

Understanding People and Change

When redirecting an organization, as a church, it takes time. This is one of the mistakes I see pastors and church leaders make in attempting to transition a church, not taking the needed time to produce change.

Seeing how in most circumstances, we, as the pastor or church leader, usually serve as the change agent in the church, how do we best determine when to take the risks necessary to make the changes, while at the same time acknowledging the needs of the existing congregation?

Of course the first and most important thing is Prayer – and lots of it.

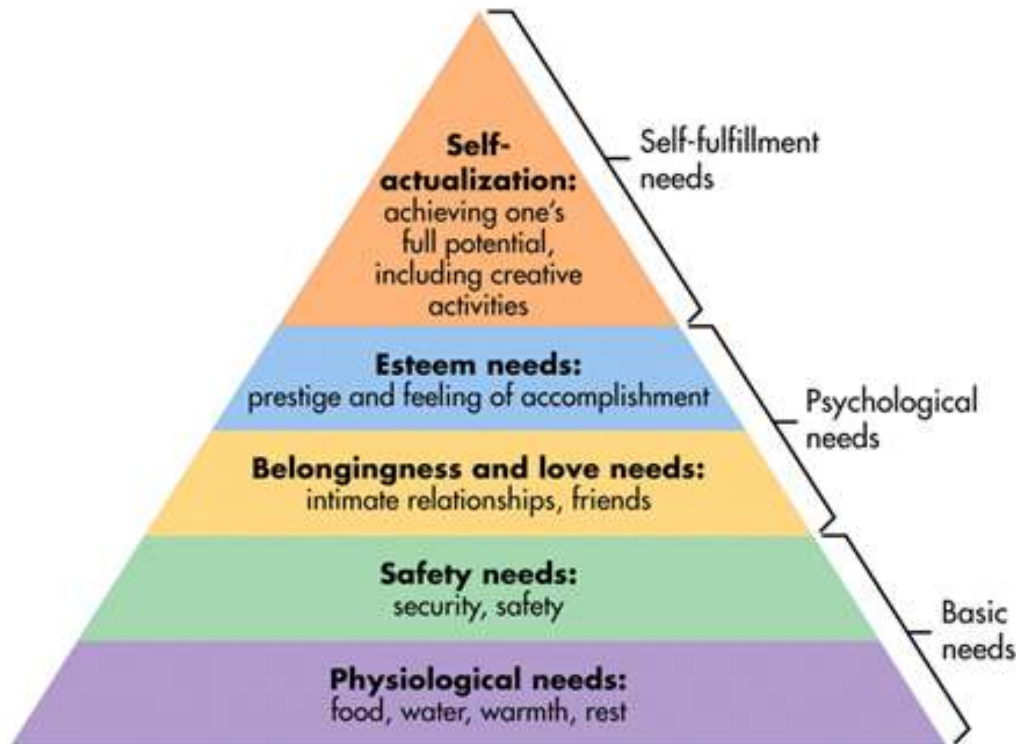
Change is one of life's continuums. Every living thing God created, He created with a perpetual state of change - every plant, animal, and person is continually changing. People change in every area of their lives. There are areas in our lives where we do not readily accept change. For many people the church seems to fall into this category.

The key to someone accepting and embracing needed change is for he/she to realize the personal benefit for him/herself and for others. Most people are reluctant to move outside their comfort zone until they realize and are assured of the safety on the other side of change. A benefit is something promoting or enhancing well-being. One article every leader must always be cautiously aware of is what I refer to as “risk versus reward” factor. This is a very real dynamic for people. The perceived risk factor cannot exceed the perceived reward or benefit. If I believe sticking my hand in the cookie jar may risk losing my hand, I will probably go without that cookie.

Every person needs to understand the fruit and the benefits to him/her personally and must be willing to take the required risks to reap the forthcoming benefits. Our make-up is such that it does not matter what the implied change will do for hundreds of others. The safety and security of my family and me in particular comes first. When a church leader states, “We are making these changes to reach hundreds of people for Christ.” It will not resonate with parishioners until they can sense and realize the benefit for themselves individually. I know this sounds harsh, but unfortunately it is in our make-up.

Our essential need of self-security and safety must be realized before the level of loving and belonging, or esteem can be experienced. (See Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) In a given situation where we are at the loving and belonging level, it is difficult to move backward to an area where our security is unknown. Through past experience, our cognitive being tells us change will cause us to move backward in our levels of need. This is why the perceived reward must be higher than the perceived risk factor. Change takes us out of our comfort zone.

In the diagram below, Abraham Maslow demonstrates how our psychological makeup drives our requisites individual comfort levels. A person must believe his/her basic needs are met and unthreatened before he/she will move to the next level of need fulfillment.



In other words, we will not enter into an acceptance and belonging relationship until we are satisfied that our safety and security are not at risk. People entering a church building for the first time may enter cautiously, but with relative assurance they are safe and their security is not threatened. How many times have you seen new young guests come into your church, and no matter how many people attempt to make the young couple aware that you have a good nursery for their child, the parents insist on keeping the child with them in the service? Remaining together gives a sense of control over the safety and security of the entire family. Separation threatens that security.

Another example: a man (or woman) will throw safety and security out the window if someone breaks into his home at night. Why, because the physiological needs are threatened.

Understanding the hierarchy of needs can help a leader pace change and realize the risk versus reward factor. Pace your change, bring your people along, guiding them through the process of change, leading them to discover for themselves the personal benefits as well as the kingdom benefits.