



“Change is in the Air – Now, Let’s Make it Last”

For many Jews around the world, the past week has been intense. *Rosh Hashana* ushered in a period of self-evaluation and, hopefully, triggered an impulse to improve. In just a day or two, *Yom Kippur*, with its solemn intensity, will set the stage for the coming year – will we be better, will we avoid mistakes, will we not settle for the status quo and aim higher? ‘Tis the season for change, and most of us would prefer it be lasting.

This process of self-assessment and thinking about the future is no less true for institutions and organizations – will they achieve their goals in the coming year? Will they aim to be more efficient or effective? Will they, guided by their mission, better serve their constituents? Whether you’re a professional, a lay leader, or a highly invested funder of a Jewish institution, this time of year you’re also thinking about change.

Like individuals, institutions want their improvements to stick. Leaders and investors want to reduce the likelihood of backsliding and ensure that the changes are permanent. In this season of planning lasting change, here are a few ways to promote and structure sustainable institutional change.

First, **change is complex**. Another similarity between people and organizations is that they are both complex: Every individual goes through his or her own personal process during a transition. This personal transition process usually involves three phases:

Letting Go: Every transition begins with an ending or a loss. When things change, people leave behind the way things were in the previous situation. This is hard for people to do.

Exploration: Also called the neutral zone, this is a potentially confusing and frustrating time between the old way and the new.

Acceptance: Acceptance can only happen after people have let go of the past and have spent some time exploring the future. In this phase, people let go of the past and start to identify with their new destination.

Leaders—who are personally impacted by the change—experience this same change process. Often leaders are uncomfortable exposing their own vulnerabilities regarding change with their people. *However, nothing is more powerful in leading change than to see a leader personally committed to changing his/her own behaviors and sharing personal change experiences.*

Second, **try to anticipate obstacles or potential headwinds**. When structuring the change process, make sure to identify what other forces may be contributing to the status quo, or what might derail or obstruct change. Think how to avoid or work around those pitfalls, find ways to reduce their influence, or, if possible, recruit them into the change process.

Lastly, **build “scaffolds” for successful completion**. In all settings, it is individuals who implement change, but as a rule, people are very busy. Even well-intentioned people committed to change can be easily distracted or forced to attend to other, more urgent, assignments. Build into the program regular and consistent structures – weekly, biweekly or monthly check-ins, deadlines for updates, presentations to colleagues – anything that will create regular accountability and move participants along.

It would be wonderful if intensive, inspiring once-a-year experiences could produce lasting change. Outstanding Yom Kippurs would turn us around, and astonishing one-day workshops would move institutions forward by leaps and bounds. However, human beings, no matter how well-meaning and motivated, typically deal with what's most urgent and then move on to the next pressing matter, leaving change uneven, incomplete, and prone to lapses and backsliding. The steps above are designed to help change stick around – something we all aim for.

One final thing: with change so complex, it's also often slow, really slow. Quick solutions almost never work, and even backfire. Make sure you give the change process enough time to take root, to make adjustments, and to assess. That means being patient – with colleagues, with institutions, and above all, with ourselves.

May we all be blessed with health, happiness, and enduring change in 5779.

Sources:

<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/change-is-in-the-air-now-lets-make-it-last>

<https://www.rootinc.com/blog/successful-change-management-9-tips/>