

How Leaders Create Change

By Johnny Parker

Harold Wilson, the former British Prime Minister, once said, “He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.” In order to be effective, leaders and organizations need to be adaptable and willing to adjust to new circumstances, both internally and externally. Leaders are critical to fostering change. As you consider your leadership responsibilities, what change(s) needs to be made? Are you aware of the role you play in facilitating change? Let’s explore some practical things you can do to initiate change and to help your team (followers) to be relatively comfortable in the process.

Why Change?

The Creator built “change” into the fabric of creation. Plants experience germination and butterflies morph. The human body grows from an embryo to an adult. The world is dynamic, not static. Change is not only crucial for growth, but to be expected in a dynamic world. Solomon, King of Israel, recognized the significance of change. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, he penned these words,

There’s an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

A right time for birth and another for death, a right time to plant and another to reap, a right time to kill and another to heal, a right time to destroy and another to construct, a right time to cry and another to laugh, a right time to lament and another to cheer, a right time to make love and another to abstain, a right time to embrace and another to part, a right time to search and another to count your losses, a right time to hold on and another to let go, a right time to rip out and another to mend, a right time to shut up and another to speak up, a right time to love and another to hate, a right time to wage war and another to make peace.

As Alvin Toffler says, “Change is not merely necessary to life - it is life.” Change is necessary and constant in a changing world. The pressures on organizations to facilitate rapid change will increase. Leaders must develop the personal qualities, skills and methods needed to effectively guide the “change-process.” However, before you can “sell” change to your organization, you must understand why change is necessary.

There are two types of change. The first is *innovative change*, which is proactive, like Toyota’s doctrine of *kaizen*, continuous improvement. (Daft, p.399) *Innovative change* must be embraced in order for an organization to remain on the cutting edge. Oliver Cromwell said, “He who stops being better stops being good.” Leaders and organizations that stop growing will lose their effectiveness. In the Biblical story of the parable of the talents, Jesus admonished the servant that did not invest or grow his one talent. You and your organization must accept the challenge to continue to stretch toward your greatness.

The second type of change is *survival change*, which is reactive and based on crisis. In an atmosphere that breeds *survival change*, there is an urgency to change due to

decline and ineffectiveness. This is when a leader or organization experiences desperation and it must change or perish. (Daft, p. 400)

As a leader, you need to assess what type of change is needed. The healthiest organizations are the ones that follow the example of Toyota and seek to maintain a mindset of *kaizen* – continuous improvement. It is rarely healthy to be caught by a process of change unexpectedly.

How Leader's Create Change

According to Brian Kittleson, Principal of Spencerville School, one way leaders create change is by being out in front of the change curve. Leaders need to do practical things such as reading books and discovering resources about strategic change. To remain current, leaders require a regular diet of exploring trends and practices in their area of discipline, helping them anticipate future change. Change shouldn't catch you off guard. As a leader, you must expect it, anticipate it and be ready to embrace it when the time comes.

In addition to being on the look out for necessary change, smart leaders:

1. Model an openness to change.
2. Are willing and eager to involve others in the change process.
3. Create a foundation for change through their internal fortitude.

Smart leaders model an openness to change. Gandhi taught that, "People need to be the change they wish to see in the world." This is especially true of leaders. Their attitude regarding change is essential for success. A strong leader displays a positive mindset to the opportunity that change can bring to the organization. This, in turn, influences members of the team.

Speaking of the team, leaders need to be willing and eager to involve their team members in the change process. Change starts with individuals. At Toyota, when they are about to implement a change, they have frequent face-to-face meetings (conversations) with all the key players to discuss the critical factors. This is called "obeya" which means "big room." (Daft, p.399) Without buy-in, any major initiative will be stalled, perhaps to the point of failure.

Kittleson says, "Leadership is about creating conversations that foster an environment for change readiness." Leaders create the foundation for change by virtue of who they are, and because leadership style greatly impacts the success or failure of any change process, approach matters. Followers are inclined to trust and embrace a transformational leadership approach. Dr. Richard Daft, leadership and organizational consultant, states, "Transformational leadership is particularly suited for bringing about change. Top leaders who use a transformational leadership style enhance organizational innovation both directly, by creating a compelling vision, and indirectly, by creating an environment that supports exploration, experimentation, risk taking and sharing of ideas." (Daft, p. 425)

Embracing a Transformational Leadership Style

There are four aspects of transformational leadership that can serve you extremely well in facilitating change.

1 - *Idealized Influence.*

Followers respect leaders who possess strong character. Most often, they will desire to pattern their leader's example. By virtue of who you are as a leader, you can create openness with your followers regarding change. Your strong character breeds trust. According to the work of Goffee & Jones, followers admire leaders who are able to engender feelings of significance and excitement.

2 - *Inspirational Motivation.*

Followers are motivated by a leader's encouragement and affirmation. Goffee & Jones' research shows that followers seek to be appreciated and affirmed for a job well done. They aren't only looking for formal recognition programs, but also informal gestures like hand-written notes, positive voice-mail and affirming e-mail messages. In other words, happy cows produce better milk.

3 - *Intellectual Stimulation.*

Followers are more inclined to accept ownership as they are empowered and have freedom to be innovative. Kouzes & Posner assert transformational leaders promote collaboration and encourage diversity of perspectives.

4 - *Individualized Consideration.*

Leaders act as coaches, caring and listening carefully to the needs of followers. Leaders provide support to enable followers to be successful. Followers feel valued and are more receptive to invest energy and endure the stress of making change happen.

By embracing a transformational leadership approach, you can possibly reduce the amount of resistance you may encounter when you are ushering in a change.

Leading Change

In his book, *Leading Strategic Change*, J. Stewart Black suggests that to motivate people through change of any size, leaders must invite followers to be a part of the process itself. Followers are most engaged when they are allowed to offer their own ideas about the process.

The leader must *confront* and *contrast*. The leader's job is to show where the organization was, where it is now and where it will be if change does not occur. Once the organization begins to implement change, Black asserts that the leader needs to *chart* how the change is making a difference and be the *champion* to followers through much encouragement and positive affirmation.

Again, four immediate steps you can take to successfully navigate upcoming change in your organization are:

- Confrontation: show the problem, the need to change
- Contrast: show what the organization once was and the decline that has occurred
- Charting: show how the organization is improving as a result of implementing the change(s)
- Championing: provide affirmation and encouragement during transition phase

As a leader, you are the key to how successful change will be within your organization. See the need for change, have a positive attitude about the process of change and use your team effectively. With these steps, you can navigate change successfully. It won't be easy, but the reward will be great.

The essence of change is to make a difference in the world...a world designed by our Creator to develop and change. Anne Frank captured this thought when she said, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single minute before starting to improve the world." You can start today.

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