

Not only do leaders lose their jobs over change, something worse happens: leaders lose heart when their hopes for change die.

If we can't even change our own lives without adversity, why would we think leading others through change would be any simpler?

Most often, one of four things happens when a dream encounters resistance and opposition: 1. Your dream dies. 2. You settle for incremental change. 3. You leave. 4. You learn how to lead change successfully.

People who lead change without losing it develop strategies that lead to the right focus on the right things at the right moment.

Good strategies for change are about focusing on the right people in the right moments.

1. Do the math. Calculate who is actually opposed. People who oppose things tend to get loud. This strategy will show you that, while it's

easy to think otherwise, the loudest voices are not always the most important voices.

2. Choose your focus. Decide whether you will focus on who you want to reach or who you want to keep.

3. Find a filter. Develop the questions that will shape your future. Knowing you need to focus on the right people is one thing, but when you've got a cacophony of voices around you, how do you know which people it's most critical to hear? That's why finding a filter matters so much. Without a filter, everything sounds compelling.

4. Attack problems, not people. Help people see you are for them even if you are not for their ideas.

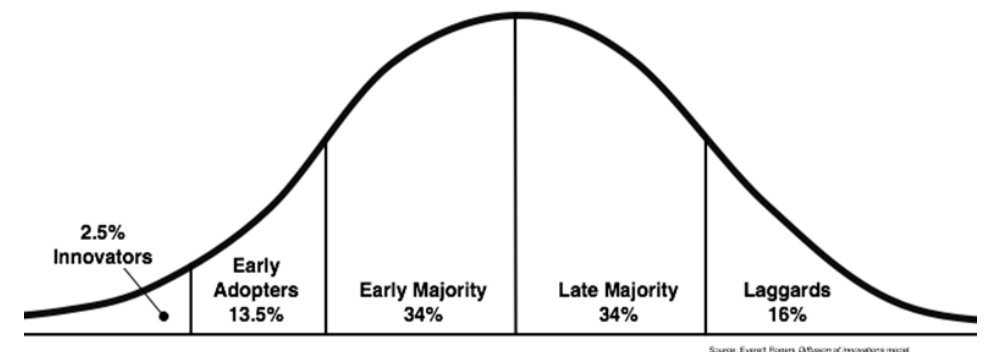
5. Don't quit. Persevere until your critical breakthrough.

Unfortunately, pain is a necessary part of change leadership. Pursuing a God-given vision doesn't mean you'll be exempt from opposition. Just the opposite: it almost guarantees you'll get some.

Strategy 1: DO THE MATH

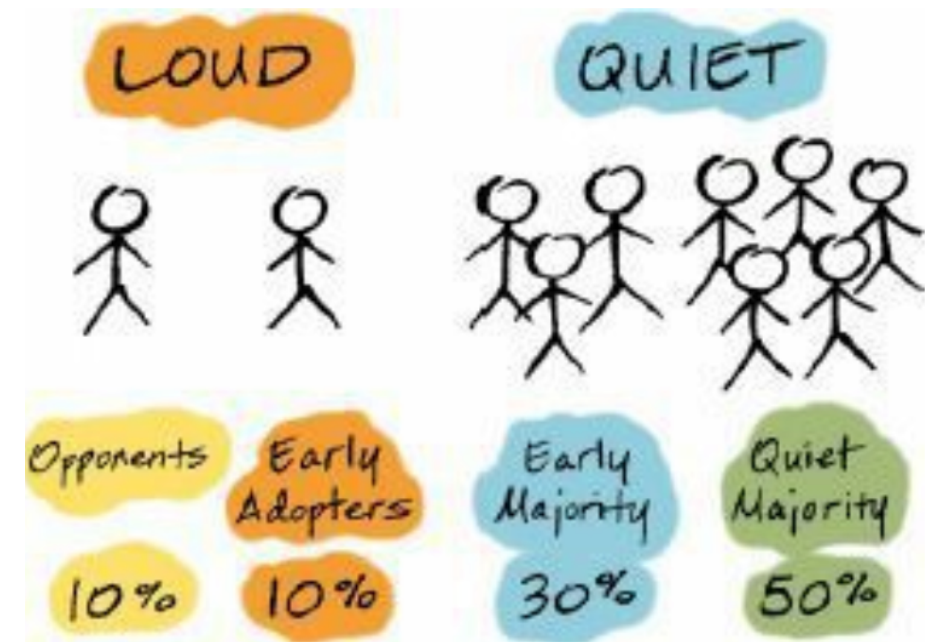
Diffusion of Innovations (Everett M. Rogers) sagt:

- Innovators, 2.5%
- Early Adopters, 13.5%
- Early Majority, 34%
- Late Majority, 34%
- Laggards, 16%.



Source: Everett Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations model

Carey Nieuwhofs Verteilung:



The loudest people affected by a proposed change are those who are most opposed. The more opposed people are, the louder they tend to become. The problem arises because the noise of Opponents to any change will make you a bad mathematician. You will confuse loud with large. And you will confuse volume with velocity. You will begin to believe that because Opponents are loud, they are many, and because they have volume, they have momentum.

That's because Opponents generally don't possess a vision for the future, only a vision for the past which—if you think about it—is an impossible vision. It's actually impossible to move to what was; you can only move to what will be.

Consider for a moment what you might be hearing (or missing) from the Early Adopters and the Early Majority. The well-thought-out change they support is going somewhere. A progressive vision of the future has a trajectory of hope.

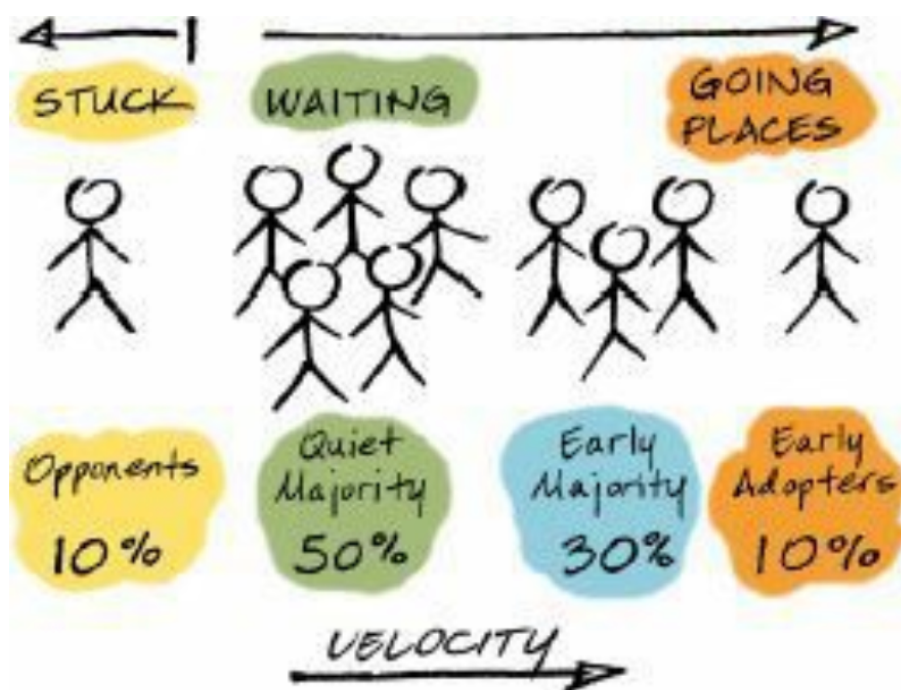
Leading change through opposition distorts reality.

Remember this: never confuse loud with large.

One of the reasons it's so easy to confuse loud with large is because people who are opposed to change claim to speak for more than just themselves.

When you listen to the loudest voices, you miss the most important voices.

Don't Trust Your Inbox.



Ninety percent either will be or are already in favor of change.

You would be sacrificing the interests and desires of 90% of your people for the sake of 10%.

I understand that you're worried the 10% will leave. You're also worried that the 10% in your case is not 10% but 30%, or 40%. I doubt it, but let's say it was. Will you sacrifice the remaining 60% for the sake of 40%, or the remaining 70% for the sake of 30%?

Let's assume the 100 people you are trying to lead through change live in a wider community of 10,000. Allowing the 10% of your organization who are opposed to change to win the day would mean you decide not to reach 99.999% of your community because .001% of your community got loud in their opposition.

If you're not careful, you'll miss the voice of the future as you listen to the voice of the past.

Strategy 2: CHOOSE YOUR FOCUS

Focus, like so many things in life, is a choice.

When you focus on complaints, you lose sight of the plan.

One of the most important questions you'll ever answer as a leader is this: Will you focus on the people you want to reach, or the people you want to keep?

But it's easy to forget about people not in the room because we only hear the people who are in the room.

Just because you're reaching unchurched people today is no guarantee you will reach them tomorrow. And because the voices opposing further change are loud, it's too easy for church leaders to rest on current successes and declare victory too soon. Leaders need to keep their focus on who they want to reach, not just who they want to keep, in every season.

Sometimes when something as theoretical as «focus» is at issue, the best way I stay on track is to remind myself of the «why» behind the «what.»

We stand in a long line of leaders who have been entrusted with a Gospel whose central movement is outward.

I have come to believe that leaders who focus on who they want to reach have less quit in them, and discover a well of deeper inspiration, more powerful motivation, and greater hope. As a result, I believe leaders who keep a focus on outsiders are more resilient than leaders who don't. When you strive toward a goal that is bigger than yourself, bigger than your congregation, and bigger than your own wants and needs, you discover a drive you didn't know you had.

People rally around visions that are about others. Despite our self-centeredness, there is something deep inside each of us that wants to make our lives about something bigger than ourselves.

It takes much more resolve to focus on those you want to reach. Here's why. You have to focus on people you haven't even met. It's easier and more natural to focus on people whose stories you know, who are paying your bills, and who are going to vote in the next congregational meeting.

Unchurched people never fill up your in-boxes with messages telling you they would come if you changed this one thing. They don't show up to meetings with petitions begging you to be more relevant. They've never taken you out for lunch to explain how «everyone» they know would come to your church if you did family ministry better.

The number one question people ask me when I talk about change is this: What if we lose people? The truth is, our church lost people in all the transition.

In fact, everyone in your church likes your church the way it is; otherwise, they wouldn't be there. It's just that the rest of your community may not. Otherwise, they might be there.

There may be cumulative losses because the kind of community you're forming will start looking radically different from others. But while the losses may be cumulative, the gains are potentially exponential.

(Yes, there may be people you should lose and there are people you should keep.)

We hate disappointing people. We don't like to be disliked. We don't want to be unpopular. All of those are understandable reasons. But none of them is a good reason. Actually, they are selfish reasons.

A leader who learns that it's about far more than just how popular he or she is can actually develop a deeper humility in the process of developing a greater courage. Leaders like that are worth following. They

have moved past leadership being about them and their insecurities. They are not leading for the sake of themselves. They are leading for the sake of Christ and others.

The greatest enemy of your future success is your current success.

Strategy 3: FIND A FILTER

How do I make sense of the voices raised in disagreement with the vision? If you're a healthy leader, you're going to ask yourself some tough questions like.



What if the Opponents are right and those of us in favor of change are wrong?

What if God is speaking through them and I'm missing it?

What if my judgment is so off I can't tell what's right and what's wrong anymore?

Informally at first, but very decidedly, we developed two questions through which we'd process every negative voice we heard:

1. Is there a biblical argument in what the person is saying?
2. Is this person the kind of person we are going to build the future of the church on?

Zu 1. They're more likely to fight about cultural preferences than they are about biblical principles.

So what do you do with that as a leader? Treat it for what it is: a discussion about cultural preferences.

like it or not, our priorities tend to show up in our budgets.

Zu 2. As difficult as it is to make judgment calls about people, a leader needs to discern who the people will be that will help lead the organization into the future.

Is their vision primarily based on the past or on the future?

Do they have a spirit of humility? Are they open or closed to the counsel of other people?

Who is following them, and is this the kind of group that you would want around your senior leadership table?

Are they focused on themselves or the people you are trying to reach?

Do they offer positive alternatives that will help build a better future than your current vision for change?

Without a filter, everything sounds compelling.

Whichever questions you decide are the best ones for your situation, know that having a set of questions that serve as a filter is critical, because the questions you ask will shape the future you live.

Test your Filter. The test is dead simple: watch what happens when people leave your organization.

If the people you lose over time are indeed the kind of people you cannot build the future of the church on, you'll know soon enough.

If, however, the people who leave your organization end up at another church or in various other churches and are leading the way, making

an impact, and are really advancing the mission elsewhere, you probably have a bad filter.

Another word on testing your filter: insecure leaders will often assume that everyone who is opposed to them is the kind of person on whom you can't build the future of the church. They feel threatened by even the slightest disagreement with their idea of where things should move. If you feel some insecurity (and who doesn't?), I strongly suggest that you develop a test for your filter. If your definition of «success» in ministry is that the «good» people are only those who agree with you, you will lead a fairly lonely ministry. Great leaders will abandon you, and you will eventually be surrounded only by the sound of your own voice. Getting alignment is not the same as getting agreement.

Strategy 4: ATTACK PROBLEMS, NOT PEOPLE

Unresolved tension and anger are deadly. But you can't attack people.

4. Mose 11,10-15: Moses took it to God. He took his raw fury and let God have it.

Rachepsalmen: If you don't turn to God, you'll turn on them.

People rally around leaders who are committed to solving problems.

If you treat Opponents poorly, it can leave everyone feeling insecure: «If you turned on them like that,» they wonder, «are you going to turn on me in the same way if we disagree?» Addressing Opponents with grace, humility, and love is the best way to treat them.

Four Ways to Avoid Attacking People

1. Believe the best.

The more I'm able to believe the best about other people—especially people who disagree with me—the better leader (and person) I become.

You will never look back with regret if you remain generous and kind to people who are not kind to you.

2. Empathize with your Opponents.

Instead of beginning a conversation by stating your differences, why not begin by emphasizing what you both agree on and trying to understand why your «opponent» is upset?

When you show empathy, you help people understand that they were heard. And that's huge.

If you can empathize with the people who oppose you, you will de-escalate the relational tension. In fact, you'll discover that after being heard, some (not all) Opponents will change their minds and even support the proposal at hand.

3. Wait a Day

I'm not responsible for what I feel, but I am responsible for what I say and do.

A number of years ago I developed something I simply call my «24-hour rule.» The rule is this: if I read something or hear something that upsets me emotionally, I promise myself not to respond to it for at least 24 hours.

4. Reply Relationally

Reply relationally. Make sure your response is more relationally direct than their complaint was. If you get a letter (do people still send letters?), an email, or a direct message, pick up the phone and call them back. If you get a voice mail, call them back and offer to meet them for coffee.

At some point, you'll be in the supermarket and you'll encounter the person who wrote you a nasty note or crashed your congregational meeting. How you conducted yourself when you were in the midst of the battle will determine whether you meet that person with a smile,

endure a really awkward moment, or even pretend you didn't see them and move to the next aisle.

Strategy 5: DON'T QUIT

Persevere until your critical breakthrough. We are often most tempted to quit or give up moments before our critical breakthrough.

perseverance is actually part of the path of discipleship.

some change theorists suggest that change can happen in three to five years, but transformation doesn't happen until the seventh year.

Here are three conditions (there may be others) that, if true, would make me think twice about staying (or reconsidering the plan for change):

1. Your spouse thinks it's time to give in or move on.
2. Your circle of wise counsel is unanimously telling you to reconsider.
3. You have lost the confidence of the most capable leaders in the organization.

Five Ways to Avoid Quitting.

1. Find friends. The best practice I've seen, and also personally experienced, is to be intentional about developing a small network of trusted colleagues outside your community.
2. Get some help. I don't know of a single influential ministry leader who's made it over the long haul who hasn't been through some form of formal or informal counseling.
3. Create an encouragement file.
4. Find something energizing to occupy your time off.
5. Develop a devotional life that has little to do with work.