Module 1 Worksheets and Homework:
The Visionary Change Cycle and Your Inner Mission

Martha Beck’s Change Cycle, from *Finding Your Own North Star*
The Change Cycle in Detail

Psychological metamorphosis has four phases. You’ll go through these phases, more or less in order, after any major change catalyst (falling in love or breaking up, getting or losing a job, having children or emptying the nest, etc.). The strategies for dealing with change depend on the phase or “Square” you’re experiencing.

Square One: Dissolving (aka Death & Rebirth)

Square One is the scariest, because we aren’t taught to expect it. It’s the time when we lose our identity and are left temporarily formless: person soup. Most people fight like crazy to keep their identities from dissolving. “This is just a blip,” we tell ourselves when circumstances rock our world. “I’m the same person, and my life will go back to being the way it was.” Sometimes this is true. But in other cases, when real metamorphosis has begun, we run into a welter of “dissolving” experiences. We may feel that everything is falling apart, that we’re losing everyone and everything. Dissolving feels like death, because it is—it’s the demise of the person you’ve been.

When you melt down beliefs, the truth shows up. The hardest part is letting go of how your life was supposed to be.

“And for one breath of ecstasy give all you have been or could be. Every breath is one breath of ecstasy. To be what you must, you must give up what you are.” - Yusuf Islam

Only your hold on what you think is supposed to happen is blocking what wants to come next. If you let it go, Square Two happens naturally.

What to Do

When we’re dissolving we may get hysterical, fight our feelings, try to recapture our former lives, or jump immediately toward some new status quo (“rebound romance” is a classic example). All these measures actually slow down Square One and make it more painful.

The following strategies work better:

In Square One, live one day (or ten minutes) at a time
Instead of dwelling on hopes and fears about an unknowable future, focus your attention on whatever is happening right now.

Cocoon by caring for yourself in physical, immediate ways
Wrap yourself in a blanket, make yourself a cup of hot tea, attend an exercise class, whatever feels comforting.

Talk to others who have gone through a metamorphosis
If you don’t have a wise relative or friend, a therapist can be a source of reassurance.

Let yourself grieve
Even if you are leaving an unpleasant situation, (e.g. a bad marriage, a job you didn’t like) you’ll probably go through the normal human response to any loss: the emotional
roller coaster called the grieving process. You’ll cycle through denial, anger, sadness, and acceptance many times. Just experiencing these feelings will help them pass more quickly.

If you think this sounds frustratingly passive, you’re right. Dissolving isn’t something you do; it’s something that happens to you. The closest you’ll come to controlling it is relaxing and trusting the process.

Signs you’re leaving Square One and entering Square Two are: flickers of calm, starting to do things you never thought you’d do, changing your hair or the decoration of your house.

Square One Mantra: “I don’t know what the hell is going on… and that’s okay.”

**Square Two: Imagining (aka Dreaming and Scheming)**

For those of us who have just a few tiny control issues, Square Two is as welcome as rain after drought. This is when the part of you that knows your destiny, the imago in your psyche, will begin giving you instructions about how to reorganize the remnants of your old identity into something altogether different.

The word imago is the root of the word image. You’ll know you’re beginning Square Two when your mind’s eye starts seeing images of the life you are about to create. These can’t be forced—like dissolving, they happen to you—and they are never what you expected. You’re becoming a new person, and you’ll develop traits and interests your old self didn’t have. You may feel compelled to change your hairstyle or wardrobe, or redecorate your living space. The old order simply seems wrong, and you’ll begin reordering your outer situation to reflect your inner rebirth.

**What to Do**

Here are some ways you may want to respond when you begin spontaneously imagining the future:

Create a vision board
Daydream
Notice what catches your attention

Your job is to try out imaginary scenarios until you have a clear picture of your goals and desires. You’ll save a lot of time, effort, and grief by giving yourself time to do this in your head before you attempt it in the real world.

Square Two is all about images: making them up, making them clear, making them possible. Moving through this stage, you’ll start to feel an impulse to go from dreaming (imagining possibilities) to scheming (planning to bring your vision to fruition). Write
down both dreams and schemes, and then gather information about how you might create them.

Signs of Square Two: you don’t know where you’re going but you’re starting to make choices you don’t even understand, you’re bug soup, you get creative sparks, dramatic increase in daydreams and night dreams, your imagination is ignited.

How to handle Square Two: notice your dreams--both day dreams and night dreams, notice, notice, notice what you’re drawn to, follow your hot tracks--begin tracking your purpose.

**Square Two Mantra**
“There are no rules… and that's okay.”

**Square Three: Re-forming (aka The Hero’s Saga)**

As your dreams become schemes, you’ll begin itching to make them come true. This signals the arrival of Square Three, the implementation stage of the change cycle. Square Three is where you stop fantasizing about selling your art and start submitting work to galleries, or go beyond ogling a friend’s brother to having her set you up on a date. You’ll feel motivated to do real, physical things to build a new life. And then…(drum roll, please)...you’ll fail. Repeatedly.

Martha here: I’ve gone through Square Three many times and watched hundreds of clients do the same. I’ve never seen a significant scheme succeed on the first try. Re-forming your life, like anything new, complex, and important, inevitably brings up problems you didn’t expect. That's why, in contrast to the starry eyes that are so useful in Square Two, Square Three demands the ingenuity of Thomas Edison and the tenacity of a pit bull.

**What to Do**

Expect things to go wrong
Many of my clients have an early failure and consider this a sign that “it just wasn’t meant to be.” This is a useful philosophy if you want to spend your life as person soup. To become all that you can be, you must keep working toward your dreams even when your initial efforts are unsuccessful.

Be willing to start over
Every time your plans fail, you'll briefly return to Square One, feeling lost and confused. This is an opportunity to release some of the illusions that created hitches in your plan.

Revisit Square Two
Adjust your dreams and schemes to include the truths you’ve learned from your experimentation.

Persist
Keep debugging and re-implementing your new-and-improved plans until they work. If you've followed all the steps above, they eventually will.

**Square Three Mantra**
“This is much worse than I expected… and that's okay.”

**Square Four: Full Flight (aka The Promised Land)**

Square Three is like crawling out of your cocoon and waiting for your crumpled, soggy wings to dry and expand. Square Four is the payoff, the time when your new identity is fully formed and able to fly.

**What to Do**
The following strategies—which can help you optimize this delightful situation—are about fine-tuning, not drastic transformation.

Enjoy!
You've just negotiated a scary and dramatic transformation, and you deserve to savor your new identity. Spend time every day focusing on gratitude for your success.

Make small improvements
Find little ways to make your new life a bit less stressful, a bit more pleasurable.

Know that another change is just around the bend
There's no way to predict how long you'll stay in Square Four; maybe days, maybe decades. Don't attribute your happiness to your new identity; security lies in knowing how to deal with metamorphosis, whenever it occurs.

**Square 4 Mantra**
“Everything is changing… and that's okay.”

Society has reached a time of such change- now, it's a fluid transformative environment. There’s no “there” anymore. You have to make peace with being perpetually in the Hero's Saga. The pace of social change has been accelerating exponentially. The level of change we’re now seeing is unprecedented. It’s all happening so fast. The only thing we know is that things will be dramatically different. Use the Change Cycle to ride the waves of change, baby!
Worksheet: Change Cycle Self-Survey

The Change Cycle can help you orient to where you are in the process of change for any part of your life. You can be in different parts of the cycle for different areas of your life. Clarity on where you are gives you more information on how to nurture yourself and meet your needs as you navigate the waters of change.

I am in Square One is this area of my life:

I am in Square Two in this area of my life:

I am in Square Three in this area of my life:

I am in Square Four in this area of my life:
Homework: Letters from Your Wise Self
Take 3-5 minutes each to write the following letters to yourself.

Letter #1: Think of a time in your past when something bad happened. Now write a letter to your former self, explaining all the good things that came from that event.

Dear former self,

I know right now you’re in pain, but I wanted to let you know what arises from this time in our life…

Love,
Your current wise self

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Letter #2: Now think about a difficulty you’re facing now and write a letter from your future self about all the good things that came out of the issue you’re facing now.

Dear current self,

I know right now you’re in pain, but I wanted to let you know what arises from this time in our life…

Love,
Your future wise self
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