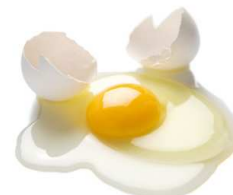


Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

by Mary Bast



You've no doubt heard the epigram first made public in January 1849 by Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, founder and editor of *Les Guêpes*:

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

Usually translated as "the more things change, the more they stay the same," *plus ça change* refers to what happens when we attempt to resolve problems within the paradigm in which they were created. What does this mean in everyday terms? To borrow again from the French:

On ne fait pas d'omelette sans casser des œufs.

Translation: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." I'm tempted to leave you with these powerful metaphors. But, I'll illustrate how *plus ça change* became the code for a married couple to interrupt an interaction pattern that was frustrating to both of them—to "break the eggs" they'd both been hatching and create a new "omelet."

This had been their pattern: When the Nine husband perceived the Eight wife as "interrupting" in conversation, he would shut down and "pout" (according to the wife). The wife, annoyed that he would blame her instead of speaking up for himself, kept talking while pulling back emotionally. He saw her withdrawing emotionally, wanted to have peace between them, so bypassed his feeling of being ignored and tried to draw physically closer. She felt "schizophrenic"—"He's critical and wants to get closer? Doesn't compute!"

In the past, the pattern had been the opportunity for each to give "feedback" to the other, not realizing that his telling her she interrupted, and her telling him he should speak up if he so desired, fed the *plus ça change* pattern so that it kept occurring, over and over.

When they looked at their interaction systemically and saw how both of them kept it going the way it always had (*plus c'est la même chose*), they stepped back, let go of blame, and agreed that whoever saw the pattern occurring would simply say, "*Plus ça change...*"

(Continued on page 2)

NEW BLOGS!

Benefit from
Mary's and
Clarence's
suggestions
on a regular
basis.

See links
below.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose (continued)

To more fully understand the *plus ça change* dynamic on page 1, we know that Nines (the husband's Enneagram style), tend to go along with others' ideas, yet feel unspoken resentment when they stifle their own agenda. They will find it especially difficult to let go of a perceived slight when they think what they have to say has no importance to another. At the same time, Nines are "peacemakers" and want to be reassured that even their unexpressed annoyance has not created a disruption. Thus this Nine husband wanted to snuggle up to his wife, who was very aware of his "pouting" and didn't feel so inclined.

Enneagram Eights (the wife's Enneagram style), in contrast, typically have plenty of ideas but often succumb temporarily to their enthusiasms and/or forget to include a Nine partner. An Eight/Nine couple might be drawn together initially because of their mutual comfort with the Eight's providing structure, then both begin to feel some pain from that same dynamic: That's what had happened with the *plus ça change* couple.

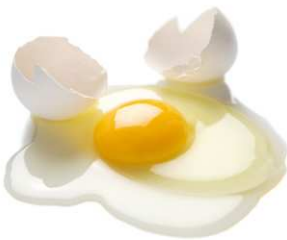
What's fascinating about this couple is that we did not spend time exploring their Enneagram styles so they could understand *why* they were having difficulty. Instead I asked questions to help them look closely at what each of them did and said, so they could see how they were unwittingly feeding the pattern. This works the same way as interrupting a personal pattern. You look carefully at *how* the pattern operates, then find a way to playfully interrupt it, so it loses its "juice." I used the French phrase *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* as a way to explain how systemic patterns work and asked them to come up with a playful name for the pattern they were examining. Because both partners are fluent in French as well as English, they adopted that very phrase.

If you've read the last chapter of our book, you know how presuppositions work and won't be surprised that I told them they might find themselves changing spontaneously without even engaging the pattern. That's exactly what happened. It's been more than two months and both report to me that the pattern has not occurred since the three of us talked.

Systemic coaching can be very powerful, encouraging individuals and couples to look at their patterns as dynamic systems that can be changed, quite easily in some cases.

Remember Clarence's tag line? *It only seems like magic...*

*On ne fait pas d'omelette
sans casser des œufs.*



BREAK AN EGG!

Follow Mary's and Clarence's blogs:

Mary: <http://relationshipsassystems.blogspot.com>

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