

Managing Change

A post sabbatical paper by Rev K. Beckingham July 2021

Hebrew 12:2: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The United Methodist church has adopted the slogan: Don't just reopen – relaunch!

First, do we want change for the better or change at any cost?

To ensure that change is for the better, *critical thinking* is required. This involves asking open questions beginning with each of the following 6 words: What, Why, Where, When, Who, How. Each of these should stimulate a series of further questions. Examples may include:

What is consistent with the Deed of Union and Our Calling? What is it that our community needs? What appropriate gifts and talents do we have? What project/activities meet the pastoral needs of our members and may attract their friends? What will success look like?

Why do we want to attract new people – to fill our pews and appoint church officers or to share the blessings of the Christian faith in a way that meets people's spiritual needs? Why are we doing this rather than letting someone else do it? Why are we not doing this in partnership with others? Why should anyone support us in doing this?

Where is the best setting for this project? Is our building suitable, is it in the right place, do we have capacity for this project, is there another church/venue that would be better suited?

When would be the best time to launch, when is a good time of the year, when will necessary preparations have been completed, when will safer recruitment and training be completed, when is there a suitable space in the church/national calendar? When will suitable consents be forthcoming?

Who will project manage, handle the finances, PR, safer recruitment and training, arrange accountability, benefit from the project, assess the success? Who do we report to?

Any church policy requires a Biblical & theological rationale. Without an inspired vision we cannot inspire others, and so time set aside for corporate and individual prayer is vital. The aim is discerning God's will and not to convince others of the wisdom of our own ideas! Reflect on your motives. Are we intent of furthering God's Kingdom or extending our own "empire"? Whose glory are we working towards?

Secondly, have we got clear strategy?

How is the process to work? *How* will it be financed? How will it benefit the church, the community, and individuals? *How* do we assess the outcome?

John Kotter & Holger Rathgeber offer the following guidelines in "*Our Iceberg is Melting*".

In brief: Set the stage. Decide what to do. Make it happen. Make it stick. Here are the steps:

1. Create a sense of urgency
2. Pull together the Guiding Team
3. Develop the Change Vision and Strategy
4. Communicate for understanding and buy-in
5. Empower others to act

6. Produce short-term wins
7. Don't let up
8. Create a new culture

In a follow up book, “*That's not how we do it here! A story about how organisations can rise and fall and can rise again*”, Kotter and Rathgeber write “The rate of change is going up, that fact can be hard to see clearly or to deal with well, and when we cannot find ways to avoid hazards, grasp opportunities and produce results we all truly value ... life can become quite unpleasant”. They argue that the two necessary factors for success are leadership and management, which are distinguished from each other. They illustrate their theory in each book with a disarmingly simple yet profound fable. When leadership and management combine a “best-of-both-worlds organization” is created.

When “The Big Opportunity” is identified a cyclical process is required:

1. Create a sense of urgency
2. Build a guiding coalition
3. Form strategic vision and initiatives
4. Enlist a volunteer army
5. Enable action by removing barriers
6. Generate short term wins
7. Sustain acceleration
8. Institute change

Their second book clearly builds on the work in their first book and represents further mature reflection on their original thinking. To fully understand it I recommend that you read the books and especially look at the helpful diagrams.

Another fable is by Dr Spencer Johnson and entitled “*Who moved my cheese? An amazing way to deal with change in your work and life*”. It is about some mice who live happily in their maze until someone moves their cheese and they must find new ways of coping. In this book cheese represents the thing (whatever it might be) that an individual or group value highly. Again, to properly understand the image it is probably best to read the short book. His main points include:

- a. Change happens – they keep moving the cheese
- b. Anticipate change – Get ready for the cheese to move
- c. Monitor cheese – smell the cheese often so you know when it is getting old
- d. Adapt to change quickly – the quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you can enjoy new cheese
- e. Enjoy change – savour the adventure and enjoy the taste of new cheese
- f. Move with the cheese and enjoy it!

Thirdly, have we got a robust theology & philosophy of life?

A J Cronin wrote: “Life is no straight and easy corridor along which we travel free and unhampered, but a maze of passages, through which we must seek our way, lost and confused, now and again checked in a blind alley. But always, if we have faith, a door will open for us, not perhaps one that we ourselves would ever have thought of, but one that will ultimately prove good for us”.