

Smart Change Leadership

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The Center is a non-profit Christian consulting group whose highly trained team is passionate about advancing leadership and organizational health. We believe this article on change leadership will be a helpful resource for you and your team. As an extension of our vision of advancing organizational health, we are providing this resource without charge.

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Smart Change Leadership

u·biq·ui·tous (yoo'biqwədəs). This is one of those difficult-to-pronounce words that make people around the user say, “She must be really smart!”

However, the word is a good one to use when describing change.

Ubiquitous means “all over the place” or “pervasive.” And that describes all the change surrounding us – it’s everywhere!

- Change of computer software at work
- Change of medical treatments for disease
- Change of technology in your car
- Change of supervisor at your job
- Change of your health insurance plan
- Change of music styles in your church
- Change of policies at your kid’s school

Change really is everywhere. One writer in the Bible described it this way in Ecclesiastes 3:

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”



Change can be a bit overwhelming at times and especially frustrating when it is not understood or it is just plain dumb. On more than one occasion, I have heard one of my children describe a change they did not appreciate with these profound words: “That’s stupid.” It is the responsibility of the smart change leader to lead smart changes in smart ways!

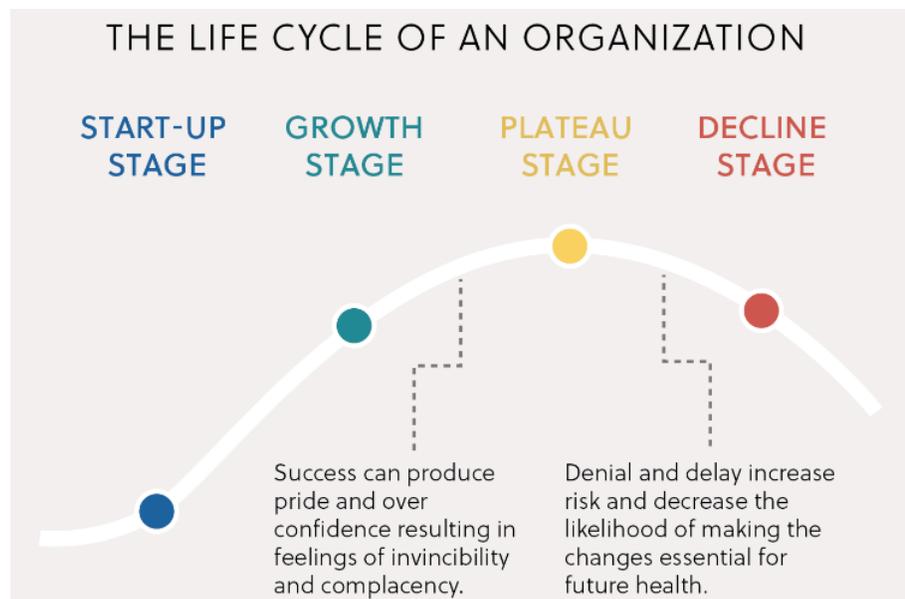
As leaders and managers, changes are not only shaping you, you are shaping change by the way you lead your team, the way you manage communication, and the way you personally respond to change yourself. Change leadership is a vital responsibility for every leader and manager. The title of an interesting book about change shows how important it is: *Change or Die!* This article is designed to give you a better understanding of change so you can lead yourself and others more effectively through it and be a smart change leader. In addition, every time you see this symbol , there is a helpful tool or exercise for you to work through on your own, or more preferably, with your team.

Life Cycle of an Organization

People and organizations have something in common – they both follow a predictable life cycle from birth to decline. While for some, the cycle is short and quick, for others the cycle can play out over many decades. It is helpful for leaders and managers to understand this cycle.



Discuss with your leaders where in the cycle you feel your organization is at this time and why.



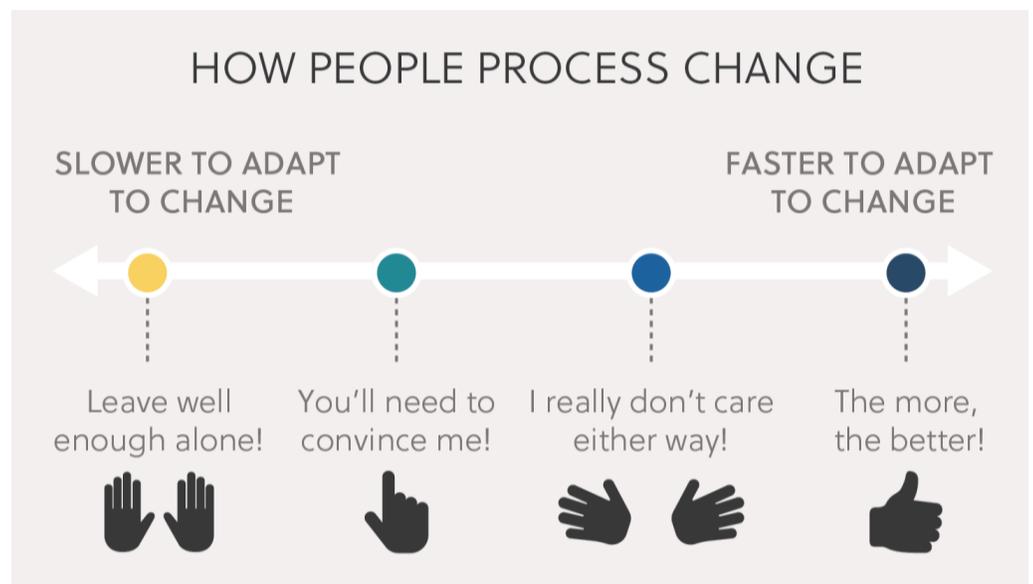
Recently, there was news of a nationally known and fast growing organization that went out of existence within six months of experiencing a leadership crisis. People were shocked, articles were written, and social media went wild. Why? Because people were surprised that an organization in a massive growth cycle could ever decline so quickly. But they can, and they do. Sometimes they die because of not changing and other times because the leaders are not wisely managing change. Either way, the result is the same: disillusionment, disappointment, and sometimes even disdain. As Helen Keller once said, “The saddest thing in life is people who can see but have no vision!”

How People Process Change

Everyone processes change differently. For example, some people overall love change and are quick to adapt, while others fear change and are slower to adapt. It is wise to consider not only how you process change, but also how some of your key leaders and constituents process it. By understanding how others process change, you can be better prepared to provide what they need to adapt to the new initiative.



Determine where you and your key leaders fall on the change scale.



Essentials of Smart Change Leadership

Have you ever gone camping? Or prepared for a major storm? If so, you know it is important to be sure to have the “essentials”: food, water, and batteries, for example. The same is true for leading change. You increase the likelihood of success by ensuring that you understand and use the three essentials of smart change leadership:

If a change fails, it will be due to something lacking in one of these three essentials.



PURPOSE

Catalyst Leadership
Compelling Vision
Clear Focus



PREPARATION

Assess Readiness
Create the Plan
Consider the Unexpected



EXECUTION

Lead the Change
Model Persistence
Allow for Flexibility

Each of the three essential elements requires successful actions as noted in the graphic above. The following sections will provide you with practical guidance on each of these three essentials.

Purpose



PURPOSE
Catalyst Leadership
Compelling Vision
Clear Focus



Jack is the pastor of a church of 200 people. But twenty years ago, it was a church of almost 500 and was viewed as healthy, vibrant and innovative. He loved people and was a good care-giver to them. However, he was not a



catalyst, and therefore, he seldom could come up with an idea or change that would ignite others toward the church's mission. In addition, because of his cautious personality, he would not embrace the ideas that came from two people who were catalysts – his youth pastor and one of his board members. Because of Jack's lack of compelling purpose, the church will continue to decline, lose people, and experience the loss of the few catalysts he had. Jack's problem was not that he was not a catalyst. After all, not every leader is gifted this way. His problem was that he did not know how to utilize those who were. Smart change leaders are either catalysts for change or surround themselves with those who are.

Catalyst Leadership

What does catalyst leadership look like?

Some may think catalyst leaders are super-human. They are not! They just have a set of talents that God has given them that, when used wisely, can make a big difference. The most effective catalyst leaders are a unique blend of some of the following characteristics. A catalyst leader:

- Is a compelling communicator
- Takes risks
- Inspires others
- Possesses exceptional wisdom
- Maintains a high level of credibility
- Creates meaningful ideas
- Attracts influential followers

Compelling Vision

How do you create compelling vision?

Every change needs a compelling vision or rationale. The longer, more complex, or muddier it becomes, the less likely the change is to survive. Author John Kotter says that if you can't communicate the vision to someone in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, you are not done creating it.



Three important steps to creating a compelling vision are to:

1. Explain the problem or opportunity
2. Provide a clear, concise, and compelling solution
3. Share this in a way that reaches the heart of the people, not just the head

(Additional resources that may be helpful are: *Making Vision Stick* by Andy Stanley and *The Heart of Change* by John Kotter.)

What is the role of providing a vision that inspires hope?

As far back as the 1950s, psychologists and psychiatrists were trying to assess which approaches to counseling were most effective. What they discovered was, in general, it did not matter. Many people experienced positive change from the counseling regardless of the therapeutic approach. The common element the researchers discovered connected to the effectiveness was hope. It wasn't the particular model of counseling that inspired the change, but rather, it was the hope that came from the help that was being provided. In applying this principle to the change process, people are more likely to be motivated to change when they experience hope – believing that what comes after the change takes place will be better than the present state. Smart change leaders inspire hope! (For more on this topic, consider reading *Change or Die* by Alan Deutschman.)

Clear Focus

How important is focus?

Cognitive researchers believe most people can only give attention to no more than 4-7 pieces of information at a time. Smart change leaders have the unique ability to keep the organization focused even in the midst of the noises and distractions common to life. Focus is what you see in great athletes and other performers who, even in the midst of 60,000 people, can tune out and zero in. Focus is important in leading change because it is essential to accomplishing the vision to which all change should be connected. Without focus, a leader or manager will drift off target and begin to work on a new idea or get caught up in micro issues rather than



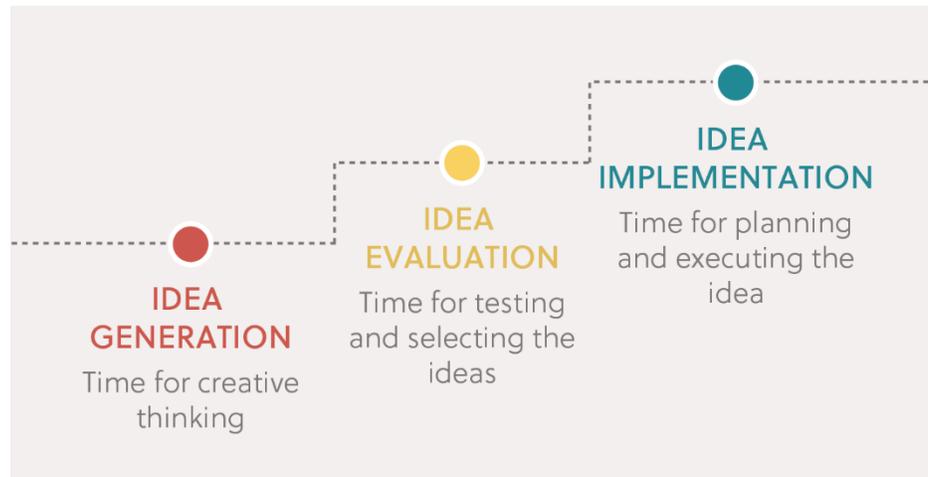
vital macro issues. (For additional reading in this area, I recommend Daniel Goleman’s book, *Focus*.)

How to work through the stages of idea generation?

The following graphic shows a healthy process for generating new ideas and solutions to problems. Sometimes teams or leaders slip into Idea Evaluation too quickly, quenching Idea Generation. Other times, a leader generates too many ideas but doesn’t implement them.



At which of these three stages are you/your team best and weakest?



Preparation



PREPARATION
Assess Readiness
Create the Plan
Consider the Unexpected



Sharon was a visionary leader of a mid-sized business. She was a catalyst for new ideas and change. While not every one of her ideas was a success, she hit a number of home runs over the years of leading this business. However, at times, Sharon’s staff would grow frustrated because she would sometimes generate the idea but not take the time to test it or consider the planning needed for success. Smart change leaders need to not only ensure the creation of new initiatives but also make sure they prepare for them.



Assess Readiness

How to determine if there is a felt need for change

Quite often people deny the realities that are surrounding them, either because they cannot see how serious matters are or they fear that change may result in a personal loss to them. Four of the most common signs that an organization is not interested in or ready for change are:

- Things do not seem all that bad
- There is evidence that all is not well but these signs are ignored
- There is a resistance to anyone who may provide data for change
- There is a sense of forced optimism where people are expected to talk positive

In his excellent book *Necessary Endings*, Dr. Henry Cloud talks about moments of truth when we have to decide to embrace a change or to embrace “average.”



How does this quote possibly relate to the circumstances you are presently facing in your personal life or organization?

“The pruning moment is that clarity of enlightenment when we become responsible for making the decision to either own the vision or not. If we own it, we have to prune. If we don’t, we have decided to own the other vision, the one we called average. It is a moment of truth that we encounter almost every day in many, many decisions.” – Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings*, 2011

How to assess the leadership credibility before launching change

Change requires leadership capital. In other words, you will need enough credibility in the bank before you can succeed in influencing others to follow you toward change. A major change usually requires major credibility reserves, and smaller changes require smaller credibility reserves.





To assess credibility...

1. Identify the people who are most important to the success of your leadership and attempt to assess how much credibility you have with them.
2. Seek feedback from other mature leaders regarding their perception of your credibility.
3. What behaviors, decisions and actions have cost you the most credibility? Were they worth it?
4. What upcoming changes will require significant credibility? Do you have enough credibility to succeed in this change?
5. What should you begin doing to improve credibility?

Credibility Builders

Always acting with integrity
 Continually improving your skills
 Doing what you say you will do
 Admitting mistakes and correcting them
 Solving problems
 Listening to suggestions and feedback
 Sharing information openly and freely
 Being accessible and visible



Credibility Destroyers

Behaving unethically or immorally
 Sharing inaccurate information
 Lacking follow through
 Failing to admit and correct mistakes
 Not returning calls and emails
 Unwilling to listen to others
 Lacking honesty and transparency
 Lacking pursuit of relationships

Create the Plan

How do you implement the change you are making?

1. Define the goals necessary for accomplishing the new initiative
2. Determine who will lead each goal
3. Create a path for implementation including dates for action and communication
4. Incorporate ongoing accountability
5. Conduct ongoing evaluation and adjust as needed

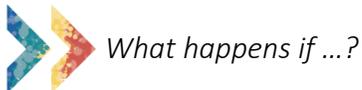
Remember: Change will often take much LONGER than you plan and seldom unfold the way you expect.



Consider the Unexpected

Have you considered the unexpected?

Unexpected things can emerge at the most inconvenient time! Leaders need to consider some of these by doing scenario planning. While it is not possible to consider or plan for every unexpected thing that can happen, the following graphic will help you plan for some of the events that have happened and can happen to you.



PERSONNEL

Moral failure
Medical crisis
Key leader quits/ terminated



FINANCIAL

Key donor(s) stops giving
Economic crisis
Momentum slows



POLITICAL

Change of board
Change of catalyst leadership



Execution



EXECUTION

Lead the Change
Model Persistence
Allow for Flexibility



Mike was the director of a small nonprofit. The leadership team of this organization loved working together. They would hold planning retreats and discuss new ideas that would address weaknesses in the organization and serve its constituents more effectively. But more often than not, nothing ever happened. They talked, and talked, and talked, and yet there was seldom any follow through. As the leader, Mike contributed to this culture of “all talk, no execution” by not providing an implementation plan or accountability. Smart change leaders know how to move from vision to action!



Lead the Change

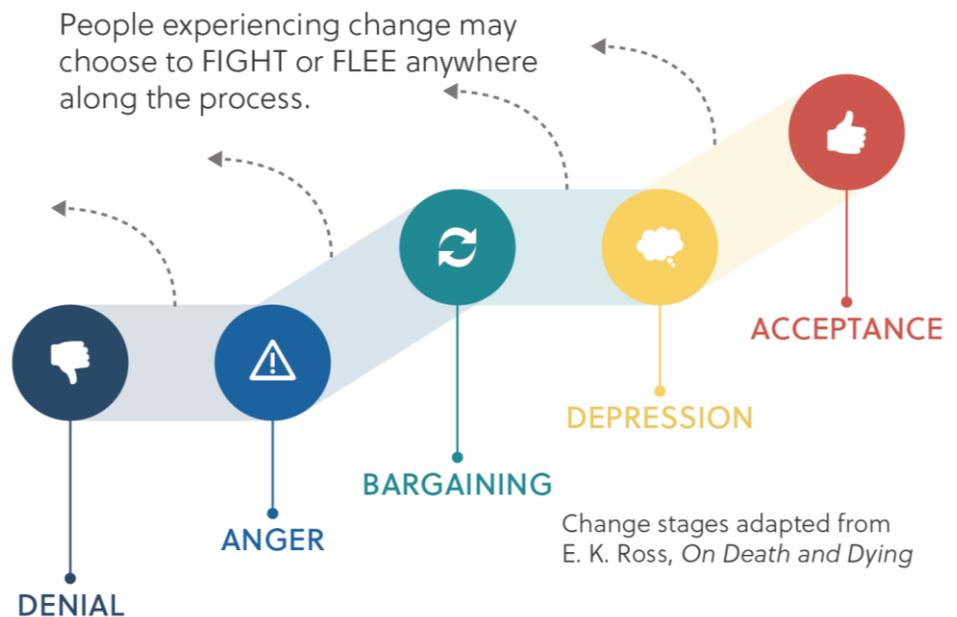
How to understand and manage resistance to change

Resistance to change is normal. Change is inconvenient, makes people feel a bit confused and embarrassed, and can often result in a sense of loss.

Remember, not everyone who resists a change is an obstructionist.

Sometimes they resist it because either they don't understand it or they see a problem with it. After all, people fight to protect what they value! The following graphic will help you better understand and manage resistance.

CHANGE STAGES



Where are you already or most likely going to experience resistance to the change you are considering? What will you do to better understand why they are resisting? What will you do to manage this resistance?

Which of these implementation killers are most common in the culture of your organization? How will you reduce them?

What are the top four implementation killers?

- Failure to cut through organizational obstacles
- Failure to assign a person to own it or a completion date
- Failure to empower people to implement
- Failure to hold people accountable



What mistakes can turn smart change leadership into dumb change leadership?

1. Failing to seek or listen to counsel
2. Having unhealthy team dynamics
3. Lacking a compelling vision for the change
4. Inadequately assessing likely resistance
5. Doing too much too quickly
6. Doing too little too slowly
7. Inadequately communicating about the change
8. Not being transparent about the change
9. Not having enough financial resources
10. Not having enough credibility and trust
11. Not having enough “critical mass” support
12. Implementing the change poorly
13. Quitting too soon – not enough grit!

“Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have—and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up.”

*-James Belasco and Ralph Stayer, *Flight of the Buffalo**

Model Persistence

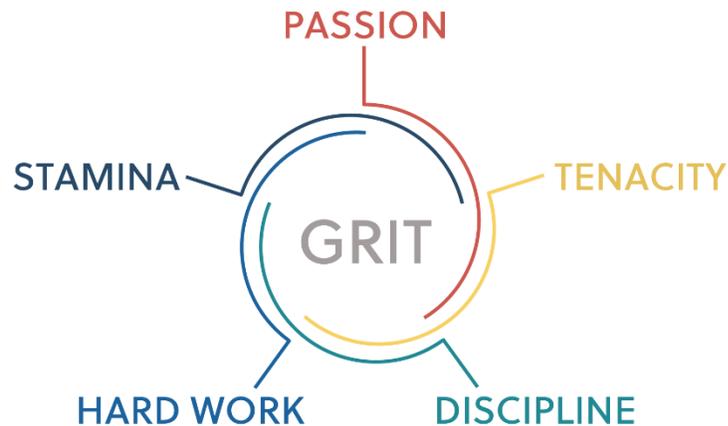
What is grit and what does grit require?

Grit is a term being used by some psychologists to describe the character trait of self-discipline. Grittiness is a common characteristic that sets apart those who are average from those who are exceptional. The following people would most likely have self-discipline as a common characteristic:

- Those who start a business or nonprofit and succeed
- Those who finish college or a training program
- Those who maintain physical fitness
- Those who develop exceptional abilities in music, sports and science
- Those who quit smoking
- Those who excel at sales
- Those who resist unhealthy or impulsive behaviors
- Those who spend less and save more



Self-discipline, which includes hard work, tenacity, passion and stamina, results in a leader who chooses not to quit when circumstances get tough. One biblical writer describes it this way: “Get rid of the things that hinder you and run with perseverance” (Hebrews 12:1-3).



Allow for Flexibility

When handling change, unexpected issues may arise. You as the leader need to be able to calmly handle the surprises that you face and be flexible to find a new solution for your organization. In addition, it is important to not “sell” your vision as being guaranteed or perfect because most change initiatives seldom are. You want to create a learning culture that allows for experimenting. You want to create a culture that is agile and open to modifying direction when evidence arises to demonstrate it would not be best to remain on the original course. There is a different and sometimes even better way.

Conclusion

The success or failure of the changes that you implement will be largely influenced by how well you lead the process. Smart change leaders surround themselves with catalysts and inspire hope. Smart change leaders ensure the creation and preparation of new initiatives. Smart change leaders know how to move from vision to action. Lead smart!





Jay Desko is the Executive Director of The Center and serves on the Senior Leadership Team at Calvary Church in Souderton, Pennsylvania. Jay brings experience in the areas of ministry assessment, leadership coaching, decision-making, and strategic questioning. Jay's degrees include a B.S. in Bible, an M.Ed in Instructional Systems Design and a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior and Leadership.

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