

Two keys to bring about change

Written by Bill Perkins

Bringing about change is tough because people tend to polarize around a position and feel they have to be right all the time. Rather than fighting it out, suggest everyone delay making a judgment until more questions have been asked and answered.

I find it fascinating that there were times when Jesus drew a line in the sand and told people they were either with him or against him. On those occasions he left no middle ground. But there were also situations where he clearly interacted with men over a period of time.

The Man Who Met Jesus at Night

My favorite example is Nicodemus. Their first and best known meeting occurred one night when the religious leader told Jesus, "No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). Instead of dealing with the issue of his identity, Jesus told the Pharisee how he could know God. Jesus explained a man could only enter the kingdom of God if he was born again (notice Jesus gave an alternative to the Jewish list of cleansing rituals and other regulations).

Unlike the combative encounters Jesus had with other Pharisees, the one with Nicodemus was tame. There's no indication Jesus asked Nicodemus to make a decision to follow him at that time. But he did give the Pharisee something to think about.

Later, when the Jews were spewing venomous words about Jesus, Nicodemus asked, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). Nicodemus was urging them to delay judgment, the very thing he seems to have been doing with Jesus.

After the crucifixion of Jesus it was Nicodemus who accompanied Joseph of Arimathea in the preparation of Jesus' body for burial. Apparently, Nicodemus quit delaying a decision about Jesus and accepted him as the Jewish Messiah. He embraced the change Jesus offered.

Forego Judgment and Process Information

That delay was crucial because it allowed Nicodemus to further examine the words and works of Jesus. He was able to determine if his previous assumptions about how a man could be made right with God were valid. It's fascinating that in the face of unsurpassed social and religious pressure, Nicodemus was open to the possibility that

he might be wrong. Instead of backing him into a corner Jesus gave him room to process—time to consider a viable alternative to his previously held assumptions

Getting a hardline opponent to be open to the possibility of another legitimate alternative is a major step in the direction of change. Instead of using the gunslinger approach, simply ask him or her to suspend judgment. And indicate your willingness to suspend judgment yourself—after all, you may discover an approach superior to the one you prefer.

It's important to remember the issue here is not implementing a particular change, but creating an environment where people are comfortable with change—a setting where people see the benefit in challenging assumptions and the way things are done. In that kind of environment change will be dynamic and life giving.

Miracles and Mystery

In the Grand Inquisitor section in *The Brothers Karamazov*, The Grand Inquisitor is mad at Christ, insisting he was just involved with miracles and mystery. Frankly, I'm convinced the people you lead want to see more miracles and mystery. Perhaps the greatest miracles they'll behold will be the transformation in their thinking as they learn to question long held assumptions and open their minds to the mystery of change.