

Planning Toward Change

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I drive a 1989 vintage 4x4 truck that perfectly serves my needs when the mountains call my name on a sunny Sabbath afternoon. But there is a great difference between sitting in a sun drenched mountain valley on the tail gate eating sandwiches and being caught on the side of the freeway watching the morning rush hour traffic sail past as I wait the usual 35 minutes for the CAA service truck to arrive.



I am not deserving of much sympathy if the Monday morning breakdown is due to my failure to keep up with routine maintenance. I may be tempted to congratulate myself for promptly repairing my 4x4 in response to this morning's failure and installing the best grade of parts, but if I am only reacting to crisis I am failing to look after my truck. A superior approach is to follow a plan of regular servicing and maintenance which replaces components before failure.

As teachers we face similar challenges in meeting change and developing appropriate responses. Change is not an optional item in the array of things teachers and administrators are expected to deal with. Conventional wisdom actually “gets it right” when it declares that there is nothing as consistent as change. To succeed, rather than just to survive, we must adopt an approach that handles both the moment and the future. Creating an environment that leads toward positive change demands that we think, plan, and act in specific ways that favor and promote our specific goals.

The changes that impose themselves upon us approach from three general directions; social/political, economic, and technological. Social and political change affects us when established contexts of social values, norms and expectations are replaced with new ones that are not addressed by our established teaching, practice, or curriculum content. Examples can be found in the way society is redefining “family” or the changing of attitude toward parochial education that sometimes occurs when there is governmental change at the provincial level. Economic change affects education when inflation and recession cycles affect employment patterns or the percentages of church budget support. These changes can very quickly affect enrollment figures and staffing numbers. The impact of technological change is directly related to the volume and pace of research into the teaching and leadership methods to say nothing of the unrelenting stream of technological innovations that are yearly being added to education. The professional journals provide us with fresh insights into “best practices” while book publishers and software/hardware manufacturers offer new integrations of machine, software, and print technologies. In addition new endeavors such as “distributed learning” illustrate the growing trend toward changes that are driven simultaneously by several streams of change.

How can we increase the degree of effectiveness with which we prepare for and successfully anticipate the changes before they arrive? What can be done to increase the likelihood that we will recognize and appropriately respond to the inevitability of change whatever its origin? Educators are consistently more proactive in adapting to change when they need to cultivate professional relationships with peers and more formal mentoring relationships, take advantage of academic professional development, and access professional growth materials through memberships in professional organizations and their journals. Educators thrive when they regularly review current discussions relating to research based educational theory and practice. Finally Christian educators who pursue and cultivate personal emotional and spiritual health are best able to grow personally and professionally and meet the forces of change.

Teachers and administrators are professional change agents whose jobs are focused on producing change in others and holding personal professional change as a core value. The ability to prosper in an environment of change, is achieved by adopting a proactive approach for what is coming, through comprehensive planning, network building, and initiating adaptive systems before the timing and agenda dictates necessity.