



Do You have a change or die mindset?

Every fall, I attend the Change or Die conference in Wisconsin that's sponsored by the Siebert Foundation. The setting provides ideas for learning to lead in a world that most pastors and church leaders weren't prepared for. It's a catalyst for updating your mental maps, rethinking your approaches to ministry, and helping leaders journey beyond their existing road maps. Participants explore being pioneers who move off the map and venture into uncharted territory for the sake of fulfilling God's mission. Consider what kind of mindset do you bring to your ministry setting?

Five questions I revisit every year before attending the conference include:

1. How is the world changing, and how do I continue to stay abreast of these emerging trends?
2. How do I lead congregations to be faithful to the God's mission in a world is changing so radically and rapidly?
3. What practices, perspectives, and programs need to be set aside because they no longer work or no longer serve the mission?
4. What assumptions, approaches, and actions do I need to test or "try on?"
5. In what ways do I need to change to provide the kind of leadership that's needed to navigate the changes ahead?

Recognizing that the world in front of us is nothing like the world behind us, leaders must strive to anticipate the emerging landscape. It involves letting go of our past successes that may sabotage new ideas and approaches. It requires being sufficiently curious and creative to risk failure for the sake of better results and to see ourselves, our congregations, and our communities from different angles of vision.

Leaders who learn to navigate the choppy waters of change find ways to:

- **stay centered** on God's mission as we follow in the way of Jesus,
- **stay calm**, finding ways to be a non-anxious presence during transitions, trials, and turbulent times,
- **stay connected** to our colleagues in ministry, our ministry partners, and our chorus of cheerleaders, coaches, and consultants,
- **stay the course**, anticipating resistance and continuing to persevere in despite of road blocks and delays, and
- **stay curious**, learning from their results, building on what works, and being willing to make course corrections as needed.

As children, we're naturally curious. It's how we grow and learn. Unfortunately, our sense of wonder and curiosity seems to dissipate by the time we enter grade school. As leaders, we need to embrace and encourage a mindset of curiosity. Listed below are some habits I seek to embed more intentionally into my life to remain more inquisitive as an adult:

1. Ask lots of questions. Curious people ask questions that start with "how," "what," "when," "where," and "why." They ask open-ended questions and follow up with more questions based on people's initial responses.
2. Be fully present and listen deeply. Set aside your phone or anything else that prevents you from being fully present with others. Listen deeply with the intent of asking a follow up question. Avoid trying to insert your opinions, ideas, and recommendations into the conversation. Listen without judgment and without any hidden agenda. As Stephen Covey would say, "seek to understand rather than to be understood."
3. Let go of the need to be the expert. Be willing to say, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure, what do you think?" Make learning more important than looking smart or being right.
4. Learn from your success as well as your mistakes. Take time to learn from your results. What worked? What didn't? What did you learn about yourself and others? What did you learn about your communication, assumptions, and approaches? We can mine a wealth of insights if we take time to reflect.

A "change" mindset is growth-oriented, positive, and proactive. It builds on what's present and repackages resources in new and creative ways. This mindset begins with us and must become part of our DNA before it begins having a profound impact on the organizations we serve. Leadership is both a verb (i.e., something we do such as model, inspire, challenge, enable, encourage, etc.) and a way of being where we mobilize people to tackle tough challenges and learn to thrive in the process.



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