But Why Do I Always Have to Change First?

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You are inspired, after reading an article or a new book, to make some improvements in your organization. Or you talk with a friend who tells you what terrific progress her company is making, and you decide you're ready to do something similar.

You decided to talk with your coach about how you can shake up the action at your place. You point out the problems that surround you, and you look for possible action steps for rallying the troops. The more you talk, however, the more your personal "to do" list grows.

You started the conversation expecting to be fired up, anticipating all the changes you'd be asking others to make. Though you started the conversation with enthusiasm, soon your coach asks some challenging questions, and you realize that for credibility reasons, you need to make some changes first.

You hang your head, your shoulders slump, and you suddenly cry out, "BUT WHY DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO CHANGE FIRST?" It's a common frustration. The idea is annoying until you realize that nothing changes until the leader changes first. That's the way it's always been, and that's the way it will be!

You see, if you've not been a part of creating the "status quo," you have 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 "whatever is" currently.

So, get comfortable with having to change before significant improvements can occur in your organization. Here's why.

Desire. It is quite 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 to convince you, teammates, and your hierarchy! That person would have to have a lot of desire to overcome all the "quit rocking the boat" resistive thoughts and especially comments!

Influence. Ah, but you think that because you're the boss, you have control over these people! Think again. You--and all the rest of us--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 do not 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 typically respond to what you say and do. But they also watch what you do, and your behavior is a role model.

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, 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 be different around here, you'll have to be the first to change. So, get over it. Start thinking about how much better things are going to be. Begin describing that future state to others. And just figure out what you will be doing differently yourself to get things moving in that direction!