

When Will All This Change Be Over?

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I was the Employee Relations Manager at a large manufacturing facility. Our company was installing a new, complex set of benefit options. Employees would now have the freedom to apply benefit dollars where they best met their personal and family needs.

My team was considering how to educate individuals about each of the opportunities. After handling several years of benefits improvements, one associate exclaimed, "When will all this change be over?"

I looked at her and smiled, suggesting, "We'll not see the end of change while you and I are employed. In fact, changes like these are what keep you and me working here!"

I sensed her frustration. I realized she would be the one to handle unending questions. I followed my comment with an expression of compassion, acknowledging her feeling of being overwhelmed. I promised to be there to handle the questions with her.

I've never forgotten that situation. I marvel even today at the truth that had slipped out of my mouth. As a leader, you may have felt similar anxieties: "When will all this change be over?" Likely, never.

Customers demand an improved product. Employees resign; new ones require orientation. Raw material costs go up, so alternatives are tested. Laws change and adjustments are made. An injury dictates that new methods be investigated.

Change seems always to be with us. Is it, really? Will change always be a part of our lives? Yep, accept it. Change is a constant we can expect to be with us forever!

Why? Is there some reason besides "That's just the way it is?"

Sure. There's always a reason. Here's one.

We live now. It's the ONLY place we CAN live. We cannot live in the past or in the future (though some seem to try!). "Now" is a unique place. It lasts only an instant. Time you spent reading this sentence has moved from "now" into "the past."

Yet "now" is where "the past" meets "the future." So "now" is and always will be a time of transition. And "transition" is merely a synonym for "change."

Change comes in two forms. Some change is unanticipated, thrust upon you by conditions outside yourself and your organization. Other change is initiated internally, usually because you want to improve your results and the methods by which you generate them.

The best organizations are looking for improvement continuously. That means that the worst of the past is made better, and the best of the past is carried forward, but is no longer good enough. This continual state of change requires that you prepare leaders to handle an ongoing demand for planning, execution, and growth.

Some organizations live with "good enough," hoping to avoid having to cope with so much change. They find, however, they ultimately have to face significant change because of the unacceptable pressures coming from outside the organization.

If you seek continual improvement, your changes will feel more manageable. You'll at least influence the pace. You'll establish criteria for measuring progress toward your vision of "what could be." You'll make corrective adjustments as you implement your opportunities for improvement.

Your role as leader is to clarify the vision of what is possible, enrolling every contributor in moving toward that more captivating future state. Continuous improvement means enhancing even the vision. The closer you come to achieving "what could be," the more demanding you choose to make it!