

*the*  
**navalent**  
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**READY**

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**Transition:** *Opportunity for growth*

**Lead:** *Change and transition*

**Ambition:** *The need to succeed*

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## The Most Important Question for our Time: Are You Ready

*By Jarrod Shappell*

### **A confession: I don't brush my teeth before bed.**

My wife chastises me every night. Not because my breath is disgusting or she is worried about my dental health (we should note that she has had 10x as many cavities as I have), but because she doesn't understand how I could skip such an important step in getting "ready for bed." The routine required for her to get ready to sleep, motionless, for 8 hours, is more complex than the process a professional athlete goes through before their biggest game.

### ***Which begs the question, what exactly is she getting ready for?***

In one way or another, we are all getting ready for something. We may not be aware of it, but our actions reflect our anticipated future. Dee Hock, Visa Founder and organizational psychologist, says that we are always anticipating the future to be chaotic, orderly, or to have control over it and that our behaviors follow our view of the future. Let's take a simple example: an emergency in your home. If you expect chaos you may have an emergency kit in your car and multiple fire extinguishers in your home. If you expect order you may have had an emergency exit discussion or two with your family. If you anticipate control, you don't do any of those things but believe you'll be able to get everyone to safety were something to happen.

## ***If you lead an organization, what is your organization getting ready for?***


Most believe that our businesses, especially in the US, should be getting ready for unprecedented chaos. Referencing the unprecedented rate of profit for US based Fortune 500s, [Richard Dobbs recently wrote](#),

*"It has been a remarkable era, but it's coming to a close. Although corporate revenues and profits will continue to rise, the overall economic environment is becoming less favorable, and new rivals are putting the Western incumbents on notice. Many of the new players are from emerging markets, but some are surprise intruders from next door, either tech companies or smaller technology-enabled enterprises. Those competitors often play by different rules and bring an agility and an aggressiveness that many larger Western companies struggle to match."*

The environments in which organizations now exist are moving so quickly that, as Dobbs suggests, up and to the right outcomes can longer be assumed. Global competition abounds. Technology moves faster than we can digest. Revolution begins in a tweets' time. In an age of unpredictability, more than ever, we must be ready.

In this Navalent Quarterly (and over the next three months of posts here on our blog) we will spend time discussing what it means to be ready. We see readiness as a posture of proactivity that informs a practice of reactivity. Both of which require foresight and forethought. Readiness is about both being able to adjust when crisis comes or our external environments throw us a curve ball, and being able to slow down and consider alternative conditions that you and your business have never seen. In the posts that follow we will consider these readiness ideas through the lens of executive leadership, innovation, conflict, and organizational change.

After my wife finishes her 12 Step Sleep Schtick, she crawls into bed and onto her [Casper](#) mattress. Perhaps you have heard of the young, bed-in-a-box company. They are just one example of companies (Leesa, Helix, and Tuft & Needle are others) who are threatening to overthrow traditional mattress makers. Traditional mattress manufactures had always assumed that their larger, heavy products were immune from e-commerce. So much so that the number of mattress showrooms doubled in the early 2000's. But flat pricing, free shipping, and 100-day-return-policies attract shoppers who don't want to step into a showroom and pay insane mark-ups. And just like that, a once stable industry was thrown into chaos.

Our hope is that in the articles that follow you will discover what it means to be READY as a leader and an organization. And that as you do so you won't find yourself sleeping through the trends, threats, and changes that could leave you and your profits helpless. 

What is your view of  
the future? What are you  
getting ready for?



# WHAT IT TAKES TO LEAD MAJOR CHANGE

*By Ron Carucci*



## **Are you ready for inner battle between “Let’s do this” and “Why bother”?**

For many leaders who lead substantial change, the journey can be very taxing. While many obstacles along such tumultuous journeys can discourage even the most tenacious leaders, the most formidable challenges to leading change frequently begin within.

Leading great transformational change takes a strong voice, clearly articulated ideas, and fervent passion. It requires translating discontent with the status quo and conviction that things can and should be better. Many great leaders possess these “raw materials” in spades; yet time and again, great change efforts end in disaster.

So what is it that derails promising endeavors even when their leaders have all the right components to make them work? It’s often the case of too much, or too little, of one or more of five ingredients. And it happens because of the inner battle that almost takes place between a leader’s agency and ambivalence. To be truly ready to take on change, a leader has to find a way to balance agency—their belief that they have the ability, and even the duty, to effect change and make something better—and their potential for ambivalence—or uncertainty about sustaining

commitment to making a difference in the face of daunting change. By better understanding how these two forces can impact and alter each of the necessary raw materials for change, leaders can keep the balance from tipping too far in either direction. Here's a closer look at the five ingredients required to lead change:

## 1. Striking the right voice.

Revolutionary leaders need a compelling voice that allows others to envision the future. When they speak with that voice, people listen. And when the vision is alluring enough, people join their cause.

However, when that voice becomes too peppered with agency, it can turn strident. Anger edges in, causing the leader to paint the picture too grimly and sometimes distort the message with embellishment. When this happens, the voice becomes less inspirational and more caustic, causing people to tune out.

On the other side of equation, a leader's voice can become muted or silenced, either by their own fatigue or by strong opposition that drowns out their call to a different future. When a leader's voice falls victim to too much ambivalence, it's no longer loud or powerful enough to be heard above the noise, or to compel change.

## 2. Ideas: Shaping thinking.

A revolutionary leader has the ability to connect unconventional dots, see unmet or unexpressed needs, and bring ideas to life in a way that changes organizations. But, too much of a good thing can be harmful. Leaders who consistently generate more ideas than can ever be acted upon risk pushing people's tolerance for change. Eventually people become exhausted trying to figure out which "idea du jour" the leader is actually serious about. Especially when ideas are particularly controversial, a leader's over enthusiasm can become polarizing, causing people to turn against, rather than rally around, them.



Sadly, sometimes it is the leader themselves whose fear of – or boredom with – their ideas becomes the diluting factor. In many cases, good ideas have an incubation period that can surpass a leader's patience or courage. Ambivalence may tempt the leader to make the idea safer or pull the trigger prematurely. As a result, the idea can fizzle out before it ever has the chance to ignite.

## 3. Passion: Motivating a movement.

Passion fuels the revolutionary and their community. Throw in a bit too much agency, though, and passion can quickly turn to zealotry. When a leader uses passion to shame or manipulatively convert others, they may build a temporary army of support. But those converts will likely defect at the first sign of trouble.

The antithesis of zealotry is a change agents' worst enemy: apathy. It can result when fatigue and ambivalence build up from endlessly pushing against the grain. And when a leader's passion dies, so to, does their cause. To protect passion and safeguard against apathy, it's critical to have community fully onboard to lend support when the going gets tough.



#### **4. Discontent: Bucking the status quo.**


Revolutionaries naturally yearn for something greater than they have. Discontent with the current situation can quickly turn into contempt, however. And when it does, it can contaminate a cause. When a leader leads from the stance of being against something that exists, rather than being for something new, they will have a much harder time rallying the troops.

On the flip side, discontent can become indifference, especially if a leader believes they stand alone. When ambivalence takes root, the leader loses their desire for something more, and they stop looking for a way forward.

#### **5. Conviction: Believing in the cause.**

Conviction that things can and should change is what fuels discontent to join passion and ideas to create a picture of something new, something more. But when convictions turn into dogma, uncompromising rigidity can put people off. It goes much better for the leader who permits others to translate their standards into their own way of participating.

Leaders must be careful, though, not to allow too much dilution of the original conviction. Otherwise, the point is lost, giving way to futility and a sense of hopelessness that any real or meaningful change will ever occur.

As a leader hoping to transform your organization in some way, remember to check in with your own voice, ideas, passion, discontent, and conviction from time to time. When you do, and when you make the effort to keep these raw materials of change in check, you can hopefully avoid the pitfalls of becoming either too extreme or too watered down. And you'll be much better prepared to see your change through successfully. 

**Leading great transformational change  
takes a strong voice,  
clearly articulated ideas,  
and fervent passion.**



## Leading Major Change Part 2

*By Ron Carucci*

### ARE YOU READY TO CHANGE YOURSELF IF NEED BE?

Earlier this month, [we posted](#) about the battle leaders must wage within themselves between their desire to lead the charge and get things done, and the ambivalence, or “why bother” attitude, that can set in when faced with significant challenges and obstacles to major change. This week, as we look a little further into the revolutionary DNA of effective leaders, we will uncover some additional balancing acts that leaders have to perform in order to truly be ready to head up overarching, sweeping changes within their organizations.



If our work has shown us one thing, it's that revolutionaries who successfully lead complex change come in all shapes and sizes. But they typically share some key characteristics, namely:

- RESULTS ORIENTATION
- INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY
- OPTIMISM
- SELF-CONFIDENCE
- AMBITION

As is the case with the agency vs. ambivalence battle, the important thing is to have these traits in the right doses. Too much, or too little, of any of the five can have serious repercussions for your change initiative.

So if you are, or will be, leading any type of transformational change anytime soon, it's a good idea to see where you weigh in, and to consider if you might need to step up, or moderate, any of your attributes to better prepare yourself for the monumental task at hand.

## HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW THESE TRAITS COME INTO PLAY:

### 1. Results orientation—*The drive to get things done.*

In a healthy state, results orientation helps leaders maintain the level of determination and perseverance needed to make an initiative happen without dropping the ball on current commitments and performance targets. It keeps leaders focused on outcomes and motivates decision-making. But when overplayed, results orientation can cause leaders to become too hasty. They trade solid, sound decision-making for the instant gratification that comes from solutions that are quicker, but likely not as optimal. The other challenge with excessive results orientation is the wake of bodies a leader leaves behind, running over anyone in their way. On the other hand, when leaders lack a sufficient degree of results orientation, initiatives can drag on indefinitely, often to a permanent state of incompleteness. In these instances, associates stop taking their leader seriously. The entire initiative loses credibility, and it is likely to die a quiet death.

### 2. Intellectual curiosity—*Imagining how things might be different.*

The intellectually curious leader is gifted in imagining many possible alternatives to what currently exists. They can explore options for “next” that allow them to build a path forward. But just as curiosity killed the cat, it can also kill a change initiative if it goes into overdrive, and leaders start pursuing change simply for the sake of change, with no other clear purpose. Leaders need to make sure they stay grounded in reality and that they keep change on track toward a clearly defined goal. But be careful not to limit curiosity too much. Without enough “what if-ing,” leaders may only come up with minor modifications to existing issues needing deeper change, which may prove to make things worse when significant effort feels wasted by those involved.

### **3. Optimism**—*Maintaining a hopeful, positive perspective during risky change.*

Big change means big turmoil and big stress. Nobody's going to follow a leader through all those headaches if the leader isn't positive about the fact that things will be much better once the organization gets to the other side. Leaders must stay upbeat, and when they do, their enthusiasm is contagious . . . as long as that enthusiasm is tempered with a healthy dose of reality. Leaders do need to honestly and openly address the obstacles that might impede progress. If they turn a blind eye, and optimism turns into naïveté, the workforce can become doubtful and cynical, concluding that their leader is out of touch. Too little optimism drains hope from the change, and leaders whose negativity toxifies the organization make little progress toward real change.

### **4. Self-confidence**—*Believing in the ability to influence the organization in a positive way.*

An "I can do this" attitude is critical for leaders launching change initiatives. The reality is that large, complex initiatives often require difficult decisions that are unpopular when implemented. That's going to come back on the leader who has to make the tough calls. Confident leaders are able to withstand the feelings of alienation and rejection that accompany such decisions. Without confidence, these leaders may cave in to the pressures from others to leave things as they are, or to shape the change in a way that is convenient or advantageous to others. But, just as leaders need to stand up for their convictions, they also must guard

against overconfidence by continually including others in their decisions and listening closely to messages of caution or warning. If leaders begin to think they can do no wrong, they will probably alienate and offend the people they are supposed to lead. Leaders must strike a balance between second-guessing themselves and ignoring potential flaws in their thinking or shortcomings in their ability to influence.

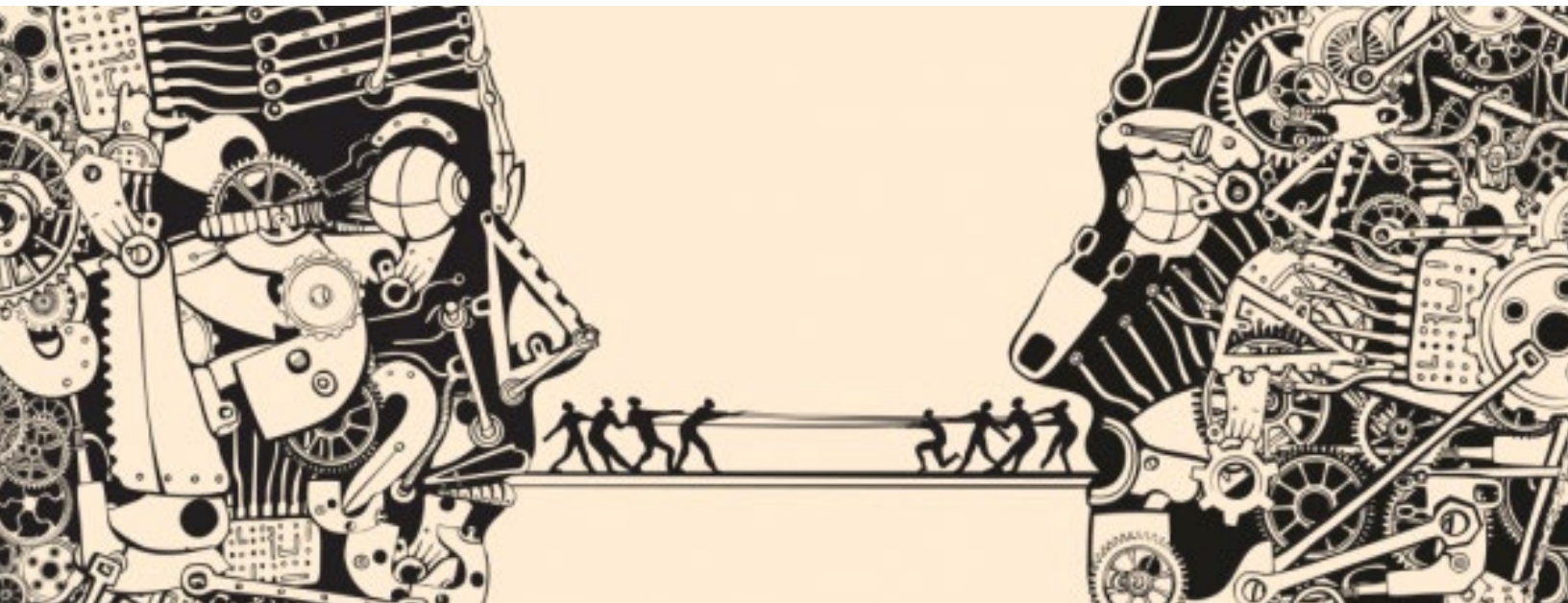
### **5. Ambition**—*The need to succeed.*

Drive is a must-have when leading change. Without enough of it, leaders can be easily discouraged by difficult obstacles that surface during the initiative, and they will likely end up taking the path of least resistance. But too much ambition can cloud a leader's judgment. The greatest pitfall for leaders here is becoming more driven by their own personal gains than by the benefits to the company. The best leaders stay focused on the greater good for their organization, and they are sure to include others in the recognition for achieving their goals.

As you gear up for your next major change, think about where you rank with each of these characteristics. Make adjustments to your natural proclivities in these five areas before you begin leading change. You will find it to be well worth the effort. Your commitment to preparing yourself for change will set the stage for your organization and will inspire others to be more committed to not just your change, but theirs as well.



Don't Expect to See a Change if You Don't Make One



# Is Your Organization Ready to Change?

By Josh Epperson

Industries are commoditizing and consolidating. There are new regulations and legislative impacts on their way. Consumer trends are changing in the blink of an eye. Emerging global markets are becoming legitimate markets daily. Great leaders see these changes.

And the best leaders not only have a point of view about how to respond to these changes and be successful, but they also know what it will take organizationally to execute those changes. Despite such insights about the need for change, [research shows that at least 50%](#) of organizations are not ready to change.

Decades of experience working with organizations and leaders in search of necessary change reveal several patterns of why their efforts fail – reasons that are largely identifiable, predictable, and avoidable. Let's look at the most common.

**Lack of clarity about success.** An unclear vision for the changes and the business case supporting those changes, or the lack of strategic clarity and the way proposed changes will enable the strategy ultimately. These often undermine the effort to actually change.

**Mismatch between challenge and approach.** Leaders frequently underestimate how ambitious the changes to which they are aspiring are and overestimate the efficacy of the approach they have put in place to realize those changes. The reverse is also common: over engineering the approach to incremental business changes.

**Insufficient alignment and commitment.** Overestimating the amount of leadership alignment that exists and not developing capability for alignment at multiple levels in the organization will ensure an understanding/commitment gap between those 'in the know' and the rest of the organization.

**Fragmented approach to change.** Leaders gravitate toward the levers most common to the organization and familiar to their leadership. The numbers guy ensures change through financial metrics. The culture gal makes sure everyone has input on the impact of

change. Change that doesn't take into account the entire system and integrate all parts of the business ends up duplicating change resources (e.g., function by function versus systemic spend) or creating competing change resources (e.g., "I'll fight for what I need at the expense of what you need to be successful.").

**Poor implementation planning.** The worst case is the declaration of change with no plan. However, more frequently one of two extremes surfaces: Plan for action versus results or, figure it out as you go. Those that espouse activity over results are more concerned with creating the illusion of change than they are tying the mechanics of change to specific work that ensure needed outcomes. Those who land in the 'figure it out as you go' camp, don't believe you can plan for every road block before beginning so they take a pay later approach to managing change, which slows results, costs more, and is more taxing on those involved. Inadequate resources to execute the changes and manage the transition will ensure the old cliché, "fail to plan, plan to fail."

**Lack of Focus and Energy.** Change is taxing. Often organizations focus on long-term outcomes and spend minimal attention on transition metrics that track the progress of change, highlight early wins and build momentum, or get change back on track before the effort completely derails.

**Inadequate Leadership.** Leaders who lack the will and/or skill needed to lead, model, and implement the change will inevitably hinder the ability to realize results.


Sound familiar? You have most likely experienced one or more failed change efforts in your career. If I asked you to reflect on those experiences, you would invariably be able to point to one or more of the above causes that undermined change. Yet these barriers to change can be seen and managed long before they undermine the business results your changes intend to make.

In the near future, you will undoubtedly participate in or lead a change initiative. Are you ready to make it a success? When determining how ready your organization is for change, make sure you do three things.

**1. Align on the case for change.** Before you, or other leaders involved, can determine if your organization is ready for change, make sure all understand and are committed to the same changes.

**2. Get reliable data about the buy-in for and impact of change.** Use an approach that solicits from and/or captures input from all the leaders the change will impact. Make sure the approach is rigorous enough to surface multiple change levers and how they need to work interdependently. Ensure findings will highlight specific challenges or obstacles and ideas for how to overcome them.

The depth and breadth of how you understand change challenges will be the extent to which you create a sufficient plan for a successful change.

**3. Create a robust change plan.** Change efforts fail during implementation; success is predicated on your plan. Your plan must include all the work required to ensure specific outcomes connected to the change. Timelines and metrics associated with the work will help keep your change on track. Know the obstacles you face and plan to overcome them. Stack your transition team or the specific group of leaders tasked to implement the changes with key stakeholder, influencers, and in some cases, nay-sayers as a way to build buy-in for the change and belief in the organizations ability to pull it off. 

The best leaders not only have a point of view about how to respond to change and be successful, but they also know what it will take organizationally to execute those changes.



Once a desired change has been articulated, one of the surest ways to know how ready an organization is for that change is to measure the organization’s readiness. Leaders responsible for the change need insights about challenges and obstacles to incorporate into a change plan before they launch. When we work with organizations in pursuit of transformational change (such as a change in strategic direction or a new organization design), we use a Change & Transition assessment to do just that. The leaders championing the change as well as the stakeholders who must execute it complete this assessment. In instances where broader views are needed, focus groups and other survey mechanisms are used to gather sufficient data and begin socializing change.

Below is an illustrative example of Readiness findings from the Change & Transition Assessment. The data represents average scores. Dark green indicates a high degree of readiness, while red indicates a low degree of readiness.

**ILLUSTRATIVE CHANGE & TRANSITION READINESS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

		CHANGE & TRANSITION					
READINES		Dark Green	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Red	
1	Degree of consistency in understanding and interpretation among senior leadership on the vision for change	HIGH	Dark Green				LOW
2	Degree of commitment by senior leadership to the vision for change	HIGH	Light Green				LOW
3	Degree of understanding among key stakeholders/influencers on the vision for change	HIGH	Light Green				LOW
4	Degree of commitment by key stakeholders/influencers to the vision for change	HIGH			Orange		LOW
5	Degree of understanding of middle managers of the vision for change	HIGH				Red	LOW
6	Degree of commitment of middle managers to make the necessary changes	HIGH				Red	LOW
7	Degree of understanding of the vision and purpose of change by those employees directly impacted	HIGH			Orange		LOW
8	Degree to which the priority and management of other concurrent change efforts is clarified and coordinated	HIGH			Orange		LOW
9	Clarity of the Change & Transition plan: Critical Path, Milestones, Success Measures, Decision Making, Ownership/Accountability	HIGH			Orange		LOW
10	Sufficiency of resources allocated to support change	HIGH		Yellow			LOW
11	Quality of resources allocated to support change	HIGH	Light Green				LOW

*Based on this data, what will this organization need to do to increase its readiness for change and raise the odds of success?*

**Create greater understanding and commitment for the change with middle managers and those directly impacted by the change.** Notice the difference of understanding and commitment between senior leadership (high) and middle managers (low). It’s the job of those leading change to learn why that’s the case and begin creating understanding and commitment broadly across the organization. If they do not, middle managers will either drag their feet and lobby against the change or minimally lack the understanding to know what they need to do differently to support it. This often causes a chain reaction where senior leaders get involved in day-to-day operations which further marginalizes middle managers and increases their cynicism about the future of meaningful change.

**Get key influencers ‘off the fence’ and willing to cash in their social capital.** Notice the difference between key stakeholders/influencers understanding (light green) and commitment (orange). This is an equally critical story for change leaders to learn from and rewrite. Leaders whose “social capital” allows them to cash in a, “Just trust me, you won’t be disappointed,” are also judicious about how they spend it. If they are unwilling to spend it, you need to know why and help them overcome it. Leaders with social capital are particularly important when leading change because they can help move individuals and groups with deep emotional connection to the way business used to be to see the potential of what the business can become.

**Be clear about required change resources and careful not to “peanut butter” them across multiple efforts.** Notice the resource discrepancy between quality (light green) and sufficiency (yellow). It would be easy to conclude, “We just don’t have enough.” However, there is more to the story than insufficiency. Notice the low degree of coordination between this change initiative and those that are already underway. The insufficiency is the result of a deeper systemic issue – one of prioritization. These change leaders must determine if a lack of prioritization and poorly allocated resources are diluting their investments in change. They may not need more resources, they may just need existing resources repositioned. If you frame the story ‘insufficient resources’ you’ll pass the hat in search of more. However, if you frame the challenge as, “We don’t say ‘no’, we just resource everything equally,” you’ll push the organization to rethink how it invests in change.

# LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE

*By Mindy Millward*



Is your organization ready for a good fight?

*“And in this corner, weighing in at \$57,253 an hour,  
fresh off a loss on their latest acquisition,  
with a combined record of 0-13-1,      **your LEADERSHIP TEAM!***

*And in the challenger’s corner, a critical decision  
about your strategy which requires collective will and  
unanimous support...*

***DING-DING!”***

Are your decisions become more critical and yet feeling easier and easier to make? Is your organization caught in a decision-making cycle that spends time and money yet yields little results? Has the quality of decisions increasingly been poor, with little innovation? Perhaps what’s happening is a move to the middle, and a slow progression towards what is safe. While tension free decisions may feel like progress, they can also be a slow crawl towards mediocrity. One hypothesis would be that to increase your likelihood of success, you need to increase the tension and discomfort that goes into your decision-making.

Many of you may be saying “our culture is inclusive and respectful! We don’t have to disagree to get a good result! Why do leaders need to enable a good fight? Can’t we all just get along?” The answer is, succinctly, no. While we need to ensure that conflict doesn’t lead to new fissures in the organization, the truth is that every organization comes perfectly equipped with its own “seams.” Those seams may be between individual leaders, functions, or departments. And it is those seams that create unique perspectives that are critical to good decision-making.

Good decision-making requires diversity in thought which means exploring differences, appreciating uniqueness and uncovering underlying values, beliefs, and biases. This is especially true given the sheer complexity of our worlds (our markets, our data, and our issues) today.

So if difference is built into our organizations and something that we must learn to leverage, how do we as leaders enable a good fight? The best leaders make sure that everyone on their team:


**1. Knows the rules.** Is this a caged MMA fight or boxing? How long is each round? How many people can you have in your corner? What happens when you get stuck in a submission hold? Setting up your team to debate and disagree with each other without giving them a set of explicit ground rules is akin to watching gladiators fight lions. It might be interesting but someone if not going to leave the ring well.

**2. Has appropriate self-awareness.** Are you a flyweight or middle weight? All participants have to have a relatively good understanding of the biases and beliefs they bring to bear on a decision or a leader has to help them increase that awareness. Part 2A to this is that it is the fighter’s responsibility to know who they are fighting. Are they a mean southpaw? Do they tire after you let them workout in the ring? Understanding your “opponent” in a fight allows you to be more productive and ensures that whatever your strategy, the relationship between the two of you can come out of the disagreement positively.

**3. Understands the size of the “purse”.** Critical to a good fight organizationally is a collective view or vision of what “winning” looks like. Be clear where and when you want to end up and help your team win as leaders even if individuals have championed ideas or perspectives that are not our end result.

**4. Is rigorously prepared.** Fighters will tell you it is the three months leading up to their fight that matter, not what they ate for breakfast that morning. Having a good fight, whether in the ring or the boardroom, requires discipline, preparation, and rigor.

**5. Maintains safety above all things.** Just like when a doctor calls a fight due to injury, it is a leader’s job to know when things are becoming personal and detrimental to an individual leader and they have to be prepared to step in and call the fight or move it to a safer ground. Additionally fights need to happen in a sanctioned time and place – not an impromptu street fight by the water cooler.

We tell our kids that if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all. We scream at them to “stop fighting!” If that same posture is taken by leaders in our organizations today, our decisions will be one sided, based in a limited data set, and likely not yield the kind of results we are looking for. If you want decisions that are thoughtful, creative, and accurate then you’ve got to be ready to rumble. And chances are if you create a culture where that is not only acceptable, but welcomed, you will have everyone in your corner. 



# Anchored in Times of Change

*By Eric Hansen*



I left home at nineteen to live in a foreign country. And, despite my preparations by learning the language, reading about and getting to know natives from that culture, I was initially overwhelmed, and even immobilized. I was limited by my personal inability to communicate and by my impulse to critique and compare the customs and circumstances of daily life in my new surroundings to home. Despite my scholarly preparations, I was not as ready as I thought I was.

It is a cosmic reality that our lives unfold continuously and despite our efforts to prepare - best or half-hearted - we control only a fraction of what actually happens. It is also true that each of us is at a different level of readiness to handle the unexpected change ups that come our way.

So, I watched with a mix of fascination and legitimate concern, the varied reactions over the results of the recent election and impending Trump presidency. It

is clear that most liberals, and a large majority of our rising generations, had not considered the possibility of a Trump victory. Their lack of preparation for the eventual outcome was shown in their emotive “cry ins” and protests (some peaceful and others unnecessarily destructive). When things didn’t go their way, they were not prepared emotionally for what that meant for them.

Circumstances and results are not always as we hope them to be. We don’t always get what we want. And, now with more road behind me than ahead, I recognize that so much of what happens in life we are, at best, only marginally prepared for - even for matters of impact weightier than national elections. In my nearly six decades of life, I’ve had my share of unanticipated, and rock-my-world experiences, so I can empathize with overwhelming feelings of fear, uncertainty, doubt, and strong impulses to lash out when life seems to conspire against my expectations and best efforts.

# Every life transition is an opportunity to grow.

After returning home from my foreign experience, and after several years of dating, marriage seemed like the logical next step. This was something I wanted and something I felt I would be good at. I had a pattern to follow having watched my parent's successful marriage and yet, there I was again, unprepared for the necessary adjustments and amount of work required to make it succeed. I realized then that my parents weren't perfectly transparent and must have managed their differences behind the scenes. And, I know it was disconcerting to my wife to find me on occasion crying privately - wondering where the easiness of the relationship we had while dating had gone. This was a commitment to a relationship that demanded of me much more adjustments and change than I had ever experienced. Thirty-one years later, I am a better man because of it.

Then there was the birth of the first two children, a third while in graduate school and the biggest surprise of a fifth child at a time while living far from home and during a particularly challenging career move. Each brought their own challenges and learning curve. Fast forward to 2013, and the sudden loss of my sister-in-law, seventeen years younger than me, to colon

cancer (an old peoples' disease) just after the birth of her third child. Devastatingly unfair. Now, we're making adjustments as our children leave home. Each departure is sweetly bitter and demands its own unique attention. It's always something. And often we are under prepared.

Napoleon Hill, a 20th century philosopher wrote: "Fear is the tool of a man-made devil. Self-confident faith in one's self is both the man-made weapon which defeats this devil and the man-made tool which builds a triumphant life. And it is more than that. It is a link to the irresistible forces of the universe which stand behind a man who does not believe in failure and defeat as being anything but temporary experiences." [i] Over the years, as I have learned to lean into the fear, uncertainty and doubt (FUD factor) that comes with life change ups, I've learned to rely on a few anchors that provide my life with ballast and constancy as I navigate the unpredictable nature of change.

1. **Clarify your Beliefs & Purpose:** Remind yourself frequently of whomever or whatever you believe in that provides higher order and purpose to your life. You are not your job, you are not defined by a rejection letter, or a failed relationship. When faced with a life transition, revisit what you believe is important and how it will bring you the long-term fulfillment you desire. By anchoring yourself back to your core values and beliefs, it is easier to move through stressful situations with confidence in the unknown outcomes.

2. **Exercise Self Control:** While you may not be able to control external forces, you do control your response. You are not helpless. You are not a victim. Remind yourself that you are an agent with the ability to act, and not just be acted upon. Choose to anchor yourself to positive actions and activities that support strengthening your mental, emotional, and physical health. Stay away from addicting habits. Identify and channel your energies toward constructive actions with the potential to propel you through current circumstances.

3. **Manage Relationships:** Reconnect with and anchor yourself to those who truly care about you. Cry, vent, sit quietly, and rest until you are still. Then, seek guidance from those who will tell you the truth, not simply agree with or tell you what you want to hear. Surround yourself with positive influences. This is often easier said than done, but when faced with a life-changing situation, it will make all the difference in how you learn to not only cope with, but face with courage and successfully move forward the realities of your new life.

Every life transition is an opportunity to grow. Adversity has the greatest potential to shape our perspective about life as we move through it. Bitterness and resentment stifle growth. Although it may be difficult in the thick of a crisis, keep a journal. Write your thoughts and feelings about the struggles and the triumphs. Reflect on it to understand more about how you view yourself and others, and more importantly to discover ways to improve, progress, and become confident in the “new normal.”



[i] Napoleon Hill, "Outwitting the Devil: The Secret to Freedom and Success," ( Sterling 2012 )





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