

CHMN760 Advanced Leadership
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz
*Leading Change: An Action Plan from the World's
Foremost Expert on Business Leadership*
Author: John P. Kotter

I have read John P. Kotter's book outlining the eight-stage process of creating major change. His insights obviously come from experience and expertise in the field of business. When an author of such stature doesn't need to use footnotes, it's quite evident that the research has been accomplished from a wealth of experience in consulting with businesses and his professorship at Harvard.

In reflecting upon the eight-stage process of creating major change, I must admit that this subject has caused me some consternation. Most likely, I am not as subject to change as I thought. My German heritage naturally bends in the direction of stability. In some ways the pastorate tends toward the status quo with a ceiling salary after so many years and minimal incentives to excel. The legacy of the past in the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not necessarily beg for change, except in the case of fund-raising for a building project or an increase in membership during an evangelistic series of meetings. Then, following these projects or meetings, the tempo moves back to "normal."

Change has been hard for my family and my personality. I have a built-in family history for longevity and consistency. My father worked in the barber shop for approximately thirty seven years on his feet. We have been proud of his stability and continuity. We knew we could depend upon dad and his unchanging constancy. Mom worked for many years as a child caregiver and then for twenty six years in a local high school cafeteria as a cook. My sister and I had no fear of the future; because we knew that mom and dad were there and "rocks" of stability for our family. Now, mom and dad are facing health

challenges in their future and I must admit it's difficult to see them limited in mobility and health—we've not seen that before!

In my personal career since starting the pastoral ministry, I've been serving the Lord and the church since 1974. Except for those early, short-stay, pastoral assignments, I've served six years in Kansas City, KS, seven years in Grants Pass, OR, four years in Napa, CA, and now ten years in Greeneville, TN. I have been pleased to stay at churches in longer tenures. So, this book on change has taken a swipe at stability and constancy in my pastoral career and family legacy.

Obviously, I can see that our society has moved from the industrial age to the information age and beyond. The twenty first century has brought constant change to our post-modern culture. That has been difficult for me to swallow and absorb as pastor and husband. In fact, my move to Greeneville, TN, from Napa, CA, was motivated not only for family reasons of being closer to my wife's mom, but due to the fact that Greeneville still operates on a slower pace and with less post-modern influence than the larger cities like Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta.

In further reflection some of the changes proposed and subtly induced by society and even the church have left me cold. I still appreciate the fact that our church studies a Sabbath School lesson from the same basic journal all over the world. It keeps us on the same page, studying the same topics. Even when we travel, there is comfort in knowing you'll be studying the same scripture subjects when you arrive at Sabbath School in a distant city. I believe this keeps us together as a world church.

The same idea holds true with world missions and tithe procedure for our church structure with several levels of organization. Our church finds unity in its structure and

mission as we direct the tithe to a central organization for purposes of spreading the gospel to the whole world. On the other hand it can be argued that we are not winning the world for Christ or leading folks to accept the three angels' messages and need to do things different and make changes to ratchet up progress and success. Personally, I'm not sure that organizational, resources, or vision/mission statement changes will accomplish the finishing of the work so Jesus can come. When I reflect upon changes that occurred in salvation history with God's people, usually it was God intervening with His sovereignty to accomplish His purposes. True, God's people stepped forward often in revival and reformation—cooperating in His purposes. But just observe the messes that Adam and Eve and Cain made. Only God's intervention at the flood changed the decay of the antediluvian world. True, God's leader, Noah, stepped forward. It was God's intervention in Egypt with the ten plagues that brought deliverance to the children of Israel. True, Moses, God's leader, with his brother, Aaron, stepped forward. In the Babylonian captivity, Daniel and his friends stepped forward in bold behavior to honor the God of heaven. Again, it was due to God's intervention and the intercessory prayer of Daniel that the children of Israel were finally allowed to return to their homeland under Cyrus' initiative. Yes, there are measures we can take in cooperation with God to implement needed changes, but I wonder if our changes are not minuscule compared to God's changes. Waiting on his timing seems to be scripturally sanctioned.

Having said all this, I'd like to speak more specifically to the value of successful changes as proposed by Kotter for the long term as those changes relate to the church in my case. A helpful insight Kotter offered was the difference in thinking by leaders versus managers (see page 87). And furthermore, both leaders and managers are needed to

accomplish the long term objectives. However, leaders need to see the long-term perspective while managers continue to care for the short-term details and day-to-day functions of an organization (see page 144). But, Kotter showed how some manager-employees can be grown into leaders with vision. I've begun to realize that in my pastoral responsibility as church leader, I'm charged with carrying and repeating the vision in a variety of forms to the church and through the lay leaders. I realize that it's my significant responsibility to model this visioning process. At the beginning of this calendar year, I used a power point presentation in the church board to remind our lay leaders of our previously established vision and mission. That's a start, but much more communication is needed in light of Kotter's call for multiple reviews of vision and mission in a number of venues. I must find ways to train and engrain vision in lay leadership and the church membership.

Another leadership trend that Kotter forecasted for the future is more team leadership than a CEO-type individual leading an organization (see p.164). Our church operates in a team approach when preparing church board and finance committee agendas. The pastor, assistant/youth pastor, and head elder meet together to develop agendas, discuss flashpoints of conflict, and actually meet with departments working through future planning and/or issues of challenge. Our elders have met together in spiritual fellowship and over meals recently. This year our elders are praying together with members after worship services, praying their way through our church directory for every member, and becoming more involved in visitation. Much of this increased spiritual ministry by elders has been due to the leadership of a passionate-for-God, young head elder. This spiritual approach has led to more meaning for our elders' board. We've also met off-site at a

nearby family retreat center for a Sabbath afternoon session of planning. These kinds of lay-inspired sessions have encouraged me in the team approach to leadership.

On the other hand, we still have a number of committees that plan and manage the volunteer ministries of their departments. I'm challenged by Kotter to make meetings meaningful and team-based. I'm further challenged to avoid the trap of too many committee meetings (see page 141). Here's where true empowerment needs to happen in our church at Greeneville. We're in the process of refurbishing our church and need regular meetings with the church renovation committee to check up on progress. However, we're now about to empower the clerk of the works to proceed without a lot of committee meetings. Once we've communicated our desires to the clerk of the works, we will not have to meet as often. The chair of the committee, our hospital president, has done an admirable job of leadership thus far in empowering volunteer leadership. However, it has been difficult to get going in the process of refurbishing our church. What I see now is how that God has put together a team that is a guiding coalition of the church leadership in this process. I really like the concept of a guiding coalition—getting all power parties on board before moving toward the transformation process (see page 51 and the chapter on the guiding coalition).

And, we're now having short-term wins along the way with a variety of folks helping in small projects that have been completed (especially those gifted in certain areas of building and construction). This is starting to allow the long-term success toward major items like parking lot, carpet, and A/V renovation projects to seem doable (see page 117 on the chapter of generating short-term wins).

Probably, the chapter that has caused me most angst in this book is the one on anchoring new approaches in the culture (page 165). And that's not because I disagree with the author necessarily. I agree that it is not wise on the front end to be changing culture in the eight-stage process of creating major change. It seems that the process would be more accepting of buy-in to change at the end.

I've seen so many efforts to change worship services on the front end of a major worship service transformation. And yet I watch as performers do most of the participation in contemporary worship services. In observing these new-style worship services, I notice that many of the attendees are not participating in singing or other interactive opportunities. It seems to me that the early stages of the major change process have been overlooked—like trust building, vision development, and the guiding coalition. I've noticed in the early history of contemporary worship services how a small group tried to implement worship changes with little success. Kotter makes it clear why—there was no broad support of the process and trust was missing. Cultural change can also be manipulated and in so many circles I have watched as both conferences and local churches have maneuvered and manipulated a new trend without broad-based support. There was a strong feeling of coercion. I experienced this in my ministry on the West coast in two conferences.

In closing, I'd like to compliment Kotter on the profile of a lifelong learner and where the 21st century will take leadership. He suggests these qualities of a lifelong learner: risk-taker, humble, solicitor of opinions, listener, and openness to new ideas (see page 183). I desire to be committed to lifelong learning, but have a history of family practices, genetics, career longevity, and church structure which could be obstacles to progress.

And beside, I choose not to change just for change sake. Ultimately, there will be pulse of harmony among the fellowship of God's people in heaven; so, I'm not sure that constant change is the goal of heaven. Maybe there is a balance between change and stability?