

## Sharpen Your Tools

Mike McKinley

### Embrace the New

#### Change to grow and grow to change

The idea of change can make people feel apprehensive. It tends to impart a negative emotional response. In our head, a little voice says, "Oh no; not again. Now what's going to happen? I know they are out to get me. I know that there is some underlying reason for this change."

All around us, change is happening all the time. We are actually confronting change every minute of our lives, which is why it's important to remain flexible and not dig our heels in when change is unavoidable.

#### Always be Prepared to Change

Organizations should always be ready to alter operations at a moment's notice to prepare for changes, such as market fluctuation or new ideas. Many times, changes occur in two ways: immediate or planned.

Great organizations are constantly readying themselves for future changes and educating their employees about what's coming at them. Unfortunately, some businesses insist upon keeping people off guard by surprising them with changes on a whim, such as new trends, quick fixes or ideas used by their competition. They are treating change like it's a magic show, which makes people feel like the organization is putting something over on them.

#### Responding to Change

When it comes to change, education and over-communication are the way to go. If people are not helped through the process of change, stress is prevalent, rumor mills disseminate false information and stagnation occurs.

Any time change occurs, be aware that problems will surface. Not dealing with them will certainly affect change from being implemented smoothly. Looking back at my career in leadership at all levels, I was a great problem solver. Foolishly, I looked forward to problems because I could then jump on my white horse and save the day.

I have learned that this is the wrong approach to problems. My job is to be a resource to the problem-solving process. The people closest to the problem should always be the ones solving it. Leadership helps train others to effectively problem solve, not to be the ones doing the problem solving.

I also learned it was important to spend more time as a group to anticipate problems. If you spend all your time reacting to problems, you can't plan on future problems. This leads to more temporary fixes and fewer lasting solutions.

So, change and problem solving go hand in hand.

The personal and emotional side of change, in most cases, is more difficult to handle than the change itself. When I'm asked to help organizations through challenges, we spend more time on effects and reactions than anything else.

First, we work to educate people about change. If we accept that change is inevitable, implementations of change will be more acceptable. We also help them understand the two types of change. Immediate change calls for quick action, while planned change takes time and consideration. People must embrace transition before tackling the specific change itself.

Our reaction to change differs depending on what the change is, the timing of the change and our perception of how the change is going to affect us personally.

#### The Personality Types of Change

In regard to change, we categorize people into three groups. Adaptors are the ones who are excited by change. They say, "Bring it on!" They believe the organization is finally on the right track. They are campaigning for this great idea.

Resisters are the ones who do not like change but can be sold on the idea. They tend to ask a lot of questions to get to the root cause and effect of this change before they make a decision whether they will buy in. I must remind you that these reactions are all happening based on the exact same change.

Coasters are the ones who say, "Oh, I've seen this all before. What do I care? Another 14 years and I'm out of here anyway." This group is the most difficult to deal with because they are mostly silent, but they require more attention. These people are the underminers and their usual response is, "If they think we're going to do that, they're crazy." The coasters need to be over-educated and over assisted through the process of change.

I love the adaptors because they sign on early and are our stewards of embracing change. I love the resisters, too, because they ask questions and force us to think through the change before it's presented. And once they are on board, they also serve as stewards to others.

The coasters need immediate and constant attention. They need one-on-one counseling, and as leaders we need to pay attention to their wants and especially their mood regarding the change. We should never ignore them or simply hope they will follow the adaptors or resisters.

#### Change is an Opportunity

When change happens, it is naïve to simply send an email about the details and believe that everyone will follow along willingly.

Change needs to be thought through. There must be a plan for implementation. There needs to be fact finding, buy-in and monitoring to see if fine-tuning the plan is needed. We constantly need to remind our people about where we've been, where we are now and where we want to be.

Change is not easy, but it should be viewed as opportunity to collaborate.

We need to be aware of people's level of acceptance of change, help them individually get through the bumps or hiccups and continually move the process along. All of us are actually great at handling change. And, if you don't think you are changing, get your high-school yearbook out and look at the pictures.

Mike McKinley is an author, speaker and consultant who engages audiences and challenges them humorously to accept change and obstacles and overcome life's adversities.

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