



Leveraging Change

by Jon Craighead

Previously we examined the inevitability of change and its effect on both our physical and psychological natural resistance to it. This article will focus on how an organization can leverage change to insure its continued sustainability. Because change is likely, it's advisable to develop skills for interacting with change as a potential opportunity rather than something to resist. To maximize its impact, change must be dealt with competently. An investigation into change requires a multitude of approaches; however, we will focus on three: vision, innovation, and leadership. Vision is the capacity to imagine a potential benefit without existing evidence. Innovation is the process of implementing a design or application with the intent of transforming an envisioned possibility into realism. Leadership is managing people into action to complete the process of transforming vision and innovation into reality. This process may be realized through existing channels or newly created methodologies to produce the anticipated outcome.

A vision is an assertion that is yet to be a proven feasible possibility. More often than not, visions are not immediately identifiable objects, otherwise they would be an already-known quantity. An example is the iPhone, which is a telephone, a watch, calendar, camera, photo album, memo pad, and a typewriter capable of communicating worldwide, and is carried in pockets and used by the vast majority of the world's population. However, not long ago this inimitable and persistently tethered utility would have been characterized as an outright unrealistic and impossible folly! Vision requires action; vision alone is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time and is of little value. Vision with action can change the world.

Innovation is the domain needed for significant discovery. It's not surprising that innovation is difficult for well established companies. By and large these organizations are better facilitators than innovators, and most are ineffective at generating breakthrough game-changing activities. Innovation requires resisting the complacency of success and necessitates a persistent alertness for trends which identify indicators that point to better efficiencies. Historically when the future becomes the present it bears little resemblance to how we might have imagine it to be. Because of this, the innovation process requires us to unleash ourselves from knowing and focus initially on our "what-if" imaginations. There are many actions that stimulate innovation, but three key ones are: choose, evolve, and mobilize.

Choose to be innovative. This is intense work; it distinguishes one from others and requires an accelerated commitment beyond normal expectations. As an innovator you become a lifelong searcher for new discoveries. An observant opportunist will see openings the unobservant will miss.

Evolve represents a condition where existing products become something new. Sometimes the neatest innovations come from exiting products. Case in point: the iPhone, in all its glory, is still basically a telephone, which was invented in 1876.

Mobilize others to engage in the innovation process. Promote an environment of achievement. Organizations that encourage and reward innovation are generally the most creative and financially successful companies. Apple and Google are examples. Their people are incentivized to think and try new approaches and are given all the support they need to be successful.

Leadership is an indispensable component for any success, and requires heroic action, especially in a time of change; even more so in the haze of upheaval, which is often a byproduct of change. Good ideas lay fallow without a trailblazer leading the charge. Leaders are required to provide an atmosphere of certainty at the height of uncertainty. They must be comfortable enough to assign operational control and authority, when appropriate, without any sense of their own diminished authority. The heroic leader is a builder of growth and stimulates a sense of achievement, while simultaneously insuring the organization remains viable throughout a transitioning process. The leader is an engineer of confidence who clearly recognizes the potential in everyone; and most importantly, holds others to account so that they are honored to be held accountable.

A most rewarding aspect of leveraging change is when it is related to as a potential opportunity rather than as a threat, making possible valuable work-life experiences. Change spurs invention and challenges us to engage beyond predictability – we become bigger than we imagine ourselves to be.