

EFFECTIVELY LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

By Robert J. Tamasy

Some people dislike change of any kind. Disrupting their sense of the status quo is very unsettling. For me, change is good – as long as it happens on my terms. But like many people, I feel resistant toward change when I have little or no influence on its implementation. Being an older member of what is termed the “Baby Boomer generation,” the current pace of change in our society never ceases to amaze me. Recently I was in an electronics retail store and observed how much technology has affected how music and video media are marketed and sold. Online streaming seems to have changed everything.

That is just one small example. Virtually every business has felt the impact of both social and technological changes, ranging from how operational activities are conducted to how sales presentations are made to the kinds of products and services being offered. This creates considerable challenges for the leader who must ensure necessary changes are put in place in a timely and effective manner.

In their book, *Leadership Lessons of Jesus*, authors Bob Briner and Ray Pritchard made this observation:

“Leadership requires an understanding of newness in the context of the old...a leader must know what is going on. He or she must also be able to articulate why the new way is better. Truly innovative leaders will always be challenged by those who protect the old ways of doing things.”

I remember in the mid-'80s when a good friend gave me my first desktop computer for work. The owner of a computer sales company, one day Albert asked, “Bob, do you have a computer?” When I told him I did not, I immediately thought to myself, “Why would I want a computer? My electric typewriter works perfectly well.” My friend insisted, however, and shipped a used Macintosh computer to me. That machine would seem hopelessly prehistoric compared to computers today, but at the time it revolutionized the way I worked as a writer and editor. It was life-changing. Thankfully, my friend persuaded me to make the leap into the then-new world of computer technology.

Despite being compiled over thousands of years, the Bible truly is a book about change – social as well as spiritual. Here are some principles it presents about dealing with change:

Know what is going on. A true leader focuses not only on the present and the bottom line, but also anticipates what may be happening in the future and how to respond accordingly. During a time of great uncertainty, the ancient Israelites were able to turn to “*men from Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do*” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Set an example worth following. One supervisor I had years ago often said, “I will never ask anyone to do something I would not be willing to do.” So in accepting change, staff members are more likely to respond favorably when they see their leader navigating the change process as well. “*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put into practice*” (Philippians 4:8-9).

Seek feedback to implement changes effectively. Often people most directly affected by changes are ideally suited for determining how best to implement them. To impose changes without asking for suggestions and comments can prove disastrous – or at least impede the change process. “*For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure*” (Proverbs 11:14).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is the most significant change you have been experiencing of late?
2. Why is change sometimes viewed as a threat? Have you ever felt that way yourself? If so, describe the circumstances and how you – or individuals you worked with – responded.
3. When important changes are necessary, how have you seen leaders undertake the task of seeing those changes implemented? Has their leadership been helpful – or a hindrance – in advancing the change process? Explain your answer.
4. In your opinion, what is the most important step a leader must take in facilitating needed changes?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions from the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 12:15, 15:22, 19:20, 28:2; Matthew 9:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5