



Moving Parts –Changing Up the Game

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

– John Fitzgerald Kennedy ⁹²

There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven.

– The Teacher⁹³

When you're finished changing, you're finished. – Benjamin Franklin⁹⁴

How many muscles and joints are involved in a golf swing? All of them. The golfer's entire core works at maximum power to accelerate and decelerate the club. The kinetic chain is the linkage system that connects adjacent joints and muscles throughout the entire body. It can improve efficiency (longer, more consistent shots) or injure the golfer.⁹⁵ Changing a longstanding pattern in a golfer or a pastor takes repetition. Changing the longstanding pattern in a congregation takes careful planning and thorough coordination because there are so many moving parts.

Change happens. It happened when you called on Jesus to forgive and save you. Change continued as you struggled to do God's will and to follow His call. Over the years, change became your friend, accepting God's will and His call for you to serve.

Your journey to accept and engage God's call was not immediate. It was not without questions and some degree of personal resistance. Helping others through change necessarily comes with questions and some degree of hesitation. Your greatest allies in this process are information, faith and patience.

⁹² <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9303>.

⁹³ Ecclesiastes 3:1.

⁹⁴ <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/5687>.

⁹⁵ <http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/generate-speed-and-power-with-each-swing>.

Watch the Moving Parts.

In any living system or active organization, there is movement. Rhythms and routines, cyclical and seasonal patterns are like your breath or heartbeat. Altering these patterns can have unintended consequences.

In church life, understanding how members are connected sheds light on how the systems work. The approach can be either to fix a problem or to tap potential. This simple choice affects every decision thereafter. A new idea or project takes on different meanings to different people. They are like loosely connected moving parts.

From the perspective of a church leader, reliable, current information is one key factor. By gathering information from various sources close to the situation, the opportunity and potential can be dissected and diagnosed.

The information should not only give current and projected facts but deal with the status quo, the equilibrium of church life. The information should affirm security and safety for the congregation while stirring some degree of dissatisfaction. Within this framework, we will examine the moving pieces that make up a congregation.

The second key factor is patience. As a leader, you may intellectually and emotionally process the idea for hours; after all, you are living it. For members, church life is a much smaller slice of their life. It takes much longer for them to absorb the basic information.

In this chapter, you will be challenged to bring clarity to the complexity of change. By understanding how and why the different parts of a church system interact, you can better introduce and lead a congregation through a series of changes. Knowing what needs changing and why is simple. Knowing how to lead a group of people through change is an art. Honorable motives and worthy goals are not enough. Courage and perseverance is not enough. You must learn to synchronize the moving parts.

Where Change Starts

Change starts with you. While you do not have control of many things around you, the one place/person you have the greatest influence to change is you. In fact, you are the greatest factor that is holding back change. You are the greatest factor in facilitating change.

Resistance to change (whether personal, familiar, or organizational) comes through a myriad of sources. Let us deal with the three most common resisters of change in church life: fear, impatience and loss of hope. By addressing the forces within you, you can better guide others to embrace healthy change.

Let's talk about *fear*.

Everybody has multiple forms of fear – heights, spiders, snakes, etc. Some fears are healthy and rational. They keep you away from danger. The fears that hold us back from healthy change and reasonable

risks are much more subtle. They generally operate below the radar of our awareness. Bringing these fears to light helps you to break free of their grip.

Name your fears. Trace their roots back to see if the fears have been programmed into your mind by how you were reared or what you've experienced. Talk with the people who know you best. Ask them what they suspect your buried fears might be. Fear of pain, failure, loss, and embarrassment are often so internalized and deep-seated that we do not recognize them. How about the fear of rejection or being judged as weak or fear of abandonment? Are you quietly afraid someone will expose your secrets of the past? All of these team up to counter your courage and cloud your vision.

Many pastors' fear is fed by insecurity. Pastors are fired every week. Most of them have no marketable skills outside of professional ministry. Needing to provide security for their family and to avoid the humiliation of being fired, pastors will accommodate unreasonable expectations and invasions of privacy. Some church leaders have learned to keep their pastor under their control using this leverage. May God have mercy on them!

A pastor's insecurity may manifest itself in various, contradictory ways, from a lack of eye contact or slumping posture to constant critical or combative comments about others. Insecurity shows itself by a comparative-competitive spirit, or self-justifying defenses. Insecurity can respond as passive, aggressive or both.

According to Barna Research, 65% of pastors would leave the ministry for a job with equal financial benefits. Their wives (80%) wish their husbands had a different vocation.⁹⁶ With pressures on every side, it is no wonder that 1,800 pastors leave the ministry every month.⁹⁷

So many fears have hidden triggers in your subconscious, informed by your past or the stories of those dear to you. These fears cause decision-paralysis. They push you to play it safe when the risk outweighs the reward. They make survival or pain avoidance the decisive factor in decisions.

Only as you recognize the influence of these fears can you factor in their value. Then you can act with courage that overcomes the fears that hold you back. Then and only then can you help others recognize and overcome their fears.

There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love.⁹⁸

Patience Is a Virtue

Patience is foundational in assisting others through the process of change. Be sensitive to the process to examine, test and choose a new path or a new pattern. It is not enough simply to deliver information about change and its benefits. Before accepting a new way of doing things, people want to know how the idea was

⁹⁶ www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics.

⁹⁷ www.ministryinstitute.org/files/22/TRAGEDY%20STATISTICS.pdf.

⁹⁸ 1 John 4:18.

birthed, how it has been modified and what others think of it. They need time to talk with their friends and the local nay-sayers before embracing the new idea.

Guiding a group of individuals through change takes great sensitivity to the movement. Keeping a sense of harmony requires that the leaders console those who desire to move more quickly while challenging those who move more slowly to perhaps pick up the pace at times. Even when the group decides on the direction, the pace of change can trip up the whole process.

Patience is better than power, and controlling one's temper, than capturing a city.⁹⁹

Patience is one expression of self-control. Whether rushing up the slow crowd or slowing up the runners, patience is required for leaders. The good news is that God grants it as fruit of the Spirit. He builds it in you through the challenges to your faith. Few things develop patience in a pastor like leading a church through change.

Hopelessness

The most difficult barrier to overcome is with those who have lost hope. How does one move forward or why would anyone want to face the risks of change without hope? Share narratives of those who have lost all to rebound and start a new chapter of life. These are found in scripture and in recent history. For some, addressing statistics can begin to shed light. Facts, emotions or stories of the faithful eventually raise the horizon of hope.

How do you raise your own hope quotient? Find someone who needs encouragement. As you give hope, you will find greater hope in whatever situation. So many pastors flee when they cannot see resolution or a better state. It is much easier to begin again with a new situation in a new location. A change of venue and a new set of characters hide the negatives. Would you approach your marriage in that way? Remember that the church is Christ's bride.

But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception.¹⁰⁰

Reality Check

There are some who choose to remain helpless, hopeless victims. They see themselves as recipients of hard knocks and bad breaks. Some people will fight change until they draw their last breath. The most inspiration you can give them is to succeed in improving the life of those around them and the congregation.

Ministry Gifting Aspects to Consider

As a follower of Christ, each person is given gifts that express themselves in serving others in His name. We have discussed this in previous chapters. Just as a quick reminder, you are drawn to ministry that

⁹⁹ Proverbs 16:32

¹⁰⁰ Hebrews 3:13

naturally expresses your gifts, even in leading the change process. However, your gifting must not hijack the process of congregational change. Consider others and the common good before you consider yourself. Be alert to how others' giftedness facilitates or hinders the changes God wants to bring.

Pastorally-gifted persons naturally draw near to those passing through pain, anxiety or doubt. In times of need, the presence of a pastorally gifted person is a physical reminder of God's presence. These moments can be life changing for all involved, encouraging growth in grace and faith. When introducing a potential change, the pastoral-gifted members are listening for how it affects church members and their families.

The evangelism-gifted are drawn to those far from God. Presenting the way of life to the lost seems like the most important duty or privilege on earth. Guiding others to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ brings a joy that words fail to capture. Communicating potential changes that results in evangelism creates greater buy-in for these believers.

The mission-related gifted are drawn to the edges of society, beyond the walls of church facilities. Congregational changes are seen as superficial unless they impact those outside the congregation. However, a congregationally-focused change that is explained with implications of its impact on outsiders can gain favor with missional-minded insiders.

Before approaching the "what" of change, think through the pastoral, evangelistic and missional aspects of the change being considered. Explaining the goals of change using terms that relate to each of these ministry aspects better communicates across the breadth of the congregation. Addressing the values of change in this way builds consensus and points to the mission of God among them. Interface how the change touches each facet of church life (worship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry and missions). This approach also connects the values and passions of the gifted believers to help them join in the change process.

Key Individuals and Key Patterns

Change is helped or hindered by key individuals in a system (whether a family or church family). While everyone has a default response to change, their response does not carry equal weight. Some are far more influential than others. It is not always the most visible or audible persons who are the most influential. The most influential church members to endorse or oppose change often do not hold leadership positions. A respected senior adult is often the gatekeeper for change.

Therapists recognize that an addict affects the life of every family member. The addict stresses others directly in proportion to the overlap of their lives. The family suffers the most. In the same way, an exceptionally healthy, talented, productive person affects those whose lives overlap with his or hers in very positive ways.

Key Players in the Change Process

Key individuals within a congregation bring positive or negative energies. Let me unpack the basic approaches to risk and change. The percentages given relate to the general population. However, within a

local congregation, the percentage will differ slightly depending on the style of church leadership. People tend to connect or comply with the type of leadership style. As you read, associate church member names with each group. It is possible that some individuals will match more than one group.

Explorers

Explorers to the western expansion were the first of European decent to walk and paddle their way through the modern-day Midwest. These daring men were driven to push back the limits of civilization and open gateways to the future. The successful explorers returned to their senders with maps and tales that inspired others to follow.

These innovators make up 2 percent of the general population. They are drawn to more progressively-minded churches and repelled by past-focused churches. Explorers invest in the new, which they adapt and adopt. They gladly throw caution to the wind if it earns them kudos with other innovators. Techies are a typical group of innovators. They pay premium prices for the latest gadgets, often to prove their “geekness” to other techies, rather than for any particular use.

Explorers are important participants in the change process. With little fear of failure, explorers test newest ideas before placing the congregation at risk. Without them, there is no “beta” version. Do not expect or request explorers to stick with a change. By the time positive change begins to catch on with other groups, they are moving on to the next thing. Turn them loose and bless their continued exploration. That is who they are. Encourage them and even ask them about any ministry ideas you might have for them to explore.

Refining a concept for local context without an explorer's beta-testing exposes church leaders to untested approaches. The benefit-risk equation will be missing the contextualized factors which leads to faulty expectations and goals. Without the test model, the perceived reliability of leadership data is incomplete which inhibits the introduction of new ideas.

Who are the explorers in your congregation? Who is the key (influential) explorer?

Pioneers

Unlike the explorers, who plan round trips into the unknown, pioneers take their journey on a one-way trip. Pioneers faced danger and risked failure. They courageously left civilization behind in order to make new and better lives elsewhere. Pioneers love a challenge.

Today's pioneers are quick to adopt a new methodology or technology. They value others' admiration, desiring to be seen as living on the cutting edge. Pioneers look to the explorers to consider coming trends and opportunities. They make up only about 14 percent of the general population but are mobilizers for change.

Pioneers are not particularly loyal to tradition, brand or status quo. Even if something benefits them and is consistent in quality, they will likely move on to something newer. In church life, denominational loyalty is evaluated based on its current relevance and the benefits it offers.

Pioneers can be rugged individualists, yet they tend to cluster together with other pioneers. They seek distinction from the masses by the activities they choose to be a part of. As part of an innovative community, they evaluate and select which ideas hold the most promise, often looking to and learning from the explorers.

Homesteaders

Homesteaders followed the pioneers into the western expansion with promises of land and opportunity. Some of the rugged edges, risks and hardships were reduced by those who forged the trails before them. Some of the early issues of survival on the expansive front had been resolved. Homesteaders were those who built villages into towns.

Today's homesteaders serve as the justifiers of change to the greater society. They make up about 34percent of the general population. Winning this group swings the acceptance of the majority. In *Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell suggests that changes will gain acceptance of the whole once a majority of this group is convinced and converted.¹⁰¹

Homesteaders are legitimizers. Those who follow will listen to the testimonies of those who dared to join the pioneers. They are not seen as unstable as explorers or as trendy as the pioneers. Homesteaders are opportunists. They are comfortable with just enough risk to stay one step ahead of the masses. They are the ones who will call the masses to act.

Settlers

Settlers eventually followed the homesteaders to the westward expansion. Explorers pointed out great spots for pioneers to establish. The homesteaders further developed communities to provide greater security and opportunity with less danger. By this point in the westward expansion, the small towns of the frontier looked more and more like the small towns back east.

In church life, settlers take advantage of a well-planned community. They are trend followers, finding greater security and acceptance by going along with the majority. They make up about 34percent of the general population. This group keeps harmony in the church and knows how to use the systems for their advantage. Settlers are helpful with support for existing programs and ministries. However, settlers are the ones who press for increased member services even at the expense of reduced missions.

Settlers tend to slow down the implementation of new ideas and projects. They prefer to modernize existing programs and ministries rather than start new ones. They remember too little of the distant past and see too little of the near future.

The Whigs

¹⁰¹ Gladwell, Malcolm. *Tipping point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002.

The Whigs were a political party that won two of three presidential elections held during their short existence. However, both of their presidents died in office. As a political party, they were divided except when it came to opposing the Democrats. They knew what they did not want. They were the original party of “No.” Most Whigs opposed the westward expansion and few of them ever ventured westward to join in the expansion.

Whigs represent the resistance. No matter the idea or object of change, no matter how it serves the common good, this group will resist change. Whigs attract other Whigs. They may not be sure what they support, but they are confident of what they oppose. They make up a noisy 16 percent of the general population.

The difficulty of working and worshipping with this kind of people is obvious. However, they are helpful in clarifying the obstacles in realizing change. In fact, when alerted to the idea early, key resisters can gain a sense of importance and occasionally be transformed to a justifier among other resisters.

Leaders can determine early whether to ignore, isolate, or appease them after a conversation or two with key Whigs. Too much or too little attention on this group can undermine the success of a project.

Stages of Change

1. Information:

In this stage, church leaders may point out an opportunity to seize or a ministry to improve. Communication begins by shedding light on a situation. Resist the urge to publicly make your suggestions on the solution.

- a. Start with the most influential persons in the church. Discover what the congregation might know or perceive about the situation. Listen for previous efforts to address it. Inquire to its potential importance to the church or community. Ask about possible responses. Research how other churches like yours addressed the need/opportunity. Interview leaders from those churches when possible.
- b. Take the information you learned to the key leaders in the church. Even if they are not the most influential, gaining their approval is important. After all, they listen to the influencers and the influencers hear them. Ask them what they know or understand of the situation in question. Encourage them to further research within a time frame and bring back their findings.
- c. Once consensus is reached on the need/opportunity among the leadership, begin communicating across the breadth of the congregants. Shine a light on the situation and assure the congregation that the leadership is studying the most appropriate response.
- d. During this stage of the process, information should help the congregation sense its responsibility to act in some fashion.

2. Persuasion:

In this stage the plan of response is given by the leadership. Allow adequate time for questions and weighing alternative solutions/responses to be presented and answered. Feedback on options being considered just might improve the plan. Be sure to give a clear estimate as to the resources and timeline that may be required. Funding for the project often surfaces during this stage. The fewer surprises, the better.

Remember how the chain of persuasion often best runs through the pioneers, homesteaders and settlers, with special consideration of the church organizational leaders and congregational influencers. If the process works, even half of the Whigs will abstain or agree.

3. Presentation:

In this stage, the church has reached the hour of decision. Leadership reviews the story of how this project came to be. The advantages and disadvantages are weighed in light of church approval and consequences if the church declines or tables the motion. Remember to relate it in some way to each aspect of the church's life and purpose. This should not be the first time for any active member to hear. This is the most delicate hour. Celebrate the unity of decision.

4. Implementation:

In this stage, the plan is put into action and the church is updated along the way. Do not be lured into thinking that once the project or change process is underway that it cannot be derailed. Do not think that those who supported the project or change will continue to be supportive. Regularly keep leaders and the congregation up to date on the process. Remind everyone of the benefits to be realized.

5. Evaluation:

Evaluation cannot wait to begin when the project is complete. Backing up and looking at progress and the waves it creates needs to be done weekly or monthly, depending on the flow of the project. Once complete, verify the positive impact made and reflect on what was learned. Include hints at future needs to address or opportunities to pursue. Give feedback first to those who invested the most time, energy and resources and church leaders in order to help them refine and unify their communication.