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## TRANSFORMATIVE BEHAVIOURS

## ARE YOU READY TO CHANGE? 39

**T**WO of my most favourite quotes are from Alvin Toffler, an American writer, futurist and management guru.

He said "the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn" and that "change is not merely necessary to life, it is life".

He is renowned for his ideas and writings on discussing modern technologies, including the world's current digital and communication revolution even before it became fashionable.

In my training and consulting work, I make reference to Toffler's ideas quite often. This helps individuals and organisations reflect on change and see growth in all transformative behaviours, policies or routines.

I have found Toffler's work an ideal platform to open the eyes of those who resist change.

In today's climate of absolute flux, being able to shift policies and to pivot, and being agile or nimble enough to change direction, are crucial abilities for everyone.

And I really mean everyone and everything. Governments, health authorities, law and order officials, quasi-government agencies, large multi-national companies, small and medium enterprises, freelancers, entrepreneurs and even startups need this ability to survive.

Yet every time the authorities, or your bosses, announce a change of direction, we collectively let out a sigh of displeasure and disdain.

I have noticed this pattern with my work in the last three months.

In nearly every training or speaking engagement, I was asked to address how to embrace change. In most of my one-on-one leadership coaching sessions, the biggest question was on how to manage the team members through this dynamic and changing landscape.

So, what really is the main obstacle for change?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famed philosopher and poet, said "fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world".

What are people most afraid of? It is the fear of getting out of the comfort zone.

When the Movement Control Order (MCO) was instituted in Malaysia in March, it was shocking for everyone. The initial weeks were spent figuring out our own basic living situation.

Getting your groceries in, securing the safety of your family, making sure you have a job and sorting out new conditions like working from home became a top priority.

It was tough! Fear gripped everyone. There were times when bad behaviours like the mad rush for toilet paper and sliced white

bread descended in the country.

However, that fear quickly subsided. Everyone figured out how to get life back on track.

Any big change, when first instituted, causes seismic-level activity akin to that of shifting tectonic plates in your mind.

Changing habits and breaking routines take an inordinate amount of effort.

As the brain is engineered to conserve energy at all costs, you resist change even if it is good in the long term.

Discovered by psychologist Daniel Kahneman, there is a phenomenon called "loss aversion".

His research shows that when you gain US\$100, the level of satisfaction you feel is not commensurate to the depth of discontent you would experience with the loss of US\$100.

You value what you have more than what you could have. This explains our tendency to keep what we have rather than to gain something equivalent.

Nonetheless, you cannot just declare that "change is hard" and give up.

This is when I will remind my coachees about Toffler's quotes that change is life itself.

You are constantly adapting, changing and evolving. This time around, remember that your company is changing and implementing new techniques, too.

Shaking things up is not simply on a whim. Just like you, employers are also fighting for their

own survival.

For employers, please make change a team effort and not a top-down declaration. Remember, even if that change is for the betterment of your team, their inner rebellious teenager surfaces if you simply decree that change.

Your team needs to see and get inspired by your action in order to want to change themselves.

This is what Malaysians keep shouting at our leaders, too!

Organisational change will cause discomfort. If you are not a leader who is willing to incur personal discomfort yourself, you will be wasting your time making an uproar.

Next, build trust and prime people for success. Change is an emotional exercise. Showing people and communicating to them the positive outcomes of change is a huge motivating factor.

Meeting people individually and offering them a conducive environment to open up and be vulnerable will help build a high-trust organisation. This is an empowering approach.

Change is here. So, connect deeply with the notion that change helps you grow. Do you have what it takes?

The writer is managing consultant and executive leadership coach at EQTD Consulting. He is also the author of the national bestseller 'So, You Want To Get Promoted?'

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