



# NAC Executive Insights

## Change is the Only Constant – and Other Life Lessons

### Key Points

- Effectively living your life and succeeding in your career means you will continuously deal with change.
- You will face adversity in your life.
- Ensure that your choices, not chance, determine your destiny.
- Take advantage of opportunities that come your way.
- Determine your own life path.
- Learn to take risks.
- Strike the balance that is right for you.
- You must be a lifelong learner.

### Introduction

Life has a way of happening when we are busy planning for other outcomes. Change will happen in our lives and careers continuously. We are guaranteed to face adversity—in many different forms and often when we least expect it. You get to make many choices in your life. Make sure those choices—and not where you were born or what you look like or who your parents were—determine your destiny.

Opportunities will come your way all of the time. Make sure your eyes are open so that you can learn to recognize them and take advantage of them. Life is not risk free. You must learn to take the risks that are right for you, just as you must learn to strike the balance in your life that is right for you. And don't forget, continuous and lifelong learning is mandatory.

### Tip One — Change is the Only Constant

The sun rises and sets at a different time every day. Why then do so many of us think that change won't happen in our lives? In fact, change is the only constant. As I like to say, as soon as I think I know all of the answers, all of the questions change. Learn to adapt, to be flexible, and to anticipate that things might be different than you assumed or hoped.

## **Tip Two — You Will Face Adversity in Your Life**

Few things are guaranteed in life except death and taxes. You will face adversity. Bad things will happen in your life and in the lives of your friends, families, and co-workers. You must learn that you cannot control the environment around you. All you can control is your attitude. You can face life's challenges head on or you can become bitter and withdrawn. The choice is totally up to you.

When I was 22 years old and married to my first husband, his parents died in a murder-suicide. His brothers were 14 and 18. They came to live with us and we tried as best we could to give them a "normal" life. They both finished high school and graduated from college. The younger one went to law school. Adversity hit us squarely in the face and we dealt with it. Was it easy? No, of course not. But I did learn a lot from the situation that I have used so many times over the course of my life.

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*You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages.*

— Michelle Obama

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## **Tip Three — Ensure Your Choices Determine Your Destiny**

You don't get to pick your parents, your hometown, your skin color, and so many other facets affecting your life. Those are the result of chance. But you do get to make your own choices. You can ensure that those choices, and not the chances, determine your destiny. Your choices include your attitude, your work ethic, and your motivation.

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*You can choose to be a victim...or you can envision a better life and pursue it. If you don't work for the life you want...you get the life that is handed to you.*

— Emmitt Smith

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## **Tip Four — Take Advantage of Opportunities**

Recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities have formed my life and my career. I was able to apply to my alma mater coming out of high school because the rules changed and women were now allowed to be admitted. I later was offered the opportunity to train as a speaker to be a member of my

first employer's Speaker's Bureau. I jumped at the chance. What a difference that has made in my life and career.

I love to quote Thomas Edison on this topic: "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." Almost everything that has happened in my life is the result of an opportunity. First, I had to keep my eyes open to recognize it was an opportunity. Then I had to act to take advantage of that opportunity. And third, many, many times, I had to work very hard to ensure that I had truly seized the opportunity that had presented itself.

### **Tip Five — Determine Your Path**

You get to determine your path. Some people like to develop five-year or ten-year life or career plans. I did that early on. Now I have a personal mission statement that guides my direction and the decisions that I make in my life. What if you don't know what you want to do or where you want to go? Then you might end up having a discussion like Alice did with the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when she got to a fork in the road and didn't know which way to go:

**Alice:** I was just wondering if you could help me find my way.

**Cheshire Cat:** Well, that depends on where you want to go.

**Alice:** Oh, it really doesn't matter, as long as...

**Cheshire Cat:** Then it really doesn't matter which way you go.

**Alice:** ...so long as I get somewhere!

**Cheshire Cat:** Oh, you're sure to do that, if you only walk long enough.

### **Tip Six — Take Risks**

Each person will have to take risks in their lives. It can be absolutely amazing to look back on your life path and to see where you took those risks—getting married, having children, changing jobs, changing homes, changing the city where you live, taking a new direction in your life. Each of these is a risk. Each comes with opportunities and many unforeseen benefits and obstacles. Every decision you make has an element of risk, but not taking risks is not really living.

### **Tip Seven — Strike the Balance that is Right for You**

Each of us has to strike a balance between our personal and professional lives. Remember, your balance isn't the balance that is right for anyone else. It is the balance that is right for you. That means you get to choose. And taking the responsibility for making those choices—that is the difficult part.

## **Tip Eight — You Must Be a Lifelong Learner**

You must continuously learn throughout your life and career. The pace of change of technology is so rapid that you will be left behind if you do not learn new things, learn new technologies, and continue to grow. Technology has changed so much since the days I was in college using IBM punch cards to program computers. Someday in the not-too-distant future, 2023 technology will seem as antiquated as 1970s technology seems today.

Your life will be full of change. You will face adversity and you will get to make choices about how to live your life, what your attitude will be, and how you will take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. You will need to strike the balance that is right for you, take risks as you live your life, and continue always to learn. Hopefully at some point you will be able to look back and appreciate the twists and turns in the path that is your life and career.

### **About the Author**

Jill Tietjen was elected to the National Academy of Construction in 2022. An author, international speaker, and electrical engineer, she is a recognized advocate for women in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields and has spent more than 45 years in the electric utility industry.

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