Time for a Change

Career Development

Your team is likely to experience the emotional and logistical hurdles of change. Change brings uncertainty; and that typically triggers a defensive reaction in most people, generating resistance. Change management is one of the most challenging tasks in business, filled with complexity, including deep-seated emotional components.

I decided to dedicate this column to change because it will be my final column for the *ACC Docket*, at least as author of “Career Path.” Changes have forced me to prioritize other tasks and I do not have the bandwidth to give this column the attention it deserves. Fortunately, the editors at this magazine understand that change is a natural state of being or as Heraclitus put it: “There is nothing permanent except change.”

Change happens in all organizations. How many of today’s blue-chip companies are structured exactly as they were in 1950? The Dow Jones Industrial Average components have changed 51 times since its inception in 1896. Pearson plc was once one of the world’s largest building contractors. Over the years, it exited that industry and entered and exited numerous others, including, at various times, oil and electric power, financial services, manufacturing, investment trusts, media, and publishing, before becoming the world’s leading education company that it is today, with operations in educational textbooks, digital learning technologies, assessments, and English language learning.

Would it have been better if Pearson, or any of the Dow Jones industrials, were preserved at a given point in time? And how would we know that any version would be better preserved than their future states? Will this column be better with another mind behind the words?

Change is not just about blueprints; it’s about winning hearts, which leads to winning minds. It is not

uncommon in change management that the team will follow the leader's plans less because they agree, and more because they trust the leader.

Change is an emotional process

Change invariably comes packed with a lot of big emotions, including fear, elation, depression, and exhaustion. It is important to recognize this as a natural part of the process; so you should know that the emotional roller coaster your team is about to get on has its own cycle of stages. Recognizing those stages makes them easier to manage.

Jeanie Daniel Duck, a world-renowned expert in change management, describes five basic phases of the change process: stagnation, preparation, implementation, determination, and fruition:

- ***Stagnation*** happens when organizations no longer innovate or provide the right products or technologies. There can be denial, and people may prefer to continue working as before. However, eventually it becomes clear that change is needed to survive.
- That ushers in ***preparation***, in which the decision is made to change. This is an in-between phase, which brings with it uncertainty and insecurity. People realize that change is coming but they are still trying to determine what the change means for them or the organization as a whole. This is a phase that is filled with difficult work and trade-offs, particularly if there is a lack of alignment or if the phase goes on for too long.
- When the organization is clear about where they need to head, ***implementation*** begins. The company announces its transformation plan and execution commences. At this stage, people experience the same fear, uncertainty, and exhaustion that they felt during preparation, except that now they also feel confused, apathetic, resentful, inadequate, and volatile. There may also be positive emotions such as relief, exhilaration, excitement, and recognition.
- At this point, ***determination*** kicks in. This is a critical juncture because the change has been formally implemented but has not yet really taken root. People begin to experience change fatigue, exhaustion, and disillusionment. In addition, some may begin to put up real resistance as they realize that the change will actually require them to work differently. An enormous amount of courage and commitment is needed to push through and secure the new ways of working. Many organizations will, at this stage, retreat.
- Finally, if the organization has been able to successfully slog through the determination phase, it will experience ***fruition*** when the organization is transformed. This is a happy period, where the new normal sets in.

Do not freeze up during your transformation. You need to move forward. If you stand still too long, you will lose momentum and things will start to unravel. Focus on what you can control and the rest will take care of itself.

To master change, you must always look ahead. And so, it seems fitting that I should end this column with one of my favorite quotes, from the pioneering female aviator, adventurer, racehorse trainer and author, Beryl Markham:

> "Never turn back and never believe that an hour you remember is a better hour because it is dead. Passed years seem safe ones, vanquished ones, while the future lives in a cloud, formidable from a distance."
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> *From West with the Night*, by Beryl Markham

I look forward to reading this column in a few months, when a new voice can share his or her thoughts on how to be in the best in-house lawyer out there. I'm confident that ACC Docket, and ACC in general, is changing — and getting stronger — with its gaze pointing firmly toward the future. Thank you for joining me on this journey. I look forward to writing other articles and, time permitting, books in the future.

The above has been adapted with the kind permission of Globe Law and Business from Bjarne's book, Building an Outstanding Legal Team: Battle-Tested Strategies from a General Counsel (see www.globelawandbusiness.com/OLT/).

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