

Notes for Change Agents

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote that the motto of history should be: “Eadem sed aliter”, or, the same things, but in different ways.

These notes are written for change agents, and for those who would become change agents. Please always bear in mind that humans, as a species, are a conservative lot. Also, do not make the mistake of assuming that being armed with fact, data and case studies significantly empowers you. In one of my more cynical and frustrating moments I wrote:

Evolution demands that old structures not be cast away or replaced outright. Rather it demands new structures be built over the older pre-existing structures, or old structures be modified to perform new functions, or a combination of both. This is not optional, it is an unconditional demand by nature to all life on earth.

Therefore the innovative creator of new paradigms and the iconoclastic, transformational change agent will be thwarted at every turn by nature itself, and by its most significant creation, human beings. Possibly the greatest trick nature has played is to create a creature intelligent enough to crack the cosmic code of creation, but which collectively remains deeply conservative, seemingly unable to take full advantage of its own huge intellect because it prefers to avoid rapid and profound change. It seldom discards central pre-existing structures merely because they function poorly or are sub-optimal. Nearly always, it will follow an evolutionary path; preferring to find ways to modify old structures or build new ones over the old. In most cases it will therefore sub-optimize, because the old foundations will place limitations on new structures.

Those whom the gods would make crazy are first cursed with a vision of the future not necessarily linked to the current reality.

In my less cynical moments, I am a lot more optimistic. I have kept the above quote handy because there is an element of truth in it, and because it reminds me what a change agent is up against. We should not complain too much about the conservative nature of humans. That's a little like howling at the moon, something in which I am well practiced, but am learning to do less often. Also, try to remember that no-one forced you to become an iconoclast. What a change agent is trying to do is to create a chain reaction. It's a little like nuclear fission. Up until the critical mass is reached, not a lot happens. But once we reach critical mass, the chain reaction is unstoppable. Change agents sometimes note that they expend

huge amounts of effort for not much by way of results. Either they are pulling in the wrong direction or they have yet to reach the critical mass.

PROOF

No-one can prove any theory or concept absolutely, but to prove something wrong is considered by science to be possible. Be prepared for the following type of attempt to prove your theory wrong;

Iconoclast: Men are taller than women. This is a fact.

Detractor: Well, here's Mary, a woman who is taller than every man in the room. That disproves your theory.

I have formulated my own methods of dealing with denial and avoidance. You must formulate yours. Try not to be too critical of your detractors. Remember that denial and avoidance can be found in all of us. None are innocent of an emotional reaction to a rational construct.

LOOK FOR THE LOOKERS

Finally, try to remember that there is only one person in the universe whom you can permanently and profoundly change. If your approach does not work well, change that which you do and say. By changing yourself, you change the interactions and relationships with others. The people you should try to work with are the senior people in an organisation and in particular, the ones who sense that there must be a better way; those who are already looking. If you choose to work with people who are convinced of the correctness of their existing approach, you choose a thorny path. This can be done, but it is not a task for the faint hearted.

THE FIFTEENTH POINT

Mr. Murray Mansfield of Melbourne has what I believe to be the only completely up to date version of Dr. Deming's famous *Obligations for Top Management*. After a long discussion with Murray, Dr. Deming agreed that there ought to be a fifteenth point. He took Murray's notes turned to the page containing the fourteen points and at the foot of the page wrote:

15. *Have a good time!*

FREEDOM TO LEARN

Are we truly free to learn, or are we trapped in our existing paradigms; trapped in our current beliefs?

Only the agnostic is totally free to contemplate the nature of God. Only the agnostic has complete freedom to wonder whether God exists at all.

The Muslim or Christian has no such freedom, nor does anyone else possessed of a profound belief in God. Their existing beliefs dictate not only that a God exists, but also pre-determines the nature of God to a large degree. Therefore they find it difficult to contemplate a universe without a God. Also, they are unable to freely study the possibility of a quite different God than their faith professes. Deeply held pre-existing beliefs limit the possibilities for study and new learning.

The atheist is sure that no God exists. Anyone possessed of such convictions is no more free to contemplate the existence and nature of God than are the faithful. Again, existing beliefs pre-determine to some extent the courses that thinking may take, and by extension, the learning that may take place.

It is not my intention to attack anybody's religious beliefs. Your God and your beliefs are your business alone. My God is a personal God; my religion is my business. The religious analogy is used here because it is one we are all familiar with, and because it elicits a strong emotional response in most people.

In order to be free to study and learn, it is enormously helpful to be able to develop an agnostic attitude towards that being studied; to be able to suspend judgement to permit the gathering of new data and the formation of new ideas. This is extremely difficult. For some it seems close to impossible. For all of us, our pre-existing knowledge, aims and beliefs will influence our thinking to a certain extent. It's a matter of degree. The greater is one's ability to suspend judgement, to at least temporarily put aside one's current beliefs, the greater are one's opportunities to learn, and to create a new reality.