

7 Change-Killers in Every Church

Almost every leader I've ever met wants to change something.

If I asked you right now what you'd love to change in your church or organization, you'd probably be able to offer an answer within seconds.

Some of you want to change everything. If you don't want to change anything, you're probably not a leader.

The truth about change is that it's more mysterious than it needs to be.

Many people aren't sure how the dynamics of change work, and have seen so many leaders get skewered trying to lead change that they're afraid to try.

Other leaders—unaware of the dynamics of change—storm change so aggressively that they look over their shoulder to discover than nobody's following.

You can learn how to lead change well.

Leading change requires a skill set. And the good news is that skill set can be learned.

A question all of us face when leading change: What do I actually say when I'm leading change?

Say the right thing...and change can happen easily.

Say the wrong thing...and plans can unravel in front of you.

7 Things NOT To Say When You're Leading Change

Some language is simply more helpful in leading change than other language.

So...let's take it from a reverse angle today. If you want to ruin the chance of change happening in your church, just say these 7 things.

1." These Changes Are Great. I Can't Understand Why You Don't Like Them." (Lack Of Empathy)

Leaders who navigate change successfully learn the skill of empathy.

Not everyone is going to cheer wildly when you introduce change. Be prepared for that.

If you want to turn an enemy into a friend, empathize with them. Try saying something like: I *can*

understand you don't like the changes...I would be upset if I were you too.

If you want to learn more about developing the skill of empathy, [this post](#) might help you.

2. “God Told Me This Is What We Should Do.” (Speaking For God)

Please, please, please don't pull the God card when you're navigating change.

I mean by all means invoke God's name when you're preaching about Jesus rising from the dead or other core essentials of the Christian faith.

But don't tell your congregation that God told you to buy your next building or change the music or stop wearing a suit or change the carpet or build a new wing or whatever else you're proposing.

Even if you believe God told you to do something, suggest it as a plan...or a wise course to follow...or the best options we see right now.

Rather than being less credible, you will become more believable and more trustworthy.

Too many leaders use God as a trump card for the plans they've designed.

I pray about the plans we make, seek wise counsel and honestly believe they are the best thing for our church. But these days I never pull the God card out.

Why? Because if the plan fails, it just makes people suspicious or cynical. I don't want to bring God's name into disrepute. If I stick to the Gospel, I won't.

So what should you say?

How about this? Our team has looked at this and prayerfully considered the options. We believe this is the best move we can make at this time for these reasons....

Ironically, you won't lose credibility. You'll gain it.

3. “We've Got This All Figured Out. Trust Me.” (Know It All)

Don't try to be the guy who 'knows it all'. You don't.

You haven't got this all figured out—you have a strategy. That's it.

So be honest. Why not say something like: *No, we're not 100% sure this is going to work. But what we were doing was not working. So we're going to try this.*

Better, isn't it?

4. What Happened In The Past Is Completely Irrelevant...Focus On The Future. (Dismissing The Past)

I've been tempted to dismiss the past. Who hasn't?

Some of that is the arrogance of the leader. History did not start with your arrival.

Brian White, who works at Disney, has a great philosophy about handling the heritage at Disney (after all, Disney has almost 100 years of history, and Frozen is a long way from Steamboat Willie.) Disney's approach?

Honor the past without living in it.

Love that. Acknowledge that what happened in the past mattered and is important, and point the way to the future.

Maybe say something like: *We've had some great moments and seasons in the past, and we want to ensure we have many more in the future. That's what I'm hoping this change will accomplish.*

5. "Everyone Needs To Get On Board Right Now." (Impatience)

People will take differing amounts of time to get on board. Be okay with that.

You'll have a handful of highly enthusiastic early adopters. Run with them.

Let others come on board over time.

Say something like: *I realize this is going to stretch all of us, and I appreciate those of you who are willing to give this a chance even though you're not sure. We so value that!*

6. "I Know People Are Leaving...Who Cares?" (Indifference)

When you make changes, it's almost guaranteed that some people will leave.

But don't gloat or pretend it doesn't matter.

Because leaving hurts you, you'll be tempted to pretend you don't feel it or to vilify your opponents.

People who disagree with you are not bad people. They just disagree with you.

Are there times when people should leave your church? Yes. In fact, [here](#) are 7 instances when you should invite people to leave your church.

But in the moment—when people are leaving—this is a moment for empathy. Express concern both for people who are concerned about people who are leaving and express regret.

But then say maybe say something like:

Yes, it is sad. But I think what need to remember is that they will have another church to go to. I'm excited about creating space for people who haven't yet been to church...and I'm excited that you want to create space for them here too.

7. “This Plan Is Bullet-Proof.” (Hubris)

No matter how well thought-through your plan is, it's not bullet proof.

It might fail. Really, it might.

So why not just be honest?

Instead, say something like: *I agree. We don't know for sure if this plan is going to work. But it's helped a lot of other churches (or...if no one's tried it that you know of, say 'nobody's really tried this before...'), and we believe it's our next best step. So we're going to try it. And after we've given it our best, we'll make sure to evaluate it. Thanks for the freedom to try new things.*

What Do You Think?

Those are some lessons from the trenches in leading change. If you are interested in more, you can read about the five essential strategies every leader needs when handling opposition to change [here](#).

What have you said or heard people say when leading change that you think is a mistake?

[Talk with an Auxano Navigator for help in steering your church through change.](#)

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