

### 3 The Theory

The message, I hope, is clear: the times are changing and we must change with them. Yes, but how? In Chapter 1 I argued that because most people do not like change, change is forced upon them by crisis and discontinuity. Thrown up against things, or into new arenas, we confront new possibilities and discover bits of ourselves we never knew were there. Discontinuity is a great learning experience, but only if we survive it.

My daughter was smitten by an unexplained viral illness earlier this year. She is 22. These illnesses knock the stuffing out of the sufferer and she had to drop everything for a year – work, friends, study, even the television. It was, for her, a massive discontinuity and profoundly depressing. Getting better slowly she went to a meeting one evening on 'Gratitude'. 'If they had asked me to speak,' she told me, 'I would have said that I was grateful for my illness. I have learnt so much.' And changed so much, I wanted to add.

Change, however, does not have to be forced on us by crisis and calamity. We can do it for ourselves. If changing is, as I have argued, only another word for learning, then the theories of learning will also be theories of changing. Those who are always learning are those who can ride the waves of change and who see a changing world as full of opportunities not damages. They are the ones most likely to be the survivors in a time of discontinuity. They are also the enthusiasts and the architects of new ways and forms and ideas. If you want to change, try learning one might say, or more precisely, if you want to be in control of your change, take learning more seriously. This chapter, therefore, is an

introduction to the theory of learning, which is the theory at the heart of changing.

'A theory of learning?' the Professor of Medicine said to me when he heard what I was writing, 'I never knew there was such a thing.' It is indeed ironic that those who teach us, particularly in our universities, are so often ignorant of the basic principles of learning. The Professor had never heard of Kolb, who first convinced me that learning is a cycle of different activities, although I have used different words from his in this chapter. Nor had he heard of Bateson or of Argyris and Schon who persuaded me that learning is a double loop, that there is learning to solve a particular problem and then, more importantly, there is the habit of learning, the learning to learn to do such things, that second loop which can change the way you live. He knew not of Revans, the unsung hero of Action Learning, who showed me that the best learning happens in real life with real problems and real people and not in classrooms with know-all teachers. There were others, too, he knew not, Dewey who said, many years ago, that learning was a process of discovery and that we must each be our own discoverer, others could not do it for you; or Illich who thought that we would be better off without schools which were concerned with indoctrination not teaching. He had, sadly, heard a bit about Skinner who believes that learning is training, that teaching is producing a conditioned response as when your dog responds to your whistle.

There are many others, for learning has intrigued mankind for centuries. This chapter is my personal anthology, turned into my own images and metaphors, for reasons which will, I hope, become clear.

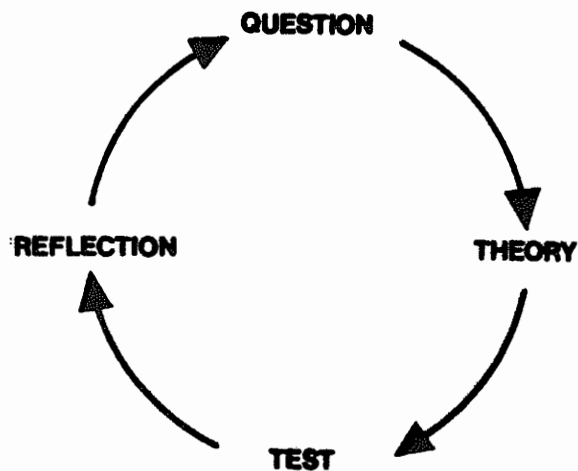
#### A Theory Of Learning

The man stood in front of the class. 'Now learn this,' he said

writing an equation on the board. We wrote it in our books. Three months later we wrote it out again in an examination paper. If the second time of writing was the same as the first, we had learnt it. I exaggerate, but only a little. That was my early concept of learning. Later on, I came to realize that I had learnt nothing at school which I now remember except only this – that all problems had already been solved, by someone, and that the answer was around, in the back of the book or the teacher's head. Learning seemed to mean transferring answers from them to me.

There was nothing about change in all of that. Nor, in fact, was there much about learning as it really is. Real learning, I came to understand, is always about answering a question or solving a problem. 'Who am I?' 'How do I do this?' 'What is the reason for ...?' 'How does this work?' 'How do I achieve this ambition?' The questions range from the immense to the trivial, but when we have no questions we need no answers, while other people's questions are soon forgotten.

It is best, I realized, to think of learning as a wheel divided into four parts:



I draw it as a wheel to emphasize that it is meant to go round and round. One set of questions, duly answered and tested and reflected upon, leads on to another. It is life's special treadmill. Step off it and you ossify, and become a bore to others. The trouble is that for most of us for much of the time the wheel does *not* go round. It gets stuck or blocked.

Mankind, I am sure, is born to learn. One has only to look at little children to see that wheel turning furiously. Why, we must wonder, does it slow down for most of us as we grow older? If we knew more about that we would know more about our reluctance to change and the consequent need for crisis and calamity to budge us into action. This chapter, therefore, is really about the things in us and in our surroundings which *stop* or *block* the wheel. First, however, we need a brief introduction to the wheel itself.

#### *The Wheel of Learning*

Logically, the wheel starts with a *question*, a problem to be solved, a dilemma to be resolved, a challenge to meet. If it doesn't start there, and if it is not *our* question, we shall not push the wheel round to the stage of Reflection. It won't become part of us. I could learn a poem by heart at school to recite the next morning, but to forget by lunchtime. This was learning to answer *other* people's questions. Just occasionally the poem would touch some chord in me, some unspoken question; it would provide some clue to the emerging mystery of life – those poems I remember still. The question, in other words, does not have to be some kind of examination question, more often it is a sort of reaching for, a questioning, a need to explore. Learning is discovery, Dewey said, but discovery doesn't happen unless you are looking. Necessity may be the mother of invention but curiosity is the mother of discovery.

Questions need possible answers. The next stage provides them. *Theories* is too grand a term. I use it only to

emphasize that this stage is investigating *possible* ideas. It is a stage of speculation, of free-thinking, of re-framing, of looking for clues. One way is to open the equivalent of a cookbook or, in my case, a series of cookbooks in search of that elusive formula which will produce a culinary miracle in half-an-hour from my random collection of left-overs. There are other ways to find possible answers; good friends, hired coaches, or even one's own imagination.

Ideas and Theories can never be enough. At this stage of the wheel all is still fancy. 'Dreams,' as my children used to remind me, 'give wings to fools.' The theories have to be *tested* in reality, the next stage of the wheel. Some will work, some won't. My sauce is always lumpy - why? Until I know why, which is the stage of *Reflection*, the final stage, I will not have learnt. Change only sticks when we understand why it happened. Too often have I invited chief executives to explain their philosophy only to listen to a bare record of their achievements, with no interpretation, no theory to explain them, no philosophy expounded. Such men have not changed and will not change. They have learnt nothing from their success which makes it unlikely that they will be able to repeat it.

The wheel, however, is difficult to turn. For some it never gets started. They have no questions and seek no answers. Content or dull depending on your viewpoint, they will not voluntarily learn or change.

There are those, too, who stick at the Question stage. Like small children they delight in asking why, or how, or when, or where, and as long as they get an answer, any answer, they are satisfied for it is the questions which fascinate them, not the answer. They don't learn and others don't learn much from their questions. They are life's Inspectors or Auditors; useful, no doubt, but irritating.

The next stage, Theory, has its own specialists. They are the bad Academics, full of answers to other people's questions. They teach the answer first and assume the

question. Knowledge for its own sake is what motivates these people, they are fact-collectors who know a lot and have, in a fuller sense, learnt little. I have a friend who turns every conversation into a lecture, on anything. He has read a lot and forgotten nothing and is eager to share it with anyone who will listen. At last I have learnt how to enjoy his company, to come with a question to which I wanted an answer and which he could always provide.

The Testing stage has its own enthusiasts, the Action Men or Pragmatists. No time for theory or for thinking, their immediate reaction to a problem is to attack it with the tools nearest to hand. Energy conquers all, they believe, and if at first it doesn't work, try and try again. Often it does work. The trouble is they don't know why. 'I kick it, that usually does the trick' is their formula. Success without prior thought or subsequent reflection does not help you to repeat the process or to improve on it, although it does get the problem moving. They can be effective, these pragmatists, but find it hard to communicate their secret to other people because they have not gone through the other segments of the wheel.

Lastly there are those who get stuck at the Reflection stage. Endlessly they rehearse the past, seeking for better explanations of what went wrong or what went right. They are the Pundits amongst us. They have learnt because they have been round the wheel but there they have stopped. One lesson is enough; they have made up their minds and feel no need for further explanation. Busy people often have no time for more curiosity. They formed their opinions long ago and see no cause to change them. 'Consistent' we call them if we agree with them, 'bigots' if we don't.

Most of the time, most of us do not go through all the four segments of this wheel. I describe it here to emphasize how difficult true learning is and why the sort of deliberate change that goes with learning is so rare. This sort of learning, the one from experience and life, is the one that

matters if we are to change. It is not to be confused with more trivial definitions of learning:

- Learning is *not* just knowing the answers. That is *Mastermind* learning at its best, rote learning at its most boring and conditioned response at its most basic. It does not help you to change or to grow, it does not move the wheel.
- Learning is *not* the same as study, nor the same as training. It is bigger than both. It is a cast of mind, a habit of life, a way of thinking about things, a way of growing.
- Learning is *not* measured by examinations, which usually only test the Theory stage, but only by a growing experience, an experience understood and tested.
- Learning is *not* automatic, it requires energy, thought, courage and support. It is easy to give up on it, to relax and to rest on one's experience, but that is to cease to grow.
- Learning is *not* only for the intellectuals, who often shine at the thinking stage, but are incurious and unadventurous and therefore add little to their experience as they go through life.
- Learning is *not* finding out what other people already know, but is solving our own problems for our own purposes, by questioning, thinking and testing until the solution is a new part of our life.

### The Lubricants Of Change

The wheel of learning, I have emphasized, is difficult to start and hard to keep moving. Most of us don't succeed most of the time. We get stuck at one or other segment and only a crisis or calamity can then move us on. Luckily there are some lubricants which make it easier - 'the necessary

conditions of comfortable change'. There are three of these lubricants, each of which needs some interpretation. Leave them out or screen them out and change or learning is effectively blocked.

#### 1. *A proper selfishness*

This is a responsible selfishness. I am often tempted to observe that the Christian injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself gives the neighbour a rather poor deal since few people seem to love or even like themselves that much.

Unfortunately, however, self-hate or just a lack of some 'positive self-regard' is no way to start learning. I am not advocating a narcissistic self-indulgence. I am suggesting, on the basis of good evidence, that those who learn best and most, and change most comfortably, are those who

- (a) take responsibility for themselves and for their future;
- (b) have a clear view of what they want that future to be;
- (c) want to make sure that they get it; and
- (d) believe that they can.

It looks easy. It seldom is. Taking a view of one's future requires, first of all, that you believe that there will be a future. There are times, for all of us, when that seems doubtful. In those moods there is no learning, no changing. Then there is the question of what sort of future would we like it to be, for us. Sensibly, selfishly, it should fit our talents and our abilities, but we are sometimes the last people to know what those are. It should not be a fantasy future - that is escapism, but what *is* reality, we may well ask.

The exercises at the end of this chapter are intended as one way to focus attention on these intractable questions. We may never get the answers right but unless we take a view we shall be mere flotsam on the waves of life. Fred Hirsch, an economist and philosopher, described what

happens to many people under a pervasive materialism. We end up, he suggested, not by working for what we *need* but for what we *want*, for the 'positional goods' that keep us abreast or ahead of the notional Joneses. It's a no-win situation for there will always be more Joneses to keep up with. It is unthinking, follow-my-neighbour, selfishness, not proper self-responsibility.

## 2. *A way of re-framing*

The second of the lubricants or necessary conditions is particularly useful in the second stage of the wheel of learning. Re-framing is the ability to see things, problems, situations or people in other ways, to look at them sideways, or upside-down; to put them in another perspective or another context; to think of them as opportunities not problems, as hiccups rather than disasters.

Re-framing is important because it unlocks problems. Like an unexpected move on a chessboard it can give the whole situation a new look. It is akin to lateral thinking at times, to using the right side of the brain (the creative pattern-forming side) to complement the more logical left side.

To conceive of one's life without the word 'retirement' being relevant is to re-frame it. To think of a job as 2000 hours in a year instead of 45 weeks of 5 long days is to re-frame it, and by so doing to open up new possibilities. A federal organization is a re-framing of a decentralized organization, with important consequences.

In business it has long been fashionable to ask 'What business are you in?' Is it cigarettes you are selling, or stress reducers, or social ease, or just a drug? The re-framing will have important consequences for the way the product is projected, distributed and priced.

Entrepreneurs, when they are successful, often achieve their success through intuitive re-framing, connecting what

was before unconnected, putting together an opportunity and a need.

I remember the year when Britain was short of potatoes – the last year there was a drought. A friend and I went shopping for potatoes only to find there were none. Weeks later he asked me what I had done as a result.

'Bought rice instead,' I said. 'Why?'

'I rang a contact in India,' he replied, 'bought one thousand tons of potatoes to be shipped to the UK at a landed cost of £130 a ton and sold them in advance for £250 a ton.'

'But, Percy,' I said, calculating quickly, 'that's ...'

'Yes,' he interrupted, 'but don't worry, it didn't happen, the Indians refused an export permit.'

Still, his re-framing nearly made him £120,000, while I bought rice.

Businesses, at their best, re-frame all the time, re-thinking what they now call their portfolios of mini-businesses, re-defining those businesses, and their markets, checking to make sure that there are as many growing businesses as declining ones. Individuals need to do the same, looking at their portfolios of talents, recognizing that what might be a disadvantage in one situation could be an asset in another, as when Mary realized that her problem – she could only talk naturally to people when she didn't have to look at them – made her a natural for telephone selling.

Some people are natural re-framers. Most of us cannot do it alone. Other people always help. Friendly groups help one to re-think the problem or the situation. It helps if they are people outside the problem because they will bring different ideas to bear. Group-think is dangerous because like-minded groups have like-minded ideas and find it hard amongst themselves to re-frame any situation.

I am a great believer in 'Irish Education' after the Irishman who reputedly said, 'How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?' Truth, said David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, springs from argument amongst friends. Even if we



don't convince the friends, we often help ourselves to see things in a new way as we look for new angles in the argument.

Metaphors and analogies help. Schon's idea of the 'displacement of concepts' mentioned in Chapter 1 as an aid to creativity is a useful discipline, to try to find other metaphors, or words from other fields, to describe the problem or the dilemma. There are other drills and disciplines to stretch the mind, most usefully in some of Edward de Bono's books.

We are all the prisoners of our past. It is hard to think of things except in the way we have always thought of them. But that way solves no problems and seldom changes anything. It is certainly no way to deal with discontinuity. We must accustom ourselves to asking 'Why?' of what already is and 'Why not?' to any possible re-framing. It can become a useful game.

For instance, why do women take their husband's name when they marry? Why not keep their own, or both choose a new common name? Why do we make marriage vows for ever, and then break them? Why not make them for shorter terms, and then renew them? Why do so many houses have their best rooms in the front, looking over the parking space? Why not put all entrances at the side? And so on ...

Upside-down thinking, re-framing, is largely a habit of mind. Those who want to learn in life, and to change comfortably, need to practise it.

### 3. *A Negative Capability*

Keats defined 'negative capability' in his letters in 1817, as 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts'. I would extend the meaning to include the capacity to live with mistakes and failures without being downhearted or dismayed.

Learning and changing are never clear and never sure. Whenever we change we step out a little into the unknown.

We will never know enough about that unknown to be certain of the result. We will get it wrong some of the time. Doubt and mistakes must not be allowed to disturb us because it is from them that we learn. Theories are no good, Karl Popper argued, unless it is possible to prove them wrong. If they are bound to be right they are either tautologies, saying nothing useful, or trivial, saying nothing important.

Entrepreneurs, the successful ones, have on average nine failures for every success. It is only the successes that you will hear about, the failures they credit to experience. Oil companies expect to drill nine empty wells for every one that flows. Getting it wrong is part of getting it right. As with my friend and the potatoes, if you do not try you will not succeed and if it fails, there is always another day, another opportunity. Negative capability is an attitude of mind which learners need to cultivate, to help them to write off their mistakes as experience. It helps to get your first failures early on; the later ones are then less painful. Those who have a gilded youth, in which success leads on to success, are sometimes the least experimental and the most conservative as they grow older because the fear of failure looms larger.

We were about to appoint a new Professor. The person in question was well-known to us, a brilliant lecturer, an authority in his field, a sought-after consultant. Why then were there so many unspoken reservations in the faces around the table? Someone then captured it for us: 'The trouble is,' he said, 'Richard has no decent doubt.' Without that decent doubt there was no questioning, no learning, no deliberate change. To Richard, certainty was precious, a negative capability something he would not understand.

We learn by our mistakes, as we always tell ourselves, not from our successes; but perhaps we do not really believe it. We should, for we change by exploration not by retracing well-known paths. We start our learning with uncertainties

and doubts, with questions to be resolved. We grow older wondering who we will be and what we will do. For organizations as for individuals life is a book still to be written. If we cannot live with these uncertainties we will not learn and change will always be an unpleasant surprise.

Negative capability, that capacity to live with uncertainty and mistake, is not given to everyone. Keats complained that Coleridge did not have it and missed a trick or two thereby. It helps, clearly, to have a belief that overrides the uncertainty. For some it is a feeling that their book of life is already written, that they are merely turning the pages. For others it is a belief in a superior being, a God. For myself, I have become convinced of the truth behind the Coda of Julian of Norwich, a holy lady in fourteenth century Britain: 'All will be well, and all manner of thing will be well', she said, again and again. Believe that, although one cannot know in what way all will be well, and a negative capability is easy.

### The Blocks To Change

It is, unfortunately, all too easy to stop the lubricants reaching the wheel. A proper selfishness, re-framing and a negative capability are fragile. It is easier to stop them than to encourage them, often unintentionally. The principal blocks are listed here.

#### *The 'They' syndrome*

Mary was divorcing her army husband. Where would she live, I asked, when she had to leave her army apartment. 'They haven't told me yet,' she said.

'Who are they?' I asked.

'They haven't told me who they are yet, have they?' she replied, irritated at my seeming stupidity.

It is easy to laugh but once I waited outside the door of the Personnel Manager of the multinational company of my youth. A wily old Scot passed by, a veteran of that place and a wise counsellor.

'What are you waiting for, laddie?' he asked.

'I am waiting to see what they are planning for me.'

'Och, invest in yourself, my boy, don't wait for them. Invest in yourself, if you don't why should they?'

It was one of those timely triggers. Until that moment I was leaving it all to 'them', I had no sense of personal responsibility for my own future. That had been delegated to the Personnel Department. 'They' would tell me. Unfortunately, 'they' wondered why I had been so lackadaisical about my own development and did not, as Jock forecast, see any great reason to continue their investment in my future unless I also invested in it.

Too many delegate their futures and their questions to some mysterious 'they'. 'They' will set the syllabus for life just as 'they' set the syllabus for our courses at school. 'They' know what is best, 'they' must know what they are doing. 'They' are in charge, leave it to 'them'. The phrases and excuses are endless. One of the strange things about growing older is the gradual realization that 'they' don't know, that the Treasury is *not* all-wise, that 'they' are on the whole just like you, muddling through, and not very interested in you anyway.

#### *Futility/humility*

Learning starts with a belief in oneself. It is for all of us a fragile belief, easily shattered. In my early days in that big company, I found myself in Malaysia with, effectively, a license to wander through the departments. I came across what seemed to me to be some gross inefficiencies. I worked

out some better options, sent them to the Operations Manager and waited – for his thanks. He sent for me.

'How long have you been out here?' he asked.

'Six months,' I replied.

'And how long has this company been successfully doing business here?'

'About fifty years, I suppose.'

'Quite so, fifty-four in fact; and do you suppose that in six months you know better than the rest of us and our predecessors in fifty-four years?'

I asked no more questions for the next three years, had no more ideas, made no more proposals. My social life prospered, I recall, but I stopped learning, and growing, and changing.

If one remark killed my belief in myself in that place, one can easily work out why it is that the unemployed or the newly redundant have little urge or energy to turn that wheel of learning. All *they* want is to turn the clock back and to have the same job again. We have made the 'job' so essential to a man's concept of himself, and now to many a woman's, that the loss of it, often through no fault of his own, can shatter his sense of identity, of personal worth, of self-esteem, for a while at least.

Self-doubt is pernicious. Humble, self-doubting people, may ask the questions but they do not press for answers or for action. 'Others need or deserve it more than I' they say, seeking always the back of the queue even if the queue is really only a huddle. John needs my help, the firm cannot spare me, my needs can wait. The selfishness is laudable, often, but the learning gets postponed. Other people become a prop for or an excuse for our lack of self-responsibility.

Self-doubters often fear success. Success puts more pressure on them to take more responsibility for even more action. Failure for some is easier to handle, particularly if you plan for it. David, his teachers noted, although a clever

boy, had stopped working some months before his big exams. They tried to coax him back to work with forecasts of what he might achieve. They tried to frighten him with forecasts of what he might *not* achieve. Nothing worked. He did as badly as they feared, but he had his excuse, he had done no work. His failure was not an indictment of his ability but only of his attitude. His own conception of himself as a clever lad, was untouched. They call it a form of 'attribution theory'; it is a way of dodging failure, of not learning in order to protect a fragile sense of self. He won't start to learn again until he is strong enough in his self-confidence to take success or failure in his stride.

#### *The theft of purposes*

Proper, responsible selfishness, involves a purpose and a goal. It is that goal which pulls out the energy to move the wheel. Diminish that goal, displace it or, worst of all, disallow it and we remove all incentive to learn or to change. Proper selfishness, however, recognizes that the goal needs to be tuned to the goals of the group, or the organization, or society, as well as being in line with our own needs and our own talents. Only improper selfishness sets goals at odds with the bits of humanity that matter to oneself.

It is tempting to impose our goals on other people, particularly on children or our subordinates. It is tempting for society to try to impose its priorities on everybody. The strategy will however be self-defeating if our goals, or society's goals, do not fit the goals of the others. We may get our way but we don't get their learning. They may have to comply but they will not change. We have pushed out their goals with ours and stolen their purposes. It is a pernicious form of theft which kills the will to learn. The apathy and disillusion of many people in organizations, the indifference and apparent indolence of the unemployed is often due to the fact that there is no room for their purposes or goals in



our scheme of things. Left goal-less, they comply, drift or rebel.

In a sensible world the goals are negotiated. The concept of the do'nut in Chapter 5 allows the organization to dictate the core and the perimeter of one's role, but allows discretion in the middle with the purposes of that discretion to be agreed. It is so, or could be so, with much of life. Responsible selfishness knows that there are core duties and necessary boundaries but also that there must be room for self-expression. Squeeze it out, as tidy-minded bureaucrats so often do, and we kill any motivation to learn.

#### *The missing forgiveness*

I asked an American the secret of his firm's obviously successful development policy. He looked me straight in the eye. 'Forgiveness,' he said. 'We give them big jobs and big responsibilities. Inevitably they make mistakes, we can't check them all the time and don't want to. They learn, we forgive, they don't make the mistake again.'

He was unusual. Too many organizations use their appraisal schemes and their confidential files to record our errors and our small disasters. They use them to chastise us with, hoping to inspire us, or to frighten us to do better. It might work once but in future we will make sure that we do not venture far enough from the beaten track to make any mistake. Yet no experiment, no test of new ideas, means no learning and no change. As in organizations, so it can be in families.

The evidence is quite consistent, if you reward the good and ignore or forgive the bad, the good will occur more frequently and the bad will gradually disappear. A concern over trouble in the classroom led to research into the way teachers allocated praise and blame. About equally, it seemed, except that all praise was for academic work and all blame was for behaviour. The teachers were coached to *only* give praise, for both academic work and good behaviour and

to *ignore* the bad. It worked. Within a few weeks unruly behaviour had almost disappeared.

More difficult than forgiving others is to forgive oneself. That turns out to be one of the real blocks to change. We as individuals need to accept our past but then to turn our backs on it. Organizations often do it by changing their name, individuals by moving house, or changing spouses. It does not have to be so dramatic. Scrapbooks, I believe, are useful therapy – they are a way of putting the past to bed, decorously. Then we can move forward.

### Putting The Theory To Work

If we want to change comfortably and deliberately we each have to start turning our own personal wheel of learning. The lubricants will make it easier – some proper selfishness, a constant effort to re-frame our bit of the world, and a readiness to forgive yourself.

Give yourself space, a purpose and goals to reach, questions to answer: find some friends to be your mentors, walk in other worlds, don't be afraid to be wrong.

It is, of course, easier to write or say than to do. Some exercises help, if you can organize yourself to do them and to use a partner or a friend to help you reflect upon them.

#### Exercise 1

Draw a line on a piece of paper to represent your life, from birth to death, and mark with a cross where you are now on that line. Think about it a bit, but not for too long; this is an impressionistic exercise not a precise one. Most people will draw a line something like the one below. Do yours before you read on.



In effect it is a line over time going up and down. What, however, do the ups and downs represent? The answer will tell you something about your real priorities in life. Where did you put the cross? The position will tell you something about the proportion of your life which you still feel is ahead of you, with time, probably, for a good Third Age. Does the line go upwards at the end or downwards? The answer will tell you something about your secret thoughts about the future. Most people feel good about it, in some modified way, and point their lines upwards.

### Exercise 2

Write your own obituary to appear in your favourite paper or journal. Assume that it is written by a good friend who knows you well and understands the 'you' behind the facts. Don't write more than 200 words.

People find this difficult to do but useful if they do it and then show it to a good friend. It is difficult because it requires you to envisage your own death as a real event. To be able to do this can be a big release because it allows you to think in more concrete terms about the long period between now and your death.

The exercise forces you to stand at the end of your life and to look backwards. It puts what you are doing now into a new perspective and forces you to work out what you would like to be remembered for. It is an exercise in very personal re-framing.

### Exercise 3

Imagine yourself asking ten friends to list one quality each which they liked or admired in you. List those qualities, then against each list two activities where those qualities *have* been useful in the past and one type of different activity where they *could* conceivably be useful. Better still, ask ten friends to do it for you.

It is difficult to do this objectively by yourself, but worth

trying. The point is to accentuate the positive in you and to conceive of other areas where your talents might be useful. It is, in a small way, a practice in liking yourself.

### Exercise 4

Now, and only now, having done the others, list five things you would like to have achieved in three years' time. Describe in a little detail how the achievement will be measured or observable and set down what practical things need to be done to start work on them.

This, of course, is putting the wheel of learning and of deliberate change into motion. It is surprising how easy it can be to do what we want to do when we know what it is that we want. Changing is exciting, fun and not too difficult if we see it as learning, learning in my sense, learning that we control and that we want.

I am more and more sure that those who are in love with learning are in love with life. For them change is never a problem, never a threat, just another exciting opportunity. It does, however, require what you might call a positive mental attitude.

Earlier this year we had to move out of our home for nine months while urgent repairs were made to the foundations. It was going to be a great nuisance and inconvenience. At first we were minded to minimize the inconvenience and camp out in makeshift accommodation next door. Then we decided to turn it into an opportunity, an opportunity to live in another part of town in a very different sort of home and community, to treat it like a foreign posting. It was more inconvenient, but now we call it exciting, fun, adventure and a bit of positive learning. Bad news became good news, change was learning.