-be often go through with raw food and colonics, but also through an emotional detox, looking at things I want to say goodbye to – be they love letters from exes or limiting self-beliefs.

Mind

An obvious place to start is with physical clutter. Most people are familiar with the sinking feeling that accompanies opening a certain drawer or cupboard full of things we mean to sort out "one day". But what if the negativity isn't just caused by the mess, but by the sense of being weighed down or held back by the past? Photos of friends we no longer have in our lives, clothes we can't fit into any more and old school books on subjects we never cared for can all drag us back to places we'd like to leave behind. There is also a school of thought that says as long as things are unfinished – and this applies to everything from broken equipment to loose photos not yet put into photo albums – they will still consume our energy until they are resolved.

Clare Baker of the Clutter Clearing Consultancy is a former "clutterholic" who turned her life around in 2001 after overcoming her own clutter challenge, through using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) principles and modelling herself on organised people.

"It's amazing how much we keep negatively emotional stuff because we feel we should – when people work with me I ban the word 'should'," says Clare. "Sentimental clutter and photographs are the two most challenging types of clutter to deal with. Part of the problem when people go through their stuff is that when they look at individual items they think, 'That's sentimental so I should keep it.' But they're not looking at those things in the context of where they're trying to go with their lives."

She has a number of suggestions for dealing with this problem: "What I recommend is people putting the item on a scale of one to 10, with things that are very strongly sentimental, positively, at one end and the things that are less sentimental at the other end – and having what's known as a Hall of Fame or a Wall of Fame."

Clare suggests methods such as scrapbooking as a way of honouring the past. "It's not just a nice way of recording the story but can also be quite cathartic," she says.

"It's not that we are trying to ignore the fact that we may have had good times and bad times, but it's about surrounding yourself with positive things."

In terms of clearing out for life change, Clare has her own success story. "Funnily enough, after I'd had my clutter crisis, I met my husband because I'd made space in my head and my home for him to come in." Indeed, she has found the same pattern occur among her clients.

"They start with the physical clutter, but because the foundation of my thinking is in NLP and there's goal-setting... it's like a



Cate MacKenzie utilises fun in her workshops.

chain of events and they find once they've got the clutter moving inextricably it all starts to shift. I've got clients who, like me, have gone on to meet their life partners."

It could very well be that clearing out clutter helps Clare's clients let go of past relationships. She recalls an unhappy relationship she had in the nineties with a man who lived abroad. "Every time I visited him I took photographs; I was trying to show everyone else: 'Isn't this wonderful? Isn't this romantic?' But I knew that the smile on my face wasn't an honest or genuine smile, and when I moved out of my flat and into my next home, I said, 'I don't want to take those photographs with me'... so I had the ritual Friends-style burning of the photographs, which, for me, was very liberating."

Fire as a means of purification is recommended to me time and time again. My mother recalls the months after her wedding: "Just after we got married we burned all our school books in a bonfire in the garden. We felt so happy standing in the dark watching the fire – we both hated school – it was cleansing and bonding because we had a future together."

Bestselling author and life coach Debbie Ford recommends a similar ritual in her latest book *The 21-Day Consciousness Cleanse*, which leads readers through a three-part programme focused on the past, the present and the future, as a way of cleansing their emotional and spiritual selves.

After the first seven days of the programme (which deal with the past) Debbie recommends a cleansing ritual on the eighth. "You might have old journals, pictures that bring up bad feelings, clothes that no longer fit or are symbolic of a 'you' that you no longer care to express. Maybe you've been trapped inside an addiction to some food – say, cookies, cupcakes, or salted pretzels. Get a few for the ceremony."

"Next, you're going to write a letter saying goodbye to all the people, places, and things that no longer serve you – the addictions, habits, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, stories, dramas and traumas, and anything else you

can think of that fits into this category called 'the past you're ready to leave behind'."

Saying goodbye is an important part of moving on: for me, ringing a former boyfriend not only to tell him that I was getting married, but also as a way of saying goodbye was an important part of the process. Writing letters, even if you don't send them, is also a powerful way to resolve unfinished business. Massage practitioner Denise Britton-Phillips, who uses shiatsu in her therapy, advises: "Write down everything in a letter to the people who've hurt you or who you've hurt, and say what you want to say – say the 'unacceptable'. Put the letters away for three days, read them and burn them. There's no better ritual: you've secreted, you've acknowledged, you've let go."

"There are happy things about going forward, but there are things you will be letting go of in your new life and it might be good to do some releasing about that."

In Debbie Ford's ritual, she emphasises the importance of blessing symbols of the past before you burn them ("since you can only release what you bless"), repeating words such as: "I willingly give all of this pain, all of this trauma, all of this stress back to the universe to dissolve and transform." She also recommends using your breath throughout the burning ceremony – "it's the great tool you have to help you digest and release the pain of the past."

If a ceremonial bonfire is not an option for you, Debbie suggests sprinkling salt over a rubbish bag of your items, though she writes: "It's important that you take it out of



your house or the physical space in which you live." Finally, as the last symbolic part of the ritual, Debbie emphasises the importance of a cleansing bath or shower: "If you can take a bath, infuse it with one cup of Epsom salts and two cups of milk. Eat some apples and honey, praying for a sweet new life."

Clearing physical clutter is of course cathartic, but what of blockages we can't see? Craig Price of Priceless Success Coaching is a certified practitioner of NLP, Time Line Therapy and Visual Coding Displacement Therapy (VCDT).

He says of these blockages: "I like to call them invisible barriers or mental roadblocks

"Once you've made that goal, you've got to break it up into small, achievable segments... and reward yourself"

that stop someone being the person they want to be or having the things they want to have: in other words, it's an excuse of why you can or can't have something."

Craig suggests that we challenge damaging thought processes. "Listen to whether you encourage yourself in certain circumstances," he says. And the best way to turn off that negative little voice? "Relax your tongue," says Craig, illustrating what he means with an exercise in which I try and count to ten in my head, but relax my tongue at around four or five – the counting stops.

"When you count inside your head, your tongue is at the back of your throat and it's moving," Craig explains, "but when you relax it you can't communicate with yourself. It's really good for people who are suffering with insomnia, whose thoughts are racing."

In order to tackle big life changes, he advises: "First of all you have to set yourself a goal of what you want. If you don't set yourself a goal of what you want, how are you going to know when you get there?"

"The second thing is you've got to know why you want it, because if you haven't got enough reasons for why you want it and how it's going to change your life, you're not going to have the motivation to actually get it.

"Once you've made that goal, you've got to break it up into small, achievable segments... At each milestone or baby step, you have to reward yourself along the way, as your goal could be years down the line."

Another key part of NLP is modelling yourself on someone who's done it well, as Craig puts it: "Finding people who have succeeded at the level you want to succeed at in your industry and copying them." So, to use my example, copying someone who had made a success of their marriage? "Exactly," says Craig.

Body

It is, of course, difficult to separate the mind, body and spirit neatly into three separate categories with this kind of detox work, which is why many therapists work holistically. Sandra Hillawi is not only a qualified herbalist and colonic therapist, but also a master in the energy therapies of Emotional Freeing Technique (EFT) and EmoTrance. She runs healing retreats in Egypt and the UK that combine raw foods and colonics with yoga and EFT workshops.

Does she find that physical detoxes lead to emotional release? "When you start to change your diet and, for instance, go on raw foods and juices, taking sugar and all the starches out of your diet, it does allow emotional issues to surface, which might have been suppressed or numbed out by your eating habits," she says. "So when you do a detox it does allow things to come up for release. If you have the tools to release that," she says, referring to the energy therapies she uses, "it's great."

But is it possible for people to become emotionally lighter from colonics? "They can do," she says cautiously. "Certainly while I've been practising colonics and the energy techniques I've found people hold a lot of tension in the stomach area, and that tension in the muscle means the colon isn't working

in a relaxed way and so it's not clearing. So they can be emotionally releasing, but the techniques like EFT and EmoTrance are a much more effective way of creating emotional release, in my experience, for deeper issues and painful memories and stress. It's good to be more precise with the techniques used."

Nutritionist and kinesiologist Hilary Easlea of Living Essentials Natural Therapies agrees that the holistic approach is best. Using her background in vibrational medicine she looks at "what's going on in the body. Why? Where do you find the origin of it? You can see that someone's got something now, but in order to clear it you have to go back to the first time it happened and that might have happened a long way back: i.e. another lifetime."

Hilary advises approaching detoxes with caution. "A lot of people use sugar and caffeine to cover up stuff, to deal with stuff or keep things down," she says. "You need to know what you're doing; you need to be a bit careful. Great, if you're quite a fit and healthy person and you're still prepared for some emotional stuff, but if you're someone who's new to that, I would be very careful with it. Sometimes [my focus is on] just getting people to drink water and gradually make some changes."

The problem for those who are overweight or unhealthy is that, during a detox, the toxins in the fat cells are "coming in the system and can actually make someone really quite ill". Hilary instead advises making little, but permanent, changes, such as doing a bit more exercise, and taking better care of ourselves long-term.

Exercise helps with both physical and emotional detoxing. In her consciousness cleanse, Debbie Ford advises: "Move your body every day." As for the type of exercise you do, the key is "finding something you enjoy", says sports massage therapist Karl Bolton, though he recommends swimming and rowing as the best forms of exercise for your body because of the low impact and good cardio workout. Personally, I have found running and yoga have kept me feeling sane and balanced emotionally throughout my anxious times, though running has its drawbacks.

Cate Mackenzie uses dance as a tool in her workshops. "What I've discovered is most people are quite brilliant, but their energy can be slightly misaligned, so they don't quite feel themselves, which can lead them to chasing relationships or being in the wrong job... At my workshops, I get people to dance and move. It's not enough to think: you have to feel and you have to be... Some people have felt out of their bodies for years."

As well as helping us to feel more in touch with our bodies, exercise has some "chemical" benefits at times of change. Karl says: "When you are stressed, adrenaline is pumped around your body and, if that's not used, that builds up as stress in your body." Exercise, conversely, releases endorphins, which balance the adrenaline, but, as Karl explains, at times of stress – which periods of change are – "exercise is always the first thing that goes."