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EDITORIAL

THINKING SMALL TO THINK BIG: LEADING FOR CHANGE

Imagine you had the opportunity to interview senior executive leaders from secular organizations around the world. What would you learn? Is it possible to trace common denominators of leaders who successfully lead through change? The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) conducted such research surveying 275 executives who participated in a senior leadership program at their center (Bendixen, Campbell, Criswell, & Smith, 2017).

The CCL gained three main insights from surveying the 148 senior executive leaders who successfully navigated change in the past 12 to 18 months.

Change yourself. Leading for change successfully means spending time outside of your comfort zone. As the individual leading an initiative, you must change your personal mindset, actions, and behaviors.

Don't go it alone. Initiating change is a team activity. People come together, driven by a compelling, and frequently communicated, message about why the change is necessary.

Know the signs. Recognize the early warning signs that indicate an initiative is starting to derail. (Bendixen, Campbell, Criswell, & Smith, 2017, p. 1)

In addition to these indicators of success, this study also revealed three "change traps." These were generated from 127 executives who had been attempting change within the past 12 to 18 months but with an unsuccessful outcome.

Passive leading. Leaders who unsuccessfully initiate change described making assumptions, being too hands off, delegating too much, and being indecisive. These leaders reported becoming frustrated and, as a result, avoided others, didn't address certain issues, and stopped communicating with important stakeholders about the change. Leaders must find a balance between exerting too much control over the process and giving the change effort too little attention.

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Leading in isolation. Leaders of unsuccessful change described the competitive nature that came out in themselves and others during the planning and implementation stages. This competitiveness led to an “us versus them” position. This behavior led to assigning blame and fault to others. These leaders also described themselves as being too authoritative, ignoring employee needs, imposing their views, or controlling how people worked together by refusing to get out of silos to collaborate with others.

Focusing on the small stuff. Leaders of unsuccessful change focused on day-to-day details and operational processes outside of the scope of the change. These leaders focused on the outcome the change without also focusing on the process and “why” of the change. (Bendixen, Campbell, Criswell, & Smith, 2017, p. 14)

Note that these findings were gathered from leaders in a secular environment. One may wonder to what degree would these findings apply to Christian leaders. This issue of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* presents articles and responses relevant for Christian leaders who desire to initiate change.

Regardless of your denominational affiliation, as leaders in today’s world, you are pushed towards change. On one hand, you are encouraged to think big if you want to succeed. One of the “change traps” listed above warns executives against focusing on details. On the other hand, a number of leaders are afraid of thinking big because they are afraid of failure. Regardless of who we are—whether fearless visionaries or more passive leaders avoiding change—the key finding the secular world seems applicable to the Christian mindset: you must change yourself!

If someone is called to lead, whether leading other believers through preaching the Word (and leading to repentance), non-believers through proclaiming the Gospel (leading lost people to Christ), or through any initiative in the Christian world (as long as it is done for the glory of God), s/he may be required to make changes in his/her “mindset, actions, and behaviors.” Instead of complaining about the common sins of others, we are challenged to pay more attention to ourselves. As the famous saying of Leo Tolstoy states, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

When Chofetz Chaim was asked how he was able to have such a great impact on Jewish world, he answered,

Originally, I set out to change the world, but I failed. So, I decided to scale back my efforts and only influence the Jewish community of Poland, but I failed there, too. So, I targeted the community of my hometown of Radin, but I achieved no greater success. Then I gave all my effort to changing my

own family and I failed at that as well. Finally, I decided to change myself, and that's how I had such an impact on the Jewish world. (Blech, 2019)

It is acceptable to scale down our ambitions and think small when we are actively and intentionally focused on personal transformation. It may well be the way to avoid passive leading, leading in isolation, and focusing on small stuff. The challenge is not to “stick to the same way of thinking, and therefore continue living the same kind of life” (Sasson, n.d.). In every case, change is hard; any time change is implemented, it is an uphill battle to transform the status quo.

This issue of *JACL* examines different ways that leaders can facilitate change: be it by enhancing their decision-making skills, by implementing ethical leadership, by engaging in research and development, through the creation of relationships, or by rethinking our role within an organization completely.

The Biblical Reflection is written by Priscilla Wood and walks us through the decision-making power of a leader as seen through the periscope of Exodus 5–11. Pharaoh provides an example of poor decision-making in this biblical account, which ultimately leads to him being ineffective as a leader. Yet, there is much that leaders today can learn from his mistakes.

In our Leadership Interview, Monte Sahlin discusses the importance of research in today's fast-paced world. Sahlin maintains that there are four ways that research helps executive leaders in church organizations. First, research provides information directly from the source. Second, it provides an opportunity to analyze information carefully. Third, research allows for the examination of a variety of “what-if” scenarios without fueling rumors and starting debates. Fourth and finally, research provides the basis for a small circle of trusted advisors to review a situation before a much larger group gets involved in the discussion. Sahlin is a strong advocate for the importance of research in perpetuating change.

Akinwumi Oke brings us the first Feature Article, which examines leading ethically under pressure. Oke states that, “exploring leadership in ethically difficult contexts has significant implications for building credibility in societies where pervasive corruption and mutual distrust is one of the key challenges in achieving governance outcomes for the common good.” Oke's study concludes that leaders' personal characteristics, understanding of self-concepts, and a pragmatic approach empower them to successfully create a compelling personal vision that communicates a clear ethical framework.

The second Feature Article comes from Steven Reece, who conducted a case study of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) by exploring how Jews and

Christians learned to dialogue within the construct of the third space—the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery in Poland. Reece’s investigation sought to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy) in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. Reece concludes with suggestions to improve relationships between Christians and Jews, moving both groups toward positive change and reconciliation in these relationships.

Peter Burch contributes the last Feature Article, examining reasons for church non-attendance at Christian churches in the Pacifica community of California, a suburb of San Francisco. Five underlying factors for non-attendance at Christian churches in Pacifica were empirically derived from the data. There were significant discrepancies between acknowledged and perceived reasons for non-attendance, particularly in the area of personal priorities and decisions.

Does the age of a pastor impact the vitality of a congregation? The Dialogue selection examines this question, inviting leaders to take a new look at the role of aging pastors in churches today.

The Leadership Lived selection examines the story of David Maraga, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and Chief Justice of Kenya’s Supreme Court. While the Kenyan justice system has a reputation for being corrupt, Maraga has not shied away from maintaining just, fair, and upright conduct in both his role as justice and in his personal life.

As always, the issue closes with book reviews that cover the latest literature on leadership, as well as dissertation notices.

We are excited that you are joining us on this journey to be leaders to “lead for change!”

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