

## Do I Really Want to Improve My Organization?

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Surely everyone wants to improve his or her organization, right? Apparently not.

Let me share some context. Last week, I gave an overview of the six stages of change as described in *Changing for Good* by James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo DiClemente. Those six stages are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. (If you missed that overview and want to see it, contact me and I'll provide a copy.)

Today I share a more detailed explanation of precontemplators. G. K. Chesterton, the influential English author of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote, "It isn't that they can't see the solution. It's that they can't see the problem." For a variety of possible reasons, individuals at this stage typically have no intention of changing.

**Denial.** Although friends, family members, and colleagues can see opportunities for improvement easily, precontemplators often refuse to acknowledge the value. They sometimes create justifications to explain why everything is fine just as it is.

**Apathy.** These precontemplators may not overtly resist, but they certainly won't be the initiators of change. They're fine if someone else wants to generate some effort, but don't expect them to take the lead in making something happen.

**Resignation.** Some individuals have just given up, certain that improvement is not possible. They may have made unsuccessful attempts in the past and are demoralized, convinced that fate will not allow them to progress.

**Unaware.** These precontemplators have never thought of doing anything differently from what they've been doing. No one they respect has suggested a change that seems relevant, and they're comfortable with the way things are now.

Many precontemplators don't want to change, though they may welcome improvements in their circumstances or in the people around them! Not knowing how to alter their environment, and not even considering changing themselves, they allow situations to continue as they have in the past.

When in the precontemplation stage, it usually feels safe to stay where you are. The territory is comfortable, and no time, money, or energy is required. Further, you can't fail if you don't try, right? And you can always claim that you intend to change sometime in the future.

When I speak to leaders of organizations, I am surprised at how many are not putting energy into building future leaders. You'd think by now everyone would know that enhancing leadership skills is the single most powerful independent variable in improving organizational results.

John Maxwell, in his best-seller *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* writes, "Everything rises and falls on leadership....Leadership ability is always the lid on personal and organizational effectiveness. That's why, in times of trouble, organizations naturally look for new leadership."

Many organizational leaders are not aware of the criteria for the National Quality Award that has existed since 1987. There are seven categories, one for organizational results and six for the processes that deliver those results. Of the six process categories, "leadership" is valued 1/3 higher than any of the others--higher than strategic planning, customer and market awareness, workforce systems, and process management. Why? Because the health of those other process categories is dependent on the leadership system, including how leadership skills are developed and enhanced!

So, how about you and your organization? Are you willing to consider whether and how you might invest in your organization's leaders beyond the functional and technical skills necessary for survival?

Next week, I'll look at what's required to move out of the precontemplation stage into "contemplation."

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