For most people, change is not easily accepted. It doesn't feel good, it creates too many unknowns, and it's just plain scary for many people. It's easy and comfortable to keep doing what we know.

I used to be a chronic planner. Everything in my life was planned, from getting my college degree, to receiving a commission in the Air Force, to fitting in the birth of my son immediately after grad school, to the exact strategy I'd use to get promoted and for each and every vacation I took. Spontaneity was not my core strength.

But as I grew both personally and professionally, I realized that those self-imposed constraints were limiting me in many ways. To some degree, I was even missing out on the beauty of life all because surprises didn't fit into my grand plan.

It was while I was serving in the Air Force that I truly began to understand and slowly learn this life lesson. The best way to handle the ever-changing world around me was to be flexible — to
go with the flow. As a military member, you are at the mercy of your leaders. When they say “go,” you go. When they say “hurry up and wait,” you hurry up and wait.

There may have been a plan, but to restate a quote heard across the military, “No plan survives first contact with the enemy,” meaning one must be flexible and ready to make changes on the fly in order to survive.

There's really no difference as a civilian. The world we live in is ever dynamic and constantly morphing. The demands on our lives these days are excessive. But we have a choice: either we flex to the changes or our rigidity may cause us to break.

In 2009, I transitioned from active duty to reserve and was recruited as an independent consultant for a Department of Defense contractor. Having no idea that I was about to embark on the ride of my life — starting a business unintentionally — I started HRSS Consulting Group. I now work with business leaders, coaching, training and advising them on how to manage their companies, their employees, and their own lives in an effort to become more successful.

Rigidity is not an option for those who want to be out front. Successful companies value the benefits of being flexible because it allows them to see the changes that are happening around them and it enables them to take the action they need to adapt and overcome.

Through the many ups and downs of entrepreneurship, I have learned to live every day one foot in front of the other. I have learned that if you really want to enjoy the rewards of life, then you've got to be flexible and take each day as it comes.

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Karen is also a mentor for the Women’s Business Center’s IGNITE 360 Second Stage Business Mentoring Program.

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