

Leading Change through Passion, Vision, and Humility

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Change... it's an issue that every leader will face at some point in his or her leadership career. It could be expanding into a new business sector, dropping a product line, changing a ministry, or restructuring an organization. Perhaps it's a complete change in mission or focus. Regardless of the reason, change happens. Leading an organization through change can be challenging and fraught with uncertainty. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. However, leaders need to be cognizant of a precious resource, which is always impacted by change: people. They have "physical, mental, and spiritual needs" that will be impacted by any change that occurs (Winston, 2002). Therefore, as a leader leads change within an organization, they must possess and demonstrate three traits: passion, vision, and humility.

Passion

Khan (2009) defines passion as "the voluntary will to engage completely; the inner energy, drive, and desire to deliver, to achieve, and to win" (p. 19). There are two distinct parts to passion: mission and people. A passion for what one is doing is an important first step in leading change. As Love (2012) states, "Purpose and passion are *internal constructs* that can significantly influence the *external environment* that shapes your world and your work" (p. 51). Demonstrating one's passion as a leader is a step towards gaining the trust of followers, particularly during a time of change. In the Bible, Paul demonstrated his passion for his mission as a leader. Prior to converting to Christianity, he demonstrated his passion for his religious beliefs as a devout Jew, so much so that he led the persecution against Christians (Acts 8:1-3, ESV). After his conversion to Christianity, his passion continued, but it was for his new mission. As demonstrated in Philippians 3:7-9, his passion was for Christ in addition to leading and mentoring others towards Him. The passion leaders have and demonstrate, particularly through times of change, inspires the follower to trust and willingly follow

the leader on the journey of change (Love, 2012). Although passion for the mission is an important first step, passion for and instilling passion in the follower is critical.

Periods of change create emotional times for any organization. Channeling that emotion by allowing the follower to be part of the change gives them a sense of ownership, which in turn inspires the passion within. In their 2006 study, Patterson and Winston found that “when the follower has passion toward the completion of the organization’s objectives, the follower has greater commitment toward achieving the objectives” (p. 13). Thus, passion creates a more effective follower. A leader demonstrates the passion for their followers by engaging them and getting to know them and their individual passions. In turn, this frees the follower to invest themselves into the organization and be a contributing part of the change. This is demonstrated at a macro level at the African Leadership Academy in South Africa. Fred Swaniker’s passion to develop Africa’s future leaders led him to start this school. He and his students were driven to improve Africa, so together, they have been developing future leaders who will methodically bring about transformational change to the continent (New African, 2011). Fred’s passion for a better and brighter Africa led to the vision, which led to the school, which is now developing future transformational leaders for the continent.

Vision

As the previous example demonstrated, a leader’s passion leads to a specific vision for the organization. Imagine trying to drive from the East Coast of the United States to the West Coast without a map or trying to drive from Germany to Italy without a GPS. One would be completely lost. There is a chance of making it to the final destination by asking for help along the way or perhaps by pure chance, but the likelihood of making it before quitting would be slim. That is how the follower feels if no vision is given. The follower needs to know where they are going. Where is the leader trying to take the organization and what is the reason for the change in vector? As Proverbs 29:18 states, “Where there is no prophetic vision the people are discouraged.” Vision needs to be communicated in a way that the follower can identify and relate to their role in the vision and in the organization (Patterson & Winston, 2006; Northouse, 2013). This will guide their behavior in the organization (Northouse, 2013).

Vision does not, however, need to be strictly driven from the top of an organization. Leveraging the passion of the follower would allow them to engage in the process of creating the vision. In his 2012 study, Kohles found that followers were more apt to fully embrace the organizational vision if they were included in its development. The importance of including the follower in vision development

increases when operating in a global and or cross-cultural organization, such as in military coalitions. There are 42 nations in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) sharing the same vision of creating a safe and secure Afghanistan (ISAF, 2012). However, each of those nations also has their own national objectives, military doctrine, and unique resources. As the lead nation, the U.S. has had to create a military campaign and vision that would be embraced by the partner nations. This could only be successfully done through a collaborative process that included the partner nations in each step of its development. The member nations now embrace the vision and understand their role in the organization, whether it's responsibility for a battle space, training the Afghan National Security Force, or building civil infrastructure (ISAF, 2012).

These principles can be applied to today's global leaders. Leading a global organization is challenging enough, but leading it through a period of change without a vision could be career ending. By including the followers in vision development, the global leader ensures that cultural differences are taken into consideration. It also gives each member a sense of ownership in the global vision.

A note of caution on vision, leaders must remember to temper it with reality (Miller, 1995). Without a dose of reality, the leader could create a vision that is unachievable. This could have devastating effects on the organization. Even if the followers embrace the vision, they would quickly become discouraged once they realize that they will never reach the vision laid out before them. Therefore, that vision must be driven by passion, but always remain tempered by reality.

Humility

The last trait needed to effectively lead change is humility. It is the foundation of passion and vision. Mathew 23:12 reminds the leader of the importance that Jesus placed on humility. It allows the leader to "place the goals of the organization above their own goals" (Winston, 2002, p. 25). It also allows the leader to place the follower's goals above their own. Leaders must remember that being humble does not mean being weak (Patterson & Winston, 2006). Humility simply allows passion to remain pure and focused on the mission and people. It allows the vision to be driven by what is best for the organization. Most importantly, humility invites Jesus into the equation, which is what distinguishes Christian leaders from other leaders. Early (2006) stated it perfectly, "The deepest inner work for us as Christian leaders is to know ourselves through knowing God for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus" (p. 243). An example of this was found in King Solomon who, knowing his own weakness, humbled himself to God asking for wisdom to lead the nation of Israel (2 Chronicles 1:7-13). Solomon began his kingship leading through submission to God, humility (Early, 2006).

Humility is what the leader's passion and vision must be rooted in. The ultimate example of this triad of passion, vision, and humility is God. He had a vision for his chosen people, his followers, that was driven by his passion and love for them. However, it was his willingness to humble himself to humanity (as Jesus) and death that allowed his passion and vision for his organization, the church, to come to fruition. Because of his humility, his passion and vision led to one of the largest and most successful organizational changes known, the birth of Christianity.

Humility is therefore the foundation for the leader to lead change. It ensures that the leader's passion and vision are focused on what is best for the organization. It also ensures that the leader will not only focus on their passion, but they will also focus on the passion of their follower. This, in turn, encourages their active participation and excitement in the vision of the organization.

Conclusion

Change is never easy and is rarely wanted. However, in order for an organization to stay competitive and or operationally relevant, change is an inevitable reality. The leader can try to do it on their own, but they might end up with no one following once they have completed the change. To prevent that from happening, they must humbly, yet passionately, proclaim the vision and partner with their followers (Patterson & Winston, 2006). If they do that, the followers will, too, embrace the passion and the vision for the organization.

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