But Why Do I Always Have to Change First?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2010 issue of the "In CASE" Newsletter

After reading an article or a new book, you feel inspired to make some improvements in your organization. Or you talk with a colleague who tells you what terrific progress his child's school system is making, and you decide your team is ready to do something similar.

So you talk with a trusted friend and collaborator about how you can shake up the action at your place. You analyze all the problems that surround you. Together, you look for possible action steps for engaging the troops. The more you talk, however, the more your personal "to do" list grows.

You started this conversation expecting to become even more fired up about your initiative. Shortly after your enthusiastic start to the conversation, your collaborating colleague asks some tough questions. You ponder the reality of the situation you face. The obstacles are bigger than you originally anticipated. Slowly, you begin to realize that for credibility reasons, you need to make some changes first.

You leave what you expected would be an inspiring initial exploratory meeting, return to your office, and cry out, "BUT WHY DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO CHANGE FIRST?"

It's a common frustration. Why can't improvement be easier? And why can't you just give some orders and expect things to happen? You've worked all these years to achieve a position of authority. But every initiative seems to require that before you can engage others, you have a whole list of things you have to do first. The idea is pretty annoying until you just accept that it's going to be that way.

You see, if you've not been a part of creating the "status quo," you've at least accepted it. You may be tempted to blame the things that aren't working on somebody else or maybe on circumstances, but you really are a contributing factor to "what is."

So, get comfortable with having to change before significant improvements can occur in your organization. Maybe understanding why will take away some of the sting.

Desire. It's unlikely that anyone in your organization is going to have more interest in improving the current circumstances and systems than you. And even if that were so, look at the inertia he or she would have to overcome! That person would have to convince you and the entire rest of the team, and that just doesn't happen very often.

Something stimulated your desire for improvement, but nobody knows that until you start speaking and behaving differently. And those changes have to be sustained, which can only come from a deep shift in the way you're now seeing possibility. People expect certain behaviors from you; if you keep doing what you've always done, what convinces them that you are serious about a different, better future?

Control. Ah, but you think that because you're the boss, you have control over these people! Think again. You really have control over nothing more than your own thoughts and actions. Leadership is *influence*; it's not *control* (as some believe). Every person in your organization has the freedom to make his or her own choices. If you don't believe that yet, well, you're just deceived!

Your greatest power as a leader comes through communicating an inspiring vision. Further, you set the example that moves people in the desired direction. Your past behaviors have led people to create what currently exists. If you want a fresh, new "what could be," you'll have to become a new role model.

Leverage. Leadership really is influence. Sure, most people think of leadership as a position, and you fill a position that significantly influences the lives of others. Because of your authority, people respond to what you say and do.

Do you really believe that you can keep doing what you've always done, yet experience different outcomes? What makes you believe that because you now have new ideas, others in the organization will spontaneously do different things? That's rather unlikely, don't you think?

Oh, but you think if you just express your desires for improvement, people will respond and the circumstances will change? Do you have a lot of examples that show that to be so? Probably not--you're going to have to change more than your mind to cause improvement to occur in your organization!

Yep, if things are going to change around here, you'll have to be the first to change. There's always a time delay of some amount before what you create mentally appears in physical form. The sooner you start sharing an improved vision, the sooner people can index into how they fit in that picture.

So, get over it. Keep thinking about how much better your results, processes, and organizational culture are going to be. Keep describing that future state to others. At each step in this anticipated transformation, you'll have to lead the "making changes" parade.

Your belief that others will change easily and quickly may be the first major change you have to make!

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