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## Heightening Awareness of the Need for Change

When an organization is open to change, thinking individuals will still want to critically assess the evidence concerning the need for change. The change leader may experience blanket resistance and defensiveness, or may experience more localized opposition. Individuals may recognize the need for change in some departments and functions but be resistant to recognizing the need for change as it gets closer to home. If they see only the unraveling of what they've worked to accomplish and/or unpleasant alternatives ahead for them, they will be very reluctant to embrace change proposals. Even when the need for change is broadly recognized, action does not necessarily follow.

In the story above, the need for change seems obvious. However, the politicians of the city and other levels of government were reluctant to take the difficult steps needed to deal with the problems. Clearly, Naples and her citizens were not yet prepared to undertake the type of change needed.

Once change leaders understand the need for change, they can take different approaches to heighten the awareness of the need throughout the organization. Change leaders can:

1. Make the organization aware that it is in or near a crisis or creating a crisis that needs to be solved.
2. Identify a transformational vision based on higher-order values.
3. Find a transformational leader to champion the change.
4. Take the time to identify common or shared goals and work out ways to achieve them.
5. Use information and education to raise awareness of the need for change.

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The first method is a form of shock treatment and involves either *making the organization aware that it is in or near a crisis or creating a crisis that needs to be solved*. Many of the dramatic turnaround stories that are reported are successful because the actions of people were galvanized and focused by the necessity for action. In the face of crisis, people find it difficult to deny the need to change and to change *now*. When the crisis is real, the issue will be one of showing others a way out that they will follow if they have any confidence in its viability, given that the alternatives are far from attractive.<sup>51</sup>

At times, managers will be tempted to generate a crisis, to create a sense of urgency to change and mobilize staff around a change initiative that may or may not be fully justified. Creating a sense of crisis when one does not really exist must be approached with care.<sup>52</sup> If mishandled, it may be viewed as manipulative and result in heightened cynicism and reduced commitment. The change leader's personal credibility and trustworthiness are then at stake. The reputation developed in and around change initiatives casts a long shadow, for better or worse. The currencies that change agents use are credibility and trustworthiness. These take a long time to develop and can be quickly squandered.<sup>53</sup>

An extension of the crisis is the “burn or sink your boats approach.” In this case, the change leader takes the process one step further and cuts off any avenue of retreat. That is, there is no going back. This approach is based on the belief that this will lead to increased commitment to the selected course of action. While it may aid in focusing attention, this approach can increase many of the risks outlined above. In particular, individuals may resent being forced into a situation against their will. It may produce compliant and even energized behavior in the short term due to the absence of alternatives, but it can give rise to undesirable long-term consequences if the actions come to be viewed as being inappropriate or unfair. Consequences can include elevated levels of mistrust, reduced commitment, and poor performance.<sup>54</sup>

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, the transit system was underwater in many areas, infrastructure had been destroyed, and virtually nothing was running. The crisis faced by Joseph Leader, the subway's chief maintenance officer, and all the other executives and staff, was both real and devastating. They knew tough decisions were needed around the alignment and coordination of resources, and that a huge amount of work would be required to get the city's transit system operational. A competent and highly motivated staff, combined with the powerful shared goal of getting the trains moving, allowed them to mobilize, sort out what needed to be done, and act—even in the absence of protocols.

Urgency is straightforward when there is an event such as Sandy. However, it can prove more difficult when it evolves more slowly, such as deteriorating market conditions, or in the case of not-for-profits such as government agencies, deteriorating service standards or relevance to the public. With the right use of data and influence approaches, people can be woken up. Creating a sense of social/political urgency through advocacy approaches has proven powerful in the public square, as seen in the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt during 2010–2012 and pressure for change in the Department of Veterans Affairs in the United States.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, approaches that disrupt existing perspectives, challenge past learning, and hasten the adoption of new perspectives through creating a sense of urgency have been shown to help new product development teams get out of ruts and become more effective, though they do have to guard against information and knowledge loss in the process.<sup>57</sup>

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