

Igniting Change: Creating & Sustaining Organizational Transformation

Newspaper Article

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I have a good friend who often comments, “It’s a *dog eat dog* world out there, Blake, and I’m wearing milkbone undershorts.” It is indeed, Mark, and I know the feeling. If there’s one thing a leader seldom has in short supply, it’s *critics*. Why, the very nature of leadership is to create movement, and a most natural reaction to movement is resistance. This is why all leaders should rightly consider themselves *change agents* and should be purposeful and knowledgeable about what’s often described loosely as “change management.” It is for these very reasons that **Igniting Change: Creating & Sustaining Organizational Transformation** was developed.

To further explore the benefits of **Igniting Change**, let’s take a few more minutes to unpack the nature of leadership and change, both personal and organizational. The etymological root – or “word origin” of *leadership* literally means *to carry or convey* – and generally from the front. In short, leadership is about getting followers from Point A to Point B. There are a half-dozen common leadership structures that contemporary organizations embrace in order to manage followership that range from Hierarchies to Meritocracies to Bureaucracies. Each structure has its pros and cons, but what’s fascinating is how they originate and evolve. Typically, organizations reflect the belief systems of initial founders – e.g., the Owner, Father, Mother, CEO, and so forth. This individual’s (or, in the case of family-owned businesses and the like, *individuals*) philosophies about people and how they should be led sets a current and future example for others. Another way of saying it is this: the initial leaders are the composers and much of what is subsequently played is conducted by future leaders using the same sheets of music.

To envision what I’m describing, let’s use real examples. Contrast in your mind for a moment Ford (circa 1912) and Apple (today). Despite a number of significantly progressive contributions to the 20th Century (including doubled wages and franchised vehicle distribution) Henry Ford notoriously implored, “Why, when I only want to hire a pair of hands, do I get a whole person?” His belief system had sprung from the era of scientific management, typified by his assembly line, and his interest in employee creativity was often eclipsed by the commitments of mass production and inexpensive assembly. On the other hand, after a number of failed CEOs with distinguished pedigrees, the co-founder of Apple (Steve Jobs) has returned to that organization and transfused its creative juices and aligned innovation with actual consumer interests through user-friendly and well-designed laptops, desktops, phones, and other devices that we all envisioned a decade ago but are only now able to purchase. By contrast again, Henry Ford notoriously said, “Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black.” (He did sell red Model T’s, but that’s another story for another day.) I can hear Bill Gates saying something similar, despite his colossal contributions to humankind and the development of an operating system that some 97% of the computing population uses today.

The point is this – all leaders create ripples – some good, some bad. Generally, those leaders who succeed in measurable ways do so because of certain traits they exhibit like stick-to-itiveness, discipline, creativity, credibility, wisdom, etc. And yet they all – we ALL – have our blindspots and pressure points. As a leader, one of our primary commitments should be to ferret these out and understand them. Much has been written by Marcus Buckingham and Jim Collins regarding *understanding one's strengths* and *hedgehog principles* that govern organizations. I agree with most of what they have discovered and articulated and also remain an ardent believer in *knowing one's strengths and weaknesses*. And this, my friends, brings me to the crux of this little article – the nature of change and any responsible leader's role in it.

The origin of change is movement, but movement can take two primary forms: positive (constructive, progressive, adaptive) or negative (destructive, regressive, resistant). When people and organizations experience changes perceived as negative, they recoil and resist or, worse, they sabotage. But when they experience changes perceived as positive, they embrace, adjust, and quickly respond. As a leader, the foresight that comes with intuition cannot be underestimated – its importance is significant. But along with intuition, proven processes and methodologies for advancing change are also indispensable. This is where **Igniting Change** comes in. For over a decade, this workshop has helped organizational leaders of all backgrounds and philosophies come to understand a framework for orchestrating change in their companies, churches, volunteer groups, and non-profit organizations. From GE and Lockheed Martin to churches and Girl Scouts of America, the framework presented in **Igniting Change** is a proven winner.

Leaders come abundantly in various forms – sometimes formal, but often informal. Whether you are a nominated, elected, appointed, or promoted leader with positional authority...or an informal volunteer hoping to create a vision or movement, I am confident that **Igniting Change** will prove useful in your lifelong journey of serving and influencing others.

The logo for Blake Leath features the name "Blake Leath" in a stylized, metallic, 3D-effect font. The letters are interconnected and have a brushed metal texture. A horizontal line extends from the end of the word "Leath" to the right, ending in a small hook. Below the name, ".com" is written in a smaller, plain font.

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