



RITUAL'S ROLE IN PROFOUND CHANGE

Each night before bedtime a young father leads his four-year-old son through their home to inspect closets and peek under beds as they recite the benediction-like phrase, "No monsters here!" When the tour is complete, the child is happily assured and sleeps soundly.

A woman tosses a handful of soil on her husband's coffin as the priest intones, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

A dignitary breaks a bottle of champagne over a ship's bow before its maiden voyage.

Since the beginning, rituals have been an integral part of human life. Rituals help us celebrate, make sense of, and give meaning to our lives. In their book *More Than Words*, Janet Schaffran and Pat Kozak write:

[Ritual] provides the actions and forms through which people meet, carry out social activities, celebrate and commemorate. Whether actions performed appear casual or dramatic, sacred or secular, they express a meaning and significance that extends beyond the particular event itself.

Rituals express the truths by which we live, the relationships and beliefs which underlie our lives. Rituals, like the way we greet each other, the blessing before sharing a meal, the expression of thanks when receiving a gift, the spoken or kissed "good night" at the end of the day, all carry a significance greater than mere social conformity.¹

Rituals, often expressed in symbols and myths, have many uses, including:

*Ritual
Facilitates
Transitions,
Heals
Wounds*

- To recognize endings and celebrate beginnings
- To note special or dramatic occasions, such as holidays or achievements

Summary In today's healthcare environment, characterized by downsizing, restructuring, mergers, and acquisitions, organizational cultures and employees are experiencing rapid—and often tense—changes. Ritual can facilitate change by acknowledging it and allowing the grieving process to take its course. The success of an organizational culture change can depend on whether the organization and its members have been given an opportunity to grieve. Until they grieve their losses, people cannot embrace the new.

Organizational leaders who have survived downsizing must come to grips with their own survivor status first and then lead others in the organization through the current painful but irrevocable shift in their relationship to the organization. The use of ritual helps organizational survivors see the connection between the grieving process and their survivor symptoms of denial, anger, depression, guilt, fear, insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty.

A good ritual should allow those present to rise above barriers that separate, worries that overburden, and blindness that limits and to gather as one with God. As a rule, a good ritual is participative and recognizes the audience's diversity. The ritual should not just address those present but invite them to act, pray, or sing.

Ritual is an important way to provide a structure that allows people to express their emotions. For leaders, it can be a visible way to acknowledge grief and show support for organizational members. For ritual to have any meaning, key leaders need to be present and perhaps have a role in the creation and enactment of the ritual.



- To show appreciation
- To grieve
- To affirm consensus or unity
- To resolve the gap between the real and the ideal world

Unfortunately, in addition to positive uses, rituals can also be used to deny painful truths, or they can become bogged down with meaningless verbiage. The use of imagery, symbolism, gestures such as touch, and participation of those involved is often more meaningful than the words.

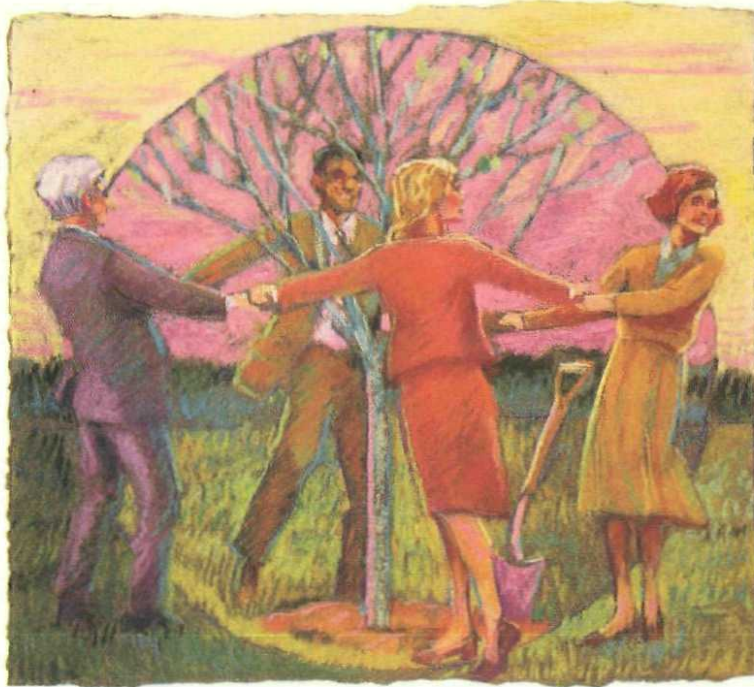
RITUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Ritual is as important to organizational life as it is to the personal. Organizational experts Terrence E. Deal and Allen A. Kennedy define ritual as moments in an organization's history that mark important events and bind people together.²

In today's healthcare environment, character-

ized by downsizing, restructuring, mergers, and acquisitions, organizational cultures and employees are experiencing rapid—and often tense—changes. Changes are external, such as a new policy, says William Bridges, PhD, who has spent more than a decade writing about personal and organizational change.³ As we experience change, Bridges explains, we also experience transition—an internal psychological process through which we come to terms with a new situation.

Transition begins, notes Bridges, with an ending, a letting go. During this time of tension and conflict, people enter a “neutral zone” between an ending and a new beginning, according to Bridges. The neutral zone is a sort of limbo at which time leaders can manage the transition process by developing and implementing strategies for formally acknowledging



Sim Gellman

RITUALS: SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

The opening of a patient-focused care wing in one West Coast healthcare system involved massive changes for employees—layoffs, job transfers, and retraining. To facilitate the change:

- Leaders planned a parade for employees from the old wing to the new.
- Employees wrote what they found difficult to say good-bye to. These were gathered together and burned in the courtyard as a symbol of letting go.
- Leaders and employees planted a tree to show the hope, new life, and growth that was taking place through the change.

CHANGE OF SPONSORSHIP

St. Mary's Hospital of Blue Springs, MO, traded sponsorship with St. Joseph's

Hospital in Kirkwood, MO. System, mission, and organizational leaders participated in rituals that were held at each hospital. Both rituals involved a reflection on the history of the organization and its sponsor, spiritual and reflective readings, music, and an invitation for employees to come forward and tell stories.

Although the change did not involve layoffs or hardship, some employees found the letting go of their traditional sponsor to be a painfully emotional, bittersweet experience. Several employees told moving stories of their personal attachment to small things that symbolized their relationship and endearment to the sponsor.

MERGER AND ACQUISITION

In times of merger or acquisition, some organizations have held a series of ritu-

als and celebrations to allow employees to say good-bye to the old and welcome the new.

Such rituals need not be funereal, and they need not take the form of a “prayer service.” They should focus on welcoming the new as much as saying good-bye to the old.

For example, the leaders of one newly merged organization held a party to launch its updated joint mission statement; each employee received a framed copy.

The employees of another organization celebrated the new beginning and said good-bye to its past in a different way. They gathered to sip wine, look at an exhibit of photographs dating from the “early days,” and receive copies of a commemorative history of the organization.



endings and losses, for giving persons the chance to grieve and let go of things to which they have become accustomed or that gave them a sense of identity or safety.

Ritual can facilitate change by acknowledging it and allowing grieving. The success of an organizational culture change can depend on whether the organization and its members have been given the opportunity to grieve (see Fr. Arbuckle's article on p. 25). Until they grieve their losses, people cannot embrace the new.

COPING WITH CHANGE

The "forgotten survivors"—those who remain after events such as a downsizing, who are expected to revitalize a tired or traumatized orga-

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nization—often suffer from "layoff survivor sickness" that is "widespread and toxic to both the human spirit and organizational survival," maintains David M. Noer.⁴

Survivors may experience symptoms that they cope with through lowered productivity, reduced risk taking, blaming, and other negative methods. Symptoms include denial, anger, depression, guilt, fear, insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty.

In such situations, organizational leaders must come to grips with their own survivor status first and then lead others through the current painful but irrevocable shift in their relationship to the organization. According to Noer, this requires leaders who feel a personal vulnerability and experience emotional and spiritual symptoms of the change. Finally, through the use of good intervention strategies, leaders can help people work through their symptoms to achieve acceptance.

RESOURCES FOR RITUALS

VIDEOTAPE

Catholic Health Association, *Embodying the Future: The Art of the Sacred—The Use of Creative Ritual within Pastoral Care*, part III, St. Louis, 1994.

PRINT

Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts, *Rituals for Our Times: Celebrating, Healing, and Changing Our Lives and Our Relationships*, HarperCollins, New York City, 1992.

Thomas D. Maddix, "Navigating Change: Spirituality and Hope," *CHAC Review*, Spring 1992, pp. 14-18.

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, HarperCollins, New York City, 1994 (see especially Chapter 10: "The Need for Myth, Ritual, and a Spiritual Life," pp. 203-230).

Jean Roche, *Celebrations of Life*, Religious Sisters of Mercy, Albany, NY, 1991.

Jean Roche, "The Story: A Primary Spiritual Tool," *Health Progress*, July-August 1994, pp. 60-63.

Miriam Therese Winter, *Womanprayer/Womansong: Resources for Ritual*, Meyer-Stone Books, Oak Park, IL, 1987.

MUSIC

Martha Ann Kirk and Colleen Fulmer, *Her Wings Unfurled*, Loretto Spirituality Network, Albany, CA, 1990.

Rufino Zaragoza, *Light of Christ: Prayer Changes for Meditation and Liturgy* (CD, tape, and songbook with prayer guide for meditation and movement), OCP Publications, Portland, OR, 1990.

Rufino Zaragoza, *Love's Radiant Light* (CD, tape, and songbook with prayer guide; includes prayer guide by Martha Ann Kirk), OCP Publications, Portland, OR, 1991.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR MUSIC

Background, instrumental, or reflective music from Windham Hill, George Winston.

Hymns from Catholic music collections such as *Glory & Praise, Music Issue, and Worship II*.

MANAGING GRIEF

Leaders know that helping their organizations survive and rekindling employees' spirit and creativity during a time of transition is no easy task. To manage emotions during a transition, Noer advocates the use of a four-level approach to facilitate the necessary grieving:

- Centering and relaxation exercises
- Sharing events and feelings
- Using metaphors and storytelling
- Conducting sessions in which employees can express grief, experience an organized rite of passage, and share their feelings, secure in the knowledge that others are listening

The use of ritual helps organizational survivors see the connection between the grieving process and their survivor symptoms. For example, Noer reports, one group held a wake, complete with candles, music, and testimonials. They wrote out the old system ideas they needed to let go of, read their lists aloud, tore the lists in half, and placed them in a box draped in black. The group then sang "We Shall Overcome" and symbolically buried the box in a dumpster. Noer notes that this group's symbolic acts had a power and value that enabled them to move on to a new vision and image of service.

KEY ELEMENTS IN DEVELOPING RITUALS

Ritualist and dramatic liturgist Sr. Martha Ann Kirk, CCVI, says that good ritual allows people to leave everyday chronological time and to enter into a sense of God's timeless eternity. A good ritual should allow those present to rise above barriers that separate, worries that overburden, and blindness that limits and to gather as one with God. She writes:



Good ritual allows us to enter what anthropologists call liminal space and time. This derives from the word for threshold—we are betwixt and between. We are not held by the past or the future. We are both in the world and transcending it. Good ritual invites us to the grace of the incarnation. The spiritual shines through the physical. The divine face is reflected in human faces. Christ touches through our hands and speaks through our words. And the Spirit dances through us.⁵

Planning a good ritual (and not just a ceremony) is a challenging task. Rituals enable persons and groups to recreate and interpret their lives in a number of ways. As a rule, a good ritual is participative and recognizes the audience's diversity. The ritual should not just address those present but invite them to act, pray, or sing. Sr. Kirk says that the ideal ritual:

- Involves many senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell
- Gives some security or sense of familiarity
- Offers some challenges (e.g., the challenge of letting go)
- Involves (at least implicitly) the three aspects of the paschal mystery—dying, rising, glory
- Is more like poetry than prose
- Respects personal needs but draws participants to community
- Gives participants time and space to enter deeply into their feelings

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The following questions or considerations should be addressed when developing a ritual.

Purpose of the Ritual What is being celebrated or marked? A passage, an occasion to grieve, or a change?

Audience Who will be there? How many? What kind of people are they (e.g., nurses, administrators)? What cultures are represented?

Environment and Atmosphere How can we encourage participation? How can we help participants experience, understand? What would be the most comfortable and symbolic environment for this?

Opening What kind of clear opening would best help participants move into a quiet, reflective state of mind? A welcoming, a reading, a prayer, music, or deep silence?

Content and Elements What will the content include? Singing, prayers, readings, symbolic action, storytelling, mime, drama, slides, or visual images?

Dynamics Are there moments of silence for ideas to sink in? Are there opportunities for participation that allow people to experience deep meaning? Are there appropriate pauses?

Ideas for Symbolic Action What kinds of symbolic actions will add to the ritual's meaning? Planting; digging; burying; burning; tasting; weaving; dancing; mixing; cooking; holding something such as a shell, gourd, flower, root, rock, mirror or candle; or sharing a kiss of peace?

Closing How will the ritual close to unify words and actions? A summary prayer, a blessing, a sending forth or "missioning," or a song?

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TAPPING AN ORGANIZATION'S SPIRIT

Ritual can help ease some employees' and organizations' pain as they move through a transformation. But ritual also helps shape and focus the organization's spirit, Harrison Owen explains in his book *Spirit: Transformation and Development in Organizations* (Abbott Publishing, Potomac, MD, 1987).

One way to tap an organization's spirit is through its stories, or myths, Owen says (see also Rev. Gerald A. Arbuckle's article on p. 25). Owen writes, "With ritual, myth assumes shape, form, texture, color, sound, and motion as all the senses are brought into play." He sees myth and ritual as two sides of the same coin—"mythos."

An organization's mythos begins through "little stories." These stories

are then often repeated at informal organizational gatherings. Eventually, for an organization's members, the stories become like maps, helping employees venture into strange territories.

Mythos is not the only vehicle that helps an organization's employees through transformation. They must also experience the stages of dying, described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Owen states, "To live is to change, to change is to die, to die is to live." In fact, rather than experience a transformation process, employees would rather die first, which is essentially what they will have to do.

And part of this dying is a letting go of the old and moving on to the new,

which leads to reconciliation. According to Owen, reconciliation is "the supreme act of leadership, which lovingly creates a new story wherein all may find completion to their transformational journey as expressed in a new covenant."

If the organization is to have a future, both the employee and the organization must acknowledge that they have died to what has been and then move on. Some employees may find new meanings elsewhere. Some employees, feeling they have no options, may hang on—without spirit. Others, for whom the organization has been their life, will work through their pain toward transformation. "Those invested, dedicated individuals provide the critical resource of spirit from which a future may be made."

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

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• Selection and orientation systems that ensure employees are comfortable with and will support the organization's goals and expectations. Although the organization's goal should be to minimize turnover, employees who are unable to find meaning in the culture may leave on their own or be removed in a compassionate manner.

Cultures are real. Healthcare leaders who ignore organizational culture do so at risk of not achieving organizational outputs of high morale, trust, quality, and economic success. □

NOTES

1. Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1990.
2. Stephen M. Shortell, et al., "Creating Organized Delivery Systems: The Barriers and Facilitators," *Hospital and Health Services Administration*, Winter 1993, pp. 447-466.
3. Center for Leadership Excellence, *Transformational Leadership for the Healing Ministry: Competencies for the Future: A Report on the Findings*, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis, 1994.
4. Susan Cartwright and Cary L. Cooper, "The Role of Culture Compatibility in Successful Organizational Marriage," *Academy of Management Executive*, no. 2, 1993, pp. 57-70.
5. Arbuckle.
6. Arbuckle.
7. John P. Kotter and James L. Heskett, *Corporate Culture and Performance*, Free Press, New York City, 1992.
8. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday Currency, New York City, 1990.
9. Jill L. Sherer, "Corporate Cultures: Turning 'Us Versus Them' into 'We,'" *Hospitals and Health Networks*, May 5, 1994, pp. 20-27.
10. Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 1992.
11. Wheatley.
12. Price Pritchett and Ron Pound, *High-Velocity Culture Change: A Handbook for Managers*, Pritchett, Dallas, 1993.

REFOUNDING

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Once we assent to walk with Christ, we must become ruthlessly honest in assessing our institutions, systems, beliefs, and attitudes in light of his mission. We must question whether these further or hinder Christ's mission. Only through ongoing assessment can we refound the ministry.

If we are open to accepting God's gifts, then we will face humanly impossible tasks, as did the founders of religious congregations and the ministry. We will search for the creative and committed people in our midst, strategically placing and supporting them. We will summon our healthcare organizational cultures to grieve over what has been lost in order to move forward to embrace what we may as yet be unable even to imagine. Through these blessings from God, which chaos disposes us to receive, and our ownership of them, we will initiate and continue the renewal and refounding of the Catholic health ministry. □

NOTES

1. I approach the notion of chaos from a cultural anthropological perspective. See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos: Refounding of Religious Congregations*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1988, pp. 14-45. In a complementary way, Margaret J. Wheatley looks at the relationship between chaos and leadership within the context of contemporary science in *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 1992.
2. Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1993, p. 42.
3. This is a modified definition from E. H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1987, p. 314.
4. V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1977, pp. 94-203; and Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1990, pp. 62-78.
5. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, pp. 21f.
6. R. D. Stacey, *Managing the Chaos: Dynamic Business Strategies in an Unpredictable World*, Kogan Page, London, 1992, pp. 189-208; Wheatley, pp. 139-151.
7. Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos*, pp. 29-45 and 88-111.

RITUAL

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LEADERS' RESPONSIBILITY

Ritual is an important way to provide a structure that allows people to express their emotions. For leaders, it can be a visible way to acknowledge grief and show support for organizational members. For ritual to have any meaning, key leaders need to be present and perhaps have a role in the creation and enactment of the ritual.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, SC, it is the leader's role to structure a confusing and ambiguous environment toward some unifying purpose. Noer says, "This concept defines leadership in terms of process: any individual or group who can create a galvanizing meaning is exercising leadership. . . . The basic task of new-paradigm leadership is making meaning." Thus leaders should not hesitate to turn to others within the organization for help with making meaning. Mission and pastoral care team members—people with a history of tending to people's spiritual and emotional needs—can help develop healing rituals.

Whether dealing with mergers, downsizing, change of sponsorship, or some other organizational or cultural transition, leaders must provide—through ritual—the official, visible symbols to allow employees to deal with loss, let go, say "hello," remember, or, perhaps, cry. Only then can an organization's members make the necessary mental, emotional, and spiritual adjustments that will allow them to become part of a new culture. □

NOTES

1. Janet Schaffran and Pat Kozak, *More Than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities*, 2d ed., Meyer-Stone Books, Oak Park, IL, 1988.
2. Terrence E. Deal and Allen A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1982.
3. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1991.
4. David M. Noer, *Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1993.
5. Martha Ann Kirk, personal correspondence, September 1994.