

ODEA E-BOOK SERIES

A
NEW
Beach

INSIGHTS FOR BETTER CHANGE



JOHN M. GRECO

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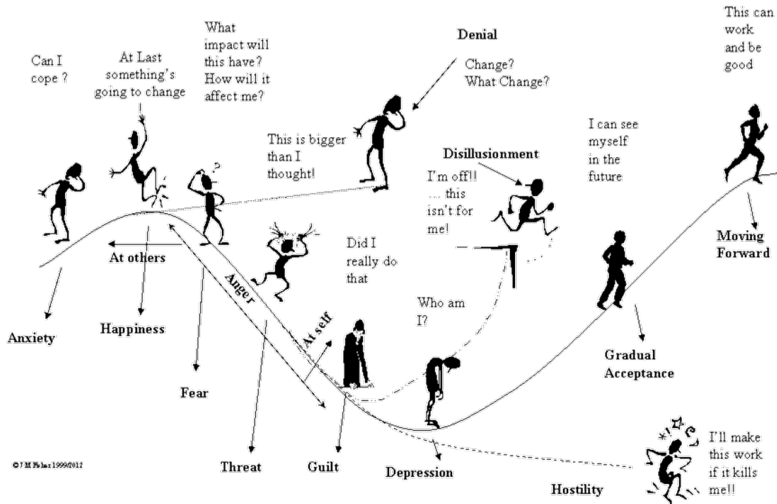
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INTRODUCTION



Are you challenged by change?

The stress and anxiety of change is very real and all too often debilitating. It can, and has, disrupted careers and relationships. You and I (and perhaps a friend or two?) would likely benefit greatly by strengthening our ability to *adapt* to change. While we may not be able to avoid the emotional change curve ride, odds are we can smooth it out and even perhaps quicken our return to normalcy...

Companies face considerable change challenges that disrupt their steady-state performance. When unmanaged, change can, and has, stunted growth and plummeted profitability. Organizational leaders are therefore highly motivated to minimize the disruption and organizational stress of change. Odds are high (on this I can speak with great confidence!) that they can

benefit from a strengthened approach to *managing* change.

Over time and through change, I've learned a few things about myself and about the nature of change. I've been knocked off course by its force and intrigued by its complexity. My mid-life career pivot into the field of organization development fueled a deeper understanding, which, years later, provoked johnponders.com, my blog on work/life topics.

This curated collection of twelve posts presents some diverse thoughts on change and change management. I drew inspiration from pretty much anywhere --- a personal experience (*Admit the Effect, Learning from Blurring*), a quote (*Survival Is Not Mandatory, Forward, The Hire Wire Act of Organizational Change*), a vignette or story (*A New Beach, And in the Morning, At Peace, Burn the Boats*), my work (*Selling Problems, An Unlikely Change Management Essential*) and even mundane, innocuous, everyday life things (*Mobile*).

I learned from and enjoyed the deeper thinking and change insights that my blogging was provoking. To my delight, blog readers did too!

I so enjoy your posts! I share them with my work group on a regular basis. Always a nugget that makes me think.

In my tumultuous work environment, I have read, re-read, and shared this blog. You have kept me out of the bread line so far. And for that, I most sincerely thank you.

Let me say how much I love your blog from a personal perspective. I always walked away with an aha moment or two hanging above my head.

* * * * *

Change is a challenge.

Better change is possible.

Reading these posts may make that challenge a bit easier... though, to be fair, I must note that it really isn't necessary to change... because (first post!) *survival is not mandatory*...

SURVIVAL IS NOT MANDATORY

SURVIVAL IS NOT MANDATORY

Originally published April 14, 2013

It is not necessary to change.

Survival is not mandatory.

- W. Edwards Demings

*It is not the strongest of the species that survives,
nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is the most
adaptable to change.*

*[Author unknown, though commonly
misattributed to Charles Darwin.]*

A NEW BEACH



Adapt, or die.

I'm not going to spend any time running through the litany of things changing. You know what's changing where you are, I don't.

But I do know two things.

One, change is happening, all around me, and those that work all around me.

Second, we'll need to adapt.

Or not. Survival is not mandatory.

Adapting means embracing that we will need to work on different things. In different ways. With different people. And with different expectations.

Adapting means we'll need to let go of workflows and processes that we know inside and out, and begin executing workflows and processes that we aren't familiar with, don't believe in, and don't trust.

SURVIVAL IS NOT MANDATORY

Adapting means changing how we interact with peers and partners, no longer relying on our position or tenure and our ability to debate and overpower.

It's not my way or the highway any longer.



It's adapt or die.

This is not the least bit easy. I've seen too many belly up dinosaurs in my career...

Seeing the extinction up close and in real time is not a pleasing sight. Because seeing strong, intelligent, experienced, and skilled people self-destruct is just plain painful. Because it is so unfortunate.

Because it is so preventable.

It's not about the strength of your fight. It's not about the strength of your knowledge, or your experience, or your relationships even. It's not about what you've accomplished yesterday.

It's about bending, flexing, adjusting, learning. To be effective, in a changed tomorrow.

Changing is necessary, if you want to survive.

But survival is not mandatory.

AND IN THE MORNING

Originally published August 9, 2012



Lady Astor, to Winston Churchill: “Winston, you’re drunk.”

Churchill, responding: “Madame, you are quite right! I am drunk. But you are ugly; and in the morning, I shall be sober.”

Ouch!

This is one of my all-time favorite exchanges. Before you think ill of me, please give me five minutes to articulate my three reasons for liking this so much!

First: it’s clever and funny!

Yes, we need to disregard that Churchill likely wasn’t pleasing to Lady Astor’s eye any more than his words were pleasing to her ears ... it might be the classic pot calling the kettle black! ... and it’s certainly understandable if male chauvinist pig comes to mind ... and I suspect other men and women --- drunk or sober --- would indeed not find Lady Astor the least bit ugly ...

But all that doesn’t pull me away in the least from the rip and

cut of the repartee!

But if it offends your sensibilities; apologies, and read on for perhaps two more meaningful take aways?

Second: I just can't help but see this little ditty as an awesome example of the power of implication. I am drunk. You are ugly... and in the morning I shall be sober quite clearly implies that in the morning she will still be ugly. He didn't say that, but he didn't have to... We are active participants in his insult, decades later! Wow! no?

Brilliant, as I imagine our UK friends would say.

Third: Extrapolating from Churchill provokes me to think of transitory and permanence. Churchill's inebriation is a temporary condition. He will simply need time to recover. Lady Astor's ugliness (as Churchill perceives and implies) is *not* temporary...

This is a valuable perspective for us to consider. If we can cut through the fog long enough to understand that our present condition will indeed not likely last, then our strategy might be to simply find a way to endure and buy time.

And this perspective isn't just relevant for us in troubled times. When we find things going our way and life is good, might it not be equally important to realize that that also is likely a temporary condition? If we can bring ourselves to consider this sobering reality, might it not empower us to sustain and endure when circumstances change and life is not quite so rosy? Because we know... we know... that in the morning... one morning ...

Because one thing leads to another. And another. And another. And things change.

And in the morning...

As for Churchill and Lady Astor, I don't find it at all hard to believe that the exchange above led to this one ---

Winston, if I were your wife I'd put poison in your coffee.

Nancy, if I were your husband I'd drink it.

Ouch!

A NEW BEACH

Originally published August 13, 2012



A huge hurricane was pounding the Outer Banks of the eastern United States. A geologist, whose specialty was beaches and shorelines, was being interviewed.

The geologist had studied the Outer Banks for many years and was speaking fondly about their unique geological features. He was waiting for the storm to abate so he could get out and take a look at the hurricane's impact.

The interviewer asked: "What do you expect to find when you go out there?" The interviewer assumed he would hear a

A NEW BEACH

*response of demolished homes, felled trees, and an eroded shoreline. But that's not what the geologist said ---
"I expect," he said calmly, "to find a new beach."*

-- Adapted from a story in Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World by Margaret J. Wheatley.

I expect to find a new beach.

I find this geologist's perspective fascinating and profound. He is clearly viewing the destruction that will inevitably result from the hurricane as an act of creation. It will be a new beach.

Can you sense the acceptance inherent in that perspective?

He has already pivoted; his focus is no longer on what is, or on how what is will be changed. He is already seeing things differently, before he actually sees that things are different.

He's looking forward, not back.

* * * * *

There is a leadership change coming in my organization. At the very top. It could very well have force and pressure, like a hurricane.

Within my organization, I am akin to the geologist. The geologist studies the solid and liquid matter that makes up the earth, and the forces that change it.

With my OD expertise, I study the people and culture of my organization, and the dynamics at play that affect them.

Like the geologist, I know things will likely change. Things will likely be different with that leadership change at the very top.

I am trying very hard to look forward in the way that the geologist did.

I am trying very hard to simply expect to see a new beach.

MOBILE

Originally published August 16, 2012



We are going low tech today. Where I'm more comfortable. :-)

So with that title we're not talking about our ubiquitous mobile phones, but rather that old-fashioned contraption that was hanging over your bassinet when you were a baby.

Remember?

Wikipedia reminds us that a mobile is a type of sculpture consisting of a number of rods, from which weighted objects or further rods hang. The objects hanging from the rods balance each other, so that the rods remain more or less horizontal.

A NEW BEACH

And with each rod hanging from only one string, it can rotate. The objects can move, yet they sustain the delicate balance.

They are an ensemble of balanced parts, utilizing the force of gravity and the principle of equilibrium.

Elegant in their exquisite engineering, mobiles captivate; they are able to transfix a gaze for an extended period of time. Which probably explains why they are a stable accessory in nurseries, presumably giving caregivers a few more moments of R&R...

But when a change of some sort or another disrupts the equilibrium, there is no longer elegance. And there is no longer fascination; the captivation shifts to an unsettling feeling akin to watching an impending crash...

And returning to the balanced state is anything but simple.

I see the mobile as a terrific metaphor for life; in the office, in our family rooms, and in the everyday ebb and flow of our living.

Let's imagine that the objects hanging in the mobile are people.

When the mobile is in equilibrium, everyone has their place, and as people move, others move, to maintain the balance. A peer's workload surges, and teammates help out where they can; a husband/dad takes the kids to preschool, so wife/mom can sleep in and recuperate; a teenager learns to drive... Everyone is hanging together. Life, we can imagine, is in the main good; satisfying; comfortable.

And then something changes.

Life happens.

It could be a relatively minor change, like one team member picking up a special project, requiring a longer term shift in responsibilities of the other members of the team. Everyone adjusts, as everyone must, to keep in balance, to get the work done. During the adjustment, there's an uneasy feeling, with everyone trying to keep in sync. But with everyone making the

MOBILE

slight shifts, the steady state is again reached.

Other relatively minor changes might be when a wife/mom decides to go back to school; or when a husband/dad takes on a part time job to pay the bills, or when a teenager falls in love... Everyone adjusts, as everyone must. There's a momentary unstableness; and then, once again, the mobile moves, rebalancing.

And then there are more significant changes. Budgets are tightened, and staffing is cut. An aging parent moves in to live with the family. Your teenager-in-love moves in with her beloved...

Imagine the mobile now! Whole pieces are missing! New pieces are added! People are precariously hanging! Adjustments are more significant now; it takes time to figure out what adjustments to make; there is heightened discomfort in making them, and they take longer to take effect. There is prolonged disequilibrium, as everyone shifts...

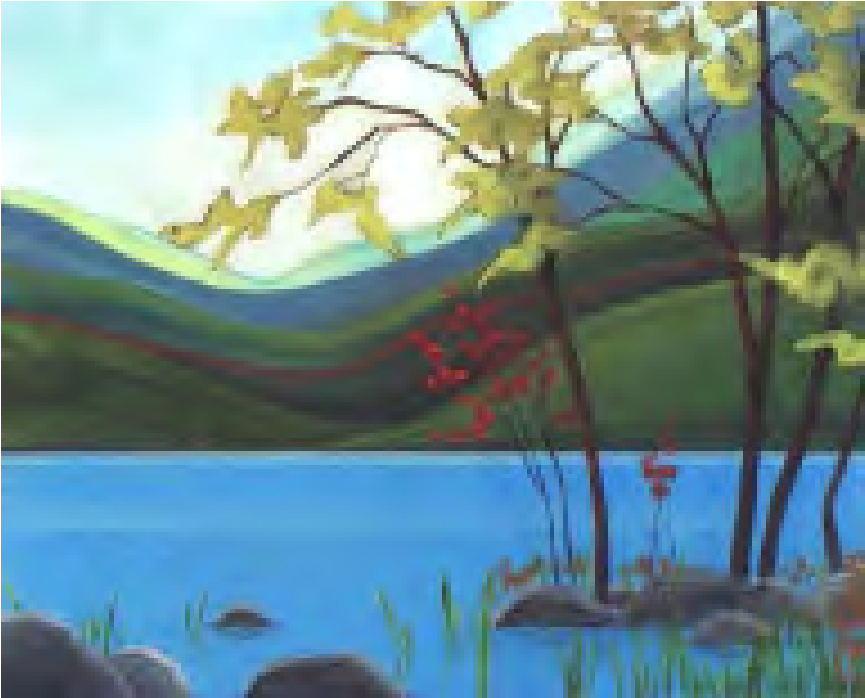
And then there are graver changes --- job loss; a divorce; a death in the family. Everything gets thrown out of whack. What was once synchronized living is now unreality. There is palpable doubt that that comfortable state of equilibrium called normal will ever be experienced again. And even if it is, it just won't be the same. It will never be the same...

The mobile as metaphor helps us appreciate that life is a balancing act. And while change will always disrupt the balance, it's our transitioning that's the real challenge.

But we *do* transition. We *do* adjust. We find our place. We hang in there. We *do* move. Life hangs in the balance. We *are* mobile.

AT PEACE

Originally published May 7, 2012



There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures. There were only two he really liked.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture

thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning flashed. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. At first glance, this did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest.

The king chose the second picture.

“Because,” explained the king, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

[Author unknown, but greatly appreciated! If you or anyone you know has a proprietary interest in this story please authenticate and I will be happy to credit, or remove, as appropriate.]

Do you agree with this king’s perspective?

I suspect there would be widespread agreement with the notion that it is easier to be at peace when in peaceful surroundings. But to be at peace while in inhospitable --- unpeaceful --- environments; quite another thing!

I go on vacation to get some peace. I leave work early to go home to get some peace. I take a walk to get some peace. I would go, in a heartbeat, to that place that first artist depicts: that calm lake mirroring the surrounding mountains with the overhead blue sky with fluffy white clouds... to get some peace.

And while I am in those places, I get peace.

But am I *at peace*?

That seems to be another thing entirely, and not one, I’m thinking, that is determined by the environment we find ourselves in.

AT PEACE

So, while it can hardly be denied that external forces have considerable influence over how we feel, there are (apparently) formidable internal forces that we can summon, to be calm and peaceful when all around us it is not...

Oh! The implications! Can we be at peace *anywhere*?

- Perhaps we should manage our own expectations regarding how much peace we actually should get when we seek to get peace in other places?
- Perhaps we should seek to learn more about how to develop our capability to stay composed and calm instead of railing against that which we have little control over?
- Perhaps we should also re-gauge how much responsibility we place on others for our own well-being... and look inside to see what we're doing to ourselves that is working against us feeling at peace?
- Perhaps, when leaders disrupt our peace when making organizational changes, they should orchestrate efforts to enable us to adapt and change?

So, a bit more on that last bullet point --- here's how I think you and I can really make a difference ---

Other people might see us as being composed while in the midst of the turbulence created by some organizational change, and come to us to ask *what's up?* And see how we cope... I share my story with the person that comes to me, but that might not resonate with him; but when he sees you and comes to you and listens to you, what you share might hit home... and vice-versa... and so on...

So; no matter where they are, they are at peace.

THE HIGH WIRE ACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Originally published February 29, 2012



*The art of progress is to preserve order amid change
and to preserve change amid order.*

— Alfred North Whitehead

For leaders, implementing major change is quite the high wire act...

Under weighting the urgency and magnitude of the changes risks toppling back over to current convention. The culture, the current ways of working, current processes, and current procedures have a palpable gravitational pull that tips us back to the comfortable status quo.

But over weighting can overwhelm. Just as each of us as individuals have a threshold, so do organizations; driving major change beyond the capacity of the organization to adapt freezes the action. We shut down. Immobilized.

Both the status quo as well as organizational immobilization leads to quite a fall when real change is a competitive imperative.

So, as if walking the high wire, change leaders must find the right balance, with every step. Progress involves counterbalancing --- preserving order amid change; preserving change amid order.

Preserving order amid change provides us with a steadiness to process the inevitable losses that come with major change --- coworker relationships; comfortable routines, known responsibilities.

I think preserving order amid change means emphasizing what is *not* changing while articulating what *is* changing.

I think it means signaling a supreme confidence that the organization will prevail and thrive in the future state.

I think it means increasing the frequency of communications and feedback so we can use it to continually rebalance. So while we might feel yet a bit unstable, we don't feel helpless. Though yet uneasy; hopeful. We can proceed. We will progress.

Another step; another step.

Preserving change amid order ensures we can keep stepping into the future.

THE HIGH WIRE ACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Articulating the change vision, with increasing detail to connect everyone's role and contribution to the future state, promotes



forward momentum. The old way of doing things starts to fade, but the new way doesn't yet feel comfortable.

The change theorists call this the neutral zone. I think it's far from neutral; it's no man's land. No one wants to be in no man's land; but when there is no going back, there is only go-

ing forward.

Another step; another step.

But why the *art* of progress?

I think Mr. Whitehead sees the challenge as fundamentally involving exquisite sensitivity and feel.

Much like walking the high wire...

SELLING PROBLEMS

Originally published October 18, 2012



Let's straightaway clear up a misconception about this post, stemming from that title.

You might be expecting this post to be about the challenges your sales team faces. "Selling problems" meaning problems with selling a product or service.

But that's not what this post is about at all.

It is about selling *problems*. Really! Consider this scenario --- A leader decides that something must be done. It might be a restructure, a key policy revision, the reengineering of a core

process, or some other such change. The leader handpicks a team to help work through the necessary data collection, analysis, and action planning. They schedule a meeting to communicate the planned changes to the department.

In the two hour meeting they present an elaborate project plan detailing the sequence of moves that will be executed over the next several weeks. They are high energy, upbeat and forward-looking, in an attempt to generate confidence and enthusiasm and buy in to their impressively thought-out solution.

The subdued and puzzling reaction during the Q&A ... What problem are we solving? Why do we need to do all that? All that effort and change; for what?

The leader and team were hoping for people to buy in.

But people are not in the market for solutions to problems they don't see, acknowledge, understand, or under appreciate.

It might be counter intuitive, but to create energy and urgency and buy in, what is really needed is time and energy selling the problem.

When the emphasis is on selling the solution without establishing the presence and importance of the problem, people will be skeptical, distrustful, and resist. They will not climb on board. They will not buy in.

Selling the problem is crucial.

How might leaders sell the problem?

They might share customer and financial data --- disturbing and problematic trends --- in an effort to establish a compelling urgency to take action.



They might orchestrate putting managers and associates in contact with dissatisfied customers. Let them see the problem first hand. Let

SELLING PROBLEMS

them experience the problem up close and personal. Maybe spend an afternoon Y-jacking in the call center listening in on live customer calls...

Here's a real example. For a regional VP, I designed a management meeting for him to execute with each of his district management teams. The meeting design devoted the first three hours to having small teams of managers dig deep into reviewing and interpreting the stock reports of two key competitors as well as their own company, published by major brokerage firms. Each team reported to the whole group on what the brokerage firms had to say... and while it wasn't all gloom and doom, it was sobering...

Selling the problem is all the more compelling when independent third parties do the selling for you!

Articulating the "burning platform" will induce people to move. People will work with you to solve the problem, mitigate the threat, drive the change, and strengthen the operation.

And if you are open to the possibility, they might even come up with a better solution than yours, with the additional benefit that you won't have to sell it --- it will be theirs. They will already own it.

So far from this post being about the problems of selling; it is about a key aspect of effective change management. It is about spending time, energy, and effort in communicating the reason for an organizational change.

It is about selling problems. There is a market. People will buy in.

FORWARD!

FORWARD!

Originally published June 14, 2012



BENEDICTINE MONK

English Monastic Life by K.A. Gasquet
Methuen & Co. London, 1904

If you cry “Forward!” you must make clear the direction in which to go. Don’t you see that if you fail to do that and simply call out the word to a monk and a revolutionary, they will go in precisely the opposite directions.

— Anton Chekov, Russian dramatist

To make sense of this quote, we need to understand monks and revolutionaries.

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When citing a monk I imagine what Chekov had in mind is someone who lives within an established routine, with not a lot of change or variance, and with a reverence for the past. I enhance that image further by thinking that monks have so much reverence for the past that they keep it alive in the present.

I imagine what Chekov had in mind when referencing a revolutionary is very different --- strong intention, with strong action, to break from the current status quo, and create something radically new. I enhance that image further by thinking that revolutionaries have such an appetite for immediate change that they want to pull the future into the present.

Forward, to a monk, means no change is necessary or anticipated.

Forward, to a revolutionary, means change is assumed and must happen NOW!

It is easy to see, then, that “forward” to a monk might mean committing to a strict adherence to the practices and traditions of the past. And to a revolutionary, “forward” might mean the accelerated establishment of new and different policies and practices, NOW!

There is likely a monk-like colleague and a revolutionary-like colleague sitting to the left and right of you. Same, sitting on either side of each of them.

And which way do you lean?

The implications for leaders are considerable.

We need to be explicit with plans and strategies and visions. What is changing? What isn't changing? We might see ways to bridge the gap; we can speak to how planned changes actually honor the past (which will get the attention of the monks) while speaking to the promise of changes in short order (which will pique the interest of the revolutionaries).

Just think of what this means vis-à-vis mixed generational workforces. And vis-à-vis rapid technological advancement. And social change.

FORWARD!

Oh boy!

So; not unlike the high-wire act of change, calibrating and recalibrating the messaging is important; if the monks have inordinate influence, marginalization, irrelevance, and extinction are real risks. If revolutionaries hold sway, chaos and confusion disable.

In either scenario, there is not progress.

There is no forward.

LEARNING FROM BLURRING

Originally published June 18, 2012



I went to the eye doctor recently; it was time to get new glasses. One of the tests, new this visit, was a dilation of my eyes so the doctor could do a more comprehensive eye exam.

Once the eye drops were delivered (the worst part of the procedure, actually, since I am very skittish about my eyes) the drops needed about 15 minutes to take effect. The actual time the doctor looked into each of my eyes was probably no more than 2 minutes. The report? Everything looks fine ...

... Except for the next two hours, it didn't.

Seems it takes about two hours for the dilation to dissipate.

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During this time, vision is blurred, as your eyes, with pupils dilated, are ultra-sensitive to light. I needed to wear temporary sunglasses under my regular glasses --- really just a strip of light-reducing film --- for two hours. And I needed to scale back my expectations on what I could actually get done on my to do list for those two hours.

This got me to thinking about a change dynamic in work and in life that is universal and unavoidable.

To affect a change from a current state to some desired future state, there is almost always a worse before better pattern.

Have you ever decided to remodel a room in your house?

You plan the remodel, with visions of a brand spanking new kitchen. You schedule day one of the project, knowing that you will be inconvenienced and with very limited kitchen capability for some time, hopefully not an extended time...

You start to move everything out --- counter top items, dishes, food, small and large appliances. And then you begin to realize that it isn't just the kitchen that will be in disarray. The dining room, living room, even family room looks like a war zone...

And then the demolition begins. And the complications are discovered. Which, okay, you can handle ... what can we do? ... But more stress comes from realizing the impact on your schedule ... omigosh we aren't going to be ready for our Labor Day family gathering! ...

And you start to rue the day you decided on a brand spanking' new kitchen.

But then, of course, come Labor Day (or perhaps shortly before?) you have your brand spanking' new kitchen, and you know from that day on it was worth it.

This is no different than implementing a revised work process, installing new technology, restructuring a department, integrating a company acquisition...

Worse before better. Acceptance of this dynamic is a good thing.

LEARNING FROM BLURRING

Of course I'm not suggesting acceptance without efforts to minimize. Stakes are high with both the kitchen remodel and the revised work process. Spousal and boss unhappiness both have undesirable consequences. Careful planning makes good sense.

But we need to know that we will need help in sustaining the effort, in pushing through the phases that challenge our confidence and question our decision making and keep us strong and determined in the face of spouses and bosses...

That help must come in the form of a crystal clear vision of the highly desirable future state. With early and often views.

In other words, we need to keep our eyes on the prize.

The blur is temporary.

ADMIT THE EFFECT

Originally published June 21, 2012



Scene One: He's done eating his dinner. He gets up and walks to the kitchen with his plate. His intention is to place his dish into the dishwasher but, as he enters the kitchen he sees a pile of dirty dishes on the counter. With a slight hesitation, he decides to add to the pile with his dish...

Scene Two: She leaves the office to go have a cigarette. She lights up and takes a few drags, contemplating the afternoon's meeting. As she takes her last drag, she starts walking toward the ashtray a few paces down the walk but, on her way, she

sees dozens of butts on the walkway. With a slight hesitation, she decides to cut her walk short, drops her cigarette and steps on it to put it out, turns, and returns to the office.

What do you think about this? Dirty dishes and cigarette butts?

Have we found two people in these two scenes that just don't give a shit?

Okay, I agree, that's too strong; maybe they are just uncommitted, or weak willed, or just plain lazy.

Shame on them, right?

Shame on us. For judging. For there is something going on here that is very significant, and very important.

If you can't relate to either of those actors in those scenes, then maybe it's the scenes that don't resonate, and that's understandable. Imagine a scene closer to you, more realistic for your day to day.

But I'll bet the *behavior* resonates. Because we are all subject to the same "force" that those two people were subject to.

These two people are not slugs! They are not people of poor character. They are really a lot like us. Like you and me.

Our behavior is --- substantially --- a function of our environment.

I'm not saying our behavior is determined by our environment; only influenced.

This is hard to accept, perhaps. Hard or not, it is real.

We see dirty dishes, or cigarette butts, and we respond with a changed action, one inconsistent with our intention.

What's really significant is that, once we realize the predominance of this effect, we get stronger. We can start to resist.

And it gets better yet; once we realize this dynamic, we realize that when we place the first dirty dish on the counter, or throw the first cigarette butt on the walk, we are largely responsi-

ADMIT THE EFFECT

ble for all the others that will undoubtedly follow. And with the knowledge of that responsibility, we are able to respond differently. We are able to behave consistent with our values, and with our character.

I'm not making this up. There is significant research. One place to start might be to check out the broken windows theory.

Lastly, three points, specifically for leaders.

First: While you are subject to the same environmental influences as the rest of us, you have the differentiating ability to resist, push through, and overcome, in the face of the strongest of environmental influences that the rest of us succumb to. That is where your power truly comes from, not from rank, position, title, or status.

Second: If you want to change our behavior, change our environment. If you want us to collaborate more, create an environment that has collaborative spaces and tools. If you want us to innovate more, create an environment that stimulates and challenges. If you want us to believe that the organization is really facing major change, really change the look and feel of the office, of the meetings, of the communications...

Third: If you find yourself railing in reaction to that second point; thinking you shouldn't have to spend the money, the time, the energy, the effort, to do all that; thinking that it might be cheaper just to find people who will listen and comply and choose to follow your lead... Sorry. It doesn't work that way. I know you think it does, because, heck, look at you! You're a living breathing example of overcoming the environmental influences! That very thinking is your potential demise. You are special; please don't expect all the rest of us to be able to do what you do.

Admit the effect.

It is real.

And it is real important.

BURN THE BOATS

Originally published May 3, 2012



A long while ago, a great warrior faced a situation which made it necessary for him to make a decision which insured his success on the battlefield. He was about to send his armies against a powerful foe, whose men outnumbered his own. He loaded his soldiers into boats, sailed to the enemy's country, unloaded soldiers and equipment, then gave the order to burn the ships that had carried them. Addressing his men before the first battle, he said, "You see the boats going up in smoke. That means that we cannot leave these shores alive unless we win! We now have no choice—we win, or we perish! They won.

--- Napoleon Hill, in Think and Grow Rich

This story is likely familiar; it is often attributed, incorrectly, to Cortez, and it is usually used to compellingly explore the topic of motivation.

You will probably not be surprised to learn that I'm going to go somewhere else with it. I want to talk about change, and what my profession curiously calls change management.

There are two basic theories of change. One of them is flawed. One holds that change begins with our knowledge and attitudes. Leaders who hold this theory of change implement initiatives that are training intensive, zeroing in on changing our attitudes. The more we know, the more we understand, the more we will adjust our attitudes. Attitudinal change, then, leads us to change our behavior, and as we all change, the organization changes.

Behind door number two we have the theory that says just the opposite --- we change our attitudes in response to a change in our behaviors; and we change our behaviors in response to changes in our environment.

I would like to believe that I change my behavior based on different perspectives that I've received through learning new and different things. I would like to believe that I don't need to be "forced" into changing.

What do you think? I'll bet you, like me, would like to think the first theory of change is right, but, in fact, it is exactly backward.

Initiatives based on the first theory of change will take forever to produce meaningful change, if at all. Odds are, it won't produce a tipping point for the organization before it crosses the frustration threshold of its leaders.

Burning the boats is way more effective.

We change our behaviors because we *have* to; and we have to because something around us, outside of us, has changed.

I liked hamburgers as a kid, but good gosh no cheese; I wouldn't eat cheeseburgers, period. Until one day, when I didn't have an option. I love cheeseburgers now...

BURN THE BOATS

What do you think was more responsible for a reduction in smoking: the public service announcements and surgeon general's warning or the banning of smoking in restaurants, bars, and other public places?

The surprising truth is that we don't change when we have control and can make choices; we change when we don't have control and we have limited choices.

Effective leaders don't try and change their people. They know that they simply do not control their people... And the more they try and directly change our attitudes, the more we push back, dig in, and resist.

Instead, they burn the boats! They redesign the structure; re-write organizational policies; reengineer processes, integrate technology and tools, update the incentives, clarify the measurements...

Instead of changing *us*, they change what carries us, what affects us; they change what we depend on; they change what is all around us.

They burn the boats.

AN UNLIKELY CHANGE MANAGEMENT ESSENTIAL

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Two companies merged, creating redundant jobs in most divisions.

One division manager called his people together and gave a gloomy speech that emphasized the number of people who would likely soon be fired. The manager of another division also met with his people to share the realities; but he also was

up-front about his own worry and confusion, and he promised to keep people informed and to treat everyone fairly.

The first manager saw his division sink as many demoralized people, especially the most talented, departed. The second manager retained his best people; his division remained as productive as ever.

--- Adapted from What Makes a Leader? Harvard Business Review; Daniel Goleman. Rutgers Graduate School of Applied Professional Psychology.

Bad manager; good manager? Happens every day, pretty much everywhere. That's life at work. That's business.

But business is personal. Rational *and emotional*. Logical *and psychological*. Profits *and people*.

There is no denying the affective domain of work.

One of the managers above gets this. He may or may not have been trained in change and change management, but it is clear that he possesses the essence of really effective change management.

Empathy.

The first manager was too worried about his own fate to consider the feelings of his anxiety-stricken associates. The second knew intuitively what his people were feeling, and he acknowledged their fears with his words.

When it comes to business, we rarely speak of empathy. The very word seems unbusinesslike, out of place amid the tough realities of the workplace. Even more rarely do we hear of managers being praised, let alone rewarded, for their empathy.

And it's not, I believe, because they are not capable. Even in the most formal leaders, I see and hear empathy in breakfast meetings, over lunch, in parking lot conversations...

But it tends not to be exhibited in the office. As if it would be perceived as a weakness. Ironically, it really is just the opposite!

And when business managers are empathetic at work, with

their people, in times of change, positive things happen.

Whatever the change management model, they all teach that with the right support people can move beyond fear and resistance. They can cope; they will adapt; they do transition.

To get a handle on what the “right support” is, empathy is essential.

Because business is personal ... rational and emotional ... logical and psychological.

And profits come through people. And people must work through change.

And leaders must manage with empathy.

CLOSING THOUGHTS – BETTER CHANGE

Change is a challenge.

It's threatening, embarrassing, anxiety-producing, and disruptive. But when all is said and done, there's really not much mystery here, right? You know what change is all about, because you've experienced change time and time again.

But that doesn't mean your next ride on the change curve will be any less challenging!

The challenge of change is a shared experience. No one is immune. Because of that, I see great opportunity in unpacking our experiences to find the lessons that can smooth your ride and enhance the effectiveness of your change leadership —

- When facing change, we simply must adapt. Denial and resistance just aren't helpful... Adapting and transitioning is required to thrive in a changed tomorrow. To survive, change.
- The stress, anxiety, frustration, depression, and uncertainty that we feel while moving through change is *temporary*. It will pass, over time and through change.
- We jumpstart our adapting when we begin accepting that things will be different. We can accept things being different, before actually *being* in the different. Like seeing that new beach...
- Change disrupts not only *our* balance, but others in our orbit... Adapting leads to rebalancing. Transitioning is all about finding those new — different — places to hang together.

- We have innate internal forces that allow us to be at peace despite outside turbulence. We can stay calm and composed, *regardless of where we are on our change curve ride*.
- Ambiguity, at best, immobilizes; at worst, chaos. Managing change involves articulating what's changing, and what's not changing; in change management parlance, it's producing a robust current state / future state analysis. It's a requisite to inform change plans that will minimize chaos and propel forward momentum — preserving order amid change and preserving change amid order.
- Communicating and discussing the *why* of change is essential. People are actually pretty resilient! Once they appreciate the rationale underlying the change, their resistance converts to support, and positive momentum is reinforced.
- Managing change effectively requires clarity and significant individual consideration. This is the stakeholder analysis, in change management terms. It's a must to get a read on the reaction dynamics and to devise influence strategies; for monks as well as revolutionaries...
- Change leaders need to anticipate and plan for a worse-before-better result. Overreacting to short term trends just introduces more change and risks a slide into unrecoverability and yet even more change. The project principle must be *over time and through change*...
- Your behavior — and mine — is highly influenced by our environment. As big a deal as this is for us as individuals to learn; *it's a monumental lesson for change leaders*. It can suppress the judgment (blaming the people) and redirect leader energies toward finding the flawed or missing environmental influences.
- Change management, at its core, is about ensuring changes in behavior within an acceptable timeframe. Because we change our behaviors when it's in our best interests

to do so, and because our behaviors are highly influenced by our prevailing environments, effective change management focuses on changing context — structure; policies; processes, technology, tools, incentives, consequences... *This lesson is game-changing.*

- Empathy is the difference-making skill that enables strong change plans that support people through change. Without empathy, that stakeholder analysis will lean superficial or be constrained by leader biases. Also, without empathy, follow-on actions to mitigate worse-than-better in-process results will exhibit more blame/judgment than caring. With empathy: the right support, at the right time, in the right way.

Change is a challenge.

But better change is possible!

Whatsayyou? What are *your* take aways? Where are you in agreement? Where would you pose a bit different slant? And on what points do you hear your inner voice saying “*nuh-uh, no way...*”

Would love to hear from you... johngreco@odeaconsulting.com



Inspired by the intrigue and ever-flowing lessons he experienced while working within diverse organizational cultures, John began blogging his work and life insights in 2012, creating johnponders.com.

John has been practicing his unique principled commitment to excellence as an organizational consultant for over thirty-five years. He is the founder of ODEA; an organization development consultancy that he hopes will continue his life's work into semi-retirement.

John has earned a Master of Science in Organization Development from Loyola University Chicago and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the University of Illinois.

John is married to wife Jamie and has one adult son (Jesse). Living in Elgin Illinois USA, John is a life-long Cubs fan still basking in the glory of their epic 2016 World Series win...



Odea is an organization development consulting practice that helps leaders, teams, and HR professionals enable change, build organizational capability, and drive results.

Our different thinking is a mash up of strategic thinking and systems thinking with a healthy helping of behavioral science added into the mix. We focus on identifying systemic conditions that constrain performance potential, helping clients see beyond symptoms to structural causes, leading to enduring solutions.

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