

MASTER CHANGE



OR CHANGE WILL MASTER YOU

Follow these steps to translate your good ideas into positive change.

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The only alternative to embracing and guiding change is to let external forces change you. The problem is that deciding to change is only the first step. Even more difficult is translating your ideas into action.

No matter how committed you are to a proposed change, the likelihood is that it won't happen. Why? There are three reasons:

- Controlled change takes time, always in short supply.
- A change agenda has no organizational home to protect it and keep it alive.
- People automatically resist change. Change has no natural constituency, while allegiance to the familiar is strong. Change takes people into unknown terrain, raising all kinds of fears.

If your good ideas are to become reality, you must counteract those three barriers. To do so, follow these key steps:

1 Create a Special Program

Imagine that you and other key executives and board members have agreed to make some large-scale changes. Perhaps you have completed a visioning process or held a strategic planning retreat, as we described in earlier issues (see "Selected References").

In these earlier articles, we reported changes planned by several nonprofits. These changes included improving the organization's image in the community, trying new fundraising ideas, restructuring board committees, and strengthening the organization's planning process.

In those articles, we stressed the importance of follow-up to be sure that the planned changes were made. Merely tossing a new idea into the maelstrom of daily events is the best way to make sure nothing happens. It will inevitably be sucked under, disappearing from sight and eventually from mind.

Thus, the first step in assuring change is to establish a special "change management program." This program will provide the organizational home needed to protect and nurture change. It will focus people's efforts and sustain their commitment. It will create explicit roles, accountabilities, and processes to assure that change happens.

Be sure everyone recognizes this change program as a vital part of the organization. There can be no implication that a few ambitious change champions have

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taken it upon themselves to run with the ball. Confer legitimacy on your change program by formally inaugurating it. See "Tips to Facilitate Your Change Program" on page 38 for ways to legitimize your special program.

2 Appoint a Coordinator

Ask a member of your executive staff to serve as coordinator for the change program. The coordinator will be the hands-on executive responsible for the program's day-to-day operation. The coordinator will also be responsible for preparing an action plan for change. This plan should list detailed steps to implement each change. For an example, see "Sample Action Plan for Change" on page 39.

The coordinator's responsibilities are so demanding and the stakes so high that only an executive-level staff person should be assigned this role. The coordinator should be flexible, skilled in planning, and strongly committed to the planned changes.

3 Gain Board and Staff Support

Your change program cannot succeed without the support of all board and staff members. It is crucial to include



Planned change creates a dynamic organization, as Lutheran Homes of Michigan has discovered. It has completely "reinvented" its board structure.

them early in the change process and make sure they understand the reasons for and benefits of proposed changes.

Both board and staff should help plan any organizational change. But including them in the planning is not enough. You must sustain and strengthen their commitment as the weeks pass. Be sure they think of the change as belonging to them. Otherwise, vital energy will be lost.

4 **Develop a Committee to Oversee the Program**

Many organizations that have successfully implemented change have found that creating a steering committee to direct the change program works well. This committee is usually chaired by a senior board member. It consists of three to five board members, the chief executive officer, and the board chair. Its purpose is to oversee the action plan created by the program coordinator.

The steering committee meets regularly and reports progress to the full board. It is also responsible for allocating resources to carry out the action plan. See "Tips to Facilitate Your Change Program" on the right for other things the steering committee can do to make sure the change program works smoothly.

5 **Use a Team Approach**

You, as chief executive, must work closely with your coordinator and steering committee. You and they, working together, will make sure your action plan is followed. Thus, you must all be ardent champions of change.



One of the principles Lutheran Homes follows: Keep the pace of change realistic.

Tips to Facilitate Your Change Program

- Give your program a name, such as "Strategic Organizational Development Program."
- Have the board pass a resolution authorizing the program to carry out the proposed changes.
- Appoint a coordinator and steering committee to be responsible for devising and executing an action plan for change.
- Create a central headquarters for the change program, perhaps by appropriating one of the organization's conference rooms. On the wall, display a blown-up version of the action plan. The steering committee can hold its meetings here.
 - Provide board and staff with three-ring binders in which to store information related to the change program.
 - Foster identity of the change program by printing special program letterhead and creating a simple program logo.
 - Send staff and board members regular bulletins with updates on program progress.
- Remember that doability is all-important in managing change. You must pace change so that it doesn't place undue strain on the organization or jeopardize its ongoing programs and services.

Lutheran Homes uses a team approach to managing change. Its mission is to be alert to the ever-changing needs of aging people and their families.



As the chief executive, you must be in the forefront of this team effort. In word and action, you must be the officer in charge of change.

This is no small task. You will need to devote significant time and attention to the change program. You'll need to provide clear direction to staff in carrying out the plan.

If you signal a grudging acceptance of change, you will erode commitment and slow progress. But if you are a visible, passionate advocate, you will assure that change really does happen. ■

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

Sample Action Plan for Change

Let's assume you have decided to establish a new board committee. This committee will replace an existing program committee, which is run by volunteers.

While this change may seem straightforward, you must address some complex steps in your action plan. These include the following:

- Tell staff and board members about the change, and be sure they understand and accept it. Reassure volunteers who may be displaced by the new committee that they will have new, important roles.
- Draft a by-laws revision sanctioning the new committee. Decide how to secure adoption of this revision. (Is a vote of the membership required? If so, when should this vote take place? How should members be briefed on the proposed revision?)
- Fashion a transition plan for phasing out the old committee and phasing in the new one. This plan should ensure that critical work is not derailed during the transition.
- Develop a detailed charge for the new committee.
- Appoint a chair and members for the new committee.
- Prepare and execute an orientation program for members of the new committee.
- Organize staff teams to support the committee, and make sure they are prepared to play their support roles.
- Plan the critical first meetings of the new committee.