



FINDING LEADERS ATTUNED TO CHANGE – AND KEEPING THEM “Change Management”

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Characteristics of Change Leaders

Not everyone is a candidate for the challenging role of leader in change, nor is individual potential or leadership development uniform and to be taken for granted. In a climate dominated by change we must take care to identify and select leaders best suited to that climate, attuned to change.

Here are their characteristics:

- **Resourcefulness:** “Resourcefulness” is the ability to use whatever is at hand to further one’s own position. Changing conditions often eliminate the obvious choice, the optimum method, and the most direct process. Leaders who cling to specific processes or techniques, are comfortable only with the ideal, and are unable to extemporize do poorly in change. When we eliminate candidates for management, the first to go should be process zealots, who insist that their “one” way is the “only” way things can be done.
- **Goal-orientation:** Resourceful leaders are more often goal-oriented than process- or position-dependent. They embrace results rather than methods, choosing to accomplish rather than to comply. This is not to say they are always breaking the rules or deviating from them capriciously. To the contrary, they simply see rules as tools justified only by their effectiveness, and are not afraid to bend them or to develop new ones when the need arises. Goal-oriented leaders recognize that the effect of change is to reduce the importance of success.
- **Ability to synthesize:** Change mastery requires general perspectives and approaches and an ability to synthesize the disparate efforts and methods of specialty groups. Leaders who excel in this capability help transcend the gaps and walls separating contributing parts from the higher whole. Not only is synthesis necessary, we seldom have time for it to occur under ideal, controlled conditions. It must be accomplished rapidly and with as little internal friction as possible. To the extent that any one leader shows this ability, he or she will succeed in a world where sorely needed.
- **Vision:** Change seldom sneaks up on our companies or attacks without warning. Astute leaders constantly peer into the future, over the horizon of their immediate needs, in order to sense impending change and better prepare for it. This requires a special quality called vision, and the ability to change one’s perspective from near to far and back again almost instantaneously. To develop and hone such a skill, leaders must have broad interests and far-reaching concerns as opposed to special, narrow interests and shortsightedness.

7 Characteristics of Change Leaders

- Resourcefulness
- Goal-orientation
- Ability to synthesize
- Vision
- Nonlinearity
- Variable focus
- Reason

- Nonlinearity: We are often tempted to profile a candidate by specific skills, specific types of experience aligned with them, and a history of handling constant and improving responsibilities similar to those we will give the new leader. This expectation is a sort of experience linearity that tends to stifle generalization, focus on detailed optimization, and rule out candidates who have shown adaptation to be a strength. It might be better to select those who have succeeded in vastly differing settings, in changed conditions, and by so doing have demonstrated an ability to adapt, to transcend, and to quickly marshal their talents and focus them on different objectives. Nonlinearity of success demonstrates management adaptability and sustained confidence-attractive features for a leader facing change.
- Variable focus: The knack of changing management focus or attention from the detailed to the summary, from the near term to the far term, and from the specific to the general increases a person's immunity. In a sense, we can think of such a leader as possessing a variable-focus lens of attention, capable of zooming in and out frequently and clearly. Leaders in change can readily shift from one area of concern to another, can relate to low-level production problems and to high-level strategic issues, and are often seen translating for others – helping them to make intuitive leaps from the big picture to the small component and vice versa.
- Reason: Zealotry in any field of business, at any position, is sometimes confused with enthusiasm, loyalty, or dedication to our company and what it represents. The problem with this attribute is that it ties any such loyalty, enthusiasm, or dedication to a specific product, process or technique. It clings to management variables with must often change, or be changed. This is the negative effect of zealotry: it creates fixity of process or purpose, which hampers adaptability to change.

Company zealots tend to force solutions on questions that haven't been asked, or to fit the work to the tools they so patriotically espouse and defend. They tend to ignore alternatives and to shut out changed circumstances. Leaders attuned to change, however, know when to continue with what works, most important of all, they know when to admit defeat, let go, and move on. Their loyalty is to higher principles, such as company advancement, change immunity, long-term profitability, and viability, rather than to specific, temporary accoutrements in use today. Leaders attuned to change are decidedly nonzealous. They are more accurately described as expedient, pragmatic, and reasonable. This doesn't mean they are not dedicated; they are just wise in selecting their objects of dedication.

Keeping Adaptive Leaders

If there is one prevailing misconception in most companies and among most leaders, it is that the recruitment process ends once a candidate is hired or promoted. Nothing could be further from the truth. Recruitment of any individual is a continuous process, beginning with initial screening before employment and only ending when the individual has eventually left the firm. We must constantly identify, attract, and reward leaders. They don't fix their impressions of our company upon employment and tear up their resumes because they won't need them again. On the contrary, every astute leader seeks the best for him or her at all times. People who don't do this aren't the type of leader most of us would prefer to have working for us. They are drones, not leaders attuned to change.

To separate the winners from the losers requires a few basic steps in every company.

Here are some:

- Continual recruitment: We simply cannot fix a person's expectations, objectives, or value systems at any given time and presume to keep that person contented in the future by meeting them. Just as we must constantly vary our impression of each leader's capability (by continually revising the first impression), so should we revise our understanding of their expectations. This takes more than the traditional annual review. Expectations and objectives of leaders attuned to change are modified much more frequently.
- Deferral to management judgment: The content and substance of leaders' daily work must excite and challenge them. For generalist, and those with expedient, product-oriented vision, we need to provide general guidelines and to give wide latitude to their individual management discretion. Rote procedures and a compliance mentality are anathema to these people. They prefer to use their own creativity, imagination, and resourcefulness (those attributes we so highly value during the recruitment process) rather than to comply with existing procedures without question.

Resourcefulness, creativity, and imagination must be continually exercised, or they will soon atrophy. We cannot allow this happen, for we will need these qualities in the future, when things are going to change.

7 Ways to Keep Change Leaders

- Continual recruitment
- Deferral to management judgment
- Frequent appraisals
- Recognizing group accomplishments and barriers
- Providing ancillary information
- Rewarding transcendence
- Recognizing multiple accomplishments

- Frequent appraisals: Progressive leaders do not like to perform for extended periods of time without any process feedback, readouts, or intermediate accomplishment. They

constantly scan their environments for indications of how well they are doing, because they know that process- or position-dependent confidence, though comforting, is unresponsive to change. Process zealots need little encouragement or orientation, for they “know” they are doing well as long as they perform the process that is “best.” They see no reason to take intermediate readouts or to identify intermediate accomplishments.

Leaders attuned to change, then, need lighter leashes (looser procedures, etc.) and shorter ones. This is not because they don’t trust them to proceed for longer durations, but because they want to know how well they are doing at intermediate points along their journey. To give them a long, unresponsive leash is tantamount to programming their activity.

- Recognizing group accomplishments and barriers: Parceled-out nurture, that given only to selected individuals, is no different from favoritism. We must encourage and allow our leaders to nurture those around and below them. We do this by insisting on group leverage rather than individual success, and by measuring not merely what a leader has done, but what that leader has allowed others to do.

Whenever a significant accomplishment takes place within the limitations and risks generated by change, we need not only to acknowledge the accomplishment but to enunciate the barriers surmounted, the difficulties transcended, and the setbacks overcome on the road to the accomplishment. Seldom is significant progress made without difficulty. We should let our leaders know that we fully recognize the difficulties they have faced, and we should reward accomplishment by enunciating barriers overcome.

- Providing ancillary information: Successful leaders hone their adaptive skills and broaden their peripheral vision by ingesting a great deal of information, particularly information that goes beyond maintenance of their knowledge at subsistence levels. They crave ancillary knowledge, different perspectives, and general exposure. To fill this need, we must provide them with much more than they require for their immediate functions. In particular, they expect to be told why something is done, in addition to what and how.
- Rewarding transcendence: To nurture generalists, we must recognize and reward, rather than punish, attempts at building bridges, transcending specialty barriers, and creating environments in which many, not a few, may succeed. Leaders successful in change seldom succeed alone or with small groups closely aligned with them. Instead, they succeed jointly, with the participation of many others, often including very different organizations holding very different value systems. Pragmatic, expedient leaders do not ignore different approaches that may contribute to success.
- Recognizing multiple accomplishments: Leaders attuned to change show a preference for multiple accomplishments as opposed to singular optimization. We should recall that, beyond a certain point, optimization of any singular product, process, or technique exacts penalties and costs in change immunity. We need leaders who can help us improve on many fronts, advance many capabilities, and develop many different opportunities, rather

than leaders only able to perfect a single function. Regardless of the incremental value such perfection may bring, it could ultimately represent the mere polishing of a chance target. Again, most of us would rather have a leader with a 90 percent success rate in five areas than with a 99 percent success rate in only one. This capability is what separates “leaders” from narrow-scope “individual contributors.”

