



Changing the scenery

TN81 Training Notes series: Planning

These notes were first published on the website in April 2014 and last updated in February 2024. They are copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted.

When I lead training events on managing (or coping with) change, I often start by reversing the idea that we should see staying still as the default and change as the exception. I then go on to provide a language to describe change in terms of different 'sceneries'.

These notes summarise these two foundations on which to build an understanding of how to lead a church or mission through change. So here are six points to challenge your views on change, five questions to ask and four ways of being involved.

Six points to challenge your views on change

1 **Change is natural**

As living creatures our bodies are constantly changing while we live in a world that is always moving. Life within us means that we breathe, develop and age. Nature around us is never still: the wind, the waves, the seasons. Change can be beautiful.

2 **Change is everywhere**

Our society is undergoing constant change – history is the story of change. Everyone is seeing transformation (whether they like it or not), most obviously in the field of technology but also in our culture, our fashions, our viewpoints.

3 **Change is of God**

He is the God who does not change (eg. Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 1:17) but who most definitely is in the business of changing *us* (consider John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17 and then 1 Corinthians 15:51,52). Disciples are, by definition, people who are learners and followers and so changing.

4 **Pastors are leaders of change**

This may come as news to some congregations but pastors disciple people and so their role is to see their congregations change. Many pastors find people highly resistant to change – and so many Christians remain stuck rather than moving on to maturity. The basic role of any church leader or evangelist is to see people change.

5 **Significant change is often messy**

Just because it should be natural for the Christian does not necessarily make change easy. And once someone has led people through a successful change it does not follow that they will succeed next time. Jesus came to bring change. We killed him.

6 **Discernment is vital**

Hence, since the process is often difficult, you need to be very sure that the changes you are proposing are wise ones and are carried out in the best way possible. And of course the person most resistant to the 'right' change may well be the leader.

Try to grasp how these points challenge our normal church mindset that the default position is to maintain the status quo and the special case is when there is a change of any kind. The idea being expressed here is that leaders are, at heart, change-agents. Yet many Christians long to escape from the world's changes to a church where life is constant.

Exercise

The exercises in TN81 are written as though for you alone, but you can easily adapt them for your church or a team working together.

- A List all the changes in your life you can think of over the past year that have been completed or which are still in progress.
- Some of these will be events: you moved house, your pet cat died, a new leader took over your project team at work. Some will be gradual shifts: your finances became more difficult to manage, your church continued to grow in numbers, you went to the gym more often.
- B Now list some of the natural developments that you may forget about: the seasons changed, you grew in experience, and so on.
- C Next, list issues to do with your own Christian discipleship whether events or shifts. In what ways are you growing as a Christian?
- D Which of all these changes in A to C did/do you enjoy and benefit from? Which were/are particularly messy or uncomfortable? Why?

Five questions to ask

Any change, whether physical, cultural or attitudinal, can be seen as *journeying from Scenery 1 to Scenery 2*. Examples include travelling from home to a holiday destination, or reading a book and thereby changing your mind on an issue. In the following questions 1 and 2 are the practical issues, 3 is the pivot, 4 and 5 are the feelings issues.

1 **What is the change?** – An issue of scenery

See change as being able to experience and describe two different sceneries. One you see today, the other you see in a different place tomorrow. One you see by looking out of a front window, the other you see by moving to the back. But you don't just *see* sceneries, you may hear, feel and even smell them too. You may not know very much about Scenery 2 when you set off.

2 **How do we get there?** – An issue of journey

All changes of scenery involve some kind of journey between locations or in time. Some journeys are swift, others take ages. Some are unexpected, others are prepared for. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some are expensive, others are without cost.

3 **Why are we changing?** – An issue of purpose

Understanding the reason for the change can give reassurance. The benefits of seeing Scenery 2 need to be greater than the loss of Scenery 1 together with the cost of the journey. It helps if you can understand that Scenery 2 is a better place to be in and therefore to have some measure of dissatisfaction with Scenery 1.

4 **Who are the stakeholders?** – An issue of people

The way you experience both the journey and the change in scenery will be greatly affected by those you are with. A solo journey will be quite different from a group one, much will depend on the leader. Different groups involved in any change will experience it in different ways. Consider groups as someone is dying: spouse, friends, nursing staff, etc.

5 **How much influence do I have?** – An issue of control

Your experience of any change will depend very largely on how much control over the journey you have (such as its route or speed) and whether you can do something about Scenery 2. Some people much prefer to lead a change process rather than to be led through it. If you want to exert control and are not the leader, you shout loudly!

Exercise

Take one particular change you listed in the previous exercise. Answer each of the five questions above in turn about it, using the ideas of Scenery 1, Scenery 2 and the journey from 1 to 2.

What does this tell you about the change itself and your reaction to it?

Four ways of being involved

The final question in the previous section, about control, needs a little more thought. Here are four different possibilities about control. Note that the one who manages the change has to live with it too.

1 **You are expected to *manage* the change**

You may be alone or you may be the leader taking others with you. You are therefore in some measure of control. You need management advice and experience.

2 **You have to *live with* the change**

So someone else (or no one) is managing it all and you may have little or no control. You need counselling or encouragement in some form.

3 **As 1, but you are not in control**

You are the leader, but the change may be an unexpected crisis or the timing may not be in your hands. This makes your job more difficult.

4 **As 2, but the leader is not in control**

This is an unexpected crisis, you are not the leader, but the leader is unable to fully control the journey or Scenery 2. This can be scary.

Exercise

Do these four categories specially help you understand any of the changes you have already listed?

How does it affect any of these if you believe that God is in ultimate control?

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN81. See also Training Notes TN3, *The bewildering world of change*, TN12, *Fifteen ideas to help people change*, TN59, *Don't you dare change anything!* and TN121, *Making a case for change*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN81 under Planning.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325

Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk

Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>