

When Change is Needed But Not Wanted

Facing Realities with Solutions
A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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A coaching client of mine recently came to our call with some very popular and focused questions about his congregation:

- “What is a good response when change is clearly needed but not wanted by the congregation or group?”
- “How do we respond when change is wanted but then not accepted by the core?”
- “What are the clues that might help us respond well to each scenario?”

The pastor had framed their issues well. We had a very encouraging and enlightening coaching call. I asked if I could share some of our insights and gather some feedback from others.

Facing Realities in Church Today and Tomorrow

What a rapidly changing world we are in! I have spent the last 28 years of my ministry exploring the impact of such a world on the way we do or do not do church. As soon as I think I have a handle on it, more changes emerge for the church to address. Here are some new realities facing many churches today and tomorrow:

- Growing diversity in our population base. The reality of a non-European immigrant population explosion in this country challenges every facet of church and community life in many cities – suburban, urban and rural.
- Growing secularization of the culture.
- Growing disinterest in institutional and denominationally-aligned church.
- Growing house church worship.
- Growing generational gaps and distinctive personal preferences among a wide range of age groups.
- Growing diversity of family relationships from non-biological to married with children, single parent, with or without children, same-sex, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic family systems, adopted and multi-cultural families, divorced, remarried, co-habiting, etc.
- Increasing mobile-driven and connected culture. Mobile phones and devices are among all age groups, and an avenue to staying connected and informed. Yet how do we stay connected and personal becomes the issue for many.
- Increasing scope and challenges of a 24/7 world.
- Increasing interest in spirituality from eastern and western perspectives.
- Reframing of economic realities for families, communities and churches.

The point here is that most every person, family and congregation is facing at least one, if not more, of these changes. How people choose to respond to the massive changes is as diverse as the changes.

Prevalent Responses to Change

Response to change is often emotionally charged and all along a continuum of change:

- **Denial** – some just stick their head in the sand and deny that any changes are needed.
- **Rationalization** – others rationalize that if we don't change we will die or become irrelevant and out of date.
- **Avoidance** – some just dance around change. Pretending that if we avoid the reality it will disappear.
- **Resistance** – many, if not most, initially resist change. The old saying is, no one likes change except a baby with a dirty diaper! Some resist by fighting it, others resist, by withholding money or support, others still resist by blaming the leadership and/or pastor, others resist by spiritualizing and declaring that God never changes and neither should we.
- **Sabotage** – some work hard to sabotage change through presenting distractions, declarations that many are against change when in reality it is one or two people. Or, there are determined efforts to stop this change for the sake of the church and comfort.
- **Embrace** – some embrace change, even through their discomfort with it, because they believe the change is essential if the church and the mission of God are to be taken to their children and grandchildren in another generation. Others embrace change because they are strong people of faith and trust in God's Spirit moving the church forward. Others embrace because they are not fully satisfied with what is currently going on.

With this brief summary of changes and responses to change the purpose here is what are the clues a pastor or congregation might look for that help them assess where their leadership base and congregation are when it comes to understanding the need for change, the process of change, and the consequences, benefits and challenges of change or of staying the same.

Assessing the Viability of Change in Church

Clues Change is Needed	Clues Change is Not Wanted	Possible Responses
Plateaued or Decline in Attendance/Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort treasured • Polarization of members • Us/them mentality • I pay the bills here • Value come structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Invite to visit other churches -Create opportunity for casual dialogue with them -Explore – what are the consequences of this mindset?
Growing Irrelevancy for the Context/Population Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church is for members-mindset • Personal preferences more valued than Biblical mandates to go • Insulation from community • Tradition over Mission valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan windshield survey in community with key leaders -Dialogue between groups and generations about personal preferences in music, spiritual formation, etc. -Prayer walks in the community -Getting clear about mission and tradition and the differences
Leader-fatigue; Over-programmed for active membership base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition over appropriate or need • Return to good old days • This is the way we have always done it • Just be more committed and it will work. • Problem is our pastor/staff not members • Resistance to leadership or outside voice – we can handle it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Do an assessment: Is your church over-programmed? -Dialogue about value add and clear function of each activity/program of the church -How does each fuel the mission of the church? the biblical mandate for church? -Assess how many leaders are leading out of oughtness vs. giftedness and calling -Get clear about how each generation defines commitment -How are we really doing now? evaluation/dialogue

Clues Change is Needed	Clues Change is Not Wanted	Possible Responses
Minimal Conversions or life transformation connected to church activities/focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preacher's not doing the job • Just need to be more committed (but cannot tell you what that looks like) • Programming valued more than end result of programming • Resistance to rethinking measuring what matters now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Clarity about expectations of pastor/staff and members -Clarity about what it means to be more committed -Get clear about measuring what matters: metrics for your ministry and mission -What are we trying to do to people? -How do we know spiritual transformation is happening?
Inward focus of resources/staff, programming and pastoral care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church is for me/us values/mindset • Declaration of friendly church but not practiced to outsiders • Resistance to persons not like us • Demanding attention by members and dislike sharing with outsiders • Content to give rather than go missions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Survey and walk to discover God in our community or culture? -How many of our resources/budget, programming is primarily for us? For them? -Dialogue about dealing with growing diversity in community, families, membership?

Pursuing Solutions to Resistance to Change in the Church

Change is a challenge for many organizations, particularly for churches. Businesses can mandate or impose change on their employees and expect employees to carry out the new changes. Churches, on the other hand, are primarily volunteer organizations that have deep history, tradition and personal or family connections to the way we do church here. Pursuing solutions to resistance to change in church is an ongoing and essential skill set for most churches in this rapidly changing world. Conversations about change need to be consistent. Sermons and Bible studies about transformation, the mission of the church, how church impacts the world are needed and often explored and programmed. What is missing is the consistent and ongoing dialogue about:

- What those in the study heard?
- Where are the pinches for them regarding change in the church?
- On a scale of 1 (completely closed) to 5 (totally open) where are you now in regards to openness to change?
- What is the Spirit saying to me? Us?
- What shifts are needed in me? Us?
- How can we make it happen?

Effective and meaningful change happens from the inside out in persons, families, groups, teams and congregations. Exploring the inner beliefs, values, preferences and comfort zones is a step-by-step journey that we explore and walk persons through in the book ***Making Shifts Without Making Waves***. When inner thoughts, feelings and preferences are explored, shared, prayed through things begin to shift in ways that open up new possibilities and a deeper sense of God's leading and direction. I take the principles and exercises found in the book into workshop settings designed to facilitate these powerful conversations and help groups discover the elements and then to coach them to next steps that are forward moving. Unpacking the lies the bind many of us unlocks great potential. The lies that bind are often limiting beliefs, deceptions or mistruths we prefer to embrace simply because they are familiar beliefs but not often transformational beliefs.

When change is needed but not wanted is faced by many, but tackled by few. Avoiding change or distracting change does not help anyone in the long run. Moving leaders and organizations forward can be done and new heights and deeper depths of ministry can be experiences. It really is possible, but it

calls for intentionality, good coaching from soulful leaders in an open and trusting atmosphere. Visit www.soulful-leadership.com for additional tools for the journey and consider the coach approach to leading persons and churches forward. It really can happen. Will you take the challenge?

Suggested Resources for Next Steps:

1. Reading list for possible group study
 - a. ***Making Shifts Without Making Waves*** – Edward Hammett and James Pierce
 - b. ***Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age*** – Edward Hammett
 - c. ***The Gathered and the Scattered Church*** – Edward Hammett
(Go to www.transformingsolutions.org for other options and free downloadable podcasts around topics related to this article)
 - d. ***Transformational Church: A New Score Card*** – Ed Stetzer
 - e. ***Whole Life Transformation: Becoming the Change Your Church Needs*** – Dallas Willard, Keith Meyer
 - f. ***Preaching for Church Transformation*** – Bill Easum
 - g. ***Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*** – Reggie McNeal
 - h. ***UnFreezing Moves: Following Jesus into the Mission Fields*** - Bill Easum
2. Invite an outside coach or consultant to visit your church with *Fresh Eyes* and give feedback as how your church deals with outsiders. Check out www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org.
3. Set up a www.50for99.info time with one of our TCP ministry colleagues to explore the coach approach for change and transforming congregations and denominations.
4. Plan a sermon series and dialogue/feedback groups for multi-generational groups in your church and community.
5. What else would help now?

Important Things to Know

Eddie Hammett is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is a certified coach with the International Coach Federation. Recent books of which he is the author or co-author are ***Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60***, ***Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age***, and ***Making Shifts Without Making Waves***. He is available for speaking and coaching with leaders, congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations. His personal web site is www.TransformingSolutions.org. His work is also highlighted at www.cbfn.org.

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