

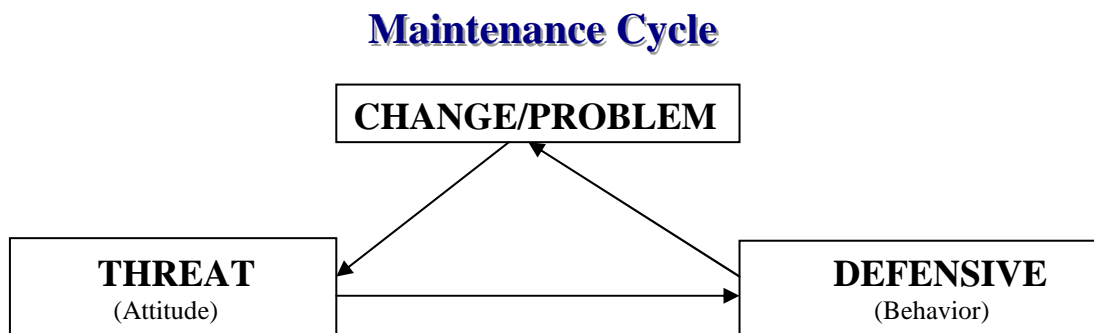
CHANGE: AN OPPORTUNITY OR A THREAT?

Most people are not as good at coping with change as they think they are!

How many times have you heard people say that they love change... that they are always creating change, exploring different ways of doing things. Maybe so. But what happens when someone else wants you to change, or comes up with the idea first? What happens if someone close to you does something totally unpredictable?

How do you cope with unexpected change... bad news, or problems? They are just examples of change. Everything was working normally until POW! When that happens, how do you feel? It will no doubt depend on the severity of the change or problem, but it is perfectly natural to feel threatened, and respond defensively.

There is a model that we use in our leadership programs called the **Change Cycles**, developed by Ralph Colby, co-founder of Integro in Minneapolis. When a person perceives the change or problem as a *threat*, and then behaves in a *defensive* way, we call that a **Maintenance Cycle**. Their motive is to maintain things the way they are:



Different people also use different forms of defensive behavior. Some people react with *fight* behaviors such as attacking, yelling, throwing something, arguing, criticising, or blaming. Others use *flight* behaviors, like avoidance, procrastination, leaving, complaining, making excuses, sulking, silence, or justifying. Yes, *justifying!* How many times have you asked someone to do something, and then had to listen to all these *rational* excuses why it can't be done.

Justifying is a more sophisticated way of being defensive, because it looks so rational, it sounds intelligent, and you can be so cool and calm while you do it. But when the purpose of it is to resist change, without considering possible opportunities (which it often is), then it is still defensive behavior.

Defensive behavior is everywhere. Just watch the TV news and current affairs, go into any home, any company, or government agency. Yes, it is natural, it is in fact our instinctive survival behavior. And yet

in the overwhelming majority of instances where we see defensive behavior, survival is not at stake... at least not our physical survival. It is more likely to be in defence of our egos.

So what? What's the big deal? It's natural. Everyone does it. What's the problem?

The problem is in what it is costing you, and the fact that you really do have a choice. In most cases defensive behavior does not get you what you want, and if it does, it's difficult to enjoy, because it usually comes as a result of a win-lose outcome. Defensiveness is always accompanied by stress... and that's not good for you. Defensiveness between people causes conflict, and a deterioration in relationships.

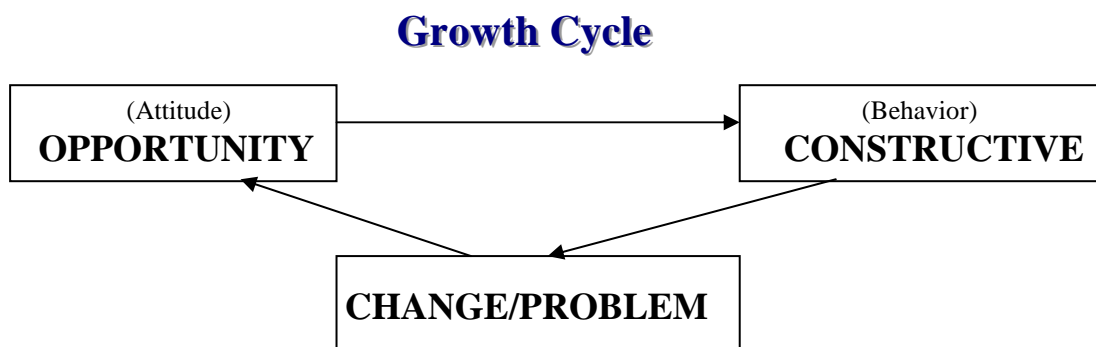
OPPORTUNITYISNOWHERE

When you first read the line above, what did you see? Opportunity is nowhere? If you did, what was your reaction to that? If you accepted that statement, then that's probably all you saw. If on the other hand your mind rejected the statement, you more than likely then saw the alternative.... Opportunity is now here! You may have seen that first up. This is a simple little example of how you can choose how you perceive things. When things look bad, look for the good... what can I learn from this, what are the opportunities.

By defending any position, we close off our ability to see alternatives, and the potential benefits that other opportunities may have for us. How many opportunities have we lost in our lifetimes because we have not been looking for them. We will never know, but we don't have to miss out on anymore!

Getting yourself out of a Maintenance Cycle

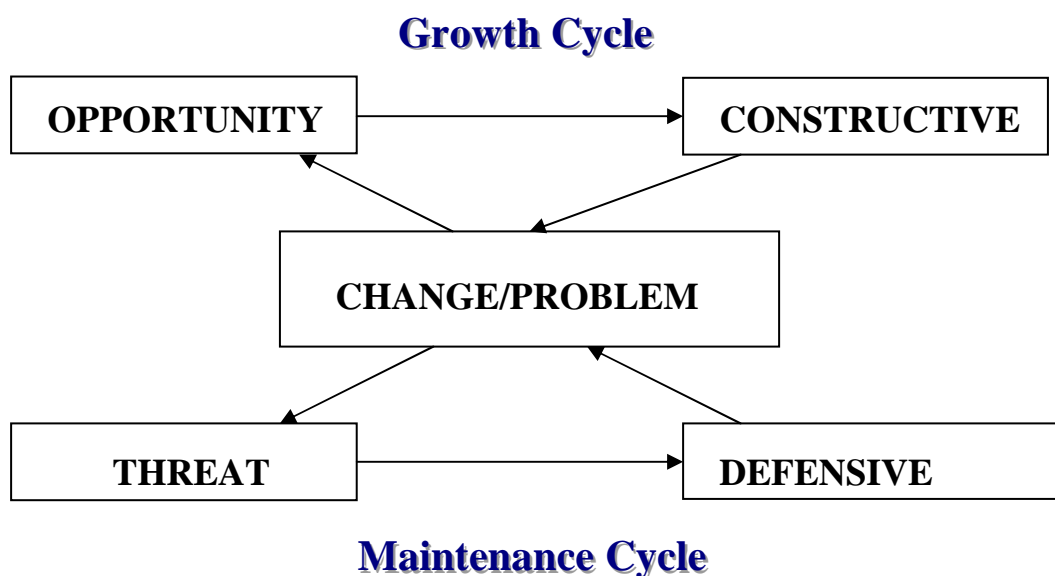
It may not seem like it sometimes, but we can choose to live life in a **Growth Cycle**, instead of the **Maintenance Cycle**:



In any situation, no matter how bad it may seem, we can choose to look for the *opportunities* it presents. We may not find any... or they may not be apparent for some time. But if we don't look for them, *we can be absolutely sure that we will never find them!*

Another significant benefit of staying in a **Growth Cycle**, is that you can be much more certain that a particular change is not beneficial for you, if you have really looked for the opportunities and alternatives... and then found none. You will then be able to reject the change without feeling or behaving defensively.

So the total **Change Cycle** model looks like this:



We do have to learn to consciously move up to the **Growth Cycle** instead reacting into a **Maintenance Cycle**... it is *learned* behavior, not something that comes naturally. Initially you may have already reacted before you realize what you have done. But the moment you do realize, whether it is in the middle of reacting, the next day, or the next week, it is never too late to ask yourself how you could benefit from what happened.

The local radio station in Sydney that I was listening to today asked listeners to call in and say what one thing they would do differently if they had their life over. What would you do differently? Some people called in with stories of regret, "I ruined my life", some were humorous, but how would they know to do it differently if they hadn't learned from what they did? What did you learn from the one thing you would like to have over? And how have you have benefited as a result of that experience?

A simple process I have found helpful in getting myself out of a **Maintenance Cycle** is to ask myself:

1. **What am I feeling?** This is usually a pretty easy question to answer at this point... because we are in an *emotional state*. I'm feeling angry, upset, disappointed, frustrated etc.
2. **What am I thinking?** This question must come second. It is difficult to think rationally while emotional, but having identified the feeling, I have started to think! I'm feeling angry because....

- 3. What do I want?** This question helps me to clarify the expectations I have that are not being met. I am then able to make a more rational choice about how to get what I want, and look at whether the thing I am being defensive about can help me get what I want.

Getting Others out of a Maintenance Cycle

This has to be one of life's most valuable skills... the ability to get others out of a **Maintenance Cycle**. Think of the situations in which you could encounter defensiveness from another person... negotiating, selling, counseling, managing, interviewing, training... in fact any situation where your success is dependent on your ability to influence others to change. So the more successful you are at getting others to see the opportunities and behave constructively, into a **Growth Cycle**, the more successful you will be.

There are some simple steps we can take to achieve this:

- 1. Don't take it personally.** When the other person goes into a **Maintenance Cycle**, there is a strong tendency for us to feel rejected, they are resisting what I want them to do. If you do take it personally, you will end up in a **Maintenance Cycle**, and then you have conflict.
- 2. Don't attempt to reason with them.** A person in a **Maintenance Cycle** cannot be reasonable, they are emotional, and any attempt at reason will result in increased defensiveness. Haven't you ever wondered why they couldn't see the logic of something so *obvious*? Get them out of the **Maintenance Cycle** first.
- 3. Accept their feelings.** In other words, be understanding. If someone is in a **Maintenance Cycle**, the last thing they need is you to tell them that they shouldn't feel that way. They are feeling that way!
- 4. Ask questions, focussing attention on their needs.** This the most important step. By asking questions, we get them to talk. When they start to talk, two important things will begin to happen. Firstly, they start to express the emotion they are feeling... and secondly they have to think in order to answer the questions. "How do you feel about the situation? What do you think should be done? What would happen if we looked at it from this angle?"

If you are genuinely looking for a solution that is beneficial for both parties, that is, the change is, or can be beneficial for the other person, then it shouldn't be too difficult using this process to get them into a **Growth Cycle**.

Change is always going to be with us. It is not an option, something we can avoid. What you can do is take control of the effect that change, and any accompanying problems, has on you as an individual, and your organization. You can only do that effectively from a **Growth Cycle**... the **Maintenance Cycle** is really fighting a losing battle, and that's hard work! You really do have a choice, between an *inward* focus on how to protect yourself and your beliefs, and an *outward* focus where a world of opportunities awaits you. You can be defensive or you can cope with change. You can stay in the **Maintenance Cycle** or a **Growth Cycle**. The choice is yours.

Keith E Ayers