

**MAXWELL MOMENT****The Challenge of Change**

by Dr. John C. Maxwell

The history of Henry Ford and the Model T illustrates a fundamental truth about leadership: **leaders never outgrow the need to change.**

On his way to dominating the automotive market with the Model T, Henry Ford embodied innovation and progress. By pioneering the assembly line, Ford slashed the amount of time needed to manufacture an automobile. He installed large conveyor belts in his factory, allowing workers to stay in one place rather than roaming around the factory floor. He also shortened the workday of his employees from nine hours to eight hours so that his factories could operate around the clock.

The efficiencies Ford introduced allowed cars to be manufactured at a fraction of their previous costs. In under a decade, automobiles went from being luxuries affordable only to the wealthiest Americans, to being standard possessions of the average American family. Ford profited handily from the popularity of the Model T, and Ford Motor Company grew into an empire.

However, the dominance of Ford Motor Company was short-lived. As competitors changed their operations to copy Ford's concepts mass production, Henry Ford made a tremendous leadership blunder. With cars rolling off assembly lines like never before, consumers began to demand a variety of colors. However, Ford stubbornly refused, uttering the famous line, "The customer can have any color he wants so long as it's black."

In Ford's mind, producing multiple colors was foolhardy since black paint dried the fastest and could be used most efficiently. Amazingly, Ford did not comprehend the human preference for variety. Customers flocked en masse to other producers who catered to their color preferences, and Ford Motor Company never regained its grip on the market.

For so long, Henry Ford had focused on moving from inefficiency to efficiency that he refused to move in the opposite direction - from efficiency to inefficiency - even when doing so would have been wise and profitable. Ford's genius in sparking change had catapulted him to the pinnacle of American commerce, but later, his inability to change cost him dearly.

In this edition of *Leadership Wired*, I'd like to overview the central challenges faced by leaders when they try to make changes in their lives. In doing so, I have drawn

upon the wisdom of my friend, Sam Chand, author of the book *LADDERShifts*, and a prominent thinker in the field of leadership and change.

## **Issues That Make Change A Challenge**

### ***Critics***

Along the journey of leadership, you'll meet all sorts of people, and I guarantee you'll bump into a few critics. Early in my career, I didn't know how to handle disapproval, and I bent over backward to keep everyone happy. In spite of my best efforts, I failed. Some of my people still didn't like me.

Trying to appease everybody invites trouble. Appeasers end up being average because they always gravitate to the middle of the road. They're afraid to make waves, and therefore, they avoid changes. My leadership began to take flight when I allowed myself to press people to change - whether they thanked me or cursed me.

### ***People You Have Outgrown***

As we climb the levels of leadership, we come to the sad realization that most people aren't committed to personal growth. Friends who once shared our dreams begin to settle for second best. Members of our inner circle quit when the journey gets hard. If we are to change ourselves for the better, then we need to change the company we keep.

Eventually, we must change our relationships by disengaging from the people we've outgrown. Disassociating from colleagues can be especially painful given your history together, the contributions they have made in your life, and your personal feelings toward them. Disengaging is painful because you care about them. It's painful because they may not understand why you've drifted away from them. It's painful all the way around, but remember, unless you are willing to endure these pains, your own growth as a leader will be limited. Leaders only grow to the threshold of their pain.

### ***The Weight of Responsibility***

When we're young, leadership has an idealistic appeal. We yearn to be in charge and out front, making the decisions. However, the reality of leadership involves the heavy burden of responsibility. Missteps by a leader can affect people's livelihoods or an organization's sustainability. The fear of getting it wrong can paralyze a leader.

If we, as leaders, want to make significant changes to increase our impact, then we must be willing to shoulder progressively greater loads. Although added responsibility gives us a greater opportunity to exercise leadership, it also magnifies the consequences of our mistakes. To be a change agent, a leader must be willing to take ownership of key projects and pivotal decisions.

### ***Personal Inadequacies***

As we grow in our leadership, we advance into uncharted territory - areas beyond our comfort zones. Such occasions give us growing pains by confronting us with our inadequacies. Our wisdom fails to solve a problem, or we stumble into a situation requiring more wisdom than we possess.

Facing our limitations can be daunting. At times, we'd rather stick to familiar roads than blaze a new trail and risk failure. Ultimately, pushing our personal boundaries is the surest way to grow, improve, and expand the scope of our influence.

## Review

Issues That Make Change A Challenge:

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## LEADERSHIP@LARGE

### Leading to a Cure

Imagine a highly contagious, lethal disease completely wiping out every man, woman, and child in the United States. Sounds like the plotline for a Sci-Fi horror flick, doesn't it?

Sadly, in the 20th century, smallpox claimed 300 to 500 million lives worldwide - more than the entire population of the USA.

Smallpox was a gruesome disease. It's victims contracted large blisters inside their mouths and on their hands and feet. Shortly thereafter, the blisters spread throughout the body. In fatal cases, the blisters would merge together and peel skin away from the victim's underlying flesh. Historical photographs showing the disfigurement of victims are simultaneously shocking and heart-wrenching.

As tragic as the story of smallpox may be, it has a happy ending, thanks to the heroic work of American physician, William H. Foege. For his contributions eradicating smallpox, Foege was named one of America's Best Leaders by *U.S. News & World Reports*.

### FIGHTING THE VIRUS

As a child, William Foege quickly developed an aptitude for science. Inspired by his uncle, a missionary to New Guinea, Foege also cultivated altruistic instincts. By the time he was 13, he announced his intention to serve as a doctor in Africa.

Making good on his pledge, Foege moved to Nigeria to provide health care in a rural village. After enlisting in the U.S. effort to curb smallpox in the region, Foege was soon confronted with a brutal reality. He did not have nearly enough vaccinations to keep pace with the spread of the virus.

Considering his options, Foege came to a novel conclusion. If he focused his efforts on places with high volumes of human interaction, he could slow the virus' ability to

spread. He quickly set about immunizing urban centers and marketplaces. Even visitors to those areas were vaccinated. The strategy worked amazingly well. Whole neighborhoods, and soon, entire cities, were cleansed of smallpox.

In recognition of his expertise, the Center of Disease Control selected Foege to oversee their worldwide initiative to combat smallpox. He implemented his tactics across the globe, and by 1979 the World Health Organization proudly declared that smallpox had been eradicated. Thanks to Foege's leadership, millions of lives were spared the deadly effects of the virus.

### **ONE DISEASE DEFEATED, COUNTLESS MORE TO GO**

For an encore, Foege convinced Merck pharmaceutical company to distribute its innovative drug, ivermectin, for free in Africa. The drug prevents river blindness, a disease impairing the vision of its victims. Thanks to the public/private partnership Foege built with Merck, river blindness is rapidly declining in Africa. Hopefully, like smallpox, one day it will cease to be a threat.

Currently, Foege is partnering with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to stem the spread of other infectious diseases around the world. A hero in the field of medicine, Foege has inspired a generation of public health workers, and he has given hope to those who battle against the deadliest diseases of our day.

To read more about William Foege's contribution to global health, you can [visit the website of U.S. News and World Reports](#).

### **The Downfall of Snake Oil Salesmen**

In the 19th century, snake oil salesmen roamed the countryside, peddling phony merchandise. They were smooth talking con artists who sold cure-all potions or healing ointments that had no medicinal power whatsoever. Snake oil salesmen made a living by fabricating elaborate myths about the potency and authenticity of their products. Preying upon the naivety and isolation of their customers, they wowed them with fancy language and sophistication. The polish and persuasiveness of snake oil salesmen allowed their specious claims to sound credible and sincere.

The downfall of snake oil salesmen was brought about by the spread of information. Through newspapers and word-of-mouth, news circulated exposing the snake oil salesmen, and warning people to beware of their schemes. As customers grew more informed, they became suspicious of traveling salesmen. In time, the market for counterfeit medicines dried up, and snake oil salesmen moved onto other things (like selling used cars, I suppose).

### **MODERN SNAKE OIL SALESMEN**

Although the heyday of snake oil salesmen passed long ago, several tactics of the conniving salesmen have survived. Marketers dress up their products with celebrity endorsements, flashy packaging, and embellished assertions. While not as blatantly deceptive as the snake oil salesmen, they nonetheless exaggerate in order to increase sales. Like the snake oil salesmen, today's retailers often end up vanishing

after taking their clients' money, hiding behind automated "customer service" systems.

As society became entwined in the World Wide Web, predatory marketers licked their chops. They could now literally stalk their prey across the Internet, observing their interests, preferences, and buying habits. Excitedly, they prepared to gain entrance into the minds of those they hoped to hook with their products.

However, the very tool marketers hoped would boost their sales, the Internet, is undoing today's version of snake oil salesmen. In an article for Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge, Julie Hanna cites the trend of consumers "using technology to learn about marketers, rather than the other way around." By enabling consumers to control their accessibility and hold advertisers accountable, the Internet is forcing advertisers to come up with messages rooted in authenticity and free from exaggeration.

## **THE THREE "A" TRENDS OF ADVERTISING**

### ***Accessibility***

Customers are gaining unprecedented power to shield themselves from marketing, thereby limiting access to advertisers. Customers buy TiVo and bypass commercials. They sign up for the Do Not Call Registry and stonewall telemarketers. They purchase pop-up blockers and prevent online ads from reaching their computers. They've even created their own markets (eBay, Craigslist, Auto Trader) so that they can buy and sell with one another rather than dealing with corporate brokers.

### ***Accountability***

At light speed, consumers are being informed about the strategies, values, and performance of the companies vying for their business. Ubiquitous seller ratings offer feedback on purchases. Through online forums, consumers discuss the merit of products or services. Customers broadcast both positive and negative buying experiences through social communities such as Facebook or My Space. Bloggers post information about corporate misdeeds and consumer manipulation.

With their business practices under close scrutiny by customers, companies know they will be held accountable for their words and actions. They cannot over-hype a product without being taken to task by the online community. They aren't able to hide behind consumer ignorance anymore.

### ***Authenticity***

To win over the marketplace, advertisers must authentically connect with the deeply held values of their customers. Customers now control the message. It's up to advertisers to understand the message and embody it within value-laden brands.

Readers interested in the changing face of marketing can read Julie Hanna's article, ["Authenticity over Exaggeration: The New Rule of Advertising,"](#) available on Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge website.

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## ***The Mindful Leader: Ten Principles for Bringing Out the Best in Ourselves and Others***

by Michael Carroll (Trumpeter, 2007)

In *The Mindful Leader*, Michael Carroll applies Buddhist meditation to business leadership. In the book, he decries the prevailing ethics of ambition and power attainment, and he sets forth a divergent leadership path of openness, selflessness, and inspiration.

Carroll's message hits home by being counterculture. While the acceleration of life beckons leaders to squeeze as much as possible into each second, Carroll urges his readers to stop. Many people have become accustomed to barreling past the events of the day without truly attending to them, but Carroll reminds the reader to see the significance of each moment. Within a culture of change, leaders often cope by shielding their emotions from unpleasantness. Carroll summons his readers to open themselves courageously to the present reality.

Throughout the book, Carroll trumpets the manifold benefits of withdrawing from the frenetic pace of life and simply being still. He counsels his readers to cease striving to achieve an impossible ideal, and, instead, he encourages them to embrace their imperfect selves.

As a graduate of a Buddhist seminary and as a senior teacher in the Shambhala Buddhist lineage, Carroll has been studying mindfulness meditation for over 30 years. For this reason, it's no surprise that his religion informs his writing. However, *The Mindful Leader* doesn't merely contain Buddhist overtones or show hints of Carroll's spirituality - the text is dominated by the author's fascination with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation. As a result, the book may put off readers who are skeptical of the validity of meditation.

To a degree, Carroll tailors his insights for those unfamiliar with the practice of meditation, but his exploration into Buddhist concepts such as *maitri*, *wangthang*, *virya*, and *kshanti*, may push away casual readers. Similarly, for the rational / practical mind, activities recommended by Carroll may seem hokey - bordering on bizarre. For instance, over the course of the book, he prompts readers to embrace boredom, make friends with themselves, and practice nonachievement. Likewise, the word pictures he paints (imagining oneself as a tiger, snow lion, or nude bullfighter) seem eccentric and may distance the author from his intended audience.

The *Mindful Leader* offers tremendous insight on cultivating qualities (such as simplicity, peace, and awareness), which have become rare due to the breakneck speed of modern life. However, unless a reader is acquainted with Buddhism or highly interested in exploring meditation, the book comes across as uncomfortably spiritual. All things considered, LW subscribers may want to skip over this one when searching for leadership literature to devour.

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QUOTES

**Potential**

"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already." ~ John Buchan

"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion. The potential for greatness lives within each of us." ~ Wilma Rudolph

"Focus on your potential instead of your limitations." ~ Alan Loy McGinnis

"If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never." ~ Soren Kierkegaard

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