

Face It – Change Is Constant

by Jon Craighead

Change Management – why is it such a big deal? Try this: Everything you know and understand in your business will be completely compromised in the relatively near future. Here's another one: If you're not changing and updating your business practices and operations on a routine basis, your competitive advantage will be lost due to time and competition. Neither of these statements is pleasant to hear but must be confronted without hesitation, based on the assumption the business leader is committed to the success and viability of his/her business. Change Management is a familiar term, yet it is rarely fully understood. The subject is apt to be avoided rather than embraced.

John Kotter, Harvard Business School professor and noted thought leader on change management, says: *"We are heading into an increasingly turbulent world where change will be constant."* Any organization that is not preparing itself and its leaders to deal effectively with the impending wave of change is putting the future viability of the enterprise in serious jeopardy. Why are we so resistant to change? The more we study this phenomenon the more we learn what a natural reaction this resistance is both psychologically and physically.

The physical process is known as Homeostasis, which is the tendency of an organism, system or cell to regulate its internal conditions, such as the chemical composition of its body fluids, in order to maintain health and functioning, regardless of outside conditions. When there is an organ transplant, the physician is required to use medication in the process that enables the receiving body to accept the new organ and prevent rejection. The organism or cell maintains homeostasis by monitoring its internal conditions, and responding appropriately when these conditions deviate from their optimal state. The maintenance of a steady body temperature in warm-blooded animals is an example of homeostasis. In human beings, the homeostatic regulation of body temperature involves such mechanisms as sweating when the internal temperature becomes excessive and shivering to produce heat, as well as the generation of heat through metabolic processes when the internal temperature falls too low.

The psychological impact of change involves the human phenomenon of dealing with the unknown. The unfamiliar often occurs as threatening. For example, people will begin to read a book and then go to the last chapter to see how it's going to turn out – we can't stand the suspense. The first thing many of us do when we're in a

new situation is to try to compare it to something we already know. We're always looking for the quick answer, rather than hanging out in the question for the possibility of discovery.

In summary: Resistance to change is a natural human phenomenon. Therefore, to resist change is neither right nor wrong. It is simply a function of being a human being. This is analogous to the weather, which changes no matter what you think about it. It is an inevitability of life. Change also is a natural phenomenon of moving forward. And, while sometimes difficult, has its rewards. The challenge is not to avoid, deny or resist change, but to embrace it. Change may appear as wrong or right, good or bad – it's really neither. It's just change.

In our next offering we'll examine how change affects the workforce. How do you build a workforce that deals seamlessly with changes, rather than being at their effect? We'll explore the opportunities that are available to a workforce that deals effectively with the unavoidable, unending onslaught of surprises.