The quote, “The only thing that is constant is change,” is attributed to Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BC). Whether we want it to occur or not, change happens. Change in and of itself is neither good nor bad. Change can be for the better or for the worse. Sometimes change is thrust upon you, and sometimes you make it happen. Oftentimes, you don’t know the results until something has been changed and it’s been experienced for a while.

Those of us in the water industry are continually impacted by change. Technologies are ever expanding. Workers change employers or retire. The economy races ahead or stalls. Costs increase. Treatment plants are expanded and/or upgraded. New (cheap) water sources become scarcer. Political policies vary with election results; altered budgeting philosophies follow and are taken in stride. Competition occurs as utilities’ boundaries draw nearer. Rules for withdrawing, treating, and distributing water are amended, requiring changes to rates, human resources policies, and/or treatment methods and equipment.

Fortunately, humans have the capacity for adaptation. Many of us are problem solvers. Others are good at putting solutions into practice and making them work. In spite of all these changes, overall, the record for continuous water supply to customers is consistently extremely high throughout our country.

I know at my home of 28 years in Cocoa, I don’t recall the water ever being out of service. That’s definitely not the case for power, telephone, and cable TV!

The dedication and the performance of the professionals in public water supply are truly phenomenal. I recall in my 33 years in municipal utilities scores of situations that were dealt with to keep the water flowing.

Treatment plant workers routinely dealt with commercial power outages or minor equipment failures. The resourcefulness they consistently exhibited kept the water supply going without customers being impacted or even knowing there was a problem. During hurricanes, operators and maintenance workers stayed at their posts, assuring continuous flow during and after the high winds subsided.

In the distribution system, utility workers made repairs, often maintaining water pressure to avoid disruption of service. On one occasion, a puncture leak caused by a grading contractor on a 36-in. pipe was temporarily stopped by inserting a carved wooden shovel handle. Water loss and traffic disruption were abated until permanent repairs were scheduled for a more opportune time.

I’m sure that many of you reading this have numerous similar accounts. If they were written and compiled, they’d make a wonderful testimonial to the commitment of the folks in this industry.

Dealing successfully with the changes thrown at those providing safe, affordable water is one aspect of change. Another major one is promoting change from within.

“The most damaging phrase in the English language is, ‘We’ve always done it this way.’” This quote is attributed to Rear Admiral Grace Hopper (1906–1992). The mindset that precedes the utterance of this phrase is in direct conflict with change. Oftentimes it stymies constructive change; good ideas that, once implemented, could reduce costs, improve service and reliability, and provide a stepping stone to even greater advancements.

Two groups you aren’t likely to hear such a phrase from are employees just entering the field and experienced new hires. Look for them in the workplace. Encourage opportunities for them to ask “why” or “what if” questions. If you aren’t in one of those groups, you would do well to fight the tendency to ignore looking beyond standard operating procedures. It probably won’t be easy, but what you may find are fresh fields ripe with opportunities for change—real change that actually turns out for the better!

This is my last “Speaking Out” column. As the Florida Section AWWA chair, it’s been fun bringing you these writings each month. This past year has gone by especially fast; as soon as one article was written, it seemed another one was already due! Rick Harmon, editor for this magazine, has been a pleasure to work with. My daughter, Jessica Endress, has been my personal copy editor throughout the year. Thanks to both of you, my columns have had that professional touch!

To all of our readers, thank you as well for letting me share a bit of my life's knowledge and experience with you this past year. It's been a real treat!