

# more on change

BY TRISH BROCK

As we get bombarded with messages of “change” in this election year, we are also challenged to think about changes that may need to occur in our work environments. Maybe they are changes in staff, changes in how to go to market, and possibly a change of location or manufacturer. As changes are contemplated, they are often accompanied by resistance and fear since change can mean venturing into an unknown arena and be perceived as risky.

As I think about many people’s natural resistance to change, I am reminded of a couple of experiences that illustrate some reactions to change that may have a familiar ring.

Several years ago, I had the luxury of playing 18 holes of golf with a friend who had hired a teaching pro to play with us. It was just the three of us on a beautiful Colorado mountain course that was virtually empty – we had the course to ourselves and could take time for each shot. My friend and I each played two balls so we could practice correcting some bad habits.

Predictably, I sliced (for non golfers, a slice is a shot that instead of going straight, goes right) my first drive into the rough and snake territory. After watching me and where the ball landed, the pro approached me with a few simple suggestions. I modified my grip, changed my left foot slightly as he instructed and then hit my second ball. Bingo! Straight down the middle. My friend who also was a natural ath-

lete then took his first shot. Also predictably, he hooked (for non golfers, hooks veer left) his drive into snake territory. The pro then stepped up and offered some thoughts on the cause of the hook with a few ideas on how to correct it. To my utter amazement, my friend explained to the pro why his grip couldn’t be changed and that his foot placement was to compensate for something else; justifying why he would not be able to make the suggested changes. He teed up his second ball which he also hooked. Did he not see where the balls were going?

Things didn’t change much during that round of golf, at least for my friend. My game started improving as I implemented the suggested changes, and I began to experience how these changes were going to improve my overall game. My friend on the other hand became increasingly frustrated, grumpy and argumentative. He had hired a pro to help him and instead of listening to the advice he was paying for and claimed he wanted, he argued and justified why he was right. “Right in to the rough,” I thought to myself.

I have often thought about that day and laugh to myself as I still shake my head in amazement. And yet, how often do we continue to do the same things over and over again, each time expecting different results?

Several years ago I became familiar with a dealership that had experienced some major personnel changes. There were a number of new salespeople and the owner was anxious for them to get up to speed as all of his big producers had left for other opportunities. As the new people became increasingly busy with proposals, cold calling, following up on service issues and placing orders, it was evident that they were quickly becoming overloaded with “busy” tasks and less so with actual sales activities. It was suggested that the salespeople should be more focused on revenue producing activities and less on administrative functions. Refusing to acknowledge the “busy” work being required of his sales people, his response was that they couldn’t be busy because his sales were not yet at goal. Further justifying his position, he explained that all he needed was a strong sales “hitter” and when he found that individual, everything would be fine.

The issue of course was not in finding talent, it was keeping it. When remind-





“Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better.” *Sydney J. Harris*

ed of the “hitters” that had left and wondering why it would be different with a new “hitter,” it was also suggested that whatever problems caused his successful people to leave didn’t leave with them. And yet, the idea of identifying the real causes; evaluating internal systems and processes; and initiating changes was somehow more painful than the pain of poor performance and high turnover he was living with. The end of this story is obvious.

As we think about the notion of change, what is it that holds people back from making obvious, necessary and often easy changes? Instead of making changes themselves, it would seem that many want others to make the changes that will improve their circumstances for them. In other words, change is good as long as I don’t have to do it. What needs to be fixed is someone else’s doing. And in the case of the second story, is being “right” more important than doing the right thing, while heading right out of business?

“Because we have always done it this way” is a common rationale not to make changes although not a particularly valid one if the results are less than desired, i.e. my golfing friend. It is a dangerous stance to take in an increasingly competitive and global environment. Conventional thinking would dictate that doing things the same way will continue to yield the same results. But in this ever changing world, doing the same is not a predictor of results as the business climate continues to change. Doing the same is no longer an option – change has become mandatory.

When confronted with change, think about what may be causing resistance for you or those around you. Ask:

- ❖ Why is it preferable to stay where I am?
- ❖ Are needs being met?
- ❖ Is the past investment of time and energy preventing a shift in direction?
- ❖ If now is not the right time, why – too busy, haven’t completed current goal, in the middle of other things, etc?
- ❖ Is postponing change an excuse to take action?
- ❖ What is attractive (or not) about moving forward?
- ❖ Will the journey really be more painful than staying in the existing pain?
- ❖ Do you trust the “change agent” and reasons for change?

Before any meaningful change can occur, an awareness of why changes are needed must be identified, and a willingness to make a shift must be in place. An environment for change needs to be created. Whether management is pushing for change or staff is demanding it, the climate must allow it.

Encouraging change has a lot to do with being open minded with open communications. Good ideas happen every day, but without a forum and an easy flow of them, these same ideas and vehicles for change will be blocked. Below are several communication igniters and squelchers for the flow of ideas Nido R. Qubein mentions in his book, *How to Be a Great Communicator*. Think about the times you have either said them or have had them said to you, particularly when a change was suggested. Which list tips the scales for you?

## IGNITERS

I like that...  
Keep talking, you’re on to something...  
Go ahead, try it!...  
We can do a lot with that idea...  
That’s great, how can we do it?...

Super – what else do we need?...  
How can we get support for it?...  
I think it will fly...  
Gee, why not?...  
Hey, that’s a great idea...  
How can we build on that idea?...  
I agree!...  
How can we help you?...  
This is going to be fun!...  
I love challenges like this...  
That would be interesting to try...

## SQUELCHERS

The problem with that is...  
No way it will work here...  
Impossible under our current system...  
It’s not a bad idea, but...  
We’ve never done it that way before...  
You haven’t considered...  
We have too many projects now...  
It won’t work...  
We tried something like that a long time ago...  
We don’t have the time...  
We’re not ready for it yet...  
It’s all right in theory, but not in practice...  
Let’s be practical...  
Why start anything now?...  
You know, I think that is really dumb...  
Has anyone else tried it?...  
It’s been the same for years,  
Why change now?...

Thinking of the two stories above, there were a number of squelchers used as road blocks for needed change. Opportunities were available, but resistance to change prevented improvements. If we really want to improve our game, to attract and tap in to the talents of great people on staff, be competitive and thrive instead of survive, change must be embraced. With the right frame of mind, the journey toward the end result can be as interesting and rewarding as the ultimate goal. 🎯

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