

Coffee, Tea or Me?

7 Life Changes and 8 Rules to Guide the Journey

My title refers to my career as a flight attendant – wonderful years in my life, during which I saw the world, married, had 2 children, divorced, kept flying. Finally, when flying was just too physically painful to continue, I obtained a position in our Catering office that took me to the end of my 32 airline years. And that's when the real changes began.....

Maybe the groundwork for the changes that lay ahead of me was laid during my 3 years in our Catering office. I had never operated a computer, had really never worked in an office before and I certainly didn't have much confidence that I could do a good job. But, in spite of my doubts, I did a very good job because I so loved what I was doing.

I've been fortunate – I loved flying and I loved working in Catering. I've had thirty-two years of career happiness, which is something of which to be proud. And it was loving the job that made me good at it; that made it so easy to be good at it.

Rule #1 – love what you do – have passion for your business. Your passion will make you excel almost automatically.

When I decided to retire and then to start my own company, I must admit I had no idea what I was undertaking. I'd barely worked in the business world, let alone run my own business. But by finding courses to help with the basics of entrepreneurship, I struggled ahead.

Change #1 – I gathered up all my nerve and dived into something new. It was terrifying, but you never know what you can accomplish until you try.

I had decided that my business should be about Customer Service (something I really knew well from my airline days) and I soon decided to be a trainer. I spent 3 months writing my own training programs and then I began to try to sell my programs to prospective clients. Yikes! What an eye-opener!

After the first round of turn-downs, I was a little less bright-eyed and bushy-tailed; after the second round I was questioning my ability and after the third round I was almost hostile to these prospects – which isn't the best attitude to have when selling!

This new life as an entrepreneur was a huge change for me – I had never worked harder for less money, longer hours and more worry. And with no results! Time for change #1 – I stopped cold-calling and started networking. Networking became my salvation, both of my sanity and of my success. And it was something I loved doing (see rule #1).

Change #2 – When one method of attack didn't work, I tried a new method – but I had the tenacity to keep trying until I found the method that works for me.

Rule #2 – never, ever, be afraid to try a different approach to a challenge. If it doesn't work one way, try another.

From my networking, I met two extraordinary women who gave me a couple of wonderful gifts.

The first woman told me that I should write and that people would love to hear my airline stories. I did write and I also worked my airline stories into my training programs. Amazingly to me people did love these stories and both were vastly improved by this gift.

Rule #3 – listen to others when they make suggestions to you. Their ideas are gifts.

Change #3 – I never thought my new direction would include writing. But I was flexible enough to give it a try and it was very successful.

The second woman taught me the gift of generosity in business. The way we act/react to our business contacts should be no different from the way we do to our friends and family. Generosity in business, just like in life, will come back to you.

Rule #4 – run your business with the morals and ethics that you run your personal life.

Networking also led me to volunteering – I was anxious to become part of some of the groups I joined and volunteering was just a natural extension. I personally volunteer with my professional association, my Board of Trade and the Arthritis Society. Volunteering has led to some good business contacts and even a couple of new clients, but the main reason for volunteering is that we all need to give back to the community that supports us.

I took time to mentor others – I don't mean coaching for money, but simply mentoring to be of help. During my company's 5 years, I've met many women who are just starting out. And I've eagerly supplied them with contacts and resources that might help them.

Mentoring is a warm fuzzy – you feel good doing it and if you enrich your colleagues, they'll always remember your kindness.

Change #4 – In hindsight, I realize that I didn't choose networking groups that are really right for me at first. But I was willing to realize that a group wasn't working for me and I was willing then to move on to a new group that may be a perfect fit.

I continue to believe that it's also important to do freebies – whether this involves a product or a service. Freebies are especially important if they expose all of us to a new group of prospects, but because it's a generous thing to do, even groups who can't afford us will benefit and they'll be so very grateful of your generosity.

Rule #5 – give your time freely to others and you'll all benefit (see rule #4).

When you meet another person whose company supplies the same products/services as you, don't think of her as a threat. Remember always that you're the only one who has your own personal style. Others might have the same product, but they don't have the same product with your special twist. And becoming close with your competition can result in a joint endeavor that would benefit both of you. Often, you can help your competition by taking over her excess business from time to time. And you'll both always have a wonderful commonality to help you discuss and plan future activities.

Rule #6 - keep your competition close; close enough to make them your allies.

One of the biggest changes that have occurred in my life as an entrepreneur is going from being a very social person, constantly in the public eye, to becoming a home-based business owner. The perils of being home-based are vast, primarily because of your isolation. You sit there in front of your computer and discover you have little idea of how others are managing.

Change #5 – I found that changing lifestyles from social to private was a huge adjustment. I felt I was on totally new ground without many resources to help myself along the way. This may happen to you also – know that this stage will pass and you'll learn how to adapt a new lifestyle that includes who you were with who you are now.

When I'd been in business for about 6 months, I started to run into a 'funk' – a period lacking in confidence of my ability. 'What am I doing here' became my mantra, followed quickly by 'What ever made me think I could make a success at this?' and ending with the terror of 'What if they find out how inept I am?'

This was not just a temporary attack – I'd often not even turn my computer on for 2 weeks. And I'd continue to spiral down the vortex of self-pity and self-doubt.

I believe that I would have eventually shut down my company were it not for the advice of another woman I'd met (see Rule #5). This woman was a motivational speaker with whom I had a working relationship. And when I'd call her to talk about my doubts, she'd always manage to give me a pep talk about my abilities to prosper. Her pep talks led me back to my computer and to my efforts to run my company. Eventually, after quite a few talks from her, I became able to give those pep talks to myself when I needed to and the more I did, the less often I needed to. This was a most wonderful gift!

A short time later, I was fortunate to meet another woman who, I discovered, is one of the most nurturing women I know. Whenever I had a small victory, she'd always say 'Good for you – I knew you'd do well at that' and after a while, I started to believe her and then believe in myself. Her support continues to be one of the most precious things in my life.

These two women are now very close friends – a transition from colleague to friend is a wonderful happening and I'm so fortunate to have them as part of my life. I cannot imagine being without them.

We've now formed a kind of Mastermind of 3. We meet monthly for lunch and we each take our turn talking about the past month's challenges and upcoming plans and hopes. We each give honest feedback and suggestions to each other and we value each other's advice so much simply because we trust each other so much.

Rule #7 – form a Mastermind group only with women you admire, trust and feel totally comfortable. Share everything with them – your good moments as well as your bad ones and really listen to their advice. Their caring will guarantee suggestions that will benefit you.

Change #6 – I was unaccustomed to relying on others for support and advice. It was a massive shift in approach and attitude for me. When I did learn to accept other's advice, my life was suddenly easier, partly because I felt so much less alone.

Everyone talks today about finding balance. I can tell you from experience that it's essential to your success as a business woman and as a person. I suspect, like all new entrepreneurs, you'll spend much much more time on your business than you ever did on a job – it's natural to want results quickly.

I personally spent so much time during the first 2 or 3 years that I ended up getting very sick 3 months in a row – the last of which ended in a hospital stay. Finally, I realized that some changes needed to be made. I made a decision that I would no longer choose to work as hard as I had been.

Rule #8 – see the warning signs of over-work. Don't be so rigid that you refuse to make changes that result in a kinder lifestyle – don't buy into the super-woman myth. Instead of being mediocre at many things, find whatever way you can to be superb with the few things that are important, really important.

For me, this required a massive change – I would need to not financially support my house any longer, but would sell it and move into an apartment where the financial demands on me would be greatly lessened.

This also came at a time when my first granddaughter arrived and I knew that I wanted to make changes that allowed me to have enough time to make her a part of my life. I needed to re-prioritize the important things in my life (my health, my family) and see them as a more important than my business priorities.

It's no longer critical that I work 24/7 because my living expenses are now much subordinate and this gives me time to spend on my other priorities.

Change #7 – I found and kept the courage to make whatever lifestyle changes are necessary for me. My business is not my life. When I realized that, I was able to make appropriate changes to include all the other important parts of my life. There is no greater achievement than balance and moderation in all parts of my life.

So, there are my 8 rules and 7 changes. It's been an amazing 5 years during which I've been constantly changing and renewing myself and changing and renewing my direction.

Change is good – renewal is outstanding and extraordinary. It is the best possible gift. Embrace yours!