

Marcus Honeysett

Agents of Change

(Part One)

In business, change is a buzzword.

Adapt to new challenges or the business will fail. It is the same on a battlefield. For make no mistake, the Christian life is a battlefield. So unless your church places missional priorities right at the centre of your communal life, you will experience a shift from battlefield to care home.

Once comfort and maintenance replace mission, the church will die, even if it seems to have a good semblance of life.

What does this mean for leaders? What is the leader's role in ensuring that a church avoids atrophy and complacency?

Leaders receive and then set out a vision of where God is taking the church into the future, prioritising mission and creating a missional culture. This places a priority on change. Change, however, is a threat to stability. So leading through change is a critical skill for leaders. A leader's ability to create an environment in which a church remains

focused on gospel extension and gospel priorities will determine its success.

Spiritual leadership involves a clear understanding of God's priorities, the use of his methods and a reliance on his power. For this reason, the church is very different to a business. Change starts from different roots and it has different goals.

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The starting point is a distinctive one. Spiritual perception, godliness and an overarching hunger for God are essential. When a leader faces resistance to change, these are the areas which require attention.

Gospel-centred change emerges out of gospel-centred convictions about God, ourselves, the church and its purpose. If you don't believe that the purpose of the church is to declare God's greatness to a dying world, then any call to change it to produce that is threatening. If a church's activities lose connection with glorifying God and witnessing to his grace and

goodness, then you will never be able to stop those activities or replace them with ones that do. Furthermore, until the reality of God's promises take firm hold of people, they won't adjust their lives to base all they do on them. Stepping out in faith is only done by those who are thrilled by the grace of God in Christ. That's because it requires a level of risk, the possibility of failure. It's so much easier to be content with the status quo. In the process of change we are inviting people to embrace a new identity, a new role for themselves, and fresh purpose within the church community. We are inviting them to move from:

- the comfortable to the uncomfortable
- the known to the unknown
- inaction to action
- areas of skill to areas in which they feel less skilled

Change introduces all kinds of ambiguities and uncertainties that make people feel unsafe:

- About the future
- About what is expected of them
- About the possibility of conflict
- About whether things will be out of control
- About a reduction in their status
- About their workload and stress levels

If in the process of change, these aspects are received negatively, this will affect morale and the willingness to embrace a different future. The likely consequences are resistance, confusion and criticism. In all of this, the leader's role is central. The leader becomes the key factor in minimising the negative and highlighting the positive. Therefore the key question is: what does the leader need to bring to the table to build trust and confidence in shaping a new direction?

There are all kinds of factors that make change much more difficult in a church than in other kinds of organisations:

- It is a voluntary organisation
- People with strong voices may not be committed to a true gospel vision
- Sometimes the decision-making process

gives power as much to the fringe as to leaders

- People think their stake-holding means they have as much influence as leaders
- People have joined because they have found something attractive; they may leave if change challenges that
- Unchanging stability may be what attracts some people; change may cause them to leave
- It's hard to incentivise change with remuneration, as in the business world
- Many are passive receivers rather than active participants in vision and purpose
- Churches are often unclear about organisational goals, aims and structures, more so than in a business

Whatever it is that Christian leaders bring to the table to help change happen, it has to derive from basic biblical principles: the goodness of God, the glory of Christ, the wonder of the biblical gospel. The leader should therefore cultivate the following characteristics:

- The one who deals in **core motivations**, aligning people to **Christ and Christ's purposes**
- The one who clarifies **need for change** with **clear gospel vision**
- The one who helps others understand and embrace **godly opportunity** with **clear communication**
- The one who focuses **cooperative teamwork** with **enthusiasm and joy in God**
- The one who **smooths transition** with **wisdom and the affection of Christ**
- The one who **absorbs angst** with **prayerfulness, compassion and kindness**, minimising future distress and disturbance

If gospel change is resisted, then we need to carefully analyse where the barrier is. It will usually be lack of one or more of the elements above. For my own part, I would spend most time thinking about what motivates people, and whether those motivations are truly aligned with Christ.



NEXT
4 MILES

Marcus Honeysett is founding director of Living Leadership. He has extensive experience as a speaker and writer and as a church elder for training and discipleship. His books include *Finding Joy* (IVP, 2005) and *Fruitful Leaders* (IVP, 2011). Marcus is married to Ros and they have one son.

About Living Leadership

Living Leadership exists to help Christian leaders live in Christ joyfully and serve him faithfully.

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