

In Search of Harmony: Becoming Your Own Hero at Work

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Chapter 5

Moving toward the Middle

We do not grow by knowing all of the answers, but rather by living with the questions.

—Max DePree

**If we could read
The secret history of our enemies,
We should find in each man's life
Sorrow and suffering enough
To disarm all hostility.**

—Longfellow

Organizations *are* extremely complicated. The study of organizations combines diverse tools and concepts from psychology, sociology, political science, engineering, business management, economics, biology, history, and anthropology. Unfortunately, we are often seduced into believing



Myth #10: Somebody has the right answers.

No one has all the right answers. Believing in and searching for magical solutions breeds cynicism. Continual reorganization and planned change attack morale. A great many panaceas accumulated over the years insult the intelligence of their workers, such as slogans and exhortations about productivity, creativity, and “excellence.” Most workers know it’s a good thing to be efficient, creative, and successful. They know the idealized world often gets mistaken for the real world. They understand the targets defined as “success” are constantly moving, making it impossible to pin

down just about anything. We can assume, but that's about it. A verse in the Chinese *Tao-te Ching* and also in Sanskrit expresses this point well: "He who thinks he knows, doesn't know. He who knows that he doesn't know, knows. For in this context, to know is not to know. And not to know is to know." In other words,



More is understood about what doesn't work than what does. Chaos is normal.

There simply is no objective reality in the workplace. There are no checklists or formulae that will make it all better, despite numerous expert opinions to the contrary. "Reality" is unique to each of us, played out in new and different situations, often without transfer of insights from one event to another. Our world at work is vastly more complex and infinitely more unpredictable than we think. Ironically, the search for organizational *health* while focusing on organizational *sickness* sets into motion a lifetime journey of expectations that are never attainable—a lifetime journey of trying to scratch an imaginary itch that cannot be reached.

What if we assumed that organizations are "*healthy*" including the "*sickness*" that we're always trying to fix? What if we assumed that the turbulence that comes from the differences encountered at work is essential to our individual growth and, in turn, essential to the growth and health of the organization?

Disorder can be the source of new order. In the ground breaking book *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley describes the revolutionary discoveries in quantum physics, chaos theory, and evolutionary biology that are changing how we view the universe and in turn the workplace. She describes the work in chemistry by Ilya Prigogine, demonstrating the capacity of chemical systems (dissipative structures) to regenerate higher levels of order in response to environmental demands. Wheatley explains:

Dissipative structures demonstrate that *disorder can be a source of order*, and that growth is found in *disequilibrium*, not in *balance*. The things we fear most in organizations—fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances—need not be signs of an impending disorder that will destroy us. Instead, fluctuations are the primary source of creativity.¹ [Italics added.]

Chaos theory brings new appreciation of the relationship between order and chaos in the workplace. Much of what we do at work is geared toward reducing this unpredictability and uncertainty. Indeed, it is the trigger for organization.

Educator John Finley says, “Maturity of the mind is the capacity to endure uncertainty.” Our need for orderliness forces us to form premature conclusions—to take pictures (absolute pictures) too quickly. We simply do not keep the shutter of our lens open long enough to see the final picture. Actually, there is no final picture. Forms are constantly changing, bringing new life and meaning to each of us. “We do not grow by knowing all of the answers, but rather by living with the questions.”

As a graduate student in 1982, I was fascinated with and perplexed by the complexity and uncertainty of organizational and individual processes. As graduate students in the organizational behavior program, to learn to deal with these high levels of complexity and diversity, we were required to do almost all of our work in groups. Individuals and groups were often polarized, unable to find agreement or to make progress. Many students were very upset, unable to cope with the enormous volume of work, much of it unstructured, and the intense pressure of living in a fishbowl almost every moment of a hectic 60-hour work week. About a fourth of the class dropped out during the first year. Holding the distinction of being the first single parent to go through the program, every day I understood why no one else was that crazy! If anyone ever needed to understand how to deal with the stress of what felt like madness, it was I.

While I was in a half-sleep, early on a Sunday morning, the dynamic process whereby organization develops out of chaos became clear to me (though in a very abstract way.) The experience was so profound, I bolted upright in bed. I intuitively knew that what I now understood would have an important impact upon my life in some way. In my mind’s eye, I saw two totally different entities come together in a union of opposites, in a dynamic, creative process. Where there was difference, now there was harmony. Where there was chaos, now there was order. Visually, it looked like this:



I learned much later these scroll formations are nature's basic form of design, according to many experts, appearing in our spiral-shaped galaxy, weather maps, and early motifs in art throughout the world. (If the spirals are opened up, they look similar to DNA strands.) The power of this visual imagery shows the self-organizing quality of these spirals as they exhibit an unlocking and unfolding of new variety in an ongoing change process. Psychologist Carl Jung believes these scroll patterns are an archetype embedded within the collective unconscious (if this is not contradiction in terms.)

We may apply these abstract images and concepts to relationships on a practical level. As human beings in search of our own unique identity, we come together as members of organizations to do something that can be done better together than alone. People (or groups) come together with different attitudes, values, learning styles, and goals as a result of heredity, past experiences, demands of the present, and expectations of the future. As depicted in the model above, many core beliefs are diametrically opposed to the others' points of view, exhibiting tension and conflict that can be very difficult to understand and manage. At polar opposites, they are oil and water and do not mix. The relationships are disorderly, chaotic. When assumptions are challenged, sparks fly. Both are concerned with winning more than learning, controlling more than being open to new insight. The ability to create something new is severely diminished.

To move the relationship forward to new forms of order, both parties must be willing to look beyond the obvious in the pursuit of truth, to ask tough questions that challenge dearly held beliefs. Each must suspend judgment and assumptions, allowing the "free flow of meaning" to pass through to the participants by questioning each others' observations and conclusions. *Savvy* workers muster up courage to give honest answers within a framework of respect, setting into play a dynamic, reciprocal interaction that brings understanding and truth (the critical goal of communication.) They are willing to reserve judgment, to validate the other's perspective. The spiral enlarges as we accomplish this.



*Out of disharmony, unity is born.
Move toward the middle.*

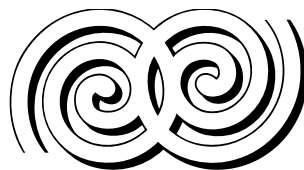
Emerson said, "No truth so sublime but it be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are *unsettled* is there any hope for them."² [Italics added.]

Though we strive for certainty, it is through lack of agreement—learning to live with the questions— that we find unity. And we can do this without giving up our individual core identity.

Most of the time if we're at odds with someone, we are at the extremity of our viewpoints. Often the disharmony is the result of moving too far out on the poles or boundaries of what is often our greatest *strength*— and in doing so—turns our greatest strengths into our greatest *weakness*. Every positive attribute has its shadow or dark side, becoming counterproductive. For example, a person's assertiveness may be his or her greatest strength, but pushed too far in a relationship with a person whose greatest strength is sensitivity or gentility, it becomes overbearing and aggressive. The same is also true of the more passive or patient person who can create inordinate frustration to the assertive person by holding back. Likewise, charm can become manipulation, spontaneity can become impulsiveness, control may become inflexibility. A fine line distinguishes the subtle qualities of the relationships: what is offensive to one is acceptable to another. Hence, we often find ourselves tiptoeing our way through potential mine fields.

Being *disagreeable* is a built-in cue to “move toward the middle”—to move toward another way of looking at the problem, often to move toward the *opposite* of our preferred style or strength. Disagreement is also a red flag that our positive trait has flipped to our dark or shadow side, and we need to make a correction. This kind of awareness, openness, resiliency, and flexibility create opportunity for reciprocal influence or insight, enlarging the scope of understanding, back and forth with both moving toward the middle, eventually, creating a *union of opposites*. Where there was previous disagreement, now there is creative productive action. We blend the best attributes of the different viewpoints by *expanding* our identity and core values. We seek to *validate* polarity, not to reduce the difference between them. Ironically, the validation of differences *feels* as if the distance between is reduced because our opinions are respected and valued.

What is important is the way we manage the tension, the *dissonance* in the interaction. With an orientation of faith, we come together *united*—from which flows creativity, innovation, harmony, and fulfillment. This is where we want to be:



Essential elements of moving toward the middle include the following:

- Engage with the mental reference of seeking new light, expanding inquiry.
- Suspend judgment. No one can be certain in advance how to respond appropriately. Preparation gives basic order, but not *spiritual* inspiration in responding to another's experience yet to be revealed.
- Listen to your thoughts; "listen to your listening." Pay attention to personal and private weaknesses that derail from a noble path.
- Speak truthfully and only for yourself.
- Capture and include what others have already said. Moving toward the middle is about *adding*, *enlarging*, and *expanding*.
- Be aware of activity in the background that is influencing the unity. We are all more than we seem; there is always more than we know.
- Sometimes, less is more. Keeping silent is also contributing.
- Opt out as a last resort but only when adversity is unmanageable.

The difficulty in many relationships at work is that one of the parties is too inflexible or indifferent to be open to new experience. He or she is too threatened by the diversity or by the changes inherent in any given situation. Or our faith is too weak to believe that God will help us find the answers to our concerns in His own time and way. Despair shuts us down. In relationships, when assumptions are challenged we dig in up to our hip bones, defensively protecting our own turf instead of creating something new and exciting. Inviting and asking questions like, "How do you know?" (asking for evidence or support of assumptions) and "So what?" (testing for relevance) force us out of our safe but boring havens of ignorance or feigned bliss, pushing us to higher levels of abstraction and insight. It is this uncomfortable process of *ebb* and *flow* that moves us to higher ground. Unfortunately, the uncertainty and the uneasiness often provokes contention, creating the temptation to quit the relationship in some way, either actively or passively. This is also true with our relationship and dependence upon God to help us in times of need.

In times like these, it is good to “mental image” these open-ended spirals, connecting us to God and each other, trusting in the ebb and flow, the yin and yang, the continual process whereby balance or harmony is restored. These connections remind us that



Organizations are systems.

On an organizational level, systems thinking is a conceptual framework that helps us to see the overall pattern of the myriad elements of life at work. Indeed, they are *open* systems. Systems thinking requires a shift of focus from parts to wholes, “from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future.”³ It provides a mental image for seeing that *everything is related to everything else*, in uneven degrees of tension and mutuality. Each element is imperceptibly bound to a larger whole, setting into motion often unseen effects upon each other. Even small changes in one part of the system produces big results. Someone said that a butterfly flapping its wings in Singapore affects the weather patterns in New York. Though not obvious or visible in time and space, these connections of cause and effect go in circles, not in straight lines, generating both positive and negative consequences to different parts of the system.

The tendency to view events from a narrow and isolated perspective instead of the larger systems viewpoint impedes our ability to solve our personal and organizational problems. We are *interdependent*. Every work group takes in resources, transforms them through some tasks, sends them out, and interacts with other units. Each work group is influenced by environmental changes, such as market demands, changes in technology, competition, changing demands of world markets, economy, governmental policies, and also changes in other parts of the company. The environmental, cultural, social, and psychological needs of each group impact the other groups and vice versa, *continually* . . . ad infinitum. This constant change requires us to be flexible, yet this uncertainty as a way of life goes against our grain. The systems viewpoint is a visual reminder that the whole is more than the sum of its parts if we can learn to be patient, patient, patient with ourselves and each other . . . ad nauseam. By shifting to systems thinking, over time we learn to be more compassionate, to feel more empathy for each other. Peter Senge articulates this well in *The Fifth Discipline*:

The discipline of seeing interrelationships gradually undermines older attitudes of blame and guilt. We begin to see that *all of us* are trapped in structures, structures embedded both in our ways of thinking and in the interpersonal and social milieus

in which we live. Our knee-jerk tendencies to find fault with one another gradually fade, leaving a much deeper appreciation of the forces within which we all operate.

This does not imply that people are simply victims of systems that dictate their behavior. Often, the structures are of our own creation. But this has little meaning until those structures are seen. For most of us, the structures within which we operate are invisible. *We are neither victims nor culprits but human beings controlled by forces we have not yet learned how to perceive.* [Italics added.]⁴

Furthermore, a great deal of the inconsistency in a company comes from environmental factors such as public policy, competition, composition of the work force, innovations, industry standards, and social factors in the community at large. Therefore, the impact of better management or increased productivity alone is limited. It does not help matters for us to continue to blame each other for problems over which there is little or no control. If we must blame anyone, perhaps a better target is, “*It’s the environment, Stupid!*” can refocus us in times of desperation. Everyone shares responsibility for problems created by “the system”; our job is to learn together, to discover truth, and to develop self-mastery in making our contribution to the greater good.

Group and individual processes that make discovering truth possible tune in on the more constructive and cooperative impulses that are in all of us. Instead of focusing on what is *wrong* or dysfunctional, we focus on what is *right*. Instead of confessing each others’ *shortcomings* and weaknesses, we look for *commonality*. Instead of trying to fix others up, we focus on what we can *learn*. We neither avoid nor confront the extreme elements in all of us. We reject artificial harmony; we embrace different gifts, attitudes, and behavior. In other words, if we are open to having our assumptions challenged, to let new light in, the distance between the poles becomes manageable, the positive interaction stays alive, and we find creative new solutions to problems. We find new common ground on which to stand:



Discover common ground.

Instead of using a variety of control tactics to oppose or avoid the extremes of opinion naturally found in diverse groups, adopt the premise that *what is best for the system will prevail if allowed to do so naturally*. Resist the tendency to force or compromise too soon. Seek to hear and appreciate differences, not just *tolerate* them. Validate polarities. Look for third alternatives. Invent new forms of action. The spiritual quality of this process resonates with everything I know about individual

and group processes. The message, loud and clear, is “*The answers are within you!*” All ideas are valid; everyone has important expertise to contribute.

Novelist Lawrence Durrell sums it up: “Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough. Will there be time?” Obviously, we have enough time. What we lack is patience. Too much efficiency drives out the natural flow of innate goodness in most people. Which reminds me of another myth:



Myth #11: If it feels good, it must be bad for business.

Anything remotely connected with the touchy-feely is often perceived as a death knell for many managers. Yet, giving and receiving respectful counsel, either individually or in group settings, transcends the competitive win-at-any price practices found in the workplace. Implicit in this kind of interaction is the belief that *given the opportunity, the cream will rise to the top; whatever thing is good and virtuous will prevail.* (As does scum, if that is what we focus on.) Many of the same managers who oppose anything “soft” also adhere to another common myth:



*Myth # 12: You can't take things personally.
It's just business.*

How many times have we been told, “Don’t take it personally. It’s just business?” This absurd directive implies the expectation that we should see ourselves differently as workers than we see ourselves as persons worthy of respect. (It also implies that by not showing any pain we should let the manager or co-worker off the hook for hurting us!) The admonition to fake an outward appearance to satisfy the proper state of mind for the person directing how he or she wants us to react forces us into a position of falsehood, relinquishing our integrity and personal congruence. It compels us to live a lie for the comfort of someone else’s unrighteous domination.

This exasperating discontinuity places workers in a double bind, forcing them to see things only from the perspective of the manager or co-worker and denies the freedom to be truthful with the personal realities of the situation. Once again, the message is “Don’t feel.” (Remember, buried

feelings don't stay buried; they just come back in more painful ways—often when we least expect them. This “don't take it personal” attitude perpetuates superficiality—the idea that people are impersonal *objects*, like chess pieces, to be used and often abused, all in the name of organizational effectiveness. If work is to be productive and rewarding, we need to stop the nonsense of trying to have dual personalities. If we are to have a new concept of work, leaders and followers alike must behave with compassion and integrity—congruent and consistent with our true nature and reality. In so doing we add value to ourselves and, in turn, to the company.

This redefinition of relationships is no easy task in a work world that asks for employees to act more like paratroopers than field soldiers. The contingent, erratic nature of the workplace often calls for us to *get the hell in and get the hell out!* Relationships are more short term, based more on the present needs of the corporation, needs which may change quickly without any notice. So, how may we get along best in this chaotic, changing, ambiguous realm?



Change is not a choice.

Quite early in life we become conditioned to certainty; we like *knowing* what to expect from the world around us. Routine makes us feel comfortable; sleeping in the same bed, being taken care of by the same baby-sitter, eating and sleeping at a certain time. As adults, we continue to be motivated toward the known and away from the unknown. Indeed, human beings will go to great lengths to preserve agreement and harmony among their thoughts, beliefs, and behavior, including self-deception when perceived as necessary. We like to think we can predict what will happen next—that future events will be orderly and foreseeable. When events surprise us, we try to understand them by relating them to previous experiences, continually striving to live up to our personal and professional standards.

But there *is* no experience from which to draw in many of the situations we face at work. Who teaches you to deal with chaos? Where do you learn to deal the high anxiety of bioterrorism or the threat of planes crashing into buildings? What antidotes may we use? How do we adapt to the new reality of psychological warfare? The following ideas about change are given for the purpose of helping you understand how you *feel* about change. These are not formulas to follow, but insights gleaned from people who have thought about change a lot. (Chapter 9 gives more specific help relating to developing resiliency strategies and coping with stress.)

First, decide what can and cannot be changed. Reinhold Niebuhr’s “serenity prayer” is a powerful reference point: Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Second, change is more about *process* and less about *content*—more about means than ends. Understanding some fundamentals of change and how to live in a transitional state at least helps us have more clarity about why we feel so bad when we are changing and perhaps increases the odds that the change will be successful. (Or to analyze our failures—again and again!)



Our boundaries of dissonance are personal and individual.

Our attitudes about change are very different, as individual as our fingerprints. Where do you fall on the following continuum?

Personal Attitudes About Change Chart

Fear change: avoid it whenever possible.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Love change: seek it and enjoy the rush.
Change brings crisis.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Change brings opportunity.
Change is messy and inefficient.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Effectiveness demands change.
Change as little as possible.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Change all the time.
If it ain't broke, don't fix it.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Continuous improvement is the way.
Planning and design come first.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Just do it and learn from your mistakes.
Stay the course and follow the plan.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Flexibility and improvisation are key.
Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Ready, fire, aim.
Change is very risky.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	Not changing is risky.
Stick your neck out and it will get chopped off.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	If you aren't growing, you are dying.
Conserve your resources and pick your battles.	<----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----->	It is better to try and fail than not to try at all.

Another way to get a feel for your “change quotient is to examine the assumptions underlying the following descriptors. *Don’t* put yourself in one of these boxes as a final conclusion about your attitude toward change; labels have a way of limiting our self-concept. The idea of this exercise is to identify a *general tendency* and to encourage you to work *outside* your box.

	Change Is Controllable		
Change Is Functional	Adapters “Go with the flow.”	Rationalists “The only good change is planned change.”	Change Is Dysfunctional
	Entrepreneurs “Lead the charge.”	Reactors “Change brings crises.”	
	Change Is Uncontrollable		

This matrix is developed around two continua. The first measures perspectives on control, with some people feeling change is controllable and manageable, while others regard change as inherently chaotic and difficult to control. The second continuum measures the desirability of change and whether people regard changing as having a practical role in a healthy organization.

Adapters feel that change is controllable and that change is functional and desirable. Professor J. B. Quinn calls adapters “incrementalists,” who excel in businesses characterized by high levels of change and uncertainty. Instead of developing a set plan or following a vision of the future, adapters admit they are not sure and encourage lots of creativity, innovation, and autonomy. Their assumption is that they will gradually be able to recognize what works and prune out efforts that are not realizing their potential. The risk of being an adaptor is due to the incremental nature of their style—when careful planning or bold vision are required, adapters tend to come up short.

Entrepreneurs feel that change is uncontrollable and that change is functional and desirable. Despite the chaos and uncertainty of their preferred business areas, they are confident that by entering the fray, they will eventually be able to lead the change, control the chaos, and come out on top. Their confidence is usually based on technical expertise or a marketing strategy they are confident will yield a sustainable competitive advantage. The risk of being an entrepreneur lies in

the nature of the strategies they tend to pursue—if their vision works out, they are heroes, but if it fails, they have led their group over a cliff.

Rationalists feel that change is controllable, but that change is inherently dysfunctional so its effects should be minimized through contingency planning, and ideally, should be avoided. Rationalists make management a science and give special status and power to analysts who can chart logical paths to meet their goals. They tend to excel in large businesses in relatively stable industries, where careful planning can lead valuable efficiencies and economies of scale or scope. The risks of being a rationalist lie in uncertain and rapidly changing environments, which tend to confound the best laid plans and strategies. Rationalists are also notoriously risk averse, making it difficult for them to recognize and pursue even promising unconventional opportunities.

Reactors feel that change is uncontrollable and dysfunctional, but handle it by solving the problems anyway. They are “troubleshooters”—usually caught up in changes they do not understand and they lack the time and resources necessary to manage the process rationally. Consequently they operate in crisis mode, running from disaster to disaster, just trying to survive and keep their organization’s head above water. Reactors are often weaker when it comes to developing the rational plans, structures, and procedures needed to prevent crisis situations. They also tend to burn out over time, since adrenalin rushes are hard to sustain on an ongoing basis.

Six Premises of Successful Change Efforts

- For most people, change represents uncertainty, and uncertainty is scary.
- Any change involves not only learning something new, but *unlearning* something that is already present.
- No change will occur without motivation, which is often the hardest part.
- Organizational change is always mediated through *individual* change.
- Most change involves change in attitudes, values, and beliefs and is initially painful and threatening.
- Change is a multistage process:
 - unfreezing*—creating a need to change (usually based on new information or motive)
 - experimenting*—new behavior or attitudes tried out on basis of new data
 - refreezing*—stabilizing the change over time. Must be able to test to see if new attitudes or behavior fit with self-concept, will integrate in present environment, and will be accepted by others. (With the pace of change today, this stage is almost non-existent!)

Gene Dalton, former professor of Organizational Behavior at Brigham Young University, found six conditions associated with successful change efforts. As many of these as possible should be included in personal change endeavors:

1. There must be a strongly *felt need* that moves people to want to change.
2. The persons helping with the change must be highly respected.
3. The change effort moves from general proposals to specific plans.
4. The change plan increases self-esteem.
5. The change plan creates new social ties or redefines old ties around new attitudes and behaviors.
6. The people changing shift from external motivation to internal commitment.⁵

In summary, the basic ingredients in change processes are

- ***Discomfort:*** You have to feel bad, feel a need, have a problem defined, experience disconfirmation.
- ***Psychological safety:*** Find a mentor, friend, or significant other person who can help keep the anxiety manageable during early stages of the change process.
- ***Support for continued change:*** Without social acceptance, the change will be short-lived.

For obvious reasons, most of us are resistant to change. We don't like to feel bad; we're afraid to look silly or stupid while we're learning a new way of doing something; we don't feel support from those around us. Most of all, we don't like feeling out of control when change is imposed upon us without our involvement or approval. William Bridges writes that understanding the difference between change and transition can be very helpful in easing the discomfort and resistance. He says, "Change occurs when something starts or stops; it can be planned or managed on a rational model... Transition is a three-part psychological process; it cannot be planned or managed by the same rational formulae."⁶ Workers in a transitional state go through three phases:

- ***Ending Phase:*** Employees experience a sense of loss or bereavement and experience the same behaviors commonly associated with mourning, denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, before they move to the final stage of acceptance. Employees feel a loss of personal identity and feel disenchanting and resentful.
- ***Neutral Zone:*** Workers feel disoriented, like puppets dangling out of control, unable to get their feet under them because the earth seems to be still moving from under themselves. Old

hurts, worries, and resentments resurface during this period, bringing many people to leave the organization during this phase. For others, new creativity emerges because they now have the luxury to let ideas incubate.

- **“The Vision” or New Beginning:** A new viewpoint can take hold only after the old viewpoint has died and been buried. At this stage, employees want to know what the future will look and feel like, hopefully in small increments. Otherwise, workers tend to become overwhelmed.



Develop a framework for change.

1. **Define the problem.** A problem well stated is a problem half solved. (If you can't name it, you can't change it.) Identify where you are in some measurable terms. You must have *accurate* data. You must feel a need to change.
2. **Set your change goal.** Where do you want to be? (The difference between where you are and where you want to be becomes your change goal.) *Be specific!* Vague goals produce vague results.
3. **Do more of what is working; do less of what is not working.** Pay more attention to your gifts, talents, and abilities; pay less attention to self-criticism, deficits, and grandeur thoughts. (Yet, stretching yourself past your comfort zone is also necessary.)
4. **Get a coach and support.** Enlist support of concerned others to help you achieve the change you want. Be candid and accountable.
5. **Structural or environmental changes.** Plan and schedule systematic support; avoid circumstances that reinforce old behaviors.
6. **Take a risk.** Create an opportunity to test your new attitude, behavior, or skills. Untested behavior is just a dream in the mind. Make the dream a reality, a step at a time, to develop the confidence to take a bigger step.
7. **Do it! Be tough on commitment; be gentle with setbacks.** John Ruskin said, “The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”



It's the becoming that counts.

One of the hardest but best doctrines about changing ourselves comes from former Brigham Young University professor Arthur Henry King (quoted in the introduction) who says that in addition to being unable to change anyone else, we are also unable to *directly* change ourselves except in counterfeit ways despite our continual efforts to do both. Instead of focusing on *doing* something different (or getting others to), he says we should *stop* doing the things which betray our best most authentic selves. Our challenge is to become open and responsive to doing the *right* things—responding to the natural promptings in all of us to *being* something good instead of *doing* something good. We change best indirectly by changing our hearts.

One more time, how do we do that?



If you can't forgive, you can survive, but not thrive.

To travel the hero's path, nothing challenges us more than moving into the superhuman realm of developing a forgiving heart. Could it be the best change strategy is forgiveness? Unfortunately, as a management strategy, discovering the quiet miracle of forgiveness does not play well in corporate America.

As a personal coping strategy, forgiveness is essential because without it, organizations are deadly for you and your family. Without forgiveness, organizations will use you up every whit. Organizations are made up of imperfect people. Paradox and irony confront us with increasing frequency, shaking our confidence and security. It's a miracle people do as well as they do considering the complexity of the human condition and the times in which we live. These frail human beings and circumstances hurt us when we don't deserve it and often when we least expect it. They hurt us deeply, intentionally, and unintentionally. The memories of these violations get lodged in our hearts and minds and stay long past their welcome. The hurt makes us hate, robbing us of the ability to wish others well. When the hurt is attached to people instead of the wrong that was done, it becomes very hard to heal.

In *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, Lewis Smedes describes how hate lingers long after the wrong done to us is dead and gone as, “the way the ashen smell of charred lumber lingers with a burned building long after the fire is out.” Smede says,

We attach our feelings to the moment when we were hurt, endowing it with immortality. And we let it assault us every time it comes to mind. It travels with us, sleeps with us, hovers over us while we make love, and broods over us while we die. Our hate does not even have the decency to die when those we hate die—for it is a parasite sucking *our* blood, not theirs.⁷

“Hate corrodes the container it carries.” It inflicts pain on others as well, setting up reciprocal hate that comes *back* to us as the “ashen smell of charred lumber.” We go to great lengths to let ourselves off the hook by rationalizing, minimizing, blocking, intellectualizing, and pseudo-forgiving, hoping to rid ourselves of the canker eating away at our souls. Yet, despite so many convincing reasons for “letting bygones be bygones,” or “turning the other cheek,” the hurt hangs on, robbing us of our energy and enthusiasm, leaving us drained and exhausted, unsure about ourselves and others.

The great temptation of pain is to get stuck in it. When *victimization* (what happened *to* you) becomes *victimhood* (a way of relating to the world because of what happened), the hurtful thing that happened to us *becomes self-defining* and *self-limiting*.) Indeed, what was once a rock becomes a boulder, picking up more and more debris as it rolls down the mountainside. When something happens to burst our bubble of hope for a successful and fulfilling work experience, the inclination to feel victimized propels us and our careers downward to cynicism and indifference. The goal is to work through the black moments, to take the leap of faith to the other side of the cycle. If we choke or hold back from the critical work that needs to be done here, we just keep recycling back through the stages on the right-hand side of the circle until we get it right.

Without a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the forgiveness process our hero's journey stops here. Sensing our indignation, co-workers distance themselves from us because they do not want to be around when there is a collision. Innocent parties often become the target of our unresolved pain, further isolating us from the thing which we need most— love and acceptance.

Why We Forgive at Work



“To err is human; to forgive, divine.”

Forgiveness is the key that ***opens the doors from pain to peace***. On the hero’s journey from naive to savvy, the ability to forgive propels us forward, moving us through each stage of healing to receive our bittersweet gift of discernment—to claim our prize of refined character and insight about the world of work. Some of us are able to move quickly through the different stages of healing. Wounds quickly cauterize, and we move on wiser and more compassionate. For others the journey is long and laborious, the bridge over which he or she must travel broken down by the inability to let hurt go. In the reconciliation stage of the hero’s journey, we drink the bitter cup, integrating the lessons and losses of our worklife.



Second, we must learn to forgive because ***hate is harmful***. It is harmful to ourselves and others. It is harmful mostly to ourselves. Hate is harmful because it stops us dead in our tracks from the thing we must all do to get along at work: *hate stops cooperation*. The seeds of malice, either active or passive, rob us of our energy to wish others well and to work toward that end. Hate escalates; it makes things worse, never better. Hate keeps us apart, divided not unified. And we need unity to do our jobs well, to thrive. Hate robs us of our creativity, our ebullience, our humor. Hate creates emotional turmoil: stomachs churn, hearts race, heads hurt, sleep is disturbed. Hate robs our vitality, blocks our vision, distorts data vital to our effectiveness. Hate is self-deceptive. Living out of the

illusion that we won't be hurt again, we carefully micro-manage our lives to avoid unfair treatment ever again and in so doing rob ourselves of the joy that would naturally flow to us. We keep the pain alive by continuing to pay attention to it. Our pride becomes more important than peace. In *Prince of Peace*, William Jennings Bryan wrote:

The most difficult of all the virtues to cultivate is the forgiving spirit. Revenge seems to be natural with man; it is human to want to get even with an enemy. It has even been popular to boast of vindictiveness; it was once inscribed on a man's monument that he had repaid both friends and enemies more than he had received.

Third, forgiving others *makes sense interpersonally*. The natural consequence of unresolved conflict is the need to talk about it to our co-workers. In my research, talking to co-workers ranks second in coping strategies used by employees, topped only by talking to friends and relatives. Employees do not talk to management very often; they don't go to personnel; they don't go to unions. They talk to their friends and relatives, co-workers, "*didn't let it get to me,*" "*just took it,*" or "*forgave*" in that order.

Surprisingly, respondents reported *low levels of satisfaction* from talking to co-workers. Equally ironic, when respondents were asked to rank the frequency of behaviors most abusive (behaviors, attitudes, or practices that cause them to feel mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual harm or to feel personally diminished), gossip ranked first. Employees in my study cope with workplace abuse by doing something which they classify as *abusive!* Only *duplicity* (being two-faced) is ranked higher in perceived harmfulness (which is also connected to the problem).

Employees commit interpersonal homicide, mortally wounding themselves by sharing their unresolved conflicts with their coworkers. Why?



There are no secrets in organizations.

While it is therapeutic to talk through problems, be cautious about trustworthiness and the conclusions others draw about what might be considered gossip. Gossip is considered a betrayal of trust to the *listener* as well as to the person being talked about. For example, if I unload my feelings about a problem I'm having someone else, the co-worker to whom I am speaking will believe that if *we* have a problem with each other down the road, I will talk about *him or her* to someone else! Avoiding gossip makes sense interpersonally in other ways. People will often *use the information* against you to enhance their own self-interests. Also, co-workers are often reluctant

to get involved in your problems; they feel caught in the middle, and it makes them feel uncomfortable. The principle of self-interest is nearly always a factor in controversial situations. In addition, people often feel they just don't have the time to deal with other people's problems. Generally speaking, people don't want to be involved in conflict because they are afraid it will rub off on them. And it often does.

Fourth, we forgive others to *allow virtuous things to define us*—not destructive things— and in so doing we create continual currents of harmony in the universe. What would our world be like without this powerful principle? Imagine the negative energy that would constantly circulate in the environment. We feel resentment as surely as we feel love and acceptance; even if there are no words spoken, we either lift or lower those around us.

Finally, we should forgive because *we can*. Forgiveness is an attribute of Deity: *His* mercy endures forever. We have perfect role models in Deity giving us the courage to do the right thing. Without God's grace and compassion we would faint from our trials and afflictions. Without our forbearance with others, they would faint from their trials and afflictions. Because of Deity, mercy overpowers the demands of justice, releasing us from rancor, knowing that in the final analysis all will be set right.

So, what do you do with all of the hurt you feel?

First, give way to the absolute miracle of letting hurt go. We can draw these miracles unto ourselves through our conscious efforts to value the soul of the person who has hurt us. We often mistake the behavior we see with the others' true identity. By imagining what might have taken place or didn't take place in the lives of others to get them to this point, our compassion unhooks us from *our* pain and resentment. Hanging on to our hurt serves our own need to justify the resentment *we* feel towards them. In an often unconscious desire to have self-pity and to invoke the pity of others, we refuse to let hurt go because it *serves us* in some way. Yet, in so doing we entrap ourselves into a life of helplessness that grows into hopelessness.

In those situations in which you are unable to forgive, how does your holding on to the pain serve you in some way?

What Forgiveness Is Not

It seems as if we should understand forgiveness better than we do. We've heard the cliches so often they never really get deep inside: turn the other cheek, let bygones be bygones, kiss and make up. Or the admonition to forgive invokes a defensiveness about how much we are really hurt, how justified we are in feeling as we do. Forgiving often implies we should wimp out or sell out regarding the things that are dear to us. Or we should just forget about it. Understanding what forgiveness is and is not gives us a much needed antidote to the agony of learning how to forgive.

Forgiveness is *not* forgetting. It is futile and deadly to bury our feelings about adversity and abuse. It's a setup for failure.



In looking back, we heal—if we don't stare.

In looking back we recognize (if we're honest with ourselves) the beam in our own eye and remove it. In looking back, you may learn to “see your enemy and yourself in the weakness and silliness of the humanity you share . . . and make the miracle of forgiving a little easier.”⁸ Gandhi said, “To forgive is not to forget. The merit lies in loving in spite of the vivid knowledge that the one that must be loved is not a friend. There is no merit in loving an enemy when you forget him for a friend.”⁹ In other words, the value lies in loving even when we feel the pain of rejection. A quick peek backwards helps us correct a deadly course and sometimes avert impending disaster. In remembering that we are in enemy territory, we learn to set better boundaries that not only protect ourselves but also prevent others from hurting *themselves* by behaving inappropriately. Respect is enhanced in the relationship. Peeking backwards makes us savvy if we use both our head and heart in the judgments we make.

Forgiveness is *not* excusing or absolving others of responsibility. It's not O.K. to hurt people at work or anyplace else. Denying, minimizing, justifying, or condoning the behavior of others or ourselves just keeps us stuck in our pain. Further, it enables the person to keep behaving in an unacceptable manner. The pain is real, and whoever caused it is responsible and accountable for it. *We* are responsible to heal from the hurt; *they* are responsible for causing the hurt and making their own peace with it. But it is *their* responsibility.

Forgiveness is *not* smothering conflict. Forgiveness is not grinning and bearing it (though this is sometimes the only strategy that makes sense). When groups tolerate everything, they self-destruct. *Acting* forgiving is not the same as *being* forgiving. Outwardly, we may go through the motions of pretending everything is okay. Yet, we harbor resentment in our hearts, sometimes hidden so deeply we hide it from ourselves. It often takes great effort to let surface how we really feel and to take responsibility for it. It's better to be honest with ourselves and with others by admitting that we're not able to forgive yet, but are working toward that end. Until we can accomplish true forgiveness, acting (with clear messages about our intent and purpose) is better than continuing to rail on and on about the offense. For example, say, "I am working on forgiving (whatever it is) but I'm not where I want to be yet. But, I won't be satisfied until I've completely let go of this." We tend to become who we consistently *act* like.

Forgiveness is not a predictable process. It is not always obvious or instant. You can't just wake up one morning and say "today's the day!" (though sometimes it may take a commitment such as this to bring closure to a painful event). *It takes as long as it takes.* Yet, we have a far greater control to move the process along when we recognize that forgiveness often comes in waves, much like the grief process. After many ups and downs with resentment, one day forgiveness sneaks up on you. We see our offenders with new eyes, with a new compassion.

Forgiveness is *not* easy. It is the hardest work at work. Some situations are so devastating that we believe we will go to our graves feeling the pain, but through divine intervention, the burden lifts through the miracle of forgiveness. You have to hang on with all your might and kill the natural tendency to fight back. It is harder if we continue to rehearse the injustice, hurt or betrayal. Instead, replace the thought with your image of what God is, what light is, what are goodness and mercy. Seek the light and chase the darkness of resentment away. Mental image yourself bathed in the light reflecting outward to those who have offended. Resist the temptation to talk about it to others. Remember, what we focus on grows larger.

What Forgiveness Is

To forgive is to recognize and renounce hurt, anger, or resentment for some injury. In my research, when the topic of workplace abuse was introduced, almost everyone had a story to tell, many of the events occurring in the distant past. For many, recounting their stories was still painful. Awareness of a need to forgive is the first step to forgiveness. As long as we pretend we don't suffer, that the wrong done to us does not matter, or we continue to react negatively when we think of it, our dishonesty and resentment limits our ability to progress.

Forgiveness is both a means and an end. Forgiveness is a byproduct of an ongoing healing process, the gift of recovering our true nature at the end of the healing process. Yet, how else does one heal if not by forgiving oneself and others a little at a time? Forgiveness is surgery of the heart and soul, the byproduct of which is insight, an increased ability to endure hard things, to suffer well for what we hold most dear, and to keep ourselves and others out of harm's way.

Forgiveness is a process, not an event. Like every heroes' journey, forgiveness is highly personal and individual. Forgiveness is a powerful tool that keeps us moving to reach our own personal destiny, being true to our commitments to take the high road of interpersonal options. Heroes recognize and accept their own personal genius—they listen to their own "inner voice" when pulled off course instead of the voice of betrayal. Each time they forgive others, the power to detach from painful situations is strengthened, giving them more freedom to be who they really are and to perform the work they were meant to do. Practice makes perfect even in forgiveness.

Stages in the Forgiveness Process

The stages of forgiveness have much in common with Elizabeth Kubler Ross's stages of grief: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In another good resource on forgiveness, Sidney and Suzanne Simon's book, *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace and Get on with Your Life*, describes the process as denial, self-blame, victim, indignation, survivor, and integration.¹⁰In portraying the stages of forgiving, much depends upon the emotional and spiritual maturity of the person who is hurt or offended. Some people are able to forgive instantly, for others it takes a very long time, if forgiveness is ever achieved at all. The journey to forgiveness is much like the other stages of the heroes' journey: what is important is to stay with the process until we let hurt go:

1. **Organizational pain.** Something harmful happens to us and violates our expectations; we interpret it as betrayal.
2. **Shock.** If the offense is severe, in addition to the expected emotional response, we also experience the same *physical* symptoms of any blow to our sense of security—as real as if someone physically slugged us. The fear is often intense because of the threat to one's livelihood; numbness is a psychological defense that helps us ease into the reality of the situation.

3. **Disbelief.** Feeling confused and dismayed, we play down the importance or impact of the hurtful experience or try to convince ourselves that it can't be true anyway. We just *can't* believe it.
4. **Self-blame.** We try to explain away what happened *if only* we had done things differently or we struggle with the a kazillion things that could have gone wrong, most of which do not make sense. We tend to be caught up in self-pity and misdirected anger.
5. **Working Wounded.** We feel victimized, recognizing we are damaged by what happened and didn't deserve it. We feel sadness and sorrow.
6. **Resentment.** We become angry at the people who hurt us and want them to pay for it. We react through revenge, either real or vicarious. If we get stuck here, we become **cynical** or lacking hope that things can be fixed or will ever be better.
7. **Reconciliation.** We begin to see the offender and ourselves in a new light. *I am more than my wounds.* We are survivors, feeling satisfaction that we are still standing in spite of everything. But the danger here is to feel self-righteous. True heroes also know that the offender is also *more than the inflictor of those wounds.* The moment we see the frailty of the offender with compassion, we recover *our* best self, willing to let go in the faith that we are learning important lessons we need to learn. We put the past in perspective and move on. When we remember the event, we do so with more wisdom, more strength. We know we are not our jobs. We are more than the **roles** we play at work.
8. **Hope.** With new lessons learned, we focus our energies on becoming more **savvy**, building a wider and deeper reservoir of strength to **prevent** difficulties in the future.

These stages aren't sequential: we may find ourselves doing bits of behaviors from each stage, all at the same time. As in everything, illusions and traps derail us from our healing journey. The chart below is another sanity check for keeping us on track:

Continuum of Forgiveness

False Forgiveness: Flight	True Forgiveness: Hero	False Forgiveness: Fight
Forgetting: “Let’s not talk about it.”	Understanding: “I will help you when you need me.”	Obsessing: “let’s talk about nothing else.”
Excusing: “It’s OK- I’ll just cope with it.”	Enduring in love: “I will help you bear this burden.”	Condemning: “I forgive you for being hopelessly sick.”
Absolution: “Don’t worry about it.”	Accountability: “Understand how you have hurt others.”	Blaming: “Your problems are the cause of all my problems.”
Repression: “I’d rather not think about this.”	Managing conflict: “Let’s deal with this positively.”	Escalation: “You cross me again and you’re dead meat.”
Denial: “Change is easy, no problem.”	Discipline: “Change requires hard work and concentration.”	Despair: “For you change is virtually impossible.”
“I forgive you, since I never trusted you or anyone else in the first place.”	I forgive you and will give you a second chance. Earn my trust with consistency.”	I forgive you, but I will never really trust you again. I never give second chances.”
Future fantasies: Good intentions are not enough	Present duty: A way of living and perceiving here and now	Past fixation: Endless worry about past problems

All of these principles of forgiving also apply when *we* make mistakes and need to forgive ourselves. Prayer and meditation can be helpful in beginning your forgiving journey, also including your *own* name if needed:

Dear God:

Thank you for the process of repentance and forgiveness.

I know it is a gift from Thee to help us reconcile our mistakes and pain.

I am very hurt by : (say what has happened).

My anger or unforgiveness is because: (say why it is difficult, why this is such a betrayal for you).

I know that if I can forgive this person and deed, I will be free again to be my best self.

I know my hatred and judgments attack me also.

I am committed to being true to the real me and my unique destiny.
I believe that out of this disharmony, unity can be borne.
Dear God, please help me to feel genuine sorrow for my pain.
But I don't want to feel it more than is needed to heal.
I surrender to You my thoughts of this person's betrayal.
Here are the feelings; I give them to You.
Encircle me with your light and comfort.
I know this love will help me transcend what has happened to me.
I am tempted to hold on to my hurt; I want to hurt back, but I know this will hurt me more.
Help me see their pain and weaknesses with Your Eyes; I know their behavior is *their* pain or deficits speaking.

Remove the scales of hatred that blind me. I want to see others as You see them.
I want to get off the self-defeating path I am on.
I cannot do it by myself.
I need your courage to pray for them.
Heal them of their weaknesses and pain.
I am willing to love again; I am willing live in harmony.
I surrender all to Thy strength and wisdom.
Thank you for enlarging my soul.
Thank you for forgiving me for losing my best self.
Amen.



*Forgiveness is complete
when we don't feel hurt any more.*

Forgiveness is the gift we give ourselves.

Endnotes

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