

# The Change Agent

First **ARIANE DE BONVOISIN**

transformed her own life. Then she started a company that can help you remake yours.

**FOR ME**, at the humble age of thirty-one, there were actually a few things that I needed to change: I wanted to get out of the corporate world, break off a relationship I knew was wrong, start a business that could make a difference in people's lives, write a book about it, lose weight (finally) and really listen to that inner microphone that was always calling my name.

So the job was big. I was the managing director of a \$500 million fund for one of the largest media companies in the world. I was at the top of the ladder, but it was the wrong ladder, leaning up against the wrong wall. I didn't feel any sense of meaning in what I was doing; I wasn't pursuing a passion, and I wasn't being creative in any way. Externally, the relationship was perfect. The guy, named in *People* magazine's "America's Top 50 Bachelors," was all right on paper. Internally, though, there was no soul connection. I knew it was wrong, but the truth was, I didn't want to be single in New York (again).

As for starting a business, I had this idea to help people through life changes, specifically the first thirty days of any life change. I'd gone through so many already: I'd grown up in six countries, attended seven schools, had numerous jobs.... But who was I? I wasn't an entrepreneur, you see—I'd never identified myself that way—and I was definitely not a writer, either. Then there was the weight issue. I'd been heavy during my teens and felt unattractive. In my twenties, as I struggled to stay "on track," I ate my emotions. Finally, that inner microphone, the one that wakes me up in the morning and always tells me where I should be heading and what changes I should be making, couldn't be ignored anymore. I think that Gloria Steinem put it

best: "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off."

How did I pull off all the changes? To begin with, I got honest. No use pretending anymore that all was well. If you want to make a change, ask yourself, "What am I not being honest about?" Everyone knows the truth. We say we don't know what we want or what's right...but really we do. We just don't want to admit it, because it often involves consequences and hard work. And our lives are ruled by excuses: I'm too old, it's not my nature, it's too difficult, it's going to take time, people won't approve, I don't have any expertise, I'm not smart enough, it's risky, it's going to upset my family—and on and on. What's yours? Excuses come from what I have learned to identify as "the liar" in us, another inner voice but this time a limiting one that prefers safety to facing any inkling of fear. As Susan Jeffers says in her book *Feel the Fear...and Beyond*, "Pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the bigger underlying fear that comes from a feeling of helplessness." So trust life. Trust yourself. There is still plenty of time. Don't let anyone define your nature. Ask yourself, "Who would I be without my excuses, without my story?" What do you cling to? The story about your age, your family, your lack of intelligence, your pattern in relationships? These stories are not who you are; they are not your identity. Choose not to define yourself this way, and instead create space for a new story.

Second, recognize that you have a "change résumé." Many people tell me, "I'm so bad at change." And yet the reality is, you are great at change but don't really know it. Think about it—who you are today is a combination of all the changes you've had to face

You have a choice to have your inner life and outer life be in sync, says de Bonvoisin, who believes strongly in the power of personal transformation.

## WHAT MAKES YOU GOOD AT CHANGE?

1. Having positive beliefs and a sense of optimism.
2. Knowing that something good comes from any change.
3. Remembering how strong and capable you are.
4. Not letting excuses and negative emotions stop you.
5. Accepting that change is inevitable and stopping resistance to it.
6. Being mindful of the stories you tell yourself and others about who you are, what your language and your thoughts are.
7. Finding the bigger meaning in all this.
8. Having a support team around you.
9. Being able to take action and take care of yourself; having a clear and strong intention and following it through with a plan.

in your life and the ones you've initiated. You've already been through several dozen changes; you've just never acknowledged yourself for that. Everyone has what I call a "change muscle," a part of you that knows how to change, is made for change and can get you through any change, even the hardest you can imagine. You are so much more capable of change than you think—you are smarter, more intuitive and stronger than you've ever been told. The core of the human spirit comes out during times of change and transition. I remember one of the things that really made me change: I got sick of disappointing myself yet again. Got fed up with playing small, with coming up on another



January and facing issues I knew I hadn't addressed, with living two lives—my inner life and my external, "trying to be in control" life. I wanted to be and do what my soul came here for, what God wanted me to fully express. That was the beginning of going from the pain of not changing to finding my power, bit by bit.

The next step is to change the amount of space that your >112

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## A Woman in Full

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But it's hard to imagine anyone as fortunate as her mother. "I have to say that the last ten years have been the best years of my life," von Furstenberg says. "When you get older, you look at yourself, you look at your children, you look at your work, the houses you live in, your friends, even your face; you look at the books you read, the food you eat. If all of it is coherent, if all of it makes sense, then you can really say you have had a successful life, and this is who I am—it all works!"

Work remains central to her own happiness, of course. "I don't know anyone who enjoys work as much as she does," Diller observes. But von Furstenberg also derives great satisfaction from mentoring others, particularly the women who work for her. "In my company, 97 percent of the people are women," she says. "I am very biased, because women are so reliable and smart. This is a business of women; we cater to women. Many times I had a man as president, and I hid behind them. And every time they f—d it up. So I am all for women!"

Hence her enthusiastic involvement with Vital Voices, a bipartisan organization whose slogan is "Invest in women—improve the world." "The word Diane uses over and over again is *strength*," explains Melanne Verveer, the foundation's chairman. "Women are victimized in so many ways, from poverty to abuse, but many have transcended enormous challenges and gone out to become agents of change. Diane sees the strength of women and the potential of women. There is so much happening that if only we could all work together, we could create a world that would be in better shape than ours is today. Diane is truly invested; she believes in it to her core, and she is out there constantly."

For von Furstenberg, that goal makes her future path very clear. "Now my mission in life is the empowerment of women," she says. "Other than my children and grandchildren, this is the legacy I want to leave behind." ❖

## Tina's Way

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the interminable presidential campaign.

All the amorous emotions I feel toward Fey come without my knowing much about her personal life beyond what's revealed in those adorable American Express ads. So I did some Googling.

Fey, thirty-eight, grew up in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a mystery-novel-writer father and a homemaker mother. (That scar on her face? The result of an attack by a stranger when Fey was five—but she doesn't like to talk about it.) As a theater major at the University of Virginia, a campus known for its keg parties, Fey refused to drink and settled into her role as a "drama geek." She has been with her husband, producer and composer Jeff Richmond, since they met, in 1994, when both of them were doing improv at *SNL*'s farm team, Chicago's Second City. Fey is devoted to their three-year-old daughter, Alice. The ambidextrous comedian wrote the teen black comedy *Mean Girls* and recently starred in *Baby Mama*. She's also earned four Emmys for *30 Rock* and happily picketed with her colleagues during the writers' strike last year. Actors and writers on the set of *SNL* have said she brought a moral authority to the show, though during her reign the use of derogatory terms toward women was at an all-time high.

"It's the show's business to make fun of people," Fey has commented, "and if it didn't make fun of women, the female performers would have no parts to play." This from a woman who uses her down time to sew and bake.

I love how subversive Fey is just by being so squeaky-clean. She is funny and sexy—even in glasses—and smart and self-effacing, all at the same time. She is a heroine to working moms everywhere, yet she also makes us feel a bit like under-achievers. As much as Fey has become a role model to women like me, I bet she'll go down in history as the archetype of the 21st-century comedian: beautiful, brainy, supportive of her fellow women and, above all, bellyache hilarious. ❖

## The Change Agent

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sense of self takes up; expand your ideas of who you are, what's really important to you, what you want your life to be about. Your life isn't about pleasing anymore, doing what's expected by society, taking care of others, being the eager helper, finding ways to be loved, appreciated or significant. It's about the self now: self-love, self-care and choices you need to make in order to embrace your beauty, your intelligence, your body, your voice, your confidence and your power. Everyone—your kids, your partner, your colleagues—benefits when you shine with your own power and don't shrink back. You become an inspiration. And they get more of you, not less. You have more to give when you are gentle with and respectful of yourself.

You have a choice to be authentic, to finally have your inner life and outer life be in sync. It's a choice to dare to break with the norm, to drop the mask of always saying "Everything is great." It's about evaluating the change, its consequences and the steps involved, and only then making a clear and smart decision. What worked for me? Journaling—getting things out of my head and onto paper. Taking time to be silent so I could hear myself. Doing regular exercise and yoga to get myself back into my body. I read inspirational books, took classes I might never have explored—pole dancing (!) was one of them, paralleled by a silent retreat. If you tell life you're open to learning and to being led in the right direction, people, books, classes, ideas, will cross your path. Your role is to say yes, to put the wholeness back into your "whole life."

The worst mistake we make during change is to think we are alone in going through it. In fact, there is always someone who can help, and we all get through changes because someone is there to close the gap. Find your team, the people who hold the light for you and believe you can change. If you're alone, ask yourself what it is that keeps you from letting somebody be there for you. Every person I've interviewed who got through a change

can always tell me who helped them.

What are the changes I think we as women all crave? We want to remember and reclaim our feminine essence, be recognized for something beyond our primary relationships and careers, get our creative spirit involved again. We want to accept ourselves, worship and adore our bodies, and feel peace, inner and outer.

*Change* was the word of the year in 2008, and it's still much on our minds this year. Thanks to President Obama, we now have a different response to change, one in which we go toward it as opposed to away from it. "Change we can believe in"—it's our time now to believe in ourselves again and in our ability to change. Maybe it's made you think of a change you want to make. I believe that as women we are allowed to shine brightly, to be powerful, to take a stand on something we feel we are called to. It's the feminine essence to be powerful, to be clear and unwavering, to be the authentic expression of who we are. When life is uncomfortable, it's because we aren't hearing the call to change and we aren't accepting what is coming, what needs to come through us now.

So I left the corporate job and the guy, two very difficult changes. In doing so, two "perfect" identities of mine disintegrated, leaving me staring at my self. After working for a nonprofit as a volunteer and living in Italy and Africa for some time and reconnecting with my soul, I started the company (First30Days.com), I wrote the book (*The First 30 Days: Your Guide to Any Change*), and the weight fell off easily (thirty pounds—notice how important thirty is!). My inner microphone now gets my attention at any time. As terrifying as all these changes have been—and some, like running my own business, continue to be on certain days—I always fall back on my favorite quote from Mother Teresa, which I offer to you with deep respect: "God doesn't require you to succeed; he only requires that you try."

Every night I know I am still scoring ten out of ten on the trying. ❖