

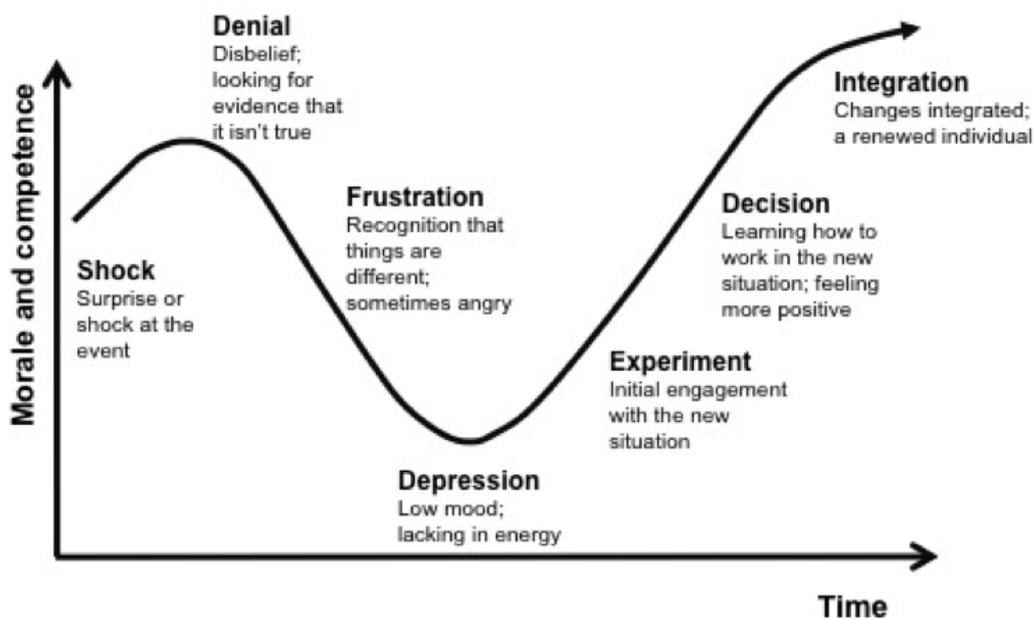
How To Deal with Emotional and Business Change During Covid 19

1 The Change Curve

Whenever we are faced with change it is often unexpected, and it is this aspect which can affect us emotionally, cognitively, mentally and physically. The Corona Virus Pandemic is a classic example of this unexpected change phenomena.

Yet, how we react to change has been well documented. In 1969, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross create a 'Grief Curve' to explain the five stages of change we go through during grief. This model has since been adapted by business to identify the change management processes and it is entirely relevant when we look at the effects of the pandemic on people and business.

The Kübler-Ross change curve



Some people don't actually get over the initial shock of the virus, and often 'progress' to living in denial. This is a view which has been levelled at many younger people who either don't believe they will get it, or if they do, it won't have a significant effect upon them.

Another group of people might quickly move out of shock and denial, but hit a brick wall of frustration as their previous working habits, schedules and communications have changed, and may never go back to what they were. In some cases, this can lead to depression.

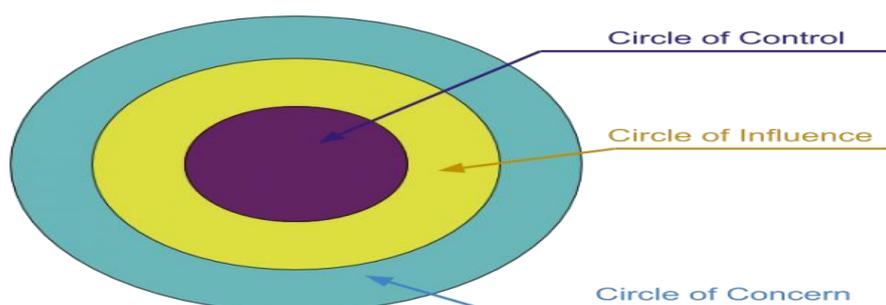
Others may be initially shocked, but then quickly accept the situation and some even see it as an opportunity to improve things from before, to start afresh, create a new business order. This cohort quickly move along the curve and start to experiment with new ways of doing business, maybe using new technology like Zoom and Microsoft Teams to remotely communicate with work colleagues and new businesses. In fact, this new way of working may well then become part of a 'new normal.'

Throughout all this change, the spotlight is also focused upon us individually. Our mental and emotional wellbeing may well be compromised, and we may struggle to come to terms with this potential threat to our own life, and the threat to our loved ones. This could even spiral out of control as we grasp for quick solutions and safe scenarios in our quest to find healthy ways exist. If this safety and security is established, our attention may turn to other aspects of our lives such as finances, work and fulfilment.

This situation has been well documented by Stephen Covey in his book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' (1989) when he talks about circles of control, concern and influence.

2 Circles of Control, Concern & Influence

Most people will have heard the cliché '*worry about the things you can control, not those that you can't*' and this is so simple, yet it can be so effective. Stephen Covey elaborated on this concept by talking about the three concentric circles ie control, concern and influence.



The outer **circle of concern** involves things that are out of our control and we can waste time **reacting** to issues we can't control such as the weather, people's opinions, the news. The inner **circle of control** involves things that we can control, and we can be **proactive** using our resources to achieve better outcomes ie how we interpret people's opinions about us, our attitudes and who we work for.

The secret is to reduce the size of the worry factor of the circle of concern, and at the same time, increase the size of your potential positive factors in the circle of control. This in itself may be a relief and it helps you to focus on what you can change.

To do this with even greater effectiveness, Covey suggested we create a circle between the circle of concern and the circle of control called the **circle of influence**. The idea being that there may well be some things that you are able to influence eg improving working relationships, understanding viewpoints of others, looking for the win-win situation. Thus, by being more proactive in the circle of influence, growth in this area is possible, and this, by its very nature, will decrease the size of the circle of concern.

3 Building Habits

Maybe the first task might be to complete the three circles in the diagram above – create a checklist of activities that you can influence, and this may then lead to better general and specific habits.

Secondly, we can often go with our first reaction to a problem, and this may not always be appropriate or effective in solving the challenge. By identifying with the Kubler-Ross Curve, we can reflect about where we are in relation to the curve, with an intention to move along and upwards more quickly. To achieve this, do a little stock take audit of your daily thoughts and actions to find out exactly where you are on the curve.

Thirdly, establish healthy and productive routines. By introducing structure to your day, you can map out your goals and objectives. However, there is a caveat, as by putting pressure on yourself to achieve in these uncertain times, where various restrictions are in place, your resolve and resilience may be compromised. So aim for more realistic.

goals and objectives, and reward yourself more often. Be prepared to flex and change these routines regularly as boredom and familiarity can lead to perceived failure.

Fourthly, remember the four pillars of mental wellbeing ie **1 Regular Exercise, 2 Balanced Diet, 3 Good Sleep Hygiene and 4 Being Connected** (online and with 2m face to face). Do these in various amounts each day and your mental health will be supplemented, rather than compromised.

We talk about eating five fruit and vegetables a day, so perhaps we should be talking about taking five mental health activities each day. Simple activities could be chosen from the list below:

- Exercise – indoors or preferably outdoors
- Gardening where you work outdoors, create a product, maybe work with others and you involve the sense of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing
- Talking, communicating and connecting with others – online socially and being able to be vulnerable with others ie sharing our fears
- Sleep hygiene – regular night time sleeping times, no late eating, reduced or no alcohol, no blue light in bedroom, lower bedroom temperature and get outside during the day to increase your exposure to natural light which can aid night time sleeping
- Diet that includes fruits and vegetables with a range of colours, less saturated fat or added sugars, smaller portions and probably less snacking between meals
- Meditation such as mindfulness, yoga, pilates
- Visualisation of goals and gratitude
- Singing on your own or with a group or choir – singing releases the feel good hormone serotonin and can actually reduce our pain levels
- Massage and smelling essential oils
- Writing down and capturing your stresses in a stress bucket or even a journal

Finally, good habits are established via willpower, or should I say, whypower. We know that willpower is finite and even the people with great willpower can sometimes crack. So unearth your reasons why you want to create a new habit and this will sustain you for longer.

Ross has over 30 years' educational experience and in this time has worked in over 1500 schools and businesses. His focus is on changing mindsets to reach potential in life, and as such runs certified courses in mental health, emotional confidence, habits, willpower, communication skills, growth mindsets and anger management. He writes for various educational and business journals, has published various books, is a regular speaker on the keynote conference circuit and is a National Trainer for Mental Health First Aid England (MHFA).

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