

Chapter 2

Confront change with confidence (Overcome your fear of change)

There is nothing permanent except change.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus had it right.

Change is *always* with us, and the *rate* of change continues to accelerate.

A lot of people actively dislike change. And large numbers of them actually fear change.

Why is that?

Many human beings dislike or fear change because it disrupts their comfort zones, their familiar environments.

They fear change because they are afraid they will not be able to confront it successfully. They are afraid of being hurt financially, physically, or in their personal relationships. They fear losing their individuality. They fear losing control over things that are important to them.

However the continuing process of change is not stopped by resisting it or by ignoring it. Change is

absolutely certain to take place. Unfortunately, changed circumstances can sometimes have the severest impact on those who have tried hardest to ignore it, due to the added element of surprise. Then their fears will come to pass ... much magnified in reality ... because they have not exercised the potential opportunity to anticipate change and exercise measurable control over it.

All of us, in our different organizations (business, family, church, social) face the *process of change*. We need to understand (and hopefully accept) that altered circumstances in the external or internal environment may make change inevitable, necessary, and even desirable.

The desired goal for us - *all* – is to understand the continuing process of change. We need to understand and accept that it is to our best interest to deal effectively with the reality of change, most especially when it is connected with new opportunities or unexpected difficulties.

Here is the key to confronting change without fear.

Lay out your planned course for the future, fully incorporating key assumptions ... the more specific the better. Track those assumptions by measuring them. Measure frequently for the more volatile assumptions, those most subject to unexpected change).

Set control limits. (Control limits are points where you have decided ahead of time to take action if any assumption is, say, 10% worse than you had predicted, or perhaps, 20% better than you had predicted. They act as trigger points. They serve to

warn you that your planned future is veering off course from where you intended to go.)

When a trigger point is activated, respond to it and adjust your plan for the future. This adjusted plan will of necessity be different than your original plan, BUT you will be in touch with reality and your adjusted plan has a much more realistic probability of coming to fruition.

Many of you already know this, but for some, you have just learned how to confront change through a proactive response to changed circumstances. Congratulations! You are making change work for you. As a result you can react objectively to change and minimize the potentially adverse impact of changes in your key assumptions. You have also laid the groundwork for finding opportunities that were not initially apparent.

Before I finished college and grad school, I had the great privilege of being trained as a Naval Aviator. I learned very valuable lessons about getting from here to there. Any competent pilot must plot a course, with the best data he can acquire as to wind speed and direction at various altitudes and locations along his course.

The pilot then files a flight plan and documents where he expects to be at various checkpoints during the journey. If winds shift, or he notices (with the help of visual observations and navigational aids) that he's drifting off course he must take timely action. If he doesn't, he risks not being able to get to his destination (on time, or even at all). Likewise if an unexpected emergency occurs (such as a massive thunderstorm, a fuel leak, or heavy snow), the pilot needs to have preplanned where to

direct the plane and crew to safety in case of such an unexpected event.

I learned these lessons well because safety and survival were clearly at stake.

In like manner, the safety and survival of your business depends on your ability to successfully chart the future course of your business and change course as circumstances dictate.

Always replace your initial assumptions with those that are more current and therefore more valid.

Identify changes that can affect your business

Consider both ongoing changes and potential changes. Then think very hard about how these changes could significantly affect your business. Here are some examples of the types of trends you may need to monitor for your business. These are examples only. Identify the trends important to your own business.

- Rapid *technological change*, and its resultant need for workers with increased skill requirements. This arises due to use of more complex equipment and processes.
- The US workforce becoming significantly more *diverse*, with some segments more highly educated (some less, for example, for workers entering the workforce from a third world country).
- The reality of *corporate restructuring* as an inexorable force continuing to reshape businesses.

- Increased *outsourcing* of work functions conventionally accomplished in-house.
- Proliferation in integrated high-performance work systems as a result of *computerization*.
- “*Just-in-time*” systems continuing to bring increasing pressure for more efficient delivery of raw materials and finished goods.
- *Changes in organizational structure* caused by mergers, downsizing, acquisitions, or rapid growth.

Everyone is affected by change. It is to the advantage of every business to recognize and fully accept this reality. Please document on the page to the left your assessment of the trends that will be important to your business in the immediate future and in the years ahead.

In summary then, there is an underlying need to:

- Understand and accept the nature of change.
- Find ways to respond on a timely basis.
- Do so to the advantage of the business (and of ourselves personally).

This understanding and acceptance almost always requires a shift in our attitude(s). This is sometimes difficult to do, but it is absolutely critical for success in both our business and personal lives.