*“Building Main Street, not Wall Street”*

**Be the Change You Want to See!**

The title of this week’s column is an often-seen quote by Mahatma Gandhi. I would like to add a few thoughts to this line of thinking. It is said if we do the same things over and over again expecting different results, this is the definition of insanity. We can also add the wise words of William Glasser, who once said, *“If you want to change attitudes, start with a change in behavior”*. Change is a topic many have written about, but few grasp the true importance of change and how it impacts our local communities, in many ways, both good ways and bad.

While in the military years ago, I remember a famous survey conducted questioning hundreds of officers as well as enlisted leaders throughout the ranks. One of the leading survey questions asked the respondents what they liked and disliked most about serving in the military? The results that came back were interesting. The leading answer by far for what military members liked most was the ‘constant change’ keeping their lives and jobs interesting. That in itself wasn’t very surprising. But what scored as the highest dislike offered a potential study in human interest. Their leading dislike, by a large margin was having to put up with ‘constant change’. One might ask, how can that be? I would submit, while change can be exciting, it can also be a source of fear and uncertainty. Additionally, it can cause upheaval, be painful at times, and it can fail.

Let me be clear, change is the most needed component in any community transformation. In fact, the word transformation in itself infers major change. Fact of the matter, an unchanging community is nearly always a dying community. Let’s dissect and discuss a few attributes associated with change and how it might translate into community transformation or revitalization.

Change causes discomfort. If you have no discomfort associated with your change, your change isn’t as powerful as it should be. There is little comfortable about change, it causes us to leave old things behind and adopt new habits. That can be very difficult for many.

Change creates fear. Much like soldiers going into battle, most are fearful of the unknown. Fear of the unknown can be stifling for a community and their leaders. Great leaders meet fear head-on and fearlessly tackle the unknown.

Change creates failure. If one isn’t afraid of change, they are probably not thinking properly. At the same time, one can’t let the fear of failure stifle what has to be done. During a community transformation and revitalization process, there will be initiatives that just don’t work. If you are not experiencing any failures, you are simply not trying hard enough. Calculated failures lead to enormous wins when we learn from these failures and drive forward. Never be afraid of failure. Failures are simply the scars of a winning warrior.

Resisting change is human nature. Even those leaders adept at change have to fight the urge to change too little. Whenever I took a new position, I always went in looking for ways to encourage change. Many changes might be little, some changes might be large. But creating constant change was a must, change requires practice and if your team has little experience in change, when the times comes to change to survive, they resist due to lack of practice. If they had experienced many little changes over the months and years, accepting change when it is highly needed is much easier on the team. Change takes practice, practice makes perfect, perfect creates true transformation.

If your community must change and they are finding it difficult, then maybe the initiatives need to be reframed in a different fashion. I am reminded of a quote I heard long ago by Wayne Dyer. He said *“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change”*. This is so true. Often times it is as simple as reframing the problem, understanding the problem in a different light and tackling it from a different angle. Once we view change from many perspectives, it becomes much easier as we have identified the issue in better bite-sized pieces.

Let me close with one last piece of advice on change. Don’t approach change with the attitude of, how can we accomplish this issue with the least amount of discomfort? Approach it with the attitude of, how far can we go with this change? When it comes to your community, you can’t afford a mild approach to change, you must be aggressive with change and others will learn as you go. Don’t live as a reactive community, live as a proactive community.

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