



# MANAGING CHANGE — THE KEY TO PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

BY STEVEN R. (RANDY) WATT

*Change.* The very word can evoke feelings of fear, unease, anxiety. It is the dreaded condition. It attacks our comfort, destroys our status quo, creates inner stress. We fear it, hate it and defend against it, whether it is personal change, environmental change or organizational change. We view it in a negative light and do our best to obstruct its advance. In doing so, we fail to recognize its value and we limit its personal and organizational benefits.

Myriad articles and books are written these days regarding leadership, and many speak at length of the importance of “maturing” the organization, of developing a “learning system,” of creating “empowerment mechanisms,” and of personally and organizationally “evolving.” These terms are all code words for change. They are indicative of methods of advancing the capabilities of the organization, as well as the indi-

The key to the happiness, success and power that we are looking for is not to win every battle ... it's to learn how to identify which battles are truly winnable and which are not. “The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it,” said Marcus Aurelius in the second century A.D., and it is a statement that is as true today as it was then. We, as well as everyone and everything around us, are in a constant state of change, and yet, change is what most of us fear most in life. It's our thoughts about change, however, not change itself, that cause our problems. And our fear of change is directly related to our need to maintain the illusion of control.

Joe Caruso, “The Art of Strategic Surrender”

viduals within. But make no mistake, they all mean significant change. Yet, when couched in the terms above, they are not thought of negatively; they are seen as positive. Not so for the word “change.” State out loud a desire to

change something, and watch the result, feel the immediate resistance.

Lou Holtz, exceptional coach and leader, once said of persons and organizations, “We’re either going to get better or worse; we are not going to

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stay the same.” In saying so, Coach Holtz gave great credence to the concept and power of change, both positive and negative. He explicitly indicated change is a constant process, an undeniable one, and as it runs its natural course it will cause a result one way or the other. What he didn’t say, but strongly inferred, is that getting better (positive change) requires effort; while getting worse (negative change) requires doing nothing at all. Positive change grows both organizations and individuals, while negative change draws people and organizations to the lowest common denominator, thereby producing organizational lethargy and mediocre performance.

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An important reality is that we each, individually, usually have little control over organizational and personal change. Few of us are at the very top of the organization or are charged with making changes to the organization’s mission or methods. Most of us are on the receiving end of organizational change and are expected to “make it happen.” We are often not consulted in the process leading to the change, but are charged with ensuring its success. We have a greater amount of control over personal change, but we do not have complete control of it. Much of our personal change, such as the physical changes due to natural aging processes, are outside our ability to control, relegating to us only the potential mitigation of impact. But what we do have complete control of is our attitude about change.

Our attitude directly affects our chances of success, personally and organizationally. A positive attitude trumps a negative one every time and is easily recognized by those in control of the organization. The key to gaining or maintaining a positive attitude about change is to review its impact and then examine our feelings about it. In preparing to review change and its impact, we must be careful to leave emotion out of the review, as emotion is the enemy of logic and reason and badly biases the weighing of the impact. The first question we should ask is, “Is the change good, neutral or bad in its effect on the organization?” If it is good or neutral, then we should spend no time worrying or grousing about it, but just get on with it. Do not expend energy worrying about things which have no net negative impact, and do not be vocally negative. Constant complainers, like the boy who cried wolf once too often, are organizationally ignored.

Upon reviewing the change and its impact, if we identify the change as being bad for the organization or ourselves, the next question becomes, “What is its impact on me?” After identifying the impacts of the personal or organizational change, we then determine a means of mitigating the impacts, as best we can. There will always be things we don’t want to do, but have to do anyway, whether in terms of our employment or

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our personal lives. Doing them while maintaining a positive attitude will not only mitigate the impact of the changes, it will cause a reduction in personal stress and a better outlook for the whole of our personal and professional life. As a result, we will grow in all aspects of our lives, rather than slipping into continual negativity, mediocre performance and failing relationships.

Personal and organizational success should be our goals as we work through a constant state of change to get there. A positive attitude will help us manage the organizational and personal changes occurring in our lives, and will assist us in embracing, rather than fearing, change.

Change is a powerful force, whether for good or bad. What makes the difference is our individual approach to it. Why not harness the power of change in order to achieve personal and organizational success? //