



Designing for life's changes

Helping people navigate change can win deep loyalty

Change is never easy. Whether it approaches gradually but inexorably (retirement), is the result of a conscious decision (going back to school), or is thrust upon us suddenly and without warning (health crisis), change casts us into unknown territory and demands of us new knowledge, skills, and behaviors. During periods of acute change, people feel particularly vulnerable. Companies that can help people weather storms, adjust to new conditions, or meet their personal goals will earn trust and build deeper relationships.

Today's tough economic times present companies with a huge opportunity. Many people have found themselves caught in the turmoil of job loss, tightening credit, or vanishing investments. No one knows what it all means, and no one can say what will come next. Companies that support people during times of transition will differentiate themselves from their competition today and secure the foundations of a thriving business tomorrow.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life's Changes*

1.

Take the lead

Change means confronting the unknown. Provide knowledge and know-how to help guide customers through periods of change.

2.

Allow for ebb and flow

No one's life stays the same. In order to remain relevant, craft offerings that allow for different levels of engagement over time.

3.

Get Personal

Needs and circumstances change continuously. Staying close to people will let you understand their needs and keep your offerings relevant.

4.

Smooth the way

Periods of change require new skills and taking those important first steps. Help people navigate the journey by breaking it into smaller, more manageable tasks.

5.

Connect to community

Change can feel lonely. Connect people with others who can support them along their path.



Giving birth, giving back

As her due date approached, Kalina was a wreck. She was pregnant with her first child and had decided that she would buy only organic products for her baby—everything from clothes to toys and especially the mattress—but she was overwhelmed by conflicting claims. A friend pointed her to the Golden Gate Mother’s Group, a nonprofit social network for new mothers in San Francisco.

The GGMG was there for her when she couldn’t find answers elsewhere. Now, she turns to the group first for down-to-earth advice about any baby-related question. She has become an active member and is dedicated to giving back to the community by posting her own opinions, learnings, and comments.

How might companies enable people to tap a larger network for guidance during times of transition?

Wii not?

At the age of 63 and recently divorced, Lynn elected to have gastric bypass surgery. She had struggled with her weight all her life, but was never able to stick with a weight-loss program. This seemed like her last chance to make a change.

Eligibility for the procedure requires that she stay in shape physically. Lynn was prepared for this, but didn’t know where to begin.

In a support chat room, she learned about the Wii Fit. It seemed less intimidating than other exercise regimens because it gave her goals and broke activities down into small segments. Now she’s a convert. She loves that the little character that represents her changes shape as she does. “It’s so encouraging. It lets me laugh at myself!”

How might we make the process of change less intimidating and more engaging?



Cable-cutting

Robert runs his household finances according to the same pragmatic principles he learned in engineering school. When he was laid off three months ago, he and his wife Sandy evaluated their options.

Cutting service expenditures topped the list, so Robert called each of his service providers to see what they could do to help his family through this tough time. “AT&T had us over a barrel,” he recalled. “They had us in a contract and that’s that.” But the Comcast rep listened and responded by lowering Robert’s monthly bill by \$30—guaranteed for the year. By working out an accommodation and warmly wishing his family good luck, the cable company turned Robert from an indifferent customer into a loyalist.

How might we build flexibility into our offerings to accommodate the changing needs of our customers?

Guidance for individual needs

Wegman’s, a premium East Coast grocery store, provides an in-store nutritionist to ease the burden of new diets, medical conditions, and health goals. Each week, Wegman’s posts a list of educational “tours” the nutritionist will offer: low-sodium products, smart choices for those with allergies, or options for people who are trying to watch their cholesterol. Free individual appointments are also available for those who have more specific dietary or health needs.

This can’t be the DMV

When Lisa moved east, she was reluctant to surrender her California driver’s license. It represented her long-held ties to her home state. Four years later, Lisa moved back home and went to apply for a new license. To her surprise, the DMV not only waived the driver’s test, but also gave her the same license number she had when she left. This small gesture helped welcome her home.



Pink-slip protection

Recently, Hyundai introduced the Assurance program, a promise to protect people during tough economic times. The plan lets customers return new Hyundai cars if they lose their jobs within a year of purchase. Now just a few months later, it seems like everybody’s following suit: Virgin Mobile features a “Pink Slip Protection Plan,” JetBlue will refund plane tickets, and GM and Ford followed Hyundai with programs to cover car payments during job loss.

Better than summer camp

Amy lives just outside Boston and has been going to HealthWorks for years. One thing she appreciates is the gym’s summer policy. Recognizing that many members travel, work, or just want to exercise outside during the summer months, HealthWorks allows them to put their memberships “on hold.” During these three months, Amy pays a nominal service charge and when she comes back, she doesn’t have to pay any reinstatement fee.

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you’ve been exposed to a few different examples, don’t be surprised if you start seeing *Life’s Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it’s the next new pattern.

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