

Change Management: Not Just A Movement

It's a Logical View of Evolving Circumstances

by Jon Craighead

Change Management is not a new phenomenon. On a recent visit to our nation's capital we visited the Jefferson Memorial, and I was struck by a quote on one of the wall tablets. It was written by Thomas Jefferson in 1816, and it reads as follows:

I am certainly not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions. I think moderate imperfections had better be borne with; because, when once known, we will accommodate ourselves to them, and find practical means of correcting their ill effect. But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.

What Jefferson is clearly proposing is that change for the sake of change is an exercise in foolery; but change that will improve, enlighten, and in general make a difference is a worthwhile exercise of responsibility. Dealing with change is a most challenging exercise, especially when it is unanticipated and unexpected. Nonetheless, in order to manage our business and our lives as well, we must become facile with the reality of change or we risk, in a matter of time, being powerless to guide the ship of enterprise.

I think the biggest threat to reality is to have an unmovable position on our views of how things should be rather than how they, in fact, are. As a consultant, the hardest barrier to penetrate is the successful leader who has weathered the storm in the face of adversity to succeed and is certain to have all the formulas for success. For this honorable person life is a simple formula of proceeding in a business-as-usual format, not taking into account that the environment has shifted and continuing to see the world as it was in times past. It is analogous to slowly dimming the light in the room by a rheostat and remaining unaware until suddenly finding oneself sitting in darkness. Imagine what insight Jefferson must have had to consider that the greatest democracy ever created may at some future point need to be radically revised and updated. Our founders were extraordinary in their farsightedness to envision that these fundamental principles could come into question. How blessed we are to have had such great leaders birthing America. The path to enlightenment inevitably passes through enlightened leadership ó A New Kind of Leadership.

How is our current Leadership performing? The Institute for Corporate Productivity conducts an annual survey of North American companies in which executives are asked to rank 120 different issues facing businesses. Leadership has landed in the number one spot every year since 1997. You can't pick up a newspaper today without reading about some failure of leadership in virtually every segment of our society. Polls show that half of the American people are not proud of their national and local leaders, and three quarters say that without better leadership we are headed for a decline. In its 2008 National Leadership Index, the Center for public trust at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Merriman River Group released poll results showing that 80 percent of Americans believe that the United States faces a Leadership crisis today ó up from 77 percent in 2007 and 65 percent in 2006.

In his book Leading The Charge, Marine General Tony Zinni lists the primary causes of Leadership failure:

1. Trying to manage complex, fast-morphing challenges with simple, tired, habitual, linear methods and approaches that miss the depth of complexity and the understanding that old processes and models no longer work.
2. Loss of the ability to look and plan ahead ó limited or no vision. Failed leaders were trapped in rigid bureaucracies, buried in the details and failing to think strategically ó a lost art in these new times.
3. Being reactive rather than innovative; failing to be creative and forward acting.

Fortunately there are solutions. They begin with looking at ourselves and bringing our leadership forward to address our personal, business, and community issues squarely and fill the gaps of leadership wherever needed for the betterment of the greater good. It's not simply about change; it's about our bright future. We can't rely solely on our leaders ó great leadership is generated by great followership. What's needed is leadership at all levels by all of us.