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Personal Change

From the Editor

Last week I met a person I hadn't seen in years; okay, it was a decade. After the initial how-are-you-and-where-are-you-living-now greetings, we caught up on the stuff of life — what's happened with the kids, where are you working, what took you there, how do you like it ... you know the routine.

As we were talking, I couldn't believe how much really hadn't changed: values, hopes, dreams, aspirations. I suppose that is both disquieting and reassuring. Disquieting because we know and understand the wisdom of making changes to respond to the challenges we are facing; reassuring because we know that in the midst of change, we need anchors ... values, hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

Part of what we do at LIVE Consultants is help individuals and organizations make changes that are useful for them.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

There is a piece of long-standing wisdom that goes, "The best way to change somebody is to change yourself." The suggestion in that observation is that as you behave differently, others can't keep the old pattern of behaviour going with you and, consequently, they will make changes in their response to you. It makes sense.

The additional good news in that statement is the idea that we ought to abandon any Herculean efforts to change others; we should start with ourselves.

In this article, Stephen defines five deterrents to personal change and makes 19 suggestions for making personal change.

Stephen is a partner in LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization that sponsors this publication. For more information about us, go to www.liveconsultants.com.



Stephen Baetz

Change Who Really Counts

I have the impression I am immuned to advertising. This delusion, I suspect, has been created by my use of the clicker; the more accurate name is the television remote control. An ad appears, *click*, and I'm off to another channel until an ad appears there and then *click*. I listen to CBC radio which is commercial-free (unless you count the numerous public service announcements or the news which often is the unwitting skill for political parties and causes). I can't remember the message on the last billboard I passed; I tend to avoid websites with advertising; I'm not sure who are the major advertisers of the newspaper I read most.

But this is all a fantasy. Some how or other I do recognize brands, I know tag lines, I can spot logos, and I can remember the ads I like and the ones I don't. In fact, here's the copy I can recall from a print ad for the Business School of the University of Navarra (an institution in Barcelona Spain) that appeared recently in *Harvard Business Review*.

My car changes every two years; my computer, every year; targets every quarter, and the market every five minutes. Maybe I haven't changed what really counts.

Maybe those two sentences have stayed with me because they allow me to draw the conclusion — they guide rather than shove, allude rather than prescribe. Or maybe I have remembered what was written because it reflects a bias I have; we don't spend enough time figuring out how to change ourselves.

Please don't misunderstand me; I'm not suggesting that as leaders we ought not to be skilled at facilitating change within teams and organizations. In fact, I invest a fair bit of my time as a consultant helping people do just that. My worry, however, is that often we are so busy changing **it** that we don't recognize the wisdom and value of changing or developing ourselves.

That observation got me thinking about what makes me change-reluctant. My hope is that if I can figure that out, I can then engage in tactics that will allow me to be more flexible

and change-ready. To that end, I offer two lists: one is "Personal Change Deterrents" and the other is a list of tactics that will encourage change, development, and growth.

Deterrent 1: Success

The more successful we are, the less able we are to embrace a belief that we should make changes in how we behave or even that personal development is an avenue worth exploring. Success blinds. "Why would I change what is working?" is the rhetorical question that we pose to ourselves or to others who have invited us to change.

Indeed, there is no reason to change if the conditions that we are facing today are the same ones that will face us tomorrow. But success is situationally-driven. What works today may not work tomorrow. I should go a step further and say that given that our environment is forever reshaping itself, what works today will not work tomorrow.

Deterrent 2: Fear of Loss

Every change implies that something will be lost: familiarity, respect, competence, independence, influence, belonging, power, status, the list goes on. Supporting that fear is an apprehension that we may not be able to get back what we have lost if we make the change. So we stay with what we have, with what we know.

What we fail to realize is that if something else forces us to change (events, circumstances, the action of others) the loss will be greater than if we had undertaken the change ourselves earlier.

Deterrent 3: Negative Past Experiences

If we have attempted to make changes in the past and they haven't worked out, we may be reluctant to make a change now. Experience is a powerful teacher; indeed, as adults, we are expected to learn from experience and not to engage in situations or behaviours that are negative.

It may not even be our own experience with change that becomes the deterrent; it could be the experience of others. We observe that a change hasn't been good for them and conclude that it may not be good for us either.

Deterrent 4: Perceptions About Costs

We look at a proposed change and come to the conclusion that the costs of making the change are much greater than the benefits to be gained if the change was made. We see the amount of effort it is going to take, the resources that will be consumed, the emotional drain that may occur, and we surmise that those costs outweigh any possible benefit. With that set of glasses, we figure that we'd have to be crazy to make a change.

Deterrent 5: Stress Limits

Most of us understand that change causes stress — as we learn new skills, adopt new behaviours, build new relationships, deal with failures that come with first attempts, and/or understand new complexities. We may already have enough stress in other parts of our lives and don't want to add another log to the fire.

That Being the Case

Notice that all the deterrents are quite reasonable; why would we make changes if we've been successful, why wouldn't we want to avoid loss, why wouldn't we want to steer clear of anything that looks like a previous negative experience, why wouldn't we want to minimize losses, and why wouldn't we want to reduce the amount of stress we feel?

However, our world is morphing constantly and a refusal to change ourselves will put us at a disadvantage in the longer term.

So what is it that we can do to ensure we are more capable of making personal change? Here are my suggestions, offered in no particular order.

Define what is changing around you.

- Determine what changes are most important for you to make. Make those and leave the others for another day.
- Define the purpose of the change and the benefits you will accrue if you make the change.
- Write those benefits down on a sheet of paper and remind yourself of what they are on a regular basis.
- Define what the costs of making the change will be and compare those costs to the benefits to reassure yourself the change is a *good deal*.
- Describe how you will know whether you have been successful in making the change.
- Create a plan that spells out milestones and a time line.
- Define where the plan could fail and create a Plan B.
- Determine what learning and development must be undertaken in order to make the plan work.
- Learn from others who have made a similar change or have what you've got.
- Tell others what changes you are making and ask for their support. Be specific about what support you want.
- Remind yourself that personal changes are uncomfortable and old habits die hard.
- Celebrate progress.
- Identify ways to relieve stress or cope with stress.
- Remind yourself of positive past experiences you had in making a change.
- Challenge beliefs you have that keep you from making the changes you want.
- Reframe change as a chore; think of it as a time of exciting growth.
- Persist after you feel like quitting.
- Focus on what you are gaining.

Winning The Future

Simply put strategic planning is figuring out how to win the future. It allows you and your organization to

- identify what business you are in,
- determine what your organization wants to become,
- specify the moral benchmarks by which everyone in the organization will judge their behaviour, and
- decide how your vision of success will be achieved.

But those are only the broad brushstrokes of what a strategic plan means for an organization. The actual development process for a strategic plan is one that companies often overlook, make too complex, or approach without any degree of practicality.

For that reason, we offer a strategic planning process that asks teams to come to consensus on the answers to several fundamental questions. One of the end results is, of course, a strategic plan, but more importantly that developed strategic plan

- provides an analysis of your internal and external environment,
- compels you and other employees to think strategically about the opportunities, challenges, and problems the organization faces,
- is straightforward and practical and, therefore, more easily understood and implemented, and
- makes it easy for members of the organization to contribute to a successful future.

Strategic planning doesn't have to be mysterious and strategic plans don't have to be confusing and obscure.

They help shape the organization's day-to-day operations. They guide every action and decision. They offer a compelling vision of where the organization wants to find success. They help win the future.

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.

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