

Keeping Our Faith In the Face of Change

BY SUE BOEVER, PhD

We all know that change is an inevitable part of Catholic healthcare. But knowing that does not necessarily make change any easier to bear.

What can a compassionate leader do to ease the trauma of major change when it cannot be avoided? What can be done so an organization not only survives, but thrives during tumultuous times? How, in short, can we ensure that an organization keeps its faith?

While there is no shortage of expert advice on managing change and surviving the shock associated with it, I have often found that the advice lacks a spiritual dimension. In trying to remedy that lack, what better approach than looking to Christ's example for answers? I have found it helpful to think in terms of how Jesus would lead an organization through change. I believe he would:

- **Maintain a clear focus and unwavering sense of purpose.**

It was Jesus' clear vision and sense of purpose that made him such a compelling leader. His trust and faith in God enabled him to make difficult decisions and stand alone in his convictions when he found himself at odds with the religious and political authorities. He understood that the *process*, the journey of change, is also the *product*, the purpose of it.

Following Jesus' example means keeping a steady eye on an organization's vision. It means relying on faith to provide the strength and perseverance needed to carry out difficult short-term tasks, recognizing they are necessary for the long-term realization of an organization's mission and purpose.

- **Plan for change, approaching it not as a single event, but as an ongoing journey.**

Experts in change management say that change should be planned for, anticipated, and practiced. Jesus' example teaches much the same thing.

Jesus understood he had to build a bridge to lead people to and through radical change. He realized that before his followers could be receptive to his ideas and willing to take risks on his behalf, he would have to earn their trust.

The same can be said of Catholic healthcare orga-



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nizations. Without employees' trust, the chances of a merger or partnership with a for-profit entity succeeding are about the same as those for reaping a bumper crop when you have neglected to sow the seed. It *could* happen, but it is not likely. To build the necessary bridges to help people through change, it is important to prepare far in advance of any specific threat or opportunity. The outcome of any given event is merely a reflection of the organization's overall health and strength.

- **Always speak the truth.**

Leaders often believe it is their job to come up with the answers, which they then mete out to others on a "need-to-know" basis. They sometimes refuse to address certain questions publicly, often out of a desire to protect others from the truth. This is usually a mistake.

Jesus freely shared his vision with others, even though he realized his followers often found it difficult to understand or were not ready to hear it. Knowing that he would not always be around to provide answers, he wanted others to think for themselves.

In my experience, it is almost impossible to over-communicate an organization's vision and the leader's passion for realizing it. Like Jesus, leaders often find themselves in the position of delivering difficult news. The challenge is not to be overly concerned with political correctness, but to help others see old problems in new ways.

- **Coach people through change, rather than dictate it.**

Throughout the ages, people have had a love-hate relationship with change. They expand and thrive with creative change, but crumble under the pressure of sustained, negative change. It is human nature to seek positive and pleasurable experiences, while avoiding negative or painful ones.

Jesus understood our human foibles and lived out of a deep sense of stewardship. He was not a dictator who ruled from the top down, but a consummate teacher and coach who encouraged each person to step into his or her potential.

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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CPR), "Genetics 101" (What will my baby look like?), "Diet and Health 101" (nutrition and feeding through age one), "Fiction and Facts 202" (old wives' tales), "Dorm Life" (decorating the nursery), "Mid-Terms" (fetal development), and "Final Exams" (birth and anesthesia). "Family Science" explains ways to adjust after the baby is born, and "Introduction to Management" advises fathers on child care. To reach the "Dean's List," participants learn ways to instill character in their children, while "Campus Health Services" details childhood illnesses and disease. Finally, "Spring Break" wraps up the day with a tour of the birthing center.

Classes are taught by doctors, nurses, and other staff who specialize in obstetrics and childbirth education. In addition, local vendors display the latest in baby supplies.

THE NEWBORN CHANNEL

At Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD, the Newborn Channel is the latest form of maternity education. This closed-circuit satellite television network delivers continuous postpartum and newborn educational programming in both English and Spanish.

Updated annually, the channel broadcasts on television sets in the labor and delivery, postpartum, and antepartum areas; the obstetrics clinic; and the pediatrics department. Patients receive a programming guide and can watch any or all of the programs at convenient times.

The programs cover a wide range of topics, including infant CPR and rescue breathing, automobile safety, and what to expect during the first 48 hours after delivery.

"The channel is one more way to reinforce maternity education provided to patients during their stay at Holy Cross Hospital," says Eileen Cahill, director of corporate affairs and marketing. □

☎ For more information, contact Steve Maldonado at 360-636-4111; Marlene Carey at 765-646-8290; and Eileen Cahill at 301-754-7130. Boot Camp for New Dads can be contacted at 949-786-3146 or through its Web site, www.newdads.com.

FINAL SAY

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That does not mean change should be easy. It is entirely appropriate for leaders to turn people upside down and inside out—using these opportunities to generate real growth and insights out of the chaos. A leader's job is to challenge employees, inspiring, motivating, and pushing them to be far more than they imagined they could.

• Lead by quiet, consistent example.

Jesus was a servant leader in the truest sense. He worked to enable others to see the vision, make it their own, and create ways to realize the vision from their own perspective.

Following his example means leading by spending time with employees and standing beside them in the line of fire. It means being inclusive rather than exclusive, accessible rather than intimidating. It means creating a culture of openness and trust, a safe place for creativity and risk-taking. It means approaching leadership with a great sense of humility.

• Be human.

Jesus fully experienced what it means to be human, with the accompanying fears, imperfections, pains, and doubts. Although he had a hearty sense of humor, he was sometimes sad, and he acknowledged his sadness.

Leaders need to give themselves permission to be imperfect, to be human. Likewise, they can invite the people in their organizations to take chances, to fail in creative attempts to realize the organization's vision. Jesus would also want leaders to take care of themselves. It is almost impossible to inspire—to lead—when one is overwhelmed and without physical, emotional, and spiritual reserves.

• Never attempt to do it alone.

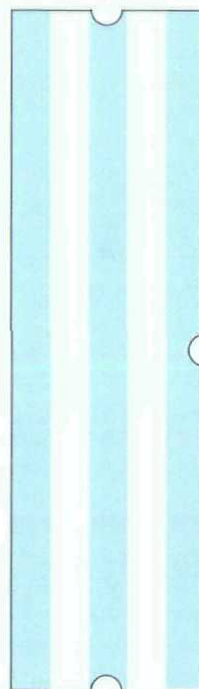
Jesus kept his balance through prayer, reflection, and community. In times of fear, he reached out to his father and those around him for comfort and support. "I am not alone," he often said.

Leaders need not be alone, either. They can ask God to accompany them on their journey. By trusting in God, pursuing a mission, and remaining true to core values and beliefs, it is possible to gain the strength to lead an organization bravely, and to succeed. □

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