

Who Moved My Cheese? Summary

By Spencer Johnson

Change is the only certainty in life, so why do we avoid and even fear it? We know that change is inevitable, yet we lack effective strategies to come to terms with it. What if there was a roadmap to help us better navigate change?

Who Moved My Cheese is a light-hearted fable that offers deep insights into adapting to change in multiple scenarios. In a simple story of the inevitability of change, two mice and two little people navigate living in a maze and maintaining their cheese supplies. The characters reveal that we can either accept change, or complain about it.

This summary takes a brief look at Dr. Johnson's story. It tackles the complexity of how we react to change, as a means to inspire us to be courageous in the face of it. Growth often emerges because of adversity, and sometimes unexpected scenarios arise when we least expect them. However, these curveballs don't have to be frightening. On the contrary, they may even offer us incredible joy and opportunity.

Is There a Slice of Wisdom in This Story for You?

The story takes place in a maze. Two mice, named Sniff and Scurry, and two mouse-sized people, named Hem and Haw, search for cheese. For an idyllic period, the inhabitants are lucky enough to find some cheese at Station C, and enjoy a plentiful supply of their favorite food. As is the inevitable way of the world, the cheese starts to run out.

The inhabitants react differently to their changing situation. Sniff and Scurry understand that the situation has changed, so they decide to search for new cheese. Hem and Haw, however, are less pragmatic. They moan about the unfairness of the situation and blame others for moving their cheese.

Even though the cheese is no longer in Station C, Hem and Haw keep going back there, hoping that the cheese will reappear. Haw, eventually realizes that the cheese isn't going to reappear magically. So, he decides to venture out in pursuit of new cheese. Hem, is far less brave and refuses to leave Station C, but Haw sets out into the unknown, leaving a note for his friend saying, 'What would you do if you weren't afraid?'

Haw, begins his epic journey, and slowly starts to notice small changes within himself. The search for something new, actually feels quite exhilarating. This journey makes him self-reflective, and he begins to write maxims on the walls of the maze in the hope that one day, Hem might see them. Eventually, Haw discovers a new station with an abundance of cheese, and he reunites with Sniff and Scurry. They have been there for some time, enjoying the fruits of their labor.

One of the book's central messages is that Haw's notes on the wall serve as encouragement for us all. Many of us are like Hem, and may struggle with the journey of change, taking risks, and venturing forward into the unknown.

So, what are Haw's insights? And how can we apply these insights to our own lives?

They Keep Moving the Cheese

Reflecting back, Haw realizes that the cheese didn't just disappear. It was diminishing all along. In this story, cheese is a metaphor for all of the things that we need in our life. We all have our different "cheeses" in life, be it our health, a great job, or healthy relationships. The problem is that, we grow accustomed to our cheese. We even believe that we're entitled to it. When something changes, when our cheese is taken or reaches its expiration date, we react with shock and lament the world and its unfairness. This reaction, only makes our situation worse. We expect things to change in our favor. If they don't change, we grow increasingly complacent, or we experience feelings of suffering.

The Buddhists have a "two arrow" analogy for suffering. They say that, any time we suffer misfortune, two arrows fly our way. The first arrow is the actual bad event, which can indeed cause pain. The second arrow is our reaction to the event - it's often just our negativity towards change. This second arrow, tends to exacerbate our suffering. Feeling the pain of change is entirely normal, but we can choose to lessen our suffering.

In the story, Haw realizes Over time that change is inevitable. Accepting change and acknowledging every situation's impermanence, helps us to avert the suffering that comes from clinging to the old, and resisting the new. 'This too shall pass,' is a saying that holds true for all circumstances. It's a mindset that can help us savor the good times, and endure the trying ones. They will always keep moving the cheese, so we always have to adapt and overcome.

Get Ready for the Cheese to Move

Haw's second lesson is that we always need to gear ourselves up for change. The two mice kept their running shoes ready, and when they noticed that the cheese was diminishing, they moved on in search of new cheese. Hem and Haw didn't anticipate or act quickly in response to their "cheeseless" situation, leaving them less equipped to handle it.

Being able to sniff out change (detect it) and scurry (take action) helps us keep one step ahead. In Pippa Malmgren's book, *Signals*, the economist argues that we can't predict how things will turn out. But, we can be better prepared. As the saying goes, "forewarned is forearmed." We all need to be alert to everyday signals so that we can navigate the world around us.

Smell the Cheese Often, so You Know When it's Getting Old

Complacency makes us lose focus. Sniff and Scurry were able to find new cheese, a long time before Hem and Haw. They did this by closely monitoring the initial cheese scenario. They remained action-focused, rather than becoming caught in over-analysis and stale resentments.

Can you identify any areas of your life that may be getting stale? What action steps do you need to take in your own life? Perhaps, it's time to learn a new skill or shift your focus. Maybe, there's a relationship that needs some rebuilding. Either way, it's vital to trust your instincts and become action-orientated in the face of change.

The difficulty is that, like Hem, we tend to resist change, while reminiscing about the way things were. Many of us focus on the past, rather than the present or the future. As Haw's journey progressed, he found little bits of cheese along the way, which helped him develop a taste for adventure. He even went back to offer Hem some of this new cheese, but Hem refused. Hem was reluctant to test the unknown.

Rather than stay with Hem at the old cheese station, Haw realized it was necessary to continue through the maze. Staying in the same place for fear of the unknown isn't a productive way of living. So, to make room for the new, we must let go of the old. To quote the author, 'The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you can enjoy new cheese.'

To settle his fears, Haw would visualize himself sitting on top of a massive wedge of French Brie: his favorite cheese. This vision enabled him to focus on future gains, rather than potential losses. Reframing the situation, motivates him to keep hope alive and continue on his search, despite disappointments.

Successful innovators and athletes use the power of visualization to see beyond their fears, and bring life to new possibilities. Focusing on what you could gain, versus what you've lost, can help to override your uncertainty. Haw realizes that he delayed his search for new cheese, because of his fear of the unknown. The same fear held Hem back as

well. Fear can protect us, but sometimes it can become overprotective. We all need to be a bit more intuitive and listen for the voice of courage, which may ask us, 'What would you do if you weren't afraid?'

It's important to acknowledge our fear and understand that our narrative often doesn't match our reality. While fear can be immobilizing, it can also stop you from embracing new opportunities. So, we all need to focus on the infinite possibilities.

Move With the Cheese

Haw's fifth piece of advice is that we all need to be willing to shift, and adapt to change. If we can learn to embrace change, we might realize that new discoveries, experiences, and achievements, can all outweigh doing the same comfortable things repeatedly. It's easy to get stuck in a rut. So, it's a good idea to adapt, and roll with the punches when the world shifts.

Savor the Adventure and Enjoy the Taste of New Cheese

Can you imagine never experiencing new things again? Rather than resisting and resenting change, ask yourself; what would happen if you could embrace it instead. It can be exhilarating to break out of old ways, and begin the search for something new. In the story, Haw eventually finds the new cheese. The journey forever changes him.

The joy of the cheese is accentuated by the lessons and experiences that he learns along the way. Change alters him for the better, and he

becomes more curious. Through going on one adventure, Haw continues exploring areas outside. He is motivated to extend his search and journey on to new cheese stations. So, the more open to change we're, the more of the world we can open up for ourselves.

They Keep Moving the Cheese

We come full circle when Haw repeats the first maxim. By doing this, he reaffirms the fact that change is inevitable.

Who Moved My Cheese is a symbolic tale about four imaginary characters. The two mice, and the two little people, represent the simple and the complex parts of ourselves, regardless of our age, gender, nationality, or race.

Sometimes we may act like Sniff, who sniffs out change early, or Scurry, who scurries into action. Sometimes we may be more like Hem, who denies and resists change, or Haw, who learns to adapt in time when he sees that changing can lead to something better.

The two mice do better when they are faced with change because they keep things simple. The two little people's complex brains and human emotions, tend to complicate things. Whatever parts of us we choose to embrace, or choose to ignore, we all have something in common. All of us have the universal need to find our way around the maze, and succeed in changing times.

In Conclusion

We all need to ask ourselves what's worth writing on our walls as we navigate the world around us? We all know that change is the only constant, so we need to learn how to anticipate, adapt to, and ultimately enjoy the journey of transformation. The only thing stopping us from moving into the unknown is fear, so remember to ask yourself, what you'd do if fear weren't holding you back.

Dr. Johnson quotes A.J. Cronin, who writes that, 'Life is no straight and easy corridor along which we travel free and unhampered, but a maze of passages, through which we must seek our way.' Cronin suggests that, 'We will at times feel lost and confused. But always, if we have faith, a door will open for us, not perhaps one that we ourselves would ever have thought of, but one that will ultimately prove good for us.'

So, what will you do when someone moves your cheese?