

# COPING WITH CHANGE AND LOSS

BY GAYLE GUYNUP

Personally, I have never handled change very well. It stems from my mistaken belief that I am actually in control of my life, though I have learned, time and time again, that nothing could be further from the truth.

As the saying goes, “Life is what happens while we are making other plans.” And while we can control how we respond to life, there are many, many things that are simply out of our control.

Indeed, the last couple of years have been a time of incredible loss in our community, from Betty Schoenbaum, to Steve Seidensticker, Bob Garner, Jim Roque, Bea Friedman and Murf Klauber, among many others. The loss of these philanthropic leaders impacts not only those who knew and loved them, but our community as a whole, and their loss will be felt for years to come.

So, as we start a new year, I thought it would be interesting to see how others handle change and loss in their lives. Be it a change in careers, a health crisis, a divorce or the loss of a loved one, how do people make it through, finding their way back to a fulfilling, albeit, different life than they knew before?

I spoke with author and internationally renowned speaker Barbara Glanz, who is no stranger when it comes to dealing with loss in her life. In fact, in her lovely apartment, in a prominent place, hangs a plaque that reads, “Oh God of second chances and new beginnings, here I am again.”

## Barbara's story

Barbara grew up in a small town in Iowa, with around 4,500 people. Her dad was a postmaster and her mom an art teacher. “It really taught me wonderful values,” she said. “You didn’t judge people by how much money they had or how many

college degrees. It was about who they were.”

She attended the University of Kansas, where she was a piano major before switching over to English in her final year. It was there that she met Charlie Glanz, the summer before her senior year. “Charlie worked for 30 years at the Chicago Tribune. We were married when I was 21 years old, and I took a job as an English and drama teacher in LaGrange Illinois. It was a wonderful experience,” she said.

Later, Charlie and Barbara made the decision that Barbara would be a stay-at-home mom. “I really wanted to be a mom, so I stayed home 19 years with the kids,” she said. Barbara and Charlie had four children, “three here and one in heaven,” Barbara says.

While at home, she finished her master’s degree in adult learning. “When our son was going off to Dartmouth, I needed to help earn a little more money,” she said. She became manager of training for a Times-Mirror company, and began public speaking. While she relished that experience, she realized she could impact so many more people if she started her own company.

“I was 50 at that time. It was such a wonderful blessing. My husband was 11 years older, and was already thinking about early retirement and we still had two girls in college. So it was a big risk for me,” she said. “In my first five years as a speaker, I had spoken on four continents and in 40 states. Things happened beyond my expectations,” she said. As of seven years ago, Barbara became the first speaker to speak in all 50 states and on all seven continents.

“I am just the messenger. It’s not about me,” she insists.

To date, she has also written 14 books, on a variety of subjects, including customer service, employee engagement and appreciation, and, of course, dealing with change and loss.

## Love and loss

The winter of 1970 to the fall of 1971 was a time Barbara will never forget. “My first great loss was the loss of our little boy. He was born on Dec. 21 and buried on Christmas Eve. I was only 28 when that happened,” she said. In her book, “What Can I Do?” Barbara recalled, “For more than four years, I could find little joy in the Christmas season. After all, it celebrates the birth of a baby, and our baby had died.”

The following Easter, while visiting family in Iowa, the family’s St. Bernard Puppy, Nanna, died during what should have been a simple operation. “Now I had lost my other baby,” Barbara wrote. And, the following fall, Barbara’s father died of a heart attack in the middle of the night at age 62. “I wondered how much grief one person could take,” she wrote.

“What that year taught me is that every day is a gift. There were days I did not think I would make it until noon. But someone gave me a book that talked about living five minutes at a time and that was a really precious gift. So I would focus on five minutes, and another five minutes, and another five minutes, and that’s how I lived for a while,” she said. “What it taught me, in the long term, was to be fully in the present moment. So, when I am with someone, I am not thinking about anyone else. It really was a wonderful gift,” she said. “I also was hurting so much that I knew that nothing could ever hurt me that much again.

“I learned that every change comes bearing gifts. I am not a Pollyanna, but since that year I have tried most of the time to look at what’s going right instead of what’s going wrong.”

In 1998, Charlie and Barbara came down to see some friends in Sarasota. “We ended up here on Siesta Key and just loved it,” she said. They had two winters here before Charlie passed away.



“We can always choose whether to be bitter or better.” - **Barbara Glanz**



Friends and family are extremely important in dealing with change and loss.

"After Charlie died, I would come down each winter to write a book. And in 2003, I moved full-time into this Gulf-front condominium. All I would do is write and walk and swim. I didn't get involved in anything," she said. That first year, she added, "I thought I would die from loneliness. I had friends all over the world, but had nobody here. I would just walk the beach every day, put my dark glasses on and cry."

Eventually, she said, as she walked, she would begin to notice all of the people who were having fun on the beach and, ever so slowly, she began to feel better again.

#### Dealing with change

"When you lose a husband, your whole identity changes," she said. "And you think, 'Well, my friends will keep including me.' But sometimes they don't. Sometimes I think they don't want you to feel alone (or like a third wheel). Sometimes they just don't know what to say and are afraid of saying the wrong thing."

"Shortly after Charlie died, I was invited to a birthday party in Evanston, and I wasn't going to go because I knew it was going to be all couples. I ended up going, thinking that I would stay just for 30 minutes. I got there and I was just about to leave, when a couple came up to me, swept me up and sat me in between them. It was such a little thing, but it made all of the difference in the world," she said.

So, does change become more difficult the older we get?

"I think it is different kinds of changes. When we are younger, change is just part of life. As we

get older, change tends to involve health-related issues and tremendous loss. Basic, heart-wrenching things. Not how could that boy have broken up with me, or whether or not I should take this new job. We also begin to look at our own mortality. But there is a quotation that has impacted me a lot. "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the greater your capacity for joy." I have always loved that saying. I believe it's true, and it gives me hope," she said.

Another favorite saying of Barbara's is "We can always choose whether to be bitter or better."

"It's like the holding on to something very tightly with your hand," she explained, adding that it helps to visualize it in order to understand. "When you visualize holding on to something very tightly, it's a reminder that it hurts to hold on like that." Instead, she suggests, it is much better for us to let things go, so that we can begin moving on with our life.

She also suggests leaving "what if" and "if only" thoughts behind. "If-only land is never a good place to be, because it is in the past and we need to be living in the moment," she said.

#### Moving forward

So, what can friends and family do to help those going through loss or drastic life changes? In the beginning, Barbara said, when emotions are still raw, don't ask "What can I do for you?" Instead, just say "This is what I am going to do for you."

"As an example, I did not go to the grocery store for at least two months after Charlie died. I knew I would see all kinds of people who didn't know he had died and I would have to tell the story, again. I

would have loved it if someone had called and said, 'Get your grocery list ready. I am going to come over and go to the store for you.' But I was too embarrassed to ask for the help," she said.

"One day," she said, "a friend who didn't know Charlie well, called and said, 'I am coming over Thursday night, bringing dinner and I want you to get out your wedding album and your other photo albums, and I want you to tell me all about Charlie.'"

Talking about the person, telling stories, is so important, she said. "If you are not ready, simply say, 'Maybe another time,' because trust me, there will come a time when talking about him or her will be very important to you — a part of the healing process. You may cry. But remember, tears are the holy water from our deepest place of loving."

"When you share tears with someone, it's a gift. It's a wonderful thing. Grief, after all, is the price you pay for love."

Barbara also remembers so many seemingly little things that people did to help: "I had a friend who loved polishing shoes, who came over and polished all of my shoes. Another person came over and helped me write all my thank-you notes. It can be teeny, tiny things, but in retrospect they are huge in your healing process," she said.

"I found a church. That was very helpful for me." She also started a book club, "a nice down-to-Earth group of gals, very informal, and those two things gave me new places where I belonged."

#### Change, change, change

Any time of change, Barbara says, is incredibly hard, which is why she avoids the expression "em-

bracing change.”

“Embrace has a connotation of something wonderful. I don’t want people to feel like they have to like or love change, but I think they can come to understand change. There is a Chinese proverb that says “The beginning of wisdom is understanding.” Once you know where you are in the process and what you have to do ... you can start to heal. It’s the not knowing that is so confusing. We need to bring clarity to our lives,” she said.

“At 56 (when Charlie passed away), I still felt pretty young. When I looked back I could either say, ‘I was so lucky to have him with me for 34 years,’ or I could say ‘Oh dear, look at all the time we could have or should have had together.’”

To get through change, you need to go through what Barbara calls “the control inventory,” answering the following questions:

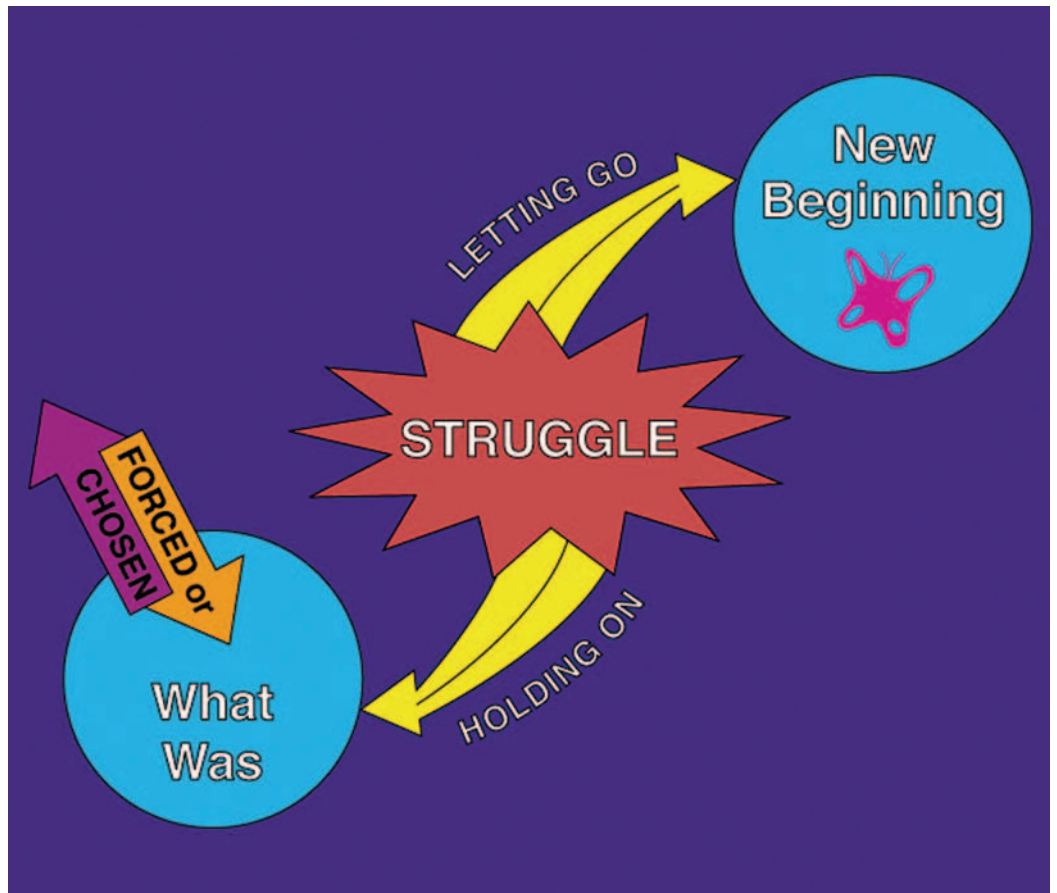
What do I have control over and what don’t I have control over?

Next, what am I losing and what am I taking with me?

“When Charlie died, I was losing my identity as his wife. But I was still the same person. I still had my faith, my family, my friends, my work.”

And finally, what do I have to let go of, in order to move on with my life?

“For me, there is one quotation that answered all of those questions,” Barbara said. “Fear knocked at the door, faith answered, and there was no one there.”



## DEALING WITH GRIEF

From Shirley Ottman in “What Can I Do” by Barbara Glanz: “I’m tired. Too tired to dress. Too tired to bathe. Too tired to eat. Exhaustion is my middle name since you have left me here to live without you. ... I’m filled with questions now for which I have no answers. I’ve not the energy to think! ... I know my heart still pumps; my lungs still fill with air; my blood still circulates. My eyes and ears still funnel their impressions to my brain; yet, I am filled with pain, unshakeable and heavily compressed within my soul.”

And from Anne Lamott in the same book:

“I have survived so much loss, as all of us have by now – my parents, dear friends, my pets. ... If you haven’t already, you will lose someone you think you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken; and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of that beloved person. But this is the good news. They live forever, in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. ... It’s like having a leg that never heals properly – that still hurts when the weather is cold – but you learn to dance with the limp. You dance ... to the minuet of old friendships.”

\* Grieving people have no energy to handle even the most simple tasks of daily life.

\* Grieving people experience “grieving brain,” an inability to think clearly and to remember things. Do not be frustrated by this, just be patient and understanding.

\* Grieving people are completely focused on survival and cannot process most advice. Telling someone how to handle their grief is not helpful. Everyone grieves differently, and must make their way through the process in their own time.

\* Grieving people do not want to hear, at least in the first few months, others’ stories. When pain is overwhelming, the last thing you need is to hear about other people’s pain.

\* Grieving people do not even know what they need, and even if they do, they usually don’t have the courage to ask for help.

\* Grieving people need time, and lots of it, to work through their grief.

\* Grieving people need good listeners, because at some point they will need to talk about their loved one.