

Choosing a New Path vs. Solving a Problem--Part Two

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If you missed last week's article, contact me and I'll provide a copy. However, my intent is that today's information will stand alone in raising your awareness. My desire is that you recognize your current situation in a fresh way and be encouraged that improvement is possible.

The basis for this week's column is Andy Stanley's latest book, *The Principle of the Path*. The principle is that **direction, not intention, determines your destination**. Whatever situation you find yourself in is a function of the path you've trod, not what you hoped would happen. Had your actions taken you in another direction, you'd likely find yourself in a different situation.

The following sentence stimulated me to write this article: "Recognizing the distinction between a *solution* and a *path* is the first step in understanding the principle of the path." Hmm. I invite you to think with me about what's involved in that distinction. Andy Stanley is offering a paradigm shift: "To get from where you don't want to be to where you do want to be requires two things: time and a change of direction. There isn't a quick fix."

I've been solving problems for a long time. You probably have, too. I had a hard time initially discerning how choosing a new path is different from solving a problem. Isn't choosing a new path merely one of the options you might consider as you evaluate possible solutions to whatever problem you face?

Solving a given problem is usually a one-time event. Once the problem is resolved, the need for addressing the situation is over, right? However, it often happens that the applied solution doesn't last. Further, sometimes the solution generates a totally new problem later.

Choosing a new path carries a very different connotation. It's certainly not a one-time event. Choosing a new path means following the newly adopted approach each time a familiar opportunity presents itself. It means remembering that the former behaviors failed to deliver the results you wanted. It means changing your former habits, which likely will require conscious thought until a new habit is established.

Sometimes in analyzing a problem, we presume that some condition in the environment created the less than desirable situation. Oh, we may admit that we had something to do with the problem occurring, but we also sometimes rationalize and justify our behaviors, making ourselves look good.

Also, we tend to look at isolated events and fail to see the larger pattern. What would happen if, instead of thinking of the current situation as a single, isolated event that needs to be fixed, you chose a very different direction toward your desired result?

What if you decided to pursue an ongoing process that was unlike what generated your current situation? Might the choice of a different path deliver a healthier long-term outcome? Andy Stanley suggests you at least consider that possibility!

In considering a new path, you evaluate the likely long-term implications of your behaviors. That's not always true when you focus on solving a problem. Usually, if the "fix" seems to offer some probability of making the immediate situation better, we'll likely consider it.

What if you chose a path that placed the accountability squarely on your shoulders? As a leader, it is your role to generate a vision of a better future, enroll others in that vision, serve as a behavioral role model, and empower others to move the organization in that direction. Think about it. Isn't leadership more associated with choosing the right direction--the right path--than with solving problems?

I'm not suggesting that solving problems is wrong. If it's working for you, continue to solve problems. I just know that thinking about this distinction caused me to evaluate my historic approach. The concept of "a new path" intrigues me! I welcome additional insights; please contact me!

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