A Tale of Changes and Opportunities
Dawn Gibas

Editor’s note: Do you have a tale you’d like to share—good or bad—about life as a soil scientist or an experience you’ve had in the field? If so, email it to Dawn Gibas at dgibas@sciencesocieties.org. You may remain anonymous if you like.

As we go through our lives and careers, we face many changes; some are good, others not so good. I was reflecting on life and career lately, and changes were foremost in my mind for many reasons. The first, as you may have noticed, is that my name has changed to Dawn Gibas. Gibas is my maiden name, and I feel in some respects, that I have come back to who I am, but that decision didn’t come without challenges. For instance, changing my name means that colleagues don’t recognize who is contacting them when I call or email, and then there are those publications that remain under my previous name. So why do it? Well, one could ask why change anything? The simple answer is to make something better or move forward, even if in the short term that decision makes things harder to deal with. My name change is only a small example of change, but what about those other changes that we deal with all the time?

I have found that there are people who embrace change, and those who typically fight it. I think I have been a member of both camps as I have gone through my career and my life thus far. Any decision to make a change is hard, especially since many decisions cannot be reversed, and while you can second-guess yourself forever, it really comes down to trusting and embracing the decisions made and continuing to move forward.

Sometimes I think we are wired to fight change because with change comes additional work to implement that change, a chance that it won’t work out, a different philosophy to get used to, and disruption of our comfort level until we reach a new balance. I admit that sometimes thinking about changing something in my life or job makes me want to hibernate. However, I can also look back on changes that I have made or been forced to make (sometimes being dragged kicking and screaming) and wonder what I was upset about. Sometimes we just need to let go of our objections or fears and keep looking ahead to what can be.

An Opportunity to Learn and Grow
Change many times brings with it opportunities. I have changed jobs several times over the years because it was an opportunity to learn and grow. While difficult, especially when it required moving across the country (and leaving family, friends, and co-workers), those changes have, in the end, been great experiences and have taught me a lot. I have met people, done things, and gone places I never would have if I hadn’t taken the opportunity to make a change. Those experiences have greatly enhanced not only me, as a person, but my career as well. I would be somewhat remiss if I didn’t also admit that those decisions and changes affected some things in a not so positive manner, but those struggles have provided me with experience, strength, and confidence, and they help define who I am.

There have also been times that my job responsibilities have changed due to something I couldn’t control. Most recently this happened when my counterpart with the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Bruce Erickson, decided to take a bit of a different direction in his career and return to Purdue University. Prior to his leaving, I had already agreed to take more responsibility with the ASA certification program, but with his leaving ASA at the end of September, the time frame moved up, and I took on more responsibility for the CCA/CPAg certification program earlier than I thought. It started with my facilitating the 4Rs online continuing education course and attending the Nitrogen Use Efficiency conference in Kansas City in August. This was nothing I would have foreseen myself doing earlier this year since my training and experience lie in soils, hydrology, and...
environmental science, and that is where I am comfortable. Add to that the fact that I grew up in the city and haven't spent a lot of time in the agricultural sector.

Now, however, I have the opportunity to learn about and work more with agronomy including nutrient management, cropping practices/management, and pest management. I had a bit of trepidation with what I originally thought of as a huge learning curve, but I have realized that I know more than I thought I did from my education and experience. I like to learn and be challenged, and this provides a wonderful opportunity to build on what I know. I have found it rewarding to work on the certification program for soils since its inception and look forward to expanding that and working with the volunteers on the agronomy side that have also built a respected credentialing program. In both soils and agronomy, there will also be some changes in how we write and maintain our exams, and exam board members will be learning and using our new exam software; another example of opportunities to move forward and continue to enhance and improve the way we do things.

**Trust is Essential to Accomplishing Great Things**

Change comes in many forms, and at times, you may not expect it or be ready for another challenge. While I admit that I am not always open to change when it isn't my choice, I think I have learned to be more accepting of it and treat it more like an adventure as I would if I were the one choosing to do something different. Sometimes it means trusting that someone else knows what is best or how something might be accomplished better or faster, i.e., giving up some control, which is not easy for many of us. Sometimes it means learning new things or a new technology. It means taking a chance that something or someone else will make your life or job better in the long run. The one thing I can say from experience is that trust is essential if we want to accomplish great things. Change is essential if we want to keep on moving forward in both our lives and our careers. No matter where we are in our careers, opportunities and how we choose to deal with them can reveal new ways of thinking or approaching our ideas and work or perhaps provide an altogether new venue that can refresh our perceptions and give us new insights to our current thinking. The field of soil science has always been a series of opportunities for me. It is a science filled with so many ideas, facets, and linkages to other sciences that it is difficult to ever get bored. There are always new concepts to think about and pursue if one is open to it. I maintain that soil is basic to everything around us, so how could one ask for a better and more compelling opportunity than that?

The overall message for this *Tales from the Pits* is this: trust yourself and don't be afraid to explore opportunities when they present themselves. You might be surprised where you end up and how much you have gained. You'll never know what you are capable of if you don't allow yourself the chance to try.