



40 Things I've Learned About Change

By **Bill Jensen**, bill@simplerwork.com

July, 2025

Forty years ago this October, I launched The Jensen Group to make it easier for you to change, work smarter, and succeed faster.

Through successes and failures, over 1,000,000 surveys and interviews, and learning from amazing leaders, teammates, friends, clients, and mentors across the globe — here are the **top 40 things I've learned about change in 40 years**.

Honoring TLDR needs: Scan for just the **3—5 that are most useful to you**.

1. **Everything you do uses a portion of someone else's life.**
(We must have far greater understanding of, and respect for, how we use other people's time and attention to get our work done, and to make change happen.)
2. **We need a lot more empathy.** (Before we design or plan change, walk a mile in the changee's shoes. See: Design Thinking, Journey Design.)
3. **Change is always personal.** (Immutable truth. Stop driving it like it's not.)
4. **Change happens at the speed of sense-making.**
5. **Simplicity and storytelling are powerful tools for changing hearts and minds.**
(Timeless, hard-wired into our souls, and universally effective.)
6. **Where the magic happens is always outside of our comfort zone.**
7. **We need much more relationship-building and creating deep human connections during change processes.** (Organizational change sticks through personal connections. Workday Study: As AI usage grows, employees will crave even more human connection.)
8. **The hardest work for each of us in the 21st century:** Making sense of, prioritizing, selecting from, and acting on the overload that comes at us.
9. **We work in the Attention Economy.** (This is what today's outdated change models don't get. In a world overflowing with too much info, attention is a limited and valuable resource. Microsoft Study: Workers are **interrupted up to 275 times a day**. Ever shorter attention spans mean that **sense-making is highly personalized**, and takes advanced skills, powerful facilitation and conversations that connect the dots, creating actionable Ahas.)
10. **Know, Feel, Do.** Communication essentials, simplified. Every changee is seeking three things from you immediately: • "What's the **one thing** you want me to **know** about this change?" • "Why should I **care**?" and/or "Show me you **care** about me."
• "What's the **one thing** you want me to **do** first?" (Jensen Search for a Simpler Way Research)

- 11. People do not resist change. They resist...** • Poorly executed change
• Change truths withheld or spun • Leaders and managers who can't be trusted to have their backs • Their input not valued or leveraged • Tools and support that are not user-centered, not easy to use • and, **most importantly...** • Changes and change programs that do not enhance their personal ability to create and control their own destiny in a highly disruptive world.
- 12. Great leaders make change easier, better, more rewarding,** and more valued. They create a compelling vision, map our journey, and motivate us to join them on that journey. They create a safe space for us to take risks, and make more of a difference to those we serve. They help us grow.
(In short: **Great leaders and great leadership matters!**)
- 13. You must discover the difference between what senior leaders want and what is actually needed.** (There is *always* a difference! See 14, 15.)
- 14. We need more voices speaking the truth to power.** (Far too few of the workforce's change needs, realities, and truths make it up to C-Suite towers, and fewer still, are acted upon. Mostly what prevails are top-down truths of *morebetterfaster* and *cheaperfaster*.)
- 15. Most important change question all leaders must ask, relentlessly:**
"What's the one thing that is true that you think I don't want to hear."
(h/t, Beth Comstock)
- 16. Change Management, as is, must die. Then be reimaged.**
(Far too corporate-centered. Needs to be way more workforce-centered. Wake up! Al-ing today's models and approaches just makes things worse. See 1 — 17, especially 3.)
- 17. Ease of use, user-centeredness, and human-centeredness create the easiest paths to major changes.**
- 18. A bad system will beat a good person every time.** (h/t, W. Edwards Deming)
- 19. The biggest barrier to an amazing future for us all: Overdue mindset shifts.**

20. The Disruptive Law of 1:1 defines the AI Era: For every person who is empowered and is better, faster, more effective because of disruptive technologies... **There is also an equal, and opposite, impact.** Another person's life just got a whole lot more complicated, uncertain, and possibly perilous. **We must not abandon these people.** We must understand their needs and design better solutions. (Jensen Future of Work Research)

21. Seven skills needed to be our best in the AI Era: 1. Self-Awareness
2. Clear, Concise Communication, Compelling Presentations 3. Creativity, Curiosity, Imagination
4. Critical Thinking, Best Questions 5. Personal Agility: Rapidly Unlearn, Relearn
6. Empathy 7. Courage. (Jensen Future of Work Research)

22. Leaders must be held accountable to the People Science behind those seven skills. (Tracking how well — or poorly — those skills are developed and leveraged throughout the organization... Using workforce-centered metrics.)

23. Biggest fears for the AI Era: 1. Displaced by technology. 2. Loss of Humanness.
3. Can't adapt fast enough. 4. Inept leadership. (Jensen Future of HR Study)

24. Biggest hopes for the AI Era: 1. We put humanness, people first.
2. AI empowers my purpose, my ability to be of service. 3. I am freed to be my best.
4. Joy, happiness. (Jensen Future of HR Study)

25. The biggest change challenge of the AI Era: Unprecedented intensity of forced personal transformation and vulnerability. (Yes, previous industrial revolutions have forced massive shifts in jobs and employment. But never before could our tools outperform us without us controlling them. Regardless of our choices or preparation, all of us are now vulnerable to transformative forces beyond our control.)
AI agents will force many of us to question, explore, and reimagine our own identity and purpose — where **what it means to be uniquely human will emerge as central to the complete redesign of work.**

26. Top three Professional Priorities for mid-managers and below:
1. Create and control my own destiny. 2. Great people, great teamwork. 3. Making a difference.
(Jensen Future of HR Study)

27. The ultimate KPI: When our better angels enter the room.

(h/t, Sohail Inayatullah)

28. The illiterate of the future are not those who can't read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. (h/t, Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*.)

20. The 80/20 Rule of Inner Knowingness. 80% of us think we know who we are, but don't. And we have done only 20% of the work to truly know ourselves.

Know what makes you, you. (Jensen Future of Work Research)

30. Your path is yours alone to define, find, and explore.

(Many have realized that great leadership is not outside of ourselves — it's within.

They have had enough of the inequities or challenges built into today's systems.

They have visions for how amazing things should be. So they are charting different paths for themselves and others.) **This is possibly the most transformative period in history.**

Make sure you seize the opportunity to be your best You.

31. The journey changes you. It should change you. It leaves marks.

You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind.

(h/t, Anthony Bourdain)

32. Make yourself more unfuckwithable. (h/t, Vishen Lakhiani)

33. Your company is not loyal to you. Loyalty goes to profits and growth, not people.

(Understand this deeply when you are asked to make sacrifices and take on hardships in the name of change. Evaluate which hardships *also* benefit you, your career, and what matters to you. And which hardships do not. Act accordingly.)

34. Your power is in your social network: Teammates, friends, connections, and communities. Your social capital — the relationships and connections that shape how work actually gets done — is how change happens.

35. The most dangerous bias of all: Confirmation bias. Searching for or interpreting information in ways that confirm your preconceptions. (h/t, Peter Diamandis)

36. Do one thing every day that scares you. (h/t, Eleanor Roosevelt)

37. Courage: Knowing it might hurt, doing it anyway.

Stupidity: Same thing.

That's why life is hard. (h/t, Jeremy Goldberg)

38. The future of work begins with us. What will our legacy be?

A generation or two from now our grandchildren will ask us,

“What did you do to create and protect our future?”

39. Pissing is something no one else can do for you.

Only you can piss for you. (h/t, Zen Master Morinaga Soko, on the personal accountability for change. Only YOU can change you.)

40. Life is precious. No one lays on their deathbed thinking, “I should have spent more time at work, or going to more meetings, or keeping my boss happy....” **No!...**

What matters: Your loved ones — friends and family — your health, freedom, the pursuit of happiness, making a difference in people's lives, clean air, food, and water, how we treat each other, living a life filled with experiences that make great stories, telling people you love them, living your values. And so much more.

Live your best life! THAT is change mastered.

41. Force-Multiplying Bonus: Have FUN!

Create a journey where joy, laughter, happiness, play, and celebrations bring people together as they work, change, and succeed.