

VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #7 by Michael Brown

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Change

In LeaderThought #5, we spoke of the "Characteristics of Servant Leader". We have already touched on the concept of Vision & Mission that tied to the characteristics of Conceptualization and Persuasion. We dealt with Goal Setting that also ties to those characteristics. Now we look at Change with ties to Foresight.

Change is something that all of us must deal with in our lives. As leaders, not only must we deal with change, but sometimes we need to be 'change agents', bringing about change in our organizations. Change can be something that is looked forward to. Change can be something that is feared and avoided. We need to understand how to handle change and how to manage it.



A great quote from Einstein that is appropriate here: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results." What is needed is a change in what you do to get the results you want. If your group is stuck in a rut, keep that in mind.

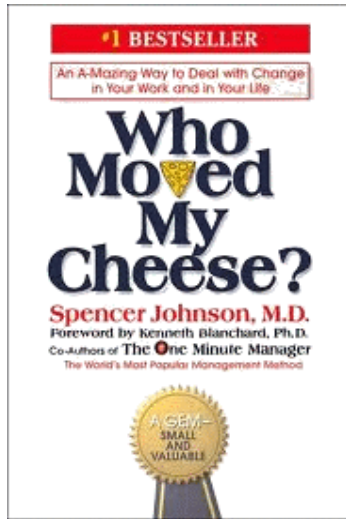
A work that is commonly used to show how individuals can handle change is Spencer Johnson's "Who Moved My Cheese" (1998). This book approached the idea with an allegory, a story of 4 characters and how they differ in their handling of change. In this story, cheese represents what we want and what gives us enjoyment. In the story we have 2 mice (Sniff & Scurry) and 2 "littlepeople" (Hem & Haw). All four characters are in a maze looking for cheese. They find a source of cheese and are content, but then change occurs: the cheese is gone from where they assumed it would be. What do the four characters do?

Sniff sniffs out change early and Scurry scurries into action, and these two start looking for new cheese before the change even happens. Hem & Haw don't. They, like many of us, are resistant to adapt to change. Hem denies and resists change and is fearful it will lead to something worse (don't we know many like this in our lives?). Haw, however, learns to adapt to the change, especially when he sees it will lead to something better. (which really is what we should be doing).

The big points of the work are shown in the "Handwriting on the Wall":

- Change Happens
- Anticipate Change
- Monitor Change
- Change
- Enjoy Change!
- Be Ready to Quickly Change Again and Again

There are a couple of other versions of this work to be aware of. This book is mainly aimed at adults, especially those in companies. There is another version aimed at teens and another for kids. The one for teens would be more of use to our Venturers.



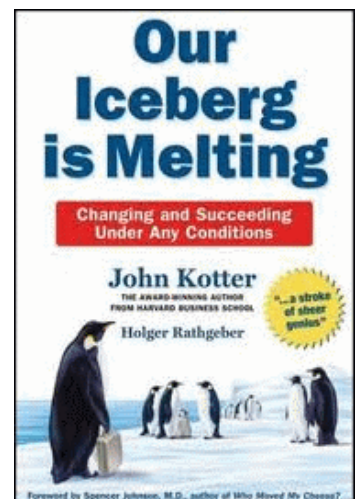
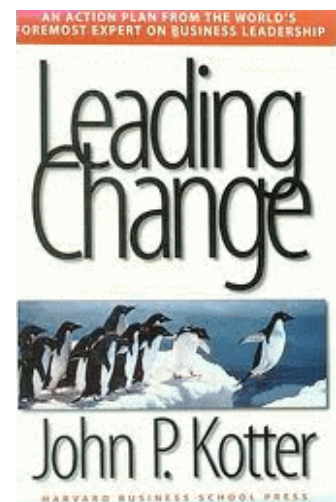
Now, any work that is as popular as this one will have criticism. There have been a few satires of it written and some valid criticism. In this work the attitude toward change places no judgment on whether the change is good or bad. And the big point of it is that one must adapt to change, not fight or resist it. Too often companies pass out copies of this book before massive changes, thru a naive belief that this will solve all the problems with rolling out the change. More on these points later in this Thought.

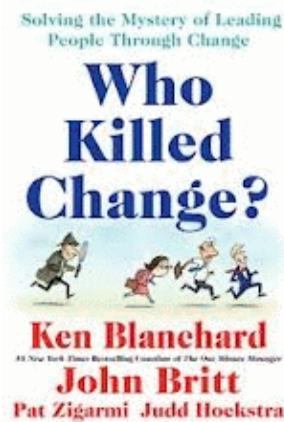
While "Who Moved My Cheese?" deals with how individuals might handle change, as leaders we also have to deal with the fact that WE may be the ones bringing about change. Often times we see that there are ways we can improve our organization, and so change is needed. Or our organization is in trouble, and change is needed before something drastic occurs. How then can we manage this?

John Kotter has probably been the leading author on the topic of change within companies and organizations. His leading work on the topic is "Leading Change" (1996) which outlines his 8-step process for managing change within companies. He has also written "Our Iceberg is Melting" (with Holger Rathgeber, 2005), which presents the same idea but in the form of an allegorical story. In the story he has a group of penguins facing a crisis that only one realizes who must convince the others of this fact and get the group to come up with a solution.

His 8-step process is:

- Establish a Sense of Urgency
- Create a Guiding Coalition
- Develop a Vision & Strategy
- Communicate a Change Vision
- Empower Employees for Broad-based Action
- Generate Short-term Wins
- Consolidate Gains & Produce More Change
- Anchor New Approaches in the Culture





A different work on change is Ken Blanchard et al's "Who Killed Change?" (2009). This work looks at the change efforts that are started in companies and organizations but which fail. He focuses on 13 "suspects", which are really elements that must come together for a successful change to occur, such that if something goes wrong with any of them the whole effort may be doomed. This topic is expanded upon in his more recent "Leading at a Higher Level" (2009), which first presents 15 reasons why change efforts fails. Then it presents the concept of Leading People Through Change Model. This model builds off Situational Leadership with a 9 strategies model that also ties in the 15 reasons for failure.

A big point of all of this is that change happens and many times we must be able to handle it. That said, one point I think that many of these works miss is that change is not always good. The assumption with all these works is that change is good and necessary. Any opposing change are doing so because they fear it (examples are the characters of Hem in "Who Moves My Cheese" or the obstructionist penguin Nono in "Our Iceberg is Melting" or several suspects in "Who Killed Change") or the like. What is overlooked is that perhaps the change being proposed is a bad idea, would lead to disaster and that those who oppose this understand it. I think the assumption in these models is that bad ideas would be caught early on and rejected, but we have examples of change that has been disastrous, so bad ideas DO get accepted. Many companies & organizations have been damaged or gone under due in part to bad changes. For an example, I can give you two words: New Coke. Or if you want a scouting example, I can give you three words: Improved Scouting Program.

The next point I should make is about how we manage change in our organizations. As mentioned, too often the approach is to tell people that change is coming and to pass out copies of "Who Moved My Cheese." The unspoken attitude is "here's the change, you have no say in it, so suck it up." This will lead to disaster. People are more willing to accept change if it's been successfully communicated to them AND they are sold on the value of the change. Change will be even MORE successful if people are made PART of the change process, that they feel they have a say in the matter. We've said before that as leaders we should have a vision for what we want of our group. If we want to be successful in leading our group to the end point we envision, we MUST communicate this vision (or this change) to our group and get their buy-in. And frankly, this IS the point of the works by Kotter & Blanchard. You see this with Kotter's having a vision, communicating it, and getting people on board. In Blanchard's Model also have similar elements (visioning, communication, collaborating). It seems so obvious, but too often it's overlooked.

I recently saw this in action with another organization I am a part of that rolled out a new brand identity AND a new logo. They kept the whole things under wrap. Selected leaders within the organization where told of what the changes entailed, but were NOT allowed to share it before the big unveil (all under double secret probation!). So that when the unveil occurred, many did NOT like it. The whole thing seemed a classic example of how NOT to manage change. People were resistant because they did not feel they were included in the change. The organization did a poor job explaining beforehand WHY the change was needed. And then they spent time AFTER the unveil to sell and explain people about it. This is putting the cart before the horse.

So if you are looking at enabling change in your organization, best to have a clear vision of what you want and be prepared to SELL this vision to your members before you start implementing it. Be open to them wanting to contribute to that vision. Heck, they may improve it. Change may be inevitable, but that doesn't mean we can't have a say in it.