



The Blake Group
Organizational Consulting LLC

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Let's Get Moving!

A parable about resistance to change

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For us humans', changing our habits is very hard. It might be comforting to know that resisting change is not new. In fact can be traced to the time Homo sapiens sought to change sought to change, influence, and convince or otherwise transform themselves into something different. Perhaps this occurred 20,000 years ago when an innovative, forward thinking, creative person tried to deal with natural threats and move from under a tree to a nearby cave to escape rain, lightening, or predators.

Picture yourself in this predicament: As the tribal leader, you think moving to a cave makes perfect sense. You are talking to the other members of your tribe. Although this move may have been for the tribe's own good, it may come as no surprise that its members don't want to relocate! For them the tree was just fine. Not only was it pretty and shady and at the very least it stopped some of the rain. Under the tree, the tribe only had to chase away a few carnivorous creatures each day; the bird pollution was only a minor problem; the insects didn't bite too much or suck too much blood; and only a few tribe members died from exposure. They were content and that was just okay.

After listening to all the reasons why the tribe shouldn't move into the cave, you (the leader) gave the members all the reasons why they should. After all, you told them, the cave is safe, roomy, warm, dry, and insect free! There aren't any carnivorous creatures or bantering birds and the bats are in the cave next door. "Hey," you say with the conviction of an evangelist in your voice, "we can use the bat guano for our agricultural needs!" And besides, you explain with enthusiasm, the tribe members could visit the old homestead anytime they want because the tree is only 50 feet from the opening of the cave.

Naturally, the tribe members wanted to know why their young sagacious leader knew so much. You tell them that you have seen the cave; you had been there and scoped it out. The tribal members reminded you that: a visit isn't a lifetime or a guarantee that changing will improve their quality of life or make the community safer, more abundant and resistant to outside threats. Then they asked, "What is agriculture? We hunt, we gather, we schmoose, we rest. Does agriculture mean more work?"

You, being the innovator that you are, reminded them of the stories the elders told the tribe about on living on the other side of the mountains, in the open, on the plains, in the rains. Back then, a wise elder convinced some of the tribe members to live under trees. The now deceased elder reminded them that the others who refused to change were eaten by the carnivorous creatures they now chase away from under the tree.

Then you respond to the question about agriculture, "Well, agriculture is growing what we gather instead of, uh..., gathering it! We can stay here and grow the stuff. We just grow it there outside the cave, pull it out of the ground, store it in the cave, and viola, we eat organically grown, fresh goodies that haven't been trampled on or are some other beast's leftovers."

Okay, the tribe understands better now and agrees to undertake a feasibility study. But they still aren't too sure about this "agriculture" thing. You are put in charge of the project.

Then the elders take you aside and tell you that there must be a planning session. They want to go for a three day retreat in which they tell you all they know, what they believe, and reminisce about the tribal values, and of course, the good old days.

Does this sound familiar? Although it is logical to move into a cave that is safe and only a short distance from the tree, what is so difficult about changing behavior? The tribe changed before, what is preventing them from doing so now?

Who are you really – the innovative tribal leader or a tribal member? Do you want to grow your soul's food or eat other beast's leftovers? What do your inner voices (e.g. your intra-personal tribal member) say to you when you want to change?

Generating self-receptivity to change requires that you understand the reasons and pressures, both external and internal that make change necessary. All of us are the sum of our experiences and choices over our life time. We carry the memories of our experiences, the consequences of our choices, the personal perspective that our consequences have shaped, and the corresponding ability to respond to events given our sense of those things, in the moment.

For example, are you threatened by predators (outside influences that might be a wakeup call for you); your own community, workplace, or tribe? Are your internal elders (experiences and consequences) supporting and implementing change? Do you have enough information about the need to change to influence those inner elder voices?

Asking yourself the hard questions and not lying to yourself is like looking at yourself in a mirror for eight hours, never blinking, never shrinking from what you see, and examining every blemish, wrinkle, and pore. At the end, you will know what you look like to yourself, and that is important.

By identifying specific objectives, you are more likely to grasp and develop ways to reach your target. The obstacle is complacency which is another word for resistance.

If you have enough self-doubt, that is good. Like faith, a life that is questioned is a life that is worth more. You are now ready to begin taking the next steps.

When I do work for organizations, I consider myself to be an agent of change. When I leave the assignment, the organization and the people are changed in some way. It is my sincere wish that they can handle the truth better than they have ever handled it before. At times, you are your own internal agent of change and you must bring outside experts to generate enough self-doubt about your current state of being. Then you must face the truth, unshrinking from it, understanding what it is saying to you, and let it set you free to experience life from a new perspective that honors your ability to enjoy.

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