

Leadership Letter

How do you handle change?



What is change? Research has shown that organisations undergo major change about once every three years, and that within that cycle of major change is an almost constant swirl of minor change.

Major change in an organisation can include things like new leadership, restructuring or implementing a whole new focus and vision, while minor change can mean anything from the introduction of new training courses or schedules to new staff or living environment. Change often alters our routine, challenges our perceptions and makes us reflect on how things are done. Change is usually characterised by a desire to improve things – whether it's reaching our passion or vision, improving the structure, or gaining a fresh perspective and motivation as a leader.

For instance, this year we had a minor change when a couple joined us on staff at the retreat centre and there are always adjustments in terms of roles and responsibilities for all the team members. A major change occurred a couple of years ago when we took on the rental of another villa for the centre that we needed for extra accommodation. This created a greater workload, a potential financial burden and a pressure to put programmes on in order to pay the bills. These kinds of changes definitely need the agreement of everyone before we make the decision.

So our work life is full of change but of course we are all going through our personal life changes too. We are moving from one phase of life to another. Our relationships and family are always changing and developing as kids grow up, as we move homes or countries, have additions of family members or as our loved ones finish their course and we have the adjustment of learning to live without them. Change is a part of each day. The question is how do we handle these changes.

Where we are & where we are going: Transitions are always easier if we know where we are and where we are going. If the future vision is clear then dealing with the change is not so difficult. However, if the future is full of unknowns, then all kinds of insecurity can come with those changes. So as leaders, one of our roles is to seek to make changes as palatable as possible. We might not know how to cross all the t's and dot all the i's but we can give a framework of understanding and keep an open door for communication to ease any sense of apprehension. Leaders can hold power when they hold back communication. If we know something that will help others in processing the change, then we need to share it. Let's not provoke our followers to frustration by holding anything back.

Revolution or evolution: When you institute change there are a number of approaches. The approach you enjoy may well be due to your personality and style of leadership and not necessarily helpful to all your followers.

Approach 1 - Revolution: Some don't like to beat around the bush, they like to get down to straight talk and communicate in black and white. They desire the clean slate approach – everything as we knew it is gone and now we will start again with something new. For some this brings excitement and enthusiasm to move forward. For others this brings a sense of frustration and even anger, that we are experiencing pain and chaos for no apparent reason. They feel, if it was working before why change. This can be a right approach as we see in Revelation 21:4-5 *'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'* He who was seated on the throne said, *"I am making everything new!"*

Approach 2 - Evolution: Others like to see change in phases and move more smoothly from one step to another. Their thought is, "Why cause more upset than is necessary, Rome wasn't built in a day, so let's take it easy." This approach is a gradual one that builds slowly and seeks to keep everyone on board and on the same page or at least as much as possible. We see in this passage there is an on-going transformation that takes place. 2 Corinthians 3:18 *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

So wisdom is needed in knowing which kind of approach is appropriate for the season that you are in.

Understand the purpose: Studies have been done in management for years in order to find out how to bring greater motivation to the workforce. One of the discoveries was that change in the working environment can bring about new motivation. A simple change in lighting of the work place can bring about fresh motivation and add to production output. However people wise up to what's going on if it's just change for the sake of change. We have previously stated that some personalities enjoy change and therefore any change will have the potential of motivating them. My wife loves change but for me to get on board with a change I need to know that the purpose is worthwhile. I don't just sign up for more work just for the sake of it – I want to see the benefit, the positive outcome and the reason behind what we are doing. Philippians 2:12-13 *"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."*

Involvement in the process: Whenever I come home for a trip, I look for the change that my wife has made somewhere in the environment. It may be in the garden, in our bedroom, a picture, a plant or a creative element in the house – this is motivating for her. However, if there is a major change, and one that will have implications on me or my work, then there needs to be a process that includes me.

The most difficult thing to cope with in transition is when you don't understand the process or you are not part of the process or there doesn't seem to be a

process. If you want to keep your people with you, bring them into the process. Make it clear you are ready to talk, pray and answer as many questions as you are able to. A process will include painting a picture of what the future will look like compared to what we have right now. It will include definitions, roles, and help people to know how their responsibilities and expectations will change.

Paul gives a clear understanding of the change that will take place in following Jesus - Romans 12: 1-2 *"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

Clarify the time period: Every transition is from one phase to another. Sometimes the problem is that the ministry never makes it to the next phase and it stays in a place of limbo or plateau. When the transition goes on too long, everyone becomes frustrated and emotionally drained and will be looking for an exit door. So we need to clarify the phase we are in and the steps we need to take to move us to the next phase. It may be that we have to make guestimates but that is always better than nothing.

Be aware of your perspective: If you have seen the film, "vantage point" you will remember that the story you see is different, depending on the position and perspective that you watch the scene from. When we are involved in change, the position that we view it from makes a world of difference. Are we comparing the change with the way it was in the past, viewing the change from the future need, thinking of the affect that it will have on us in the present, asking all the questions that haven't been answered or even thought of yet? And a whole lot more perspectives...

When a change takes place that we initially don't like, it can take us out of our comfort zone and upset our peace and then it's easy and even perhaps natural to react. We can say things like - *What are they thinking? How ridiculous is that decision! That will never fly. Don't they realise the implications of that decision?...* On and on the comments can go. These are reactions and can tempt us to create a whole story about those that brought in the change. We can start reading into the motives of the people behind the change, which can lead to criticism and judgments, and then comes the lack of trust and rift in relationship.

So when major change comes, it's time to step back, take specific time and pray for God's perspective that will help us to put on the right attitude and approach the changes in the right way. This doesn't usually happen overnight, so allow your spirit, soul and body to have space to work it all through. That is best done in the place of prayer. Remember where we are suppose to be seated. Ephesians 2:6 *"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."* No leader gets it right all the time, even when a good team makes the decision. Mistakes will be made and so grace has to be given. So having allowed the initial reaction to calm down, we can receive grace to view the transition and change from different perspectives and bring out an objective view of how to respond.

What helps us to navigate change?:

- Allow ourselves time and space for the emotions to be calm and to be able to think clearly and objectively.
- Maintain a personal rhythm of prayer and worship in order to bring our thoughts, reactions, concerns to God and have him speak into them. Wrong attitudes will so quickly colour our thinking.
- Connect with one or more colleagues/friends to share thoughts and concerns with. We desperately need others with whom we can bounce our ideas off and talk things through. We can so easily see things from the wrong perspective and therefor base our thought processes on misunderstandings. Having someone to ask helpful questions and bring other points of view is essential.
- Recognise that those instituting the changes may have gifts differing from yours and perhaps see the future much more clearly than you do. There may be a prophetic direction that seems illogical or a vision you cant get your head around. However, when there is agreement from those serving for a long time with a solid track record this needs to be taken seriously and perhaps loyalty is the way to go unless there are clear biblical reasons that don't agree.
- When there are disagreements, these need to handled with humility, gentleness, care and clarity of communication.
- Keep your attention on the outcome, the benefits and the blessings that come from change. For us in YWAM, it's one of our values!

Every leader has to develop skills as a change agent and you don't have to be in leadership for very long to discover that we have to handle change with care.

In anticipation of more changes,

Stephe