

path to awakening change® - original paper for pepperdine msod, january 2012

“Everyone needs to know a little about change – the right answer doesn't matter if you can't implement it, “ said a seasoned consultant to his peers in a training session I was leading. True, and yet change is less about knowing and more about being and doing. Most change models and literature treat change as linear, with formulas and plans to step through a process where one size fits all. Yet change is ultimately an individual choice. And organizational change is about a lot of individual choices.

“Deep change at the collective level requires deep change at the personal level.” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 116). And at the personal level, one size does not fit all. Yes, managers need to know a little about change: that it is fundamentally about people, and elements of it are predictable, and it will be hard and this is normal, but simply knowing is not enough. You must do, but to do, you first must be.

In leading change, there is being, and there is doing.

be	human	courageous	patient
do	<p>Know thyself. Get honest with yourself – how do you feel about it? What's your style? What's your appetite? What are you going to have to change? What support do you need?</p> <p>Create spaces/ forums where you show your humanity and enable others to do the same.</p> <p>Relationships are key. Know thy people. Let them get honest with you. How do they feel? What do they want and need? What is your appetite? What support do you need?</p>	<p>Be flexible – the best laid plans are only plans.</p> <p>Offer degrees of freedom. Do not manage, orchestrate. Conduct the orchestra.</p> <p>Let go of the illusion of control.</p> <p>Enter conversations where people can talk about emotions. Share yours.</p> <p>Ask questions you don't know the answers to and admit when you don't.</p> <p>Simplify versus complexify</p> <p>Tell the truth, even when brutal</p>	<p>Slow down to speed up. Sense-making takes time.</p> <p>Remember the marathon, and you're a Kenyan.</p> <p>Make mistakes, learn from them, and forgive yourself.</p> <p>Communicate more than you think you need to. Repeat yourself and allow others to do the same.</p> <p>Small steps create major transforming effects.</p>



being human

In the evolution of modern business, corporations have treated humans as machines. Management and leadership theories use mechanistic language, models, and create routines and structures to re-engineer, maintain, and manage people. (Morgan, 2006) The thing is, we're not machines. We don't always work the same way, or follow linear processes. Yes, we're rational beings, but we're also emotional beings. We're unpredictable. You have to engage our hearts and our minds. Change isn't easy, and we don't want to do it. And even when we do want to do it, we don't want to do it. If it were simply about knowledge, we would all be skinny, in great shape, never drink too much, or do whatever it is that we say we're not going to do anymore. Ever heard of the elephant and the rider analogy used in Switch? The rider is our mind, the rational side that wants us to stop or start doing something and has all these logical reasons and motives, but the rider is small compared to the elephant, that emotional side that can take over and go its own way. (Heath & Heath, 2010)

As hard as it is to make individual change, it's compounded when it involves a whole organization of individuals. Immunity to Change likens it to the body's immune system: "At the simplest level... immunity to change provides us a picture of how we systematically work against the very goal we genuinely want to achieve." (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 47)

To lead change, you have to first be human, and in touch with your own humanity. I'd say, "first know thyself," but I already said knowing isn't doing. So get to know yourself really well with respect to the change. What do you really think? How do you really feel? What excites you? What scares you? What do you need to change in yourself to enable this change in others? What's your appetite for this change? What support do you need? Self-awareness in leaders is key. Karp highlights the importance of individual leader change, by sharing Leo Tolstoy's quote "everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Karp suggests that when leaders start a new way of working, they become a role model for change.

How do you get in touch with your own humanity? Peter Block's book title says, "the answer to how is yes." (Block, 2002) Nike's slogan advises, "just do it," and do it however works for you – journal, work with a coach, talk to a mentor – a variety of approaches will work to get you there. Just do it.

Once you're in touch with yourself, you can work on the relationship with others. Change happens in relationship. (Daneke, 1997; Dolan, 2003; Keene, 2000) You have to know your colleagues as humans, and allow them to be human, too. Organizational change is emergent, and happens within relationship. Self-awareness and the recognition of differences between individuals is a key component to this success. As humans, we connect because of relationship: shared values, motivations, and mutual respect of differences. You have to create spaces/ forums where you show your humanity and enable others to do the same. OD experts offer all sorts of advice and methods on how to do this. Again, the answer to how is yes. One size does not fit all – it depends on you and your people. Structured large group interventions, many options of which are shown are options, (Bunker & Alban, 1997) as is Shaw's more unstructured Complexity approach. Both/ And can work.



being courageous

Leading change isn't easy. It's emotional, and it takes all kinds of courage from the leaders to do things differently. Where? Wherever the unexpected is needed. Have the courage to...

- Be flexible. Yes, plans are important, but they are "only blueprints, and as builders know, things are different once actual construction begins. Unanticipated obstacles require adjustments to plans. Dilemmas arise and tradeoffs are called for that can throw off schedules and ignite conflicts. Operations managers discover that many things – systems, structures, processes and people – simply don't fit together as planned." (Marks & Mirvis, 2010)
- Let go of the illusion of control. The more you try to control, the less control you'll have. Shaw advocates letting go of detailed agendas, power points and too many planned activities and says to let the future emerge in conversation. It's at the edge of chaos where true change happens. (Shaw, 2002) How do you let go of the illusion of control? Offer degrees of freedom. Dolan discusses how to do this, and it's via a shared set of values, which are "organizers or attractors of disorder." He advocates to "guide by behavioural parameters or values." (Dolan, 2003)
- Do not manage, but orchestrate. (Dolan, 2003) Benjamin Zander, a famous conductor who translates his art into leadership theory, shared a quote in his Art of Possibility video, "It was only after 20 years of conducting I had a significant realization: The conductor doesn't make a sound. He depends for his power on his ability to make other people powerful. My job is to awaken possibility in other people." So conduct the orchestra. Give them the key, the tempo, and some dynamic direction, but let them play their instruments and make the music.
- Let people get emotional. Let them get angry. Let them be sad. Let them talk about their fears. Intense emotion results from cultural change, and "when emotions were acknowledged and treated with respect, people became more engaged with the change." (Smollan & Sayers, 2009, p. 435) Talk about your emotions. Listen. Listen more. Listen even more. Ask questions. Get curious together about where it's coming from. Work together to answer the questions and create the new reality. Create space for these conversations – not just a bullet point on a structured agenda, but offering unstructured agendas, and venues where people can really talk – in private and in public.
- Ask questions you don't know the answers to and admit when you don't have answers. Be ok with it. Commit to creating answers together.
- Simplify. Resist the urge to complicate, pontificate, or do whatever "ate" you think will make you look smart. People need to be able to focus, and the simpler the better. Distill it down to its essence – whatever it is you want – the vision, the actions, the next step. Make it easy.
- Tell the truth, even when the truth is brutal. A mentor of mine, David Celmer, uses a phrase, "there's misery in change, and I can help minimize it." I love that idea. He goes on to say that what creates the misery is not the breadth of the change itself, but the gap between the expectation set and the reality. I remember how it played out on a busy night hostessing at Chili's. If you told people it would be 5 minutes and it took 10, they weren't happy. If you told people it would be 30 minutes and it was 20, they were happy. Be brutally honest. Set real expectations, and as the English say, "Mind the gap. "

Why do I categorize these actions together in "be courageous?" They sound simple, but how often do you see these actions taken in your day to day workplace? Any of them,



much less all of them? If you do, count yourself fortunate. Most still work in places where the MO is command & control, and emotions are asked to be checked at the door and picked up on your way out of the building, where people aim to show how smart they are, paint rosy pictures, and never want to admit they don't have an answer to a question. Being different takes courage, and allows change. Be courageous and enter a brave new world.

being patient

Be patient, with yourself, with others, and with the organization. Change takes time. And you will make mistakes. There will be things that could have gone differently or better. As Schein says, "errors are inevitable. Learn from them." (Schein, 1999)

Slow down to speed up. Trying to rush change turns into trying to force commitment, and they may not be ready yet. Commitment takes time. Think about how many times you've thought about trying to lose weight or start exercising or whatever it is you think about changing. How long did it take you to decide to do it? What got you there? Once you decided, how many false starts did you have? How about making progress, then stalling out when you hit a roadblock? The Japanese have a collective approach to decision making, *Ringi*, in which they take their time. They go slow. But once it's decided, it's been vetted, debated, ultimately decided and agreed, and everyone is on board. You can't rush change.

I believe it was Bridges who first described what's known as the Marathon Effect in leading change, but my friend David Celmer who tells such a great story about it. He likens it to the New York Marathon. If you're leading an organizational change, you're one of the Kenyans. You're at the front. You line up first, you're leading the pack, you can see the road ahead and you've got room to look around, time to breathe. You're making your way through the twists and turns and seeing real progress, and those poor couch potato first time marathoners are still jam packed on the Brooklyn Bridge taking their first steps to cross the STARTING LINE. They're in a crowd. They can't see where they're going and are just caught in following the crowd. In the meantime, you're all the way to Central Park – there's trees, the end line is in sight, the worst is well behind you, and you're thinking about the next race. You did it: you're fatigued, and maybe even a little bored, but you're not really a Kenyan, you're a change leader, and you've got to help all the rest of those guys finish this marathon. It's not over until they get to Central Park, too.

Small steps matter. Morgan reminds us of the butterfly effect: small steps at critical times can result in major transforming effects. (Morgan, 2006) We can't always see these and may not even realize it's happening. Good To Great highlights most transformed organizations only recognized it in hindsight. (Collins, 2001) Turning the ship by one degree can change course significantly over the long run.

Communicate more than you think you need to do. Over-communicate. Repeat yourself. Let others do the same. Listen. Listen again. Sense-making takes time. Karp advises the only way an organization can grow is to change the way people think and act, which requires alignment with or an inner shift in values:

Each person has an internal mental model of his/ her world; a dynamic model that guides his/ her thinking and behaviour that changes as a result of the consequences of that person's actions and of the information exchanges. This is how organizations as a



whole adapt to changes and it is why leading and controlling change is extremely difficult (2006, p. 5).

And why it will take patience.

Be human, be courageous, and be patient. Do what being those means for you. Take advice from all the experts out there, practice your skills, and just do it. As Tony Petrella wisely told us, "if it's worth doing, it's worth doing imperfectly."



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