



Challenge the Process

Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced. – James Baldwin

1. Search for Opportunities

The work of leaders is **change**. All change requires leaders to actively seek ways to make things better and **personal-best leadership** experiences **involve** some sort of **challenge**.

- They are about radical departures from the past, about doing things that have never been done before, and about going to places not yet discovered.
- These experiences are challenging, rewarding, and exciting—humdrum situations just aren't associated with high-level performance.

Whether the impetus for change comes from outside challenges or from within yourself or your group, leaders **make things happen**—they **seize the initiative**. Leadership is synonymous with and connected to the process of innovation—changing the status quo.

- Actively seek innovative ideas from outside the boundaries of familiar experience.
- Seize initiative with enthusiasm, determination, and a desire to make something happen.
- Be energized by the challenges of a difficult experience.
- Be proactive—able to make something happen under conditions of extreme uncertainty and urgency. Proactive people tend to work harder at what they do and persist at achieving goals.
- Believe you can make something happen. It's ultimately about **attitude and action**.

Innovations can come from anywhere and you must actively look at and listen to what's going on around you for signs that there's something new on the horizon. It's by keeping the doors open to the passage of ideas and innovation that you become knowledgeable about what goes on around you.

- Higher-performing groups have significantly more communication with people outside their own groups. Unless external communication is actively encouraged, people interact with outsiders less and less frequently and new ideas are cut off.
- Promote internal communication as well as be open to outside ideas. Receive ideas from anyone and anywhere.
- Constantly survey the landscape of technology, politics, economics, demographics, art, religion, and society in search of new ideas.
- Establish relationships, connect with sources of information, and get out and walk around.

People who challenge the status quo believe they can do something about the situation they face and are more likely to act than those who do not. Provide opportunities for people to gain mastery on a task **one step at a time**. People's confidence increases when they have the knowledge and skills to do what needs to be done.

This is not say that you have to think that you must be responsible for initiating all the change. Innovation and improvement are everyone's responsibility, and the impetus for **change can come from many sources**.

2. Experiment and Take Risks

Success in challenging the process demands more than a constant search for ideas for changing the status quo. It requires a willingness to **take risks** and **experiment** with innovative ideas.

There are mistakes and false starts. That's part of the process of innovation.

- Learn by doing things they've never done before. No one does anything perfectly the first time.
- **Mistakes and failures** are **crucial** to success because they are **learning experiences**. What's critical is that leaders promote learning from these experiences.
- Don't look for someone to blame when the inevitable mistakes are made. Ask instead, "What can be learned from this experience?"
- Encourage incremental innovation and continual experimentation to help people learn and come up with new ideas.
- Encourage others to step into the unknown instead of playing it safe. Small, visible steps are more likely to win early victories and gain early supporters than are big-bang efforts.

To get people to want to change existing behaviors and attempt extraordinary performance, break down big problems into **small, doable steps**. Small wins help build commitment to a course of action by starting with actions that are tangible, doable, and controllable.

Small wins builds confidence and reinforces desire to feel successful. By trying lots of little things in the service of something much bigger, you continually generate lots of possibilities for **small wins**. And all those **possibilities** can add up to **big results**.

The inevitable failures of innovation can cause stress, but stress can energize people and even generate enthusiasm and enjoyment. The key is how people respond.

Leaders who **handle stress positively** are psychologically hardy. Instead of being debilitated by stress of a difficult experience, they view change as challenge and are energized by it. They have a strong sense of control, of being able to influence what is going on; a strong commitment, believing they can find something worthwhile in the situation; and a strong belief in the power of challenge.

- Transform stressful events into manageable or desirable situations.
- Help people cope with stressful situations by building a sense of control, by asking them to do challenging tasks that are within their skill level.
- Encourage others to **see change as opportunity**.
- Create an environment that breeds hardiness on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

Leaders are innovators; innovators are leaders. The focus of a leader's attention is less on the routine operations and much more on the untested and untried. What's new? What's next? What's better? The most innovative ideas are most often not your own and not even your organizations. They're elsewhere, and the best leaders look around them for the places in which breakthrough ideas are hiding. Exemplary leadership requires **outsight, not just insight**. That's where the future is.

Challenging the process is not about challenge for challenge's sake. It's not about shaking things up to keep people on their toes. It's about challenging for **meaning's sake**, living life on **purpose**.

The quest for change is an adventure. It tests your will and your skill. It's tough, but it's also stimulating. It brings forth talents that have been dormant. It introduces you to yourself. For you get the best from yourself and others, you must understand what gives meaning and purpose to work and what makes it intrinsically motivating.