

The Change Agent

Dear Larry,

As the legend goes, Buffalo Bill used to brag to his brawly and tough companions of his ability to kill 1,000 buffalo a day. Amazed and bewildered by his claim, they asked, *How do you do it? Easy*, replied Buffalo Bill, *you shoot the lead buffalo, and the others just stand around until a fight breaks out and a new leader emerges!*

Like a herd of buffalo, a church will stand still and get shot to pieces until leadership emerges. The church desperately needs change agents to rise up within it and to move it forward for Christ. Today, eighty percent of the churches in America are stagnant or dying. Like never before, the Church needs called and skilled innovators to stand up and be used of God so that the people of God will not get picked off like a herd of buffalo.

Heraclitus is known for these timeless words: *There is nothing permanent except change*. This statement tells me that the task of the change agent is ongoing. It is a vital work within the life and ministry of a congregation.

If you feel God is calling you as an agent of change for the local church, then let me offer you some time tested wisdom and counsel that was passed down to me from effective practitioners of the past.

First and foremost, a change agent is one who inspires and competently leads the people to focus on the mission Christ gave the Church, namely to guide

people to an eternal and growing relationship with God. Most churches lose sight of this mission, and thus lose the promised power of the Holy Spirit. The change agent's mission is to introduce (or to get the congregation back to) the priorities that will unleash God's blessing and power in the church.

Another principle to keep in mind is that change is hard work and takes time. Nicolo Machiavelli said, *There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.* This is certainly true within the church. Helping a church make a significant turn around usually takes four years. Making a significant program change alone takes two full years from the inception of the new idea to the diffusion of that idea into the life of the congregation.

One of the most important and often misunderstood principles of change has to do with the way the leader looks at resistance from people. We must never view the people in our congregations as the enemy of change, but rather as sheep needing a shepherd to lead them to greener, richer pastures.

Because of *laggards* and *resisters*, a change agent can wrongly conclude that people don't want to change or experience something better than they have now. But this is just not true. As American futurist Marilyn Ferguson reveals: *It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear . . . It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to.*

Larry, you must fundamentally believe that people want a better life—that they want to be a part of a more effective mission center. They are just afraid of

the transition from the rung they are holding on to, to the one that is swinging out in space. Our job is to develop trust with the people in such a way that they willingly let go of what they currently have so that they may confidently grab hold of a better way.

My advice then to you is to be bold and lead the church with strength and conviction to where God wants it to go. But as you lead, do those things that help people make the transition—respect the past, give time to communicate the why of the change, allow people time to grieve losses, allow people the right to disagree with you without taking it personally, never surprise your governing spiritual authority and don't get too far ahead of your people. A quote hung in my study in my early years with these immortal words: *One step ahead of the people and you are a leader; ten steps ahead of the people and you are a martyr.*

Satan strolls about every day seeking churches that he can shoot down. If God and a church are calling you to emerge as the leader of a new day in the life of that congregation, then I urge you before God to stand up and lead with wisdom and in power.

Remember, with God's help and guidance, you cannot only keep the church alive, but organize a unified stampede for the cause of Christ. And, if you are wise in the process, like Buffalo Bill, you'll even live to tell the story.

A fellow trail guide,

Randy Frazee

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*Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins,
and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild
the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.'*

*I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me
and what the king had said to me.*

They replied, 'let us start rebuilding.'

So they began this good work.

Nehemiah 2:17, 18