

Leading Change in Your Organization ... May Require YOU to Think Differently

Dr. Barry Frew

There is certainly no shortage of books, articles and consultants professing how to manage change, how to create and manage innovation, and how to lead transformation. The discussion on change is heard everywhere, even in the Department of the Navy.

The topic of change is certainly not new, Niccolo Machiavelli wrote the following in "The Prince" in 1514:

"We must bear in mind, then, that there is nothing more difficult and dangerous, or more doubtful of success, than an attempt to introduce a new order of things in any state. For the innovator has for enemies all those who derived advantages from the old order of things while those who expect to be benefited by the new institutions will be but lukewarm defenders."

"This indifference arises in part from fear of their adversaries who were favored by the existing laws, and partly from the incredulity of men who have no faith in anything new that is not the result of well-established experience. Hence, it is that, whenever the opponents of the new order of things have the opportunity to attack it, they will do it with the zeal of partisans, while the others defend it but feebly, so that it is dangerous to rely upon the latter."

Why is it so difficult for someone to change their mind, or even more difficult, to change to another person's way of thinking? Machiavelli makes a good argument. It is difficult because it requires people to question everything, including the status quo, and to be willing to suspend their own beliefs.

Individual behavior is driven, in a large part, by an individual's values, beliefs and perceptions. An individual's mind-set causes bias to influence thinking, and this in turn, influences behavior. Thinking is a profoundly individual thing. It can be

measured, much like assessing someone's personality tendencies with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tool.

Two of the best tools available to assess how an individual thinks are:

(1) Ned Herrmann's Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument, which measures brain dominance, and (2) Jerry Rhoads' Theory Into Practice tool, which measures thinking intention preferences. Both tools give insight into a person's thinking patterns.

Although thinking is predominantly an individual function, we usually act in groups of two or more. Both of these tools can also be used in group settings to assess what kind of thinking is represented within a group. When matched with the requirements of the task and the type of thinking likely to produce better results, the tools can be used to better match teams with activities.

The way we THINK determines the way we BEHAVE!

Most of us are often unaware of how our attitudes affect our behavior. Most of us are often unaware of the impact our behavior has on others — both positively and negatively. If we learn how to behave differently and make new behaviors stick, we will begin to create a new world.

Just as each of us has a thinking preference, each of us also has a learning style preference. Some researchers have identified a dozen different learning styles, but most agree that three main categories of learners exist: visual, auditory and kinesthetic or tactile. A variety of assessment tools are available to determine your learning style.

Good listening skills are imperative for positive questioning of ideas posed by others or for encouraging understanding



of someone else's perspective. If you prefer an auditory style of learning you may already possess these skills; if you do not, you may have to work harder at listening. A list of skills provided by University of Maine researcher, Dr. Marisue Pickering, identifies the four following characteristics of empathetic listeners:

- Desire to be other-directed rather than to project one's own feelings and ideas onto the other.
- Desire to be nondefensive rather than to protect the self. When the self is being protected, it is difficult to focus on another person.
- Desire to imagine the roles, perspectives, or experiences of the other, rather than assuming they are the same as one's own.
- Desire to listen as a receiver, not as a critic, and desire to understand the other person rather than to achieve either agreement from or change in that person.

She also identifies related skills like providing verbal and nonverbal awareness of the speaker, restating, paraphrasing, reflecting,

interpreting, summarizing, synthesizing, probing, giving feedback, supporting, checking perceptions, and giving the other person time to think as well as to talk.

I would add encouraging the speaker to say more — “That is interesting, can you tell me more about...” You can also listen for what is NOT being said — what’s missing that you might expect to hear in the circumstances? Being aware of how things are said; the emotions, attitudes and body language provide additional clues to the listener regarding what is meant.

A tool that I use when I recognize that I have tuned out the speaker and have already begun to generate a response, is to remind myself to listen to understand before speaking to be understood. I have to constantly remind myself that some people’s thinking style uses more words than my thinking style prefers. How often does this habit preclude me from hearing a critical part of the story? Sometimes, the Cliff Notes version of the story won’t work — sometimes you need the entire story.

One way to determine if people are willing to give alternative ideas a chance or whether a workplace is change ready is to listen to the language. You may hear phrases like these:

I don't think that will work here; We've never done that before; We've already tried that once; Our budget won't permit that; We'll form a committee to study this; We don't have the time/resources/culture to try that; And we do this because.... Oh, you were serious; Yes, BUT...

These phrases send a strong signal that it is likely that new ideas are not welcome and this person or group may have a difficult time becoming change ready. If this is your organization’s language, then be prepared for difficulty dealing with change, creativity and innovation.

On the other hand if you hear phrases like those below, it sends an equally strong signal that a person is accepting and open to new and different ideas:

That's a great idea; Let's try that; I like your thinking; Go ahead start that; Do you have any more ideas; I think we can overcome those challenges; You're on the right track; How can I help? Yes, AND...

Careful attention to the language can

also extend to how you ask questions and how you view the possibilities of the future. The Appreciative Inquiry work by Professor Frank Barrett at the Naval Postgraduate School and his colleague David Cooperrider from Case Western University, suggest replacing the problem and deficiency-focused approach and its language with a radically affirmative approach. It is an approach that focuses on the best possible outcomes.

This approach has been used within the Navy as a basis for summits focused on leadership, the Information Professional Officer Community and most recently at the Naval IT Summit. The focus of the Naval IT Summit was on thinking about what could result if information management/information technology leaders across the DON employed the concept of One Team – One Strategy – Continual Transformation.

Appreciative Inquiry can be a powerful new tool for individuals or organizations that only know or use a single approach to fix problems and use a language of deficiency. I believe the real power of this tool is in realizing that the beginnings of change are generated by the questions we ask.

If you ask someone, “What can be done to raise customer satisfaction responses by 25 percent?,” be prepared for solutions that do just that. If, instead, you ask someone, “What can be done to generate braggingly happy customers?,” not only does the customer satisfaction problem go away, but the solution will provide more impact and be longer lasting. Both questions can create a new future; which future would you rather create?

Recall the thinking preference, brain dominance and learning style assessment ideas from earlier. The thinking preference tool can determine whether someone is comfortable thinking about the future and its possibilities or not. Some would rather spend their thinking time someplace else — and that’s all right, but engaging a little effort into knowing your own thinking preferences and those of your colleagues can go a long way to understanding one another.

When you are more aware of your own preferences for thinking and learning,

you can better understand and adapt to situations outside your preference or take action to adjust the message to your preferred style. It can make all kinds of communications much more effective. Brain dominance and learning styles awareness can be used in a similar fashion to streamline communication.

*Be a change leader ...
Be remarkable –
innovate together –
make a difference!*

Reasons for change are many. Once-good-solutions or even great solutions, can outlive their relevancy. Markets, competition or technologies can introduce better solutions; new strategies to address new threats or different cultures usually require different people, processes or organizational relationships.

Good leaders allow themselves to question the status quo, assumptions and the thinking used to generate solutions, including their own. Good leaders are able to extract themselves from events and to view them objectively, even though they may have participated in or led the event. They understand that what worked before may not be an appropriate solution this time.

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The fact that good leaders question everything does not diminish from their ability to be dreamers AND bold doers. You do not need to be one or the other — good leaders and peak performers are both.



Dr. Frew founded and directed the Center for Executive Education at the Naval Postgraduate School. He also designed and facilitated the Revolution in Business Practices course and the 30-Something Course. He is currently CEO of Frew & Associates. If you would like further information, visit www.frewassociates.com.