

Recognizing Signs of Change

To remain effective and thrive, organizations can't remain static. Their structure needs to change with new circumstances. Susan Gross believes there are seven predictable scenarios that signal times to reassess and adapt — the passages she brings to light in *Seven Turning Points: Leading through Pivotal Transitions in Organizational Life* (published by Fieldstone Alliance, available for a discounted price at NonprofitWorld.org/discounts/books).

Often the solutions of one lifecycle stage become problems of the next. Those problems aren't separate and unrelated, to be addressed one at a time. They're interdependent and highlight the need for systemic change. Recognizing that many problems are common characteristics of growing pains allays blaming, and helps organizations adapt.

Most people get involved in nonprofits to be agents of social change, not organizational managers or theorists. Still, many of us have had to learn to build, manage, and sustain effective organizations. This book helps us do so by recognizing organizational problems caused by change — and the best ways to meet these challenges.

— reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Which Pivotal Point Is Next for Your Organization?

Use these questions to pinpoint times when you must reassess the way you operate and make fundamental changes — or risk decline:

Do you need to operate in a more organized way, moving from a loose, family style to more structured policies?

Is it time to make management and organizational development a higher priority? Have your organization's management needs outstripped the executive director's skill?

Does the board need to relinquish some control to a strong executive director?

Is it time to stop diffusing your resources and focus your staff and budget on clearly delineated areas?

Should you decentralize power and let a whole new team of staff leaders emerge?

Do you need to recapture your core — the overarching goals toward which all your work will aim — and consolidate your operations and programs accordingly?

Is it time to create a succession plan to avoid a crisis if your executive director leaves? 

Questions to Help You Articulate Your Vision

Imagine your organization somewhere out on the time horizon. From “out there,” answer these questions in the present tense. Invent answers that you find thrilling, inspiring, motivating — answers that you (and the people around you) are passionate about. From your answers to these questions, you will have your vision.

1. **What important problems** do you solve?
2. **What unique market position** do you control?
3. **What is your geographic coverage?** Are you local? National? International? Intergalactic?
4. **What value does your organization create** in the world? Is that value provided to: consumers, governments, kids, small businesses, giant corporations, humanity?
5. **What kind of people** work for your organization?
6. **What role** do you play daily?
7. **What does the press say** about your organization?
8. **What's special** about working for your organization?
9. **How is your organization growing?** New products and services? Spin-off businesses? Entrepreneurial activities?
10. **How would you describe** your organizational culture?
11. **Who are your customers?** What do they say about your organization?
12. **What is your organization** known for?
13. **How do you redefine the industry** you're in?
14. **From out in the future,** what's the future of your organization?

—By Paul Lemberg, paulleberg.com

Do You Use Your Evaluation Findings to Full Advantage?

Don't underestimate the power of what you learn through evaluation. Your evaluation findings can motivate staff, engage others with your mission, demonstrate accountability, establish a sense of confidence in your organization's work, involve the media, and improve effectiveness.

Information Gold Mine: Innovative Uses of Evaluation provides examples of how real nonprofit organizations used evaluation findings for these purposes and more. When incorporating evaluation results becomes routine, it can lead to creative, unexpected results throughout the organization, as this inspiring book makes clear. Published by Fieldstone Alliance, it's available for a discount at NonprofitWorld.org/discounts/books.

— reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

What Makes You the Way You Are?

A renaissance is under way in the study of personality, according to Daniel Nettle in *Personality* (Oxford University Press, oup.com). A new type of personality test combines the frustrating profusion of unrelated constructs of the past into one coherent, comprehensive framework called the five-factor model or the big five. It's based on the idea that there are five major dimensions along which everyone's personality falls. Here are the five factors that make you who you are:

- **Extraversion.** High scorers are outgoing and enthusiastic. Low scorers tend to be quiet and reserved.
- **Neuroticism.** High scorers are prone to stress and worry. Low scorers are emotionally stable.
- **Conscientiousness.** High scorers are organized and self-directed. Low scorers tend to be spontaneous and careless.
- **Agreeableness.** High scorers are trusting and empathetic. Low scorers are uncooperative and hostile.
- **Openness.** High scorers are creative, imaginative, and eccentric. Low scorers are practical and conventional.

If you and your employees take the test, you'll know how to tap into each person's greatest strengths. Understanding your personality can help you make the most of what you have and temper traits that don't serve you well.

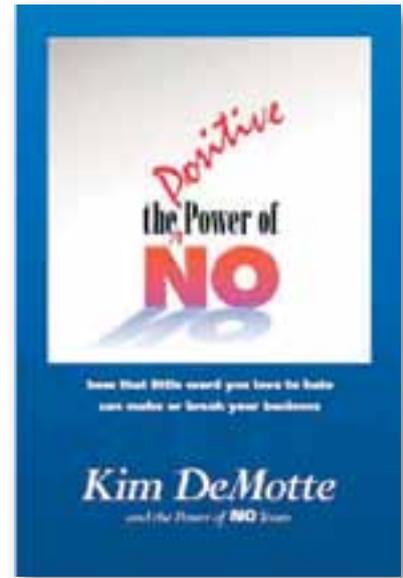
As Nettle explains, you don't have to change yourself, but you can change your self's outlet once you have complete self-knowledge. You can encourage yourself to go "against the spin," thus adjusting your behavior, making wiser choices, and reframing the way you see yourself and the world. 

Four Workplace Commandments

Do you follow these four essential tips for organizational success?

- **Set goals, and monitor them constantly.** Every month, let employees know what next month's goals are.
- **Don't micromanage.** Letting people make their own decisions gives them a sense of ownership in the workplace.
- **Make sure employees learn from their mistakes.** Ask them to write up reviews of their mistakes, describing what they've learned and what they'll do differently next time.
- **Remember, culture is everything.** If you want your organization to stay innovative, you need to create a culture to match. Reward what you want to see more of. 

— adapted from Five Point Capital, fivepointcapital.com



The Power of No

The word “no” is a powerful tool to help you reach your goals and take control of any situation.

Why? Your mission, vision, and plan depend on what you say “no” to. Your “no” defines your “yes” — the core of your work and your focus.

When? Say “no” whenever you reach a predetermined limit. That means you must decide beforehand what you'll decline to do. You must have a clear-cut purpose that you won't breach. Preparing proposals for grants that aren't a true fit, for example, is a waste of resources.

Where? The best place to say “no” is in the other person's space. Waiting for the rejected party to come to you is fraught with miscommunication potential (“you didn't say no, so I assumed yes”). Go out of your way to deliver the news so both of you can move on.

How? Always say “no” with compassion and dignity, in the spirit of “this didn't work out, and I wanted you to know as soon as possible so we both can explore other possibilities.”

Be sure everyone in the organization understands the clear limits beyond which “no” is the answer. When everyone knows what the mission is and what it's not, your organization has defined itself. That's the essence of strategy — setting limits on what you're trying to accomplish.

When you're clear about what you don't want, you have a profound advantage. 

— adapted from *The Positive Power of No* (powerofno.com)

How to Get Buy-in for Your Good Ideas

We've all had the experience of coming up with a brilliant idea that suffers a slow death because we can't gain widespread acceptance for it. *Buy-in* by John P. Kotter and Lorne A. Whitehead (Harvard Business Review Press, hbr.org) offers a powerful way to build support for a good idea.

Although it's a simple, effective approach, it's seldom used, perhaps because it's counterintuitive. Rather than keeping naysayers out of the room, it welcomes them into the discussion and virtually encourages them to shoot down your idea.

The key is to listen to detractors, show respect for their viewpoints, and respond with short, clear, common-sense comments. Then listen carefully to people's feedback, and incorporate their good suggestions into your idea.

Don't forget that it's impossible to overcommunicate your ideas, using different settings and modes of communication. And never underestimate the negative effect of just one good idea being derailed. It could be the difference between success and failure for your organization.

Some Good Answers

Here are common attacks you may encounter along with ways to respond to each:

Attack: We've been successful, so why change?

Response: True. But surely we've all seen that those who fail to adapt eventually become extinct.

Attack: You exaggerate the problem.

Response: To the good people who suffer because of this problem, it certainly doesn't look small.

Attack: We can't do it without new sources of money.

Response: Sure we can. Most important changes are achieved without new sources of money. When people truly buy into a proposal, they find the money. 

Boost Learning through Social Media

To stay on top of their game, successful organizations develop a learning culture. They encourage employees (including volunteers) to keep up on trends and new information. Creative learning organizations use social media not only for marketing purposes but also to supplement the learning environment, as Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner explain in *The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations through Social Media* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, bkconnection.com).

The first chapter looks at trends and uses of social media for learning purposes, while each subsequent chapter focuses on a particular social media tool (media sharing, twitter, virtual communities, wikis, and virtual simulators), showing how you can use each one to increase organizational capacity. You can use virtual simulators and communities, for example, for practice scenarios where participants can fail safely; virtual practice improves performance and decision-making capabilities in real situations. You can use twitter at conferences to talk about presentations while they're happening, ask questions of presenters immediately, or inform colleagues about the content of sessions they're unable to attend.

The book is intended for leaders at all levels who encourage continual learning in their organizations. It explores uses of social technology to retain, motivate, engage, and build staff capacity. It's an excellent guide to using the power of social media to broaden participation, generate meaningful conversation, boost learning, and maximize employee impact within your organization. 

— reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Questions to Ask before Your Next Conversation

If you want a conversation to be productive, put some thought into it beforehand. Here are questions to assure that everyone involved will gain as much as possible from the conversation:

- **What's the purpose?** What will people learn? Why does it matter?
- **Have you invited everyone** who cares about the outcome to be part of the conversation?
- **How can you make space** for the whole story — good, bad, or indifferent?
- **What expectations do you have?** Do others expect the same things from the conversation?
- **Is the conversational space welcoming** to the diverse people involved? 

— adapted from *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, bkconnection.com

