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Expect Change

I don't remember what her name was. All I knew was that she wasn't Miss Waters. I was sure she was nice and would take good care of us. But she was ancient. She was closer to my grandmother's age than Miss Waters'. She wore a flowered dress and sat at the front of the classroom near the blackboard. I remember that she frequently read to us. She explained that Miss Waters was taking care of some urgent school business and that she would be with us for a while instead. I didn't know the school had a business. I am not sure I liked this change. Miss Waters had been with us every other day.

There were always other ladies in the room helping out. They were nice and helpful and just seemed to know what to do without anybody asking.

When this other lady was in our classroom, things didn't go as smoothly. Her helpers had to ask what she wanted them to do next. She didn't seem very sure of herself. We followed the same schedule, like going to recess at the same time, but things just seemed to be different. Kindergarten was just a little wrong somehow.

We live in a world that is continually changing. We don't always acknowledge that, but it is true. We like to lock into the things that are comfortable. Like wearing the same sweatshirt when we relax, there are certain patterns we just seem to enjoy. I guess we are all creatures of habit.

I find that even when I am doing something new, I follow the same old patterns. I think through the sequence of how things will work in the same way. I map out my work and personal activities in the same way. I probably even hit the old blind spots in the same way. That is, of course, if I have any blind spots! Life could be fine and comfortable, if "they" would just leave us alone.

But in eBusiness, we need to think in terms of morphing the business model continually. That doesn't mean we always throw out the old and move on to the new (though there is a place for that). It means that we have to continually look at the value equation and see what should change for ourselves and for our trading partners.

Change is necessary. We don't play all the cards. Things will change around us as we find better ways of doing things, create other processes or establish new relationships. As humans we are driven to build the better mousetrap and sometimes we get snapped.

There can be competitive changes, such as moving from analog to digital technologies. We wouldn't have experienced sustained technological change over the last forty-five years if we didn't actively seek out change. Think of the semiconductor industry that has doubled capacity on the computer chip every eighteen months or less. Companies that compete in those industries either leap frog the competition or are hanging on just to stay in the game.

There are market changes, where consumer preferences swing from one place to another. This is exemplified in the fashion industry, where sometimes even old styles return to the scene and the market adjusts. They change and change and they change back.

There are changes in the environment and corresponding regulatory agencies and public opinion changes, which dramatically impact markets.

The point is that we control none of this ourselves. Get used to it. The worse thing to do is to resist it.

In the eBusiness world, it can happen so quickly that we see changes in direction before some technologies are even deployed. In B2B exchanges, for example, a short time ago everyone was moving to public exchanges. As companies considered the risk and reward, they switched gears and moved to private exchanges instead. Public exchanges (temporarily) have become irrelevant.

Don't change for the sake of change. Baseball teams do this all the time. Mostly it doesn't work. Sometimes it makes us feel better that we are doing something creative or at least responding in some way. Change, for the sake of change, typically

introduces new risks into the equation. Change is necessary, but not all change is necessary.

When we change things we can make our customers and suppliers uncomfortable. We can force them to buy and use new tools. We can force them to learn new things and hire more people. We can even force them to look elsewhere for their business opportunities and create other undesirable responses.

We need to carefully assess the impact that any change will make-- even a good change. There can be very minor changes, such as changing the banner on a web page that are neutral changes. And there can be other, seemingly minor changes that have unforeseen impacts. Our banner included the World Trade Center pictured prominently in the background. After the terrorist attack, would we keep the banner to honor those who were lost? Would we remove the view so that our customers and we were not continually reminded of our pain? Eventually we would have to change the banner, but what was the right timing?

Some change just isn't worth it. Make sure the emotional investment you may be asking others to make is worthwhile.

Change is frequently difficult. We all need to be reminded that change frequently is difficult. Not always, but frequently. If we don't remind ourselves of that fact, we don't look it straight in the eye. We don't understand the magnitude of the emotional and mental task before us. We sugar coat the tough decisions that will need to be made. We don't give them the due consideration and look at all the impacts.

At my company, change management is always at the forefront. I don't necessarily think that we always do a great job with change management, but its impact is always considered and work is done to mitigate or control risk. But you can't think of everything, so you can't mitigate every risk. Our brains don't work that way.

Recognizing change focuses our attention on the need for training and job aids. It can help us define new skills that are needed. It can help us work through the social aspects of work and job displacement.

One project I was on had outstanding savings and would have reduced customer service agents by a very dramatic number. But we also understood that our supply chain needed major attention. We could have eliminated all those jobs and not had the

resources to work on the supply chain issues. But understanding the changes we were going through allowed us to recognize that the skills for our next most immediate issue were readily available. By moving some people, instead of eliminating more jobs, we were able to get to our end state objective quickly.

Don't worry about things you cannot control. There are many changes with which we have to deal over which we at least some degree of control. There are other things where we have no control (like the weather) or no longer have much control (like my teenage son). It doesn't do a bit of good to worry about things we cannot influence or control. Think, then, in terms of how you can respond to changes around you. How you respond includes how nervous, excited, or distracted you will get.

The key is to not get overly concerned with the change; instead, work your way to defining your path forward.

We gain some control in "controlling" change. We cannot always control circumstances. But we can gain control over some aspects of change. For example, we have influence over our emotions. Sometimes we can buck ourselves up to get ready for change. Sometimes we can talk to others who have experienced similar types of change and can help us through the process.

We can also sometimes modify the timing of change. This is not stalling, which is our typical approach when confronted with change. Many times people will attempt to wait things out, to see if the change will stick. This is typically not the best approach.

We can always take responsibility in being prepared for a change.

The great dichotomy of B2B is that we cause change on an audience that doesn't want to change. All the technology aspects are easy by comparison. All the great technological advances are meaningless until *everyone* is ready to implement.

Just like with my substitute teacher, some changes are unavoidable no matter how much we may dislike them. But we can keep a sharp focus on how the change will impact others. I am sure my substitute teach was doing all in her power to make the transition on the kids as smooth as possible. We need to do likewise.

To be successful with B2B, you don't demand change by others; you teach, you illustrate, you negotiate, you gain consensus, you develop, you monitor, you adjust, you

accomplish, you measure, and you celebrate. Then you take a deep breath and start the cycle all over again, until you get the job done right.

Welcome to my world!

"It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory." -W. Edwards Deming



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