

Seascapes and the Nature of Change



By Lizzi Larbalestier



Change is a funny word, isn't it? The very fact that we have a broad term that can reference a process meaning a vast array of things, from tiny incremental adaptations to catastrophic events, can make navigating change both exciting and diverse... and, of course, the shifting variables of change can have a dramatic impact upon our awareness, attitude and actions.

Here at the coast, change is often explored in terms of *scale, pace and energy* – not necessarily in that order – all of these of course affecting *equilibrium*.

As we ease into spring and from there summer, our colour palette and soundscape alters and nature offers us so many shifting qualities that we are almost spoilt for choice when it comes to drawing life-metaphors. There are few people who say the change in the seasons has zero impact upon them – we evolved to be in tune with the natural world, no matter how urbanized we find ourselves.

Spring and summer intuitively invite an opening out and expanding of boundaries, whereas autumn and winter are about consolidation and conserving energy. Our lifestyles seek the creative or the cosy... and climate plays a role within this. I am generalising, of course, based upon how nature responds to the seasons – and yet if we truly are a *part* of nature, it would

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seem likely this is true for many of us. As a coach, I certainly see my clients arriving with a different emphasis and energy across the year.

Days becoming longer, and days and nights drawing in require us to adjust our flow in many ways. Shorter days mean more time spent indoors under artificial light, impacting melatonin levels (a natural hormone associated with sleep cycles and cellular repair) and messing with our ability to navigate our natural circadian rhythms.

Conversely, longer and / or brighter sunnier days – no matter how warm – support vitamin D production and have a positive impact on our serotonin levels, leading to feelings of satisfaction and calmness and addressing symptoms of seasonal affective disorder.

So how do we as NLP Professionals respond to this? Well, firstly we can start with ourselves, ensuring we get plenty of outdoor time to enable us to show up at our best for our clients.

We can also encourage our clients to come outdoors for their coaching. This means they are benefitting not only physiologically but also psychologically, promoting coherent cognition and a positive approach to emotional regulation. Bringing landscape metaphor into our conversations can create deeper insight and foster a healthy relationship with the natural world.

As a blue health coach™ my outdoor workspace is the coast, where water and waves provide a perfect illustrator and facilitator of personal inquiry. When we watch waves, we are in fact observing a movement of energy, a displacement of water resultant from a number of factors and forces such as wind, air pressure, terrain and gravity.

Wind and weather

Wave size relates to the strength and direction of the wind, the length of time the wind has been blowing and the distance it has travelled across water (fetch). But what does this have to do with us and change, you might well ask?

Well, every change effort has a moment of initiation. That could be the spark of an idea, the gradual awakening to circumstances, or perhaps experiencing a significant life-changing event (and more). Acknowledging the source of change



can enable us as coaches to ensure the change effort is really something our clients are committed to.

Is it really *their* change, or have they got swept up in somebody else's weather system? This is an important question to ask.

Wind direction can alter, and it is useful to ascertain whether our client's change effort has a clear direction of travel, or a general sense of trajectory. This will enable us as NLP Professionals to identify whether we promote something like the creation of a well-formed outcome or engage in some more emergent methodologies.

Is this a significant change, or simply a temporary weather front our clients are experiencing?

Acknowledging distance travelled so far is something we as professional change-makers explore for any number of reasons, such as motivation and reassurance of progress (amongst others), and timelines are one of the ways we can do this.

Waves and terrain

Let's shift our attention from wind to the waves themselves...

Much as a weather front can impact waves, the terrain dramatically impacts a shore break. The scale, shape and frequency of waves matters when it comes to our experience of water-time... and it is the same with change.

Is it going to be a bumpy ride or a smooth glide – and does the potential for either of these have a significant impact upon the energy our client brings to their change effort? For some, the turbulence adds excitement, whilst for others, less so. Exploring our client's relationship with risk is a discussion to be had upfront.

What form does this particular wave

take? Is it fun, or likely to be pretty unforgiving? Is this wave one of a series of many – in which case, how will our client regroup between waves?

What is the scale of this wave? Is our client paddling for a big wave and therefore requiring a significant amount of preparedness and energy? Are they equipped to ride this wave and how can we best help?

Where is the wave in relation to them? Is it on the horizon or are they right in the impact zone? A shore break varies between low and high tide. What are the terrain factors that have the most impact... and is the timing right?

How present and attentive are they? You don't paddle out using yesterday's forecast, after all, and with any change effort we need to balance horizon scanning with attending to the here and now. As coaches, we can ask how NLP can help our client maintain their focus and attention, and find their flow.

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How energized is our client? This depends upon the individual. For some, the further into a project the greater enthusiasm as they begin to see progress, whereas for others attention and energy can wane nearing the end of a project. This is all useful information for us as coaches.

Tides and the lunar cycle

The tidal nature of all things is a great reflection of any change effort. After all, the world is a place of ebb and flow – dynamic equilibrium.

Pace of change can be likened to the rule of twelfths. If you are unfamiliar with this, the third and fourth hours between high and low tide see a massive displacement of water (around half of the entire tidal movement). If we equate this to change, it can be like starting out with small changes, building to a crescendo where the pace of change is fast and then easing back into a slow pace of change as we reach our milestones.

We know change doesn't happen at a metronomic pace. Some clients are fast out of the blocks but despite enthusiasm their momentum fades, whereas others take a while to shake off inertia.

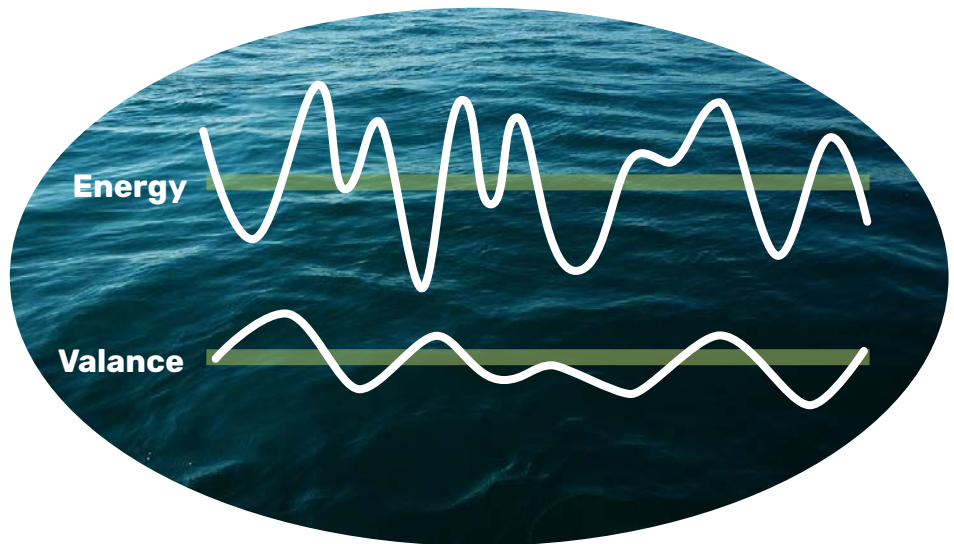
Is the pace of change compatible with our client's expectations and aptitude? As coaches, we can ask where in their change efforts would greater pace be required? What is needed to enable more pace? And, conversely, what could be a benefit of slowing down?

Consciously acknowledging 'the rate of change' can enable our clients to be discerning in their actions. They can identify potential areas of overwhelm, or perhaps recognise where they are coasting and can choose to pick up their pace where appropriate.

► Within each change effort, exploring the dynamic quality of pace enables our clients to ensure they maintain momentum but also avoid burnout. A shifting seascape inspires meta awareness of the nature of change itself and our relationship with it.

Beyond the daily tidal patterns, the moon of course impacts our tide cycles. Each beach will have a mean low water and mean high water level. Depending upon the lunar cycle, a spring tide will cause a greater movement of water, making high tide very high and low tide very low... whereas a neap tide results in less difference between high and low tides. (The rule of twelfths still stands.)

And so it is with us... and our moods. Some people are distinctly 'neapy' when it comes to shifts in mood, whereas others have a huge range of moods they display (we are not going into conditions like bipolar here). Change can impact mood significantly and, since we know mood impacts learning and motivation, it can be useful to encourage our clients to track their mood within any change effort. If they imagine themselves to have a baseline and range, a great blue health coaching exercise can be to draw a wave on the shoreline (or journal) to represent how their mood is shifting, perhaps reviewing after a month, a week or even a



day. Notice what creates deviation in either direction and how long shifts in energy (or valance) last. Of course, insights gained can inform state management exercises, which can have a profound impact.

One ocean planet

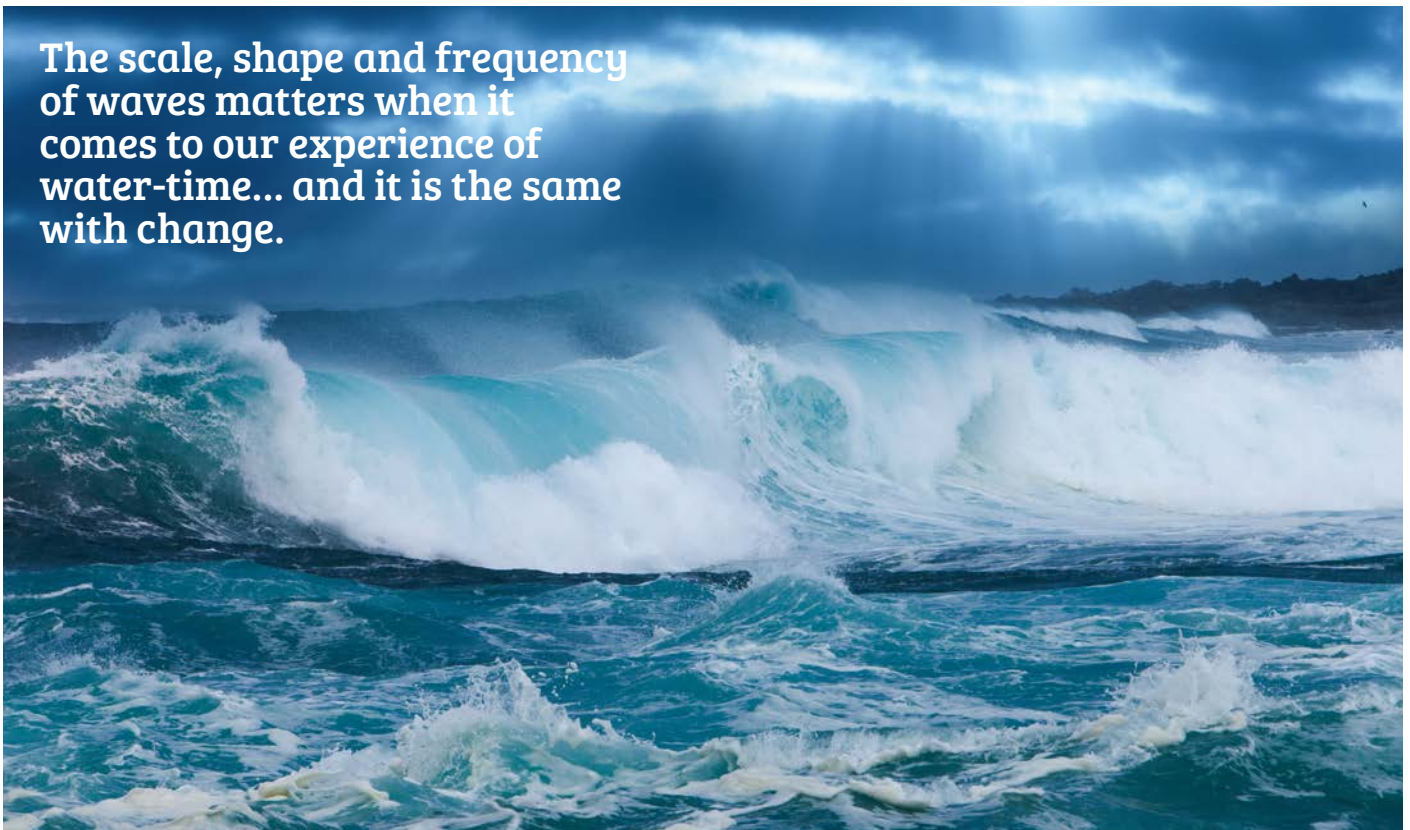
Not all catastrophic change is immediately evident. We know for a fact that our climate is changing and we need to take action to address this. If we link to the topics we have covered in this article:

- The scale of change is vast and unforgiving.

- The pace of change has been slow and insidious but is now increasing exponentially due to a cascade of environmental entropy.
- Our energy is distinctly variable – some run around attempting to do everything whilst others are oblivious, their attention and energy distracted.

It is our responsibility as coaches and professional communicators to ensure our support for change is one that values a healthy ecosystem and questions progress... at what cost. ■

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Lizzi Larbalestier is an ICF professional blue health coach and coach trainer specialising in marine-based change work in Cornwall and California. Disarming humour supports a highly provocative coaching style and she uses the coast as a landscape for trajectory-led philosophical debate grounded in neuroscience. Lizzi is the founder of Going Coastal Blue and Director of Coaching for Blue Mind Works. For more information go to www.goingcoastal.blue