For Effective Change, Leaders Must Walk the Talk

Leaders should always walk the talk, but it becomes even more critical to do so when their organization is going through a change. Failing to do so eliminates any chance that others in the organization will be committed to the change process, ensuring the failure of the change effort.

In his excellent book, “Leading at a Higher Level,” Ken Blanchard writes, “It is estimated that a leader’s actions are at least three times as important as what he or she says.”

“The minute that associates or colleagues sense that their leader is not committed or is acting inconsistently with the desired behaviors of the change,” Blanchard continues, “they will no longer commit themselves to the effort.”

As I reflected on Blanchard’s words, I thought of the many churches that have attempted changes in the past few years and how many of those change efforts simply didn’t go anywhere.

In several of the churches with which I am familiar, at least part of that failure was the result of the leaders not demonstrating through their actions that they were committed to the change.

In some cases, it was the pastoral leadership. In other churches, it was the lay leadership.

As the church members saw their leaders acting inconsistently with the changes
being promoted, they soon lost any interest in the change themselves.

Every organization will strongly attempt to return to what it knows throughout a change effort until that change becomes part of the DNA of the church.

If the leaders do not demonstrate a 100-percent commitment to the change through their actions, that organization will return very quickly to its previous state.

I see the same thing happening in judicatories and denominations. For example, I regularly hear from bivocational pastors who tell me their judicatory leaders speak of their commitment to bivocational ministry, but their actions indicate that their commitment is very limited.

Their judicatories offer no specific training for its bivocational leadership. What training is offered usually occurs during the day when the bivocational ministers are at their other jobs.

There is little recognition of bivocational leadership in the official publications of the judicatory, and bivocational leadership is seldom showcased at the regular gatherings.

Many denominations are going through difficult times right now, and there is much talk of the need for significant changes to occur to help make these denominations more viable.

However, there often seems to be much more talk than action.

Boards are sometimes reduced to make them smaller and quicker to respond to the needs of their churches, but, in reality, there seems to be little difference in how these boards operate.

I doubt that a casual observer would say that they are responding any quicker now that they are smaller than when they were larger.
There are still the bureaucratic hoops to jump through. Bylaws are not changed to make the boards more responsive to the rapid changes occurring in society.

It often appears that any changes that are occurring at the denominational level amounts to little more than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

No matter how the chairs are arranged, the ship is still going down, and no matter what surface changes these denominations make, people and churches are still becoming less and less dependent upon them.

Approaching this issue from the perspective of the family unit is insightful. I cannot understand why parents criticize their children for the poor choices they make when those children have watched their parents make the same poor choices throughout their lives.

A single parent who lives with his or her lover should not be surprised when their child becomes sexually active. That child is simply playing “Follow the Leader.”

In the same way, a parent who lies to others should expect to have a child who will lie also.

Children learn through observation and imitation. If they see their parents engaged in activities, they will be more likely to engage in those same activities. The same principle applies to leaders in churches and judicatories.

It does not matter what type of organization you lead, as a leader it is critical that your walk matches your talk if you want others to take you seriously.

If you are trying to lead a change process in your organization, that match becomes even more critical.

If your words do not match your actions, you will soon learn that no one is following you. And, if you have no followers, then, by definition, you are no longer a leader.
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