

**THE TRUTH
ABOUT**

THRIVING IN CHANGE

“Life is 10% of what
happens to you
and 90% of
how you react...”

William S. Kane

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As a human resources practitioner, I have been fortunate in my 25-year career to be a student, participant, and leader of successful organizational change. And while the environments and industries have been diverse, my observations about these processes have yielded a common theme. For organizational change to have the highest probability for success, on any scale, management must clearly identify and align the vision, strategy, tactics, and collective values of the organization—as the catalysts and cornerstones of the desired end state.

Done properly, management can help organizational participants embrace change processes for the enterprise to be merged, stabilized, started up, or repositioned in a way to satisfy most stakeholders in a relatively condensed timeframe.

Less than optimal direction setting or poor execution leads to an erosion of employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. Commitment falls by the side, goal attainment becomes elusive, and everyone is running for the lifeboats.

This writing offers guidance and hope for managers trying to keep their head above water in times of rising tides by dispelling organizational myths and providing practical advice for the newly appointed supervisor, as well as the seasoned corporate veteran. It includes a combination of “tried-and-true” success stories, lessons learned from failures, “how-to” human resources advice, related anecdotes, and research from contemporary thought leaders about large and small-scale organizational change.

The ideas presented in this book aren’t mutually exclusive, but they’re universally applicable. Stylistically, some Truths are more conceptual, while others—with more comprehensive “to-do’s”—should satisfy the most demanding pragmatists.

As a framework, I recognize that my professional experiences will not mirror yours, because every individual and organization is unique. However, I am confident that this writing can help you avoid a few bumps and foster your own individual capabilities for managing optimal and sustained performance.

Enjoy!

What is organizational change?

Coaching third-grade soccer is hard. It requires skills assessment, planning, discipline, and coordination.

It involves blending talents and teaching the players to fight their natural tendency to chase the ball all at once. Plays must be carefully scripted and yet have allowances for some individual improvisation.

As the coach, it requires personal investment, energy, and patience. It causes you to keep fingers crossed with hope and an aspirin bottle nearby for frustration. However, there is no more enjoyable reward than watching the ball sail into the back of your opponent's net.

Organizational change shares all these characteristics, with some additional complexities. It's an ongoing journey with multiple destinations and no real endpoint. It's characterized by multiple contradictions—the need to balance a short- and long-term perspective; the need to blend or select conservative and liberal points of view; the ability to be objective when analyzing subjective matters; the talent to have patience when time is of the essence; and the ability to let go of old practices, processes, and mindsets while gravitating toward new ones.

For the purposes of this writing, managing change is the all-encompassing process by which you confront or overcome challenges or seize new opportunities by perpetually transforming the organization from its current state to a state deemed more desirable through tapping new or improved ideas, suggestions, and processes, and applying them toward previously unrealized potential.

The mantra of organizational change is “better, faster, and cheaper.” Its three most important elements are speed, speed, and more speed.

The benefits of organizational change

Change, even for the sake of change, can have many benefits beyond process improvements, market share enhancement, or greater profitability. It offers individual and collective learning opportunities. It may also heighten employee engagement and interest in work, thus increasing productivity and job satisfaction. Likewise, employees will have a greater sense of pride and ownership if they participate.

What's different today?

Every generation has its business and economic challenges. The dialogue in today's corporate boardrooms and its ripple effect to the shop floors about the need for change is dramatically different and far more complex than it was even ten years ago.

First and foremost, bottom-line performance continues to be a mandate.

Second, the means to attain positive results is critical as stakeholders are demanding that ethics and organizational values be communicated and adhered to within an organization—at all levels and at all times. This includes having appropriate checks and balances (Sarbanes-Oxley, etc.) established for all aspects of corporate governance and policy.

Third, organizational leaders must be students of current events as the breadth and depth of issues to be considered, planned for, and reacted to expand on a global basis in real-time. Concerns about international political and economic instability have broad business implications.

Fourth, within domestic borders, organizational leaders must grapple with uncertainty in stock market valuations; quarter-to-quarter performance pressures; political, societal, and demographic shifts; technology changes; and inflationary concerns.

These changes—and others across the world and in our backyard—are happening faster and harder than ever, making related organizational change the primary and continuous challenge for all management. It takes real focus and fortitude to survive, much less prosper.

Is the time right?

Is the time *ever* right? In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey speaks of a trap that often proves too attractive for many to resist. It seems a lumberjack had been working feverishly to cut down a large tree; however, he made only limited progress in several hours. When asked by a passerby why he did not take the time to sharpen the blade—to speed along his endeavor—the lumberjack replied that he was too busy sawing. Managing organizational change is a continual sharpening of the saw.

Is there a checklist you can follow?

Leading and managing change is about

- Your commitment
- Identifying the cause of and the need for change by analyzing your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)
- Providing inspirational answers to "Why are we here?" "Where are we going?" "What needs to be accomplished?" and "How will we accomplish these objectives?"
- Creating your cultural and operating framework with the identification and inculcation of organizational values and desirable behaviors
- Treating everyone with respect and dignity
- Aligning people with purpose by getting the right person in the right place at the right time
- Managing performance
- Tracking progress
- Making every day better than the last

...and doing all of these things with proactive communication while wearing the hat of parent, teacher, field general, minister, confidante, coach, friend, referee, psychologist, and principal.

Is it fun?

Like a roller-coaster ride, the answer to this question largely depends on individual perspective. On the one hand, it's an exciting and invigorating process to lead, participate in, or have a fingerprint upon a process that raises the organization's collective ability to be more effective and efficient, and therefore, more competitive and viable. However, like many objectives worth working toward, such rewards can be attained only through what is likely to be a challenging and sometimes painful and difficult journey.

TRUTH

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90% of how you react

As managers, we work longer, smarter, and harder, but it seems that we can never get ahead. The pace of business is ever-increasing; expectations for results are in real-time; we're asked to make dozens of decisions per day, often with limited information; much work follows us home at the end of the already-far-too-long day; our span of control is stretched beyond capacity; and it seems that any energy and stamina are eroded by noon.

It isn't pretty, but it's reality. Change is a given. The chaotic "better, faster, and cheaper" world is here to stay.

In many respects, we don't have control over many of these dynamic business challenges; however, we can control how we react. The best indicator for us to personally monitor in this regard is stress.

Stress is somewhat difficult to define. It's a natural by-product of life—a subjective sensation associated with a variety of symptoms that differ for each of us. It involves mental, emotional, or physical tension, strain, or pressure. It touches all aspects of our lives, but it's particularly evident at work, where surveys and studies have shown that occupational fears and pressures are by far the leading source of stress in American workers' lives. And that trend is increasing.

Research says—contrary to popular opinion—that a certain amount of stress can be healthy, having a positive impact upon your productivity. Your heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, and metabolism all increase, helping your body react quickly and effectively to increased pressure or anxiety. By consequence, it helps you perform at a heightened level.

Stress gets a bad name when it takes over. Too much stress, such as derived from dealing with potential job insecurity or change, can be crippling. Emotional responses range from a sense of loss, much like grief, to eventual energy rejuvenation. Its early troubling stages include numbness, paralysis, irritability, and resistance.

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Behavioral responses include one of four adaptation strategies: ignoring what is going on around us, clinging to existing myths and paradigms (fight); escaping through rationalization or a radical change in direction (flight); making some minor modification in our behavior (hoping that the situation will somehow change); or embracing the change as a new learning and application opportunity.

While it isn't your place to judge how others are reacting to and absorbing the transformation around them, it's important to be aware of the potential emotional and behavioral responses for self-monitoring, as well as to help others through the experience. To this end, there are some scientifically proven tips to deal with anger, frustration, and exhaustion—helping you keep your head while those about you are losing theirs.

First, recognize there may be some early ambiguity, misinformation, and confusion about possible courses of action for your business and your role during times of organizational change. Try to get the facts. There is some validity to concerning yourself only with the facts and not the company grapevine.

Second, hone your skills of awareness to recognize those times when you lose touch—with yourself and those you manage. Be conscious of your whole self, others, and the context in which you live and work.

Third, never lose your optimism. Hope is a guiding force. It contributes to recuperation and renewal. It enables you to believe in and strive to attain your goals for tomorrow. It lets you inspire others.

Fourth, have compassion by directing your attention to others. This is critical for your sustenance and maintenance of a leadership role.

Last, don't underestimate the power of rest and relaxation. Your parasympathetic nervous system, which counteracts stress, positively responds to recovery activities such as meditating, exercising, listening to music, reading, and enjoying other hobbies.

Hope is a guiding force...It enables you to believe in and strive to attain your goals for tomorrow.

The next few Truths are intended to help you identify the important professional and personal factors to consider as you determine whether to participate in and manage the organizational change mandate.

