

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

Volume 3, Letter 5
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CHANGING BELIEFS – Part 2

I write this letter for those pioneers who want to move beyond the ordinary to the Extraordinary in creating business organizations.

Welcome to Letter 3-5 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. Since I took a side trip in the last letter, I want to reiterate that this series of letters is about various issues one must deal with in creating an EO. The first letter of this focused on the importance of beliefs and some ideas about becoming aware of one's beliefs. In this letter, I am going to look at the nature of beliefs and more about changing them.

I want to make a special request for this series of eletters. I know many of the issues we face in creating the new organizational model. However, I do not know all of them. Nor do I know which ones you see as most important. Therefore, I ask you to ask any questions or make any comments that come up for you. Also, let me know any issues you see as difficult in general or for your specific situation. I will address them in future letters. This will give us a considerably richer and more useful journey on this leg of our trip to Extraordinary. Thank you!

The nature of beliefs

I am going to draw heavily on *Power Dialogues – The Ultimate System for Personal Change* by Barry Neil Kaufman. In this book, he provides a sequential set of statements about the nature of beliefs:

- Beliefs are conclusions we form about ourselves, about others and about the world around us.
- We choose to adopt, create, and empower beliefs in order to take care of ourselves.
- Thus, we do this with the best of intentions.
- Everything we think, feel, and do comes from our beliefs.
- Therefore, we can use our emotions and behaviors as a tracking system to lead us to our beliefs.
- At all times, we can know and verbalize our beliefs.
- Because beliefs are freely chosen, we can decide to adopt, create, retain, change, or discard any belief at any time.
- When we make the choice to change or discard a belief, we do so in an instant.
- Every time we change a belief, we change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that the belief generates.
- There are no good beliefs or bad beliefs.
- Certain beliefs lead to happiness and comfort; others lead to unhappiness and discomfort.

This list clearly shows that we can know and change our beliefs. If this is so, why do people hold on to their current beliefs? First, they are not aware of the proposed new ones. You cannot change to a new position you do not know exists. If you do know, why do you still hold on to the old? In an *Appendix Essay* to his book *Writing Without Teachers* Peter Elbow gives his reasoning for this.

When we call someone credulous we usually mean *not* that he believes X because he has never heard of Y, but that he has heard of both X and Y and believes X when he shouldn't. The productive question is *why* does he believe X? The reason is usually one of the following: X was told him by an authority such as his parents or his teacher or his government; X is something that is in fashion; X is something he worked out himself; X is a view that is crucial to his very conception of himself or his reality; or X is an instance of a *kind* of thinking he is particularly open to believing—it fits the structure of his thinking—for example, magical thinking or scientific thinking). Other reasons could be listed, but they could all be summed up by saying that for him X *was easier to believe than Y*. All humans have a propensity to believe what is easy to believe rather than what is true. [Emphasis in original]

Kaufman gave another reason in his list. We hold beliefs to take care of ourselves. We hang on to the belief because it does something for us that we think we need. For instance, we need to feel strong so we believe that controlling others is the way to go.

Changing Beliefs

Many of the points already discussed show up in the steps Kaufman sees as necessary for changing a belief.

- SELF-AWARENESS: Identify The Belief
[A point discussed in the first letter on beliefs.]
- MOTIVATION: Want to Change That Belief
[If the belief serves a need, you will not change it unless you perceive the new one will serve you better.]
- EMPOWERMENT: Believe You Can Change It
[Another point on his list above.]
- DECISION: Actually Change The Belief
[Notice it is the person doing this **on his own**.]
- ACTION: Make Your Decision Tangible Through Action. (Repetition builds new “habits.”)
[A belief changed without action suggests the belief has not really changed.]

There is a crucial point to notice from all this. *You cannot change another person's belief*. The person must want to change it and believe she can do so. In an organization, especially a hierarchical one, a person may want to change but believes she has no chance to do so. One of the main advantages of the Freedom and Responsibility paradigm is that it enables her to do so. [Note that I have changed the name of the new paradigm again. I keep trying to capture more accurately the nature of this paradigm.]

Elbow makes another important point consistent with all the ideas so far:

People like Thomas Kuhn [*Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in which he talked of paradigms and their shifts.] and Michael Polanyi give an account of the history of science

that . . . At a period of scientific revolution—when competing paradigms or models are up for grabs—it is as it is with readings of a poem: the “wrong” paradigm is not proven wrong; rather those who carry weight in the profession perceive another one as more fruitful and indeed truer. They perceive this truth from within it, not from without.

People will only move towards the new paradigm if they see it as “more fruitful and indeed truer.”

Ideas to Remember

In this short letter, I have not given any specific answer as to how to get a C&C person to change to F&R beliefs. However, it does contain enough information to allow some ideas we must keep before us at all times.

- We can propose new beliefs, but we cannot force them on others.
- We cannot change other’s beliefs.
- A person can only change beliefs when she is aware of her current ones.
- A person will change beliefs only if she sees the new ones as serving her better.
- A person has to believe she has the freedom and ability to change.
- You cannot produce change by attacking the old paradigm.

Conclusion

It seems that we really have no control over getting people to change to a new paradigm. To have any hope of doing so the proposed paradigm must pull a person in rather than push the old one out. People must change their beliefs for this to happen.

As difficult as it is, change is possible. History shows that many momentous changes have occurred. However, it is clear that every shift depends on changing beliefs. Therefore, dealing with beliefs is definitely the first issue you must tackle in creating an Extraordinary Organization.

Until next time

I certainly have not shown a clear path to changing beliefs. I hope, however that you now understand better the complexity and difficulty of this issue. Discussion of this issue is certainly not complete, and it will come up again. In the next letter, I am again going to interrupt the list of issues. Instead, I want to talk about a view of the world that I find extremely important in thinking about changing to the new paradigm.

Be Well, and
Be Extraordinary!

Don Yates
Extraordinary Organizations

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