

Mindfulness: The Leader's Path During Times of Change

We are experiencing the next Renaissance - a period where the rate, pace and depth of change are greater than that ever experienced before. Our systems (organizational, societal, financial, etc.) are teetering on the edge of chaos and control. Our old structures, systems, and processes are no longer adequate and what's next has yet to be defined.

During the last Renaissance we were awakened to the scientific world. Newton and others taught us to see the world anew – through rational eyeglasses. The world was not unpredictable, but operated according to the neat laws of science, mathematics and physics. Our capacity to understand our natural world exploded. Rational problem solving became our MO.

Many of us and our organizations are still functioning within that fourteenth century worldview. We believe we can predict and control the future (the bedrock of our strategic planning). We believe that rational problem solving is the key to our dilemmas (the focus of most work groups). We believe that our logic is best and others simply need to see it our way (the focus of most of our conversations).

Western rationalism is cracking. We cannot create, control, or predict change. Change simply is. It's here and it's affecting us (which is quite different from the belief that the world is somewhat static and we can make change happen)

So what does all this mean? That we must become mindful of an ever changing future. Mindful leaders are accepting, curious, and humble and have

a remarkable capacity to connect with others to facilitate change. Mindful leaders uncover and light the path forward as the old ways give way.

To become mindful leaders and tap into that power we must:

1. Let go of our belief in ourselves and our technical genius in order to move from being technical wizards to mindful partners. Build an awareness of, and become more open to, subtlety and nuance. The next time you are in a meeting where different opinions are being expressed, stop and listen rather than injecting another point of view. Listen for the subtlety and nuance between both different and similar points of view. Then ask questions-not to move others toward your point of view- but to clarify and truly understand differences. Consequently, you'll have a better understanding of all of the issues before moving into problem solving mode.
2. Be open to the concept of continuous change and an unknown future. What we plan today may not work tomorrow. To succeed in an unknown future, we must:
 - a. Acknowledge mistakes when things are not as we thought or what we predicted them to be.
 - b. Be flexible enough to make the changes necessary in order to make a difference (rather than forcing action on a now-flawed plan).
 - c. Master the "do-over" and ensure that everyone learns from the new realities that are emerging and causing plans to shift.
3. Become skilled at leading through inquiry rather than unconscious reliance on command mode. By fine tuning our curiosity, we give it reign over quick fixes.

4. Become more open and accepting of the world (and others) as they are rather than trying to reshape the world in our own image. Be mindfully self aware. The leader who knows his or her own strengths, limitations, biases and perceptions is able to direct energy and attention to where it will make the greatest difference.

Evolution doesn't knock on our door to ask permission. Neither does revolution. Mindful leaders are alert to the subtle shifts and cues to changes in their world. They keep more than an open door. They keep their minds and their hearts open to the opportunities inherent in change.

About the author: Rosaria (Ria) Hawkins, PhD, is president of Take Charge consultants and has studied mindful leaders and their approach to change. Take Charge provides leadership consulting, coaching, and development services that build mindful leaders who are able to create and sustain rich relationships, reach peak performance and achieve extraordinary results.