

## Action Steps to Positive Organizational Change

If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that our organizations are not all that they ought to be. But we have a great calling as we serve the Lord and shape our organizations into effective and God-honoring workplaces.

Even with the best of intentions, it is challenging to bring about change. In fact, the research shows that a majority of change efforts fail to achieve their desired result. Habits are ingrained, people are afraid of the unknown, and sin, although no longer our lord, lingers to infect our lives and relationships with our workmates. As Paul writes in Romans 8:1-2 after lamenting his continual wrestling with sin, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” There is hope that not only we can change, but our organizations can change, because God has set us free and is changing us so that one day we will be in fact righteous, just as we have already been declared righteous.

Although this work of change is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, we’ve come up with a list of suggestions that God often blesses in the pursuit of positive organizational change.

**1. Pray.** The book of Nehemiah documents a great work of positive change as the remnant

of Israel was able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and it all began with prayer—months of prayer. Since God is the one who changes hearts, we need to rely on him for any change in our organizations. This is also a good way to examine our motives for change. That is, we should pray for what will bring God glory, not merely ourselves.

**2. “Be the change you want to see.”** Before going to your staff, focus on your own personal change. It will not only serve as an example, but also show your staff that you are sincere about the change. Furthermore, your influence will begin the process of change around you.

**3. Select a change process.** There is a large body of research about organizational change. Everyone agrees on one thing; change is hard. So, one of the key elements to change is to research and select a change process that has been proven to work in other organizations, and you believe will work in yours. Our experience has shown the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process is a positive process for change. We have found it is uniquely suited to our Christian values and beliefs. It is a process for large-scale

change management that can engage and inspire your staff.

**4. Put the right people in the right places.** Our research has shown that there is a high degree of correlation between good leadership and positive change in organizations. So, be careful to make sure the right people are in the right places, especially when it comes to leadership positions. Be honest about your own strengths and weaknesses and look out for God’s kingdom purposes above your own pride or fear.

**5. Don’t ignore external factors.** Although we are called to be different than the world, we are not told to ignore the world. In fact, as Christians, we should be alert to the changing needs and opportunities that arise as the world around us changes. The gospel is always relevant—make sure your organization is too.

**6. Identify and build on your organization’s core strengths.** It would be foolish to be reactive to external factors alone. Change happens with the consideration of positive internal factors. Positive change begins with the inquiry, analysis, and dialogue of an organization’s positive core. This process involves multiple stakeholders, and then links

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this its core to your change agenda and priorities. Focusing on the positive creates the energy needed to create change. We all know that focusing on negatives alone saps the vital energy necessary to move forward.

and developing plans. Don't underestimate your staff who are in the trenches and therefore often more alert to the pulse of your organization and those you serve.

- 7. Inspire through trust.** After plans for change are made, they need to be communicated to the staff who will be carrying them out. It is vital that a framework of trust already be in place before any plans for change are communicated so that staff will feel safe enough to embrace them. Trust is won through integrity, compassion, consistency, open communication, and shared vision.
- 8. Inspire through vision.** Another element that aids in the acceptance of a new plan by your staff is the persuasiveness of the argument for the change. Take time to fully explain your decision and answer any questions, and you will find staff far more willing to embrace the changes.
- 9. Involve Staff in the change process.** The more you can involve staff in the process of change, the more likely they will be to devote themselves to it. This includes, praying, researching external changes,