

Consulting in times of change and transition for churches

Consulting with Leaders to Facilitate Transition

Although the details of a transition are unique to each situation, church consultants are often called on to assist leaders with some of the following essential steps:

1. Helping leaders to learn to describe the change and why it must happen, and do so succinctly -- in one minute or less for each of the key communication modes (See MBTI). Clarity makes a lot of difference to the way people perceive change.

Enable Leaders to communicate in the four key modes: a) Sharing the Big Picture, b) Presenting clear facts and essential details, c) Talking through the logical process, d) Showing care for individual's needs and the impact on them.

2. Consulting with the team to assist leaders understand just who is going to have to let go of what -- what is ending (and what is not) in people's lives, positions and ministries -- and what people (including the leader) should let go of.
3. Resource leaders to make sure that steps are taken to help people respectfully let go of the past. These may include "boundary" actions (events that demonstrate that change has come), a constant stream of information, and understanding and acceptance of the symptoms of grieving, as well as efforts to protect people's interests while they are giving up the status quo.
4. Guide leaders so that the details of the change are planned carefully and that someone is responsible for each detail; that time-lines for all the changes are established; and that a communications plan explaining the change is in place.
5. Walk with leaders through the neutral space enabling them to communicate well in ways that keep connections alive and show concern for the congregation. To keep reiterating the VIP of transition communications:

The *Vision*: What the problem has been, why we have to do this, what it will look and feel like when we reach the goal.

Implementation: Step-by-step, how we will get there addressing the needs of the organisation as a whole and the individuals within it.

The *Part each Person Plays*: What each person can (and needs to) do to help us as an organisation move forward.

6. Problem solve with key leaders to create temporary solutions to the temporary problems and the high levels of uncertainty found in the neutral space. Make sure people are not struggling unnecessarily.
7. Help leaders help people launch the new beginning by articulating the new attitudes and behaviours needed to make the change work -- and then modelling, providing practice in, and facilitating those behaviours and attitudes. For example, rather than announcing a new ministry or leadership team, leaders of transition need to work through with members the skills and attitudes that such a team needs to have, and provide the necessary training and resources to develop them.

Lessons from the Wilderness

Adapted from William Bridges, 2000

Even a leader like Moses faced a trying test of his leadership in the neutral space. He was up to the task however, so reflect on some of his methods:

Don't under-estimate the value of the plagues

To make the old system (i.e., Pharaoh) "let go" of his people, Moses called down plagues -- and didn't stop until the old system gave way. At this stage, problems are your friends. Don't solve them, for they convince people that they need to let go of the old way.

Mark the ending

What a symbolic "boundary event" Moses had! After his people crossed the Red Sea, there was no going back!

Deal with the "murmuring"

Don't be surprised when people lose confidence in your leadership in the neutral zone: Where are we going? Does she know the way? What was ever wrong with Egypt, anyway? In periods of transition, look for opportunities to have contact with the individuals in transition; distance will be interpreted as abandonment. And show your concern for them by engaging them in conversation about the issues that are most on their minds; you may think there are more important things to talk about, but *they* don't think so.

Give people access to the decision makers

Moses (aided by his mentor, Jethro) appointed a new group of judges in the wilderness to narrow the gap between the people and the decision makers.

Work with the creative opportunity provided by the neutral space

It was in the wilderness, not in the Promised Land, that the big innovation took place: the Ten Commandments, the law and the new styles of worship and living were handed down. It'll be in the neutral space that many of your biggest breakthroughs occur.

Resist the urge to rush ahead

It seems as though little is happening in the neutral space, but this is where the transformation is taking place. Don't jeopardize it by hurrying.

Understand that neutral-space leadership is special

Moses did not enter the Promised Land. His kind of leadership fitted the neutral zone, where things are confusing and fluid. It was Joshua who could lead in the more settled state of the Promised Land. A new style of leadership is needed. Establishment of a new beginning requires a much more logical approach with an appeal to the followers' understanding, while the fluidity and ambiguity of the neutral zone makes an emotional connection between the leader and the followers more critical.

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