

From Stone to Flesh—God’s Role in Organizational Change by Carrie Cavanaugh

As leaders, we know that leading cultural change inside our organization is one of the most challenging tasks we may face. Leading change is the topic of many books on leadership, but the missing element of secular change leadership writing is the spiritual dimension.

Think about it. Changing a culture means we have to change the minds and attitudes of our employees. It can be a very difficult thing to change someone. Reasoning, rewards, even punishment may fail to bring about the desired change. But as frustrating as this can be for leaders, I think it is a wonderful reminder that we need to trust in God, the changer of souls. Although we can only exert external motivators, God can change people from the inside out. In a sense, this is just as amazing as His creating all things out of nothing. Think of an old cynical man, whose heart is softened by the Holy Spirit to the point where he is able to forgive and love others. **This is more than a transformation, this is a recreation!** Ezekiel 11:19 is God’s promise of the day when all believers would have the Holy Spirit, “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.” That day has come, and this is great news for leaders hoping to see positive change in the workplace.

We think popular change-leadership author John Kotter is missing a key element in his “Eight Steps of Change” model highlighted in his book, *The Heart of Change*. What did he miss? As leaders, let us make sure that we are *praying for our staff*, asking God to develop our staff into the

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men and women that He wants them to be. Don’t you think He cares about issues of laziness, gossip, deceit, selfishness, and pride just as much, if not more, than you do?

I’m not saying that we should limit ourselves to praying though. There are other dimensions of spiritual leadership we should consider as well. We need to challenge our staff to grow and take the next steps in their development. We

need to model and reinforce how to grow spiritually. We need to remind our staff of what is exemplary and persuade them of the importance of the work. We need to confront sin. But all the while we must be relying on God to make these things fruitful in their lives.

As leaders, we also need to make sure we are being continually sanctified – that is changed from the inside out by the power of the gospel as it is applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. We need to make sure that in our busy schedules we take time to study God’s word and pray, nurturing a real relationship with our Lord. As the Puritans did, we need to be vigilant to “mortify” sin, examining our own lives and systematically addressing the areas of weakness in our spiritual walk. In our western culture we fail to realize the immense impact we have on others. We tend to think that our sins are only our own concern, but those little moments of impatience, those convenient partial truths, those decisions based on partiality, these are all, unfortunately, witnesses to the world and examples for your staff.

Although I take great comfort in knowing that our God never changes and is thus someone I can always count on, I am just as delighted to know that I’m not going to remain just as I am. What

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a great promise that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). And furthermore, the Christians around us are also being made more and more in Christ’s image. Let us be patient with one another along the way, and “let us spur one another on towards love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

For most Christian organizations, it’s easy to see how the work being done is for God’s glory, but let us not forget that God is ultimately concerned with our souls, not outward deeds. As a leader, you have a special role in helping your staff grow and develop just as they carry out your organization’s mission statement. Don’t underestimate the value of this work or the joy that comes from it.

We believe it is this spiritual dimension that is the basis for our vision that Christian organizations should set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world. That as individuals and thus collectively as organizations we are being made more and more in Christ’s image. So leaders, let’s engage with our God in the spiritual discipline of praying. Yes, praying for the effectiveness of our organization’s respective missions, but also the ongoing transformation of our staff.