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How to Change Things without Alienating

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In the past change was a relatively slow process, like the gradual eroding of the shoreline. When a cycle of change was completed, things settled down to "normal." The world is different now, as author and educator Jeanenne LaMarsh has observed: "Change is a constant; multiple changes happen simultaneously with no 'normal' in sight."

The changes in the world are so widespread and far-reaching there is virtually no place you can go to get away from them--there is no island of normalcy. It's an upheaval that comes along once every two hundred years, and there's no sign it's slowing down. Indeed, it's only seems to be speeding up, like a video on perpetual fast-forward. As a leader your job is to boldly step into that video and escort your team along with you.

Of course, you've probably already figured that stepping in is easier than bringing others with you. Regardless of the changes you want to institute, not everyone will automatically follow. You may very well have to invest considerable time and effort to win their support. Over the next few weeks I'm going to share with you some principles that will help you be an effective change-master.

Principle One: To change the present, describe the future.

It may surprise you to hear that many of the people you lead think you know exactly what the future looks like. And they may think you're not telling them what it looks like because you're afraid they won't like the future you have planned.

In light of this amazing revelation, here's a bit of wise counsel. Tell everyone where you're going. Repeatedly share your vision. Fill in as much detail as possible, but be careful to tell what you know while honestly admitting what you don't know. If the picture is fuzzy, admit it. Tell your team you're unable to fill in the missing pieces or turn the dream into reality without their help.

From the earliest days of his public ministry Jesus described the kingdom of God and the role of his followers in that kingdom. The use of the word "and" is important. Not only did his disciple hear what the kingdom would look like, they heard what they would be doing as well. One of the greatest fears people have about change is fueled by uncertainty about their role in the new order of things.

For a taste of how Jesus accomplished his goal, turn to the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes describe the attitudes of the citizens of God's kingdom, and the rest of the message describes their actions.

Later, at the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John got a firsthand look at the King in his glory--a spectacular, unforgettable glimpse of what is to be fully revealed when Jesus comes again. Repeatedly tell those you lead what the future looks like in your mind's eye. And let them know what their role will be in that future. While you're at it, show how the change supports the vision.