

# Information You Can Use

## SUSTAINING POSITIVE CHANGE

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**W**hen I was growing up professionally, there were only two unavoidable truths in life, death and paying taxes. As business professionals living in an exciting time of transformation in the global business community, I believe that we should add change to that list. Change has become a business constant. Broad organizational shifts and personal evolutions. And the velocity at which change is occurring has increased dramatically. Consider this factoid...as of the year 2000, more than half of all of the change in the history of the recorded world has taken place since 1940(1)!

I have also personally noticed that energy and effort are not expended evenly throughout the change process. Lots of energy, by both individuals and organizations, is spent on creating the momentum for making a change. Often, that means that we run out of gas shortly after we make a significant change, leaving little reserve for maintaining the momentum, surging further forward or making the midcourse corrections that are often necessary.

The primary challenge to sustaining positive change, both your own and the company's, is found tucked into the following quote by Rosabeth Moss Kantor, "Change done by me is an opportunity; Change done to me is a threat; All change looks like failure in the middle." For me, the biggest challenge to sustainability is that even positive change looks like failure in the middle. And, contrary to popular belief, it takes longer than 17 to 30 days to make a change really stick. So, when change feels like failure and it goes on for some time, we end up falling back into old habits and patterns of thinking and doing simply because they feel familiar and, however maladaptive, they served us at some point in time. Without a commitment to sustainability, this is often fatal for both individual and

organizational change.

Sustaining positive change is, for me, all about sustaining awareness. That idea is captured elegantly in the other half of the Kantor quote. We get to choose to participate in change or be acted upon, opportunity vs. threat. For those of you who choose the path of opportunity, I would pose a powerful question: "How will you sustain the personal and/or organizational changes that you have already made and continue to build from that new, higher vantage point?" Your response to that question is as individual as you are. I firmly believe that you have all of the answers you need within you. But what I can offer are some provocative thoughts that may

### TEN PROVOCATIVE THOUGHTS

1. ***Become An Omni—Competent Leader***
2. ***Practice Intentionality***
3. ***Truth Telling***
4. ***Cross-Pollinate***
5. ***Adopt A "My Sister's Keeper" Mindset***
6. ***Surrender Old Haunts***
7. ***Embrace The Chaos***
8. ***Let Your Guard Down***
9. ***Be Satisfied With What Is, While Eagerly Reaching For More***
10. ***Tighten The Weave***

stimulate your thinking and allow you to easily access your answers. Notice that I don't call them "secrets." That's because they aren't or shouldn't be.

Forward thinking companies are using one or more of these to sustain change. And I didn't choose to call them "action items." That's up to you to decide. Maybe you do some of these brilliantly already. Bravo. And maybe only two or three intrigue you enough to try on for size. That's great. The coaching purpose is to create sparks of possibility for you, to allow you to more easily navigate the flow of change rather than feel overwhelmed by it and to provoke you to find your own perfect solution to

sustainability. They were developed from my observations of hundreds of high performing professionals such as you and many of them are inter-related, supporting or complementing one another.

**Provocative Thought #1 — Become An Omni-Competent Leader—Regardless of your job description or where you are in the pecking order, change creates enormous opportunity for leaders to emerge at all levels. Become an omni-competent leader in your approach to change by fully and actively engaging your three primary intelligences — logical intelligence, intuitive intelligence and emotional intelligence. Connect your heart, head and gut.**

**Provocative Thought #2 — Practice Intentionality** — Manage your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and actions on a regular basis. You are a powerful force in creating your next reality. Thoughts Become Things. Stop turning over your power to other people and circumstances by allowing them to guide your emotions. Being choiceful in how you will experience change gives you a leg up on seeing it as an opportunity adds to your laser-like focus and keeps you on a roll.

**Provocative Thought #3—Truth Tell** - In order for change to have a chance to take hold and grow, you need to have the courage to accurately assess how it's going and when things need to be refined or "tweaked." Being able, in a "charge neutral way", to speak up firmly but gently when something's not right and provide a possible solution is how change is sustained.

**Provocative Thought #4 - Cross-Pollinate** - Lilly Tomlin once said, "We're all in this alone." If that's how you feel when it comes to change, then it's time to do things differently. When it comes to change, try to intentionally avoid "tunnel thinking" - falling into old habits of thought while we ignore others' fresh ideas or miss the big picture view. Join a functional team and begin a campaign of active listening.

**Provocative Thought # 5 - Adopt a "My Sister's Keeper" Attitude -**

This one is simple but not easy. Begin to ask one or more of your colleagues the following powerful question, "What can I do today to add to your success?" This line of questioning creates powerful synergy and well-being. It assists others in navigating the flow of change and begins a cycle of giving and receiving.

**Provocative Thought #6 — Surrender Old Haunts**

— Nothing kills the momentum of change quicker than maintaining grudges against one another and giving them power over your feelings and actions. Give up on the "police record" approach to teamwork and collegiality. Let go and wipe the slate clean. Don a different set of expectations about people, departments, situations and you may be pleasantly surprised at what comes back to you.

**Provocative Thought #7 — Embrace the Chaos**

— Remember the quote at the top of the article ... "All change looks like failure in the middle." Acknowledge when you feel this level of chaos and picture it as the time between the trapezes, when you have let go of old ways of doing things and haven't quite gotten your arms around the new way of being. Understand that it is often part of the process and push through rather than

seeing it as a sign to turn back.

**Provocative Thought #8 — Let Your Guard Down**

— Take a chance at embarrassing yourself by truth telling or floating a new idea that may help the change process to flow. Ask for the help you really need during the change process in order to be successful. If you find yourself in a team leader role, be in control without controlling. And practice ego mastery... actually believe that someone else's idea may be the better one.

**Provocative Thought #9 — Be Satisfied With What Is, While Eagerly Reaching For More**

- Recognize that personal and organizational change are journeys. You really have to love getting there as much as you love being there. Focus on what's working today, in the present moment. Congratulate yourself and others more often. Celebrate how far you have come. Reward sustaining positive change as much as creating it in the first place (or at least recommend it).

**Provocative Thought #10 — Tighten The Weave**

— As you create newness, apply a "tincture of time" and build the processes to support the change. Sustaining change means have a sturdy system in place. Make sure that you don't get caught up in the false energy pattern of changing simply for the

sake of changing, rather than to fulfill a higher goal or improve and develop in some way. It's not about checking something off the list as much as it is about making it better and keeping it that way.

As you focus on creating sustainability, find like-minded others in your organization or your community of friends and associates. And "pay any price to remain in the company of extraordinary people."

**Reference**

- Secrets of Exceptional Leaders, C. Hegarty, P. Nelson, 1997, p.<sup>7</sup>

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