

**MentorNet #46**  
**Managing Change within Older Churches**

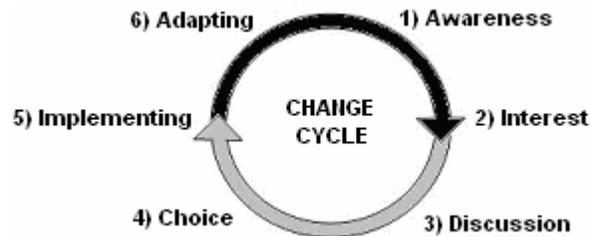
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A prophetic word of caution, adapted from Gordon Macdonald (*Current Thought & Trends*, April 1997), remains pertinent ten years later:

*A maxim warns, "If change within an organization happens slower than change outside of it, then the organization is in its death throes." A scary thought! Does your church or organization operate much like it has done for more years than you care to admit? Many churches are losing their influence and will not survive another decade. Sermons often fail to touch what people face in the larger world.*

*Yet, there is a bright side. Our younger generation is so spiritually hungry, so driven for a supportive community, and so curious to see how the Gospel speaks to issues that they face, that it forces new churches to be born rather than simply revamping old ones. They kill our sacred cows and challenge our ideas of piety. They make some of us mad. Our first impulse is to criticize, discourage and sometimes condemn them, but despite many mistakes they are succeeding. They make us see that the greatest of all change-managers is the Holy Spirit, who brought change at Pentecost, during the Reformation, during the great missionary movement, and in the many church planting movements occurring now. If there is any one thing that we who are older must do, it is to get out of the way and cheer, mentor and pray for the new generation of Christian thinkers, communicators and shepherds. Let us be Moses to their Joshuas, Elijah to their Elishas, and Ananias to their Sauls*

Does your flock or organization need change? If so, then let it go through a six-step process common to successfully making a sustainable change. These are not always discrete steps that happen in order; some may overlap. The important thing is to take believers through all of them; failure to do so will scuttle your efforts.



**1. Guidelines to Make Believers Aware of the Need for a Change**

- a) At the beginning and during the whole process ask God for wisdom with a trusting heart, and He will give it (James 1:5).
- b) Do problem *finding* as well as problem *solving*. Many churches never make the change to solve a devastating problem because no one notices it, or because no one has the courage to recommend a change. One way to detect crippling failures is to consider if your church is effectively practicing all of the ministries that the New Testament requires. (See *Pastoral Ministries Chart* in MentorNet #11.)
- c) Emphasize the obvious. What exactly is the need for change? State the facts repeatedly, in a way that is so easily understood that the solution will prove crystal clear, even self-evident.

**2. Guidelines to Awaken Interest: Help believers to think about the benefits.**

- d) Recount examples of other churches or organizations that have made the change, without hiding the problems that they faced.
- e) Ask those for whom the change matters most to discuss it with friends; set up sessions, if needed.

- f) Challenge the believers in a positive way. For example, you might need to ask older believers to make a sacrifice to keep their children and grandchildren in God's Kingdom. Where there is a conflict in scruples about non-essential issues (today's issues often touch music styles and types of meetings) Scripture requires the stronger to yield to the weaker, to avoid giving offence. Millions of young people have abandoned their parents' churches because of the latter's failure to obey this rule found in the fourteenth chapter of Romans.

### **3. Guidelines to Rouse Discussion: Talk over time, money and resistance costs.**

- g) Avoid the temptation simply to preach about a needed change. Stimulate interest by asking questions about the need for it. Why should the change occur? Explain the benefits.
- h) When people pose problems that might come from the change, help them to weigh the potential consequences of the problems against the advantages of the change.

### **4. Guidelines to Make a Formal Choice: Believers agree with their leaders.**

- i) Confirm who will bring about the change or lead a new church, cell or ministry. Talk with members of the flock to find who is eager to help. Do not build a fast, ultra-light aircraft and then find that nobody will fly it.
- j) Look for new, potential leaders and workers rather than overloading older ones. To start new ministries, cell groups or daughter churches, let older leaders mentor newer ones in an environment of freedom and encouragement. A leader should model this.

### **5. Guidelines to Implement the Change: Plan details and implement it**

- k) Propose small, easy steps. Place the stepping stones across the stream close enough so that nobody falls into the water. Let workers see progress in small but measurable increments.
- l) Move with the movers. Do not push people to do what fails to interest them. Find those who want to make the change or to start something new; work with them and let the others lie in green pastures beside still waters. Later, when all sees that the Lord is working in the new endeavour, many of the passive believers will embrace the change.
- m) Focus on a change publicly until the flock embraces it. For example, if you have recently begun cell groups — tiny churches within a bigger one — then you must keep folks' interest 'white hot.' One way to do so in a cell church is by interviewing briefly, during big-group meetings, persons who have experienced victories in a cell group. They may be new believers, folks who have received healing or who have overcome drug abuse.

### **6. Guidelines to Adapt to the Inevitable Challenges: Make successful adjustments.**

- n) Balance change and stability. Maintain both static and dynamic aspects of the body of Christ. Most people lose interest in change, not only when they get in a rut, but also when change is overdone or when changes are made too often. Beliefs and long term aims should be static, changeless. Methods, monthly goals and organization, however, should be kept dynamic, regularly revised or replaced.
- o) If you cannot bring about a needed change in your church, then do not fear to start a new work. Think of positive multiplication rather than negative division. Many churches' leaders have agreed that some members would prefer a different kind of congregational life, or a very different style of worship, and have encouraged a daughter church or cells to be born with the support and encouragement of the mother congregation.

### **Resources for Church and Cell Development and Reproduction**

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