

## ADAPTING TO CHANGE

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Change is the most pervasive influence within today's workplace. Profound changes are shaking up our lives and the way we do business. And the pace of change will continue to accelerate - driven by sharp economic swings, increasing competitive pressures, new technologies, government regulations, sociocultural shifts, further globalization of the marketplace, and the continued reshaping of organizations worldwide.

Dealing successfully with a changing reality means facing some hard truths: **Today you work for yourself.** Your only family is your real family - not the company. **No big organisation is going to take care of your future.** This means that the responsibility for your success and happiness is in your own hands. You alone are in charge of clarifying your values, defining success, designing a career path, building motivation and developing a winning strategy for anticipating and capitalising on the future.

For many of us, realising that we are totally in control of our lives is traumatic. Gloria Steinem has said, "People waste more time waiting for someone to take charge of their lives than they do in any other pursuit."

I call this phenomenon the Oz Factor - the belief that someone wiser and more powerful than ourselves (the wizard) will provide us with solutions to our problems. Just as it was for Dorothy and her friends, it is time for all of us to look within and to realize that we can rely on our own hearts and minds and courage.

Several years ago, the American Management Association (AMA) conducted a survey with 6,000 participants across the United States. The survey asked only two questions:

- 1) **Do you get enough recognition at work?**
- 2) **Would you do a better job if you got more recognition?**

The response was overwhelming: 97% of the respondents said "no" they didn't get enough recognition at work, and 98% replied "yes" they would do a better job if they received more recognition.

To the AMA, this pointed out inadequate management practices. Obviously, not enough managers were doing a good enough job at recognizing and rewarding the people who report to them.

But I looked that the results in another way: It seemed that most of us were waiting - without much success - for someone else to acknowledge our efforts. Only then would we do a "better job." Talk about relinquishing control!

On the other hand, some individuals (especially those who thrive on change) refuse to give anyone else control over their performance. **The "change-adept" don't wait for their employers to empower them; they go right out and empower themselves.**

After I presented a program for Bell Canada in Toronto, an audience member raised her hand to comment: "I'm new to the company, but there is one change that I wish we'd make. I think we need a mentor program in this organisation. To be paired with an experienced manager - to have someone to 'show us the ropes' - that would really shorten the time it takes new people to fit in." From the stage, I asked (in all my consultant's wisdom): "Well, why don't you find your own mentor?" This woman was way ahead of me. "Oh, I already did that," she replied. "I just think it would be a great program for all new employees."

Woody Allen once said that he was not worried about advanced civilisations landing on earth and taking us over because they were centuries ahead of us. Instead, what worried him the most was being invaded by aliens who would be only fifteen minutes ahead: They would always get a parking space and they would always be first in line for the movies.

**In a rapidly changing business environment, change-adept individuals gain the fifteen-minute advantage** by using proactive strategies - anticipating the new actions that external events will eventually require. And taking those actions early, before being forced to do so, while there is still time to influence or even redirect events.

A training consultant at Hewlett-Packard put it this way: "If there's a slowdown in the computer industry, it's up to the employee to figure out what it means to him. That takes talking not only to people within the company, but also to people at other companies. It means staying on top of industry trends. The people who succeed are usually the first ones to recognize change and work with it."

Of course, different people react very differently to change. Many get frustrated and pressured - and they burn out. Others seem to thrive on chaos. It is no mere accident, no random selection by fate, as to who will adapt optimally. While their co-workers are overwhelmed by the negative aspects of change, the change-adept take control and capitalise on opportunities they encounter daily.

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