



## How to Lead Yourself through Disruptive Change

By Michelle Ray, CSP

The author will be presenting the opening keynote session at CPABC's Spring Pacific Summit (May 30-June 1, 2018). In her keynote address, "Who Moved My Future? Demystifying the Fear of Change," she will explore the core reasons behind resistance to change, describe how to move beyond the status quo, and explain how to create new strategies for long-term success.

Search Google for the word "leadership" and you'll get over 800 million results—an astonishingly high return, even for a word that can be interpreted in numerous ways. The sheer number of these results speaks to the fact that, collectively, we recognize the value of effective leadership in all aspects of life.

All too often, however, leadership is thought of and discussed as outwardly facing—for example, in terms of how an individual manages a team, helms an enterprise, or oversees bottom-line results. Often overlooked is leadership that is inwardly focused, yet self-directed leadership is equally important to success, particularly amid the rapid,

disruptive change that is currently affecting businesses the world over. These businesses are facing a multitude of challenges, including keeping up with technology's rapid evolution, finding great talent to replace the retiring boomer generation, and keeping employees happy, healthy and engaged.

Now is a good time to recognize what needs to shift and why accountability starts with you. To achieve success amid disruptive change, you must first take charge of yourself. You have an opportunity on a daily basis to be the best version of yourself—the version of you who mentors others, contributes to your workplace, and leads by example. In short, you can choose to become the leader of your own life.

### What it takes to adopt a leadership mindset

The ability to lead yourself through disruptive change requires commitment, energy and determination. To be successful, it's important to consider the following tenets:

#### Know yourself

Taking charge of your life starts with self-awareness. Organizational psychologist Tasha Eulich describes self-awareness as the secret weapon of the 21st century, but in her best-selling book *Insight: The Secrets That Most People Aren't as Self-Aware as They Think*. Drawing on her own survey research, Eulich says 95% of us believe we are self-aware, but only 10%-15% of us truly are.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tasha Eulich, *Insight: Why We're Not as Self-Aware as We Think, and How Seeing Ourself Clearly Helps Us Succeed at Work and in Life*. Crown Business, 2017.  
<sup>2</sup> Jeff Kaulfle, "Only 10% of People Are Self-Aware - Here's How To Change," Forbes, May 10, 2017.

awareness requires mindfulness. This means being fully cognizant of your circumstances and surroundings—possessing internal awareness and external awareness of yourself in relation to others. By leveraging this internal and external awareness, you will be able to position yourself to focus on areas where you can truly make a difference. Increasing mindfulness will help you be proactive in navigating disruptive change and the heightened expectations of your company or your clients in the new economy.

#### View change as an essential action

As per Newton's first law of motion, a body at rest will remain at rest and a body in motion will remain in motion unless either is acted on by an external force. In other words, change is an essential action. If, after discovering your "pain point" (a problem that hinders your productivity or effectiveness) you can embrace the adage that nothing changes if nothing changes, you will be ready to move forward.

The same principle applies to organizations. Think about the number of businesses that have gone under because leadership refused to embrace new realities. The demise of these businesses is a direct result of the decision to do nothing. Taking a risk, even if it just means making an incremental change, is a better option than remaining "at rest." Yes, mistakes might be made, but these represent an opportunity for course correction—in other words, growth.

#### Take the opportunity to "rise above"

To rise above the challenge of change, you must first understand the difference between "coping" (short-term strategy) and "managing" (long-term strategy). The latter is the more effective approach.

Then you'll need to dig deep to access your inner resources and harness strength. Resilience is the cornerstone of emotional and psychological survival in challenging times. By digging deep and drawing on your past experiences, you will be able to hone your self-management skills while developing your resilience muscles. Just as athletes develop muscle memory, your ability to navigate disruptive change will become more instinctual with practice.

#### Embrace disruption

Expending energy to resist change that is outside of your control will only leave you exhausted, like Sisyphus endlessly rolling his rock up a hill. The most powerful choice you can make is to focus on the aspects of disruptive change that are within your control. Start by examining your thoughts, your decisions, and your actions. At any point, you can choose to decipher how change unfolds. How you give meaning to the challenges that arise with change will ultimately influence the outcome.

When you hit your next bump in the road, ask: "Why am I being disrupted by change?" and "How can I embrace it?" That's the leadership mindset. ■



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