

## Anchoring Change

DeNisha K. McCollum, M.S.L.E.

July 26, 2007

## Abstract

This essay will address the broad subject of individual or organizational change initiatives and include insights on how leaders may best position efforts to achieve anchored, successful, and sustainable change.

## Anchoring Change

Have you ever paused to experience the friction and energy that exist when a ship is tethered to shore, or by anchor? At first glance, it may appear the ship is at total rest; stopped. However upon closer examination, we see that though the ship is indeed no longer moving forward or back, it is none the less still moving. It moves just so with the swell of a wave or the passing of a great breeze. Much the same is true for change as it applies to an individual or organization. For example, a ship at sea is change at large, while the ship tethered is change manifest. Though changed forever by the voyage behind, the ship remains viable and flexible, for whatever change may lay ahead. The same is true for people as individuals or within organizations. We are constantly changing, and from time to time, changed.

The good book of Webster offers a virtual myriad of definitions for the word change. Included among them as we might expect are: to make different or to make radically different (Change, 2007). However, for our purposes and discussion here, we will explore change as it is more appropriately defined in terms of human or organizational context: to *become* different. Leading change, individual or organizational is more often than not, something we do *with* people rather than something we do to them (Kouzes, Posner, Maxwell, McAllister-Wilson, Lencioni, Ortberg, & Blanchard, 2004). Authentic leaders do not make change in the people or organizations they serve. They invite it.

As we are more specifically addressing the subject of anchoring change, or anchoring that which has become different, the book of Webster here again offers key pointed clarification. Changed past tense, by definition becomes that which has in fact,

become different, and is no longer undergoing the process of becoming (Changed, 2007). Granted this seems a great deal of discussion around simple semantics, but it is in these simplicities that change initiatives are completed or more often than not, abandoned.

In his book *Leading Change*, John Kotter offers eight strategic steps for entering into and actualizing an effective change process (1996). Included among them are creating a sense of urgency, developing a guiding coalition, creating a strategic vision, communicating that vision, empowering others to become part of and execute the desired vision, creating short term wins to encourage continued commitment, consolidating gains to perpetuate the change vision and the final step of anchoring change as it is now manifest and complete. Each of these steps represents great wisdom for individual or organizational application. However, each though clearly explained and offered with ample supporting evidence, represents a transformational process which is in fact, a most difficult feat at best (Kotter 2007).

Kotter reports that though most change initiatives begin with 100% of intentionality, only some 15% or so transcend the human behavioral barriers to become actuality (1996). "Guiding change may be the ultimate test of a leader – no business survives over the long term if it cannot reinvent itself" (Kotter, 2007). Interestingly, much the same is true for the individual further emphasizing the complexity and power of human emotions in the overall change process. For example, studies of a more personal nature suggest that even lone individual's stand only a one in ten chance of successfully navigating self-change, even with faced with life threatening adversity up to and including death (Deutschman, 2005). Thus as Kotter might conclude, to become that

which is indeed changed, is often “both absolutely essential and incredibly difficult.”  
(2007)

Given the statistics and ample evidence supporting the difficulty and complexity of change, it is almost amazing that anchored change happens at all. However, it can, and in the magical moments that exists somewhere between humility and perseverance, it does. In 2007, Alan Deutschman published an article entitled *Three Keys to Change* in which he explores the three most common factors in influencing that which is change to that which has been anchored or forever changed. It is with great simplicity that he writes about what drives change resistance in people and organizations, and what can be done to recognize and address the natural human response to change.

Research supports that people resist change for generally one of the following three reasons, if not some combination of all three: trust, fear, and force (Deutschman, 2007). To counter these tremendous energies, organizations who wish to create sustainable change must engage with what both knowledge and wisdom might say in response to each. To trust, we must answer with relationship. People do not trust people they do not know. The true secret of the power behind authentic leadership lies not in position, but in posture and the willingness of the individual to know, and be known (Dundon, 2002).

To fear, we must respond with information (Deutschman, 2007). People fear what they do not know. Information is power, and the more willing we are to share power, or empower as the catchphrase might be today, the more we invite engagement. Forays into emotional intelligence suggest that people, every one of us desire simply to perceive ourselves and be perceived as capable, effective, and significant (Goleman, Boyatzis, &

McKee, 2002). Sharing information engenders the trust mentioned above, and works to alleviate the fear addressed here.

Finally to force, we must counter with context (Deutschman, 2007). Here again, we find ourselves full circle with our earlier discussion around the transformation that must occur for change to be anchored and become forever changed. Leading change is not something to be done to people, it is something we must do with them. Through building trust as well as addressing fear, change initiatives become something of the people themselves rather than that which otherwise might be merely imposed upon them. When we can relate with the changes we are called to manifest, they become ours, and a whole new breed of ownership propels the likelihood of success from that which may at best be 15% ordinarily (Kotter, 1996), to that which is extraordinary.

Leaders everywhere are looking for the magic formula. Articles and books on the subject of change leadership are published in greater volume today than ever before, and where each shares perspective in various forms from the purely academic to scientific, to the simplicity of practitioner-speak, each arguably says much of the same thing. The greatest strength in combating change adversaries is in “recognizing that change happens when people change.” (Shapiro, 2003, p. 91) It is entirely possible that the greatest potential for increased change efficacy lies not in the process itself, but in the very heart of the change leader, and in their own willingness to do what is perhaps least natural; share self, information and power, so that greater good may be achieved (Kouzes, Posner, Maxwell, McAllister-Wilson, Lencioni, Ortberg, & Blanchard, 2004).

## References

- Change. (2007). *Merriam-Webster's On-Line Dictionary*. Retrieved July 24, 2007 from, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/leadership>
- Changed. (2007). *Merriam-Webster's On-Line Dictionary*. Retrieved July 24, 2007 from, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/leadership>
- Deutchman, A. (2005, May). Change or die. *Fast Company*, 94, 53.
- Deutchman, A. (2007, January). The three keys to change. *Fast Company*.
- Dundon, E. (2002). *The seeds of innovation: Cultivating the synergy that fosters new ideas*. New York: AMACOM.
- Goleman, D. Boyatzis, R, & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kotter, J. (2007, January). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 96 – 103.
- Kouzes, J., Posner, B., Maxwell, J., McAllister-Wilson, D., Lencioni, P. Ortberg, N., & Blanchard, K. (2004). *Christian reflection on the leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Shapiro, A. (2003). *Creating contagious commitment: Applying the tipping point to organizational change*. Hillsborough, NC: Strategy Perspective.