



# START Conversations

Talking about what matters most

## Change is Hard – I'll Be Ready Tomorrow.

Having breakfast with a CEO recently and talking about organisational change, he came out with the memorable line, "change is hard – I'll be ready tomorrow". It wasn't a personal reference but rather the unspoken response he seems to encounter from his senior leaders at every turn when it comes to the organisational change he knows is necessary and that cannot be delayed.

As TomorrowToday we have done extensive work globally and across multiple industries helping leaders and companies 'look out the window' and bring coherency to the ensuing conversations. Looking out the window is important work for leaders to do and those that fail to do so often end up running their company into a dead-end alley of oblivion. What we have found however is that for the most part companies know that, (1) they need to change and keep pace with an exponentially changing world and, (2) they may even know 'what that change is' or looks like but...

But, they often seem incapable of realizing the change they need. There are internal inhibitors that militate against the 'real' change needed. Of course they appear to be changing but the unspoken reality is that the more they change, the more things stay the same. Things are shifted, given different names and maybe even a fresh coat of paint but the real change needed, change that is often all too apparent, remains untouched. The structures that need dismantling; the policies that need erasing; the experimenting being called for; the honest feedback to leaders; the revisiting of core elements, are all ignored.

If we're honest, perhaps the biggest reasons for this inertia around real change has to do with leaders fearing the loss of control and / or an erosion of their own personal position both financially and status-wise. These are difficult barriers to breach and often constitute the 'enemy within' when it comes to the kind of meaningful change that is required in response to the dynamic and challenging external context.

Dealing with the 'enemy within' has become an increasingly emergent and dominant theme as we (TomorrowToday) have worked with leaders and companies in 'looking out the window'. It has become apparent to us that looking out the window constitutes but half of the equation; it is the response to looking out the window that is where the real

challenge is to be found. Having looked out the window and understood the disruptive forces driving the change, the next step is to ensure that your organisation is ready to meet tomorrow's challenges.

We have called this task dealing with the 'enemy within' and it constitutes our latest TomorrowToday framework (as both a keynote address and a workshop). It is something we are excited about taking to our clients and market. It is about helping companies understand that it is not merely their strategies that need to be overhauled nor is it simply about greasing the wheel by way of a change management process – it goes far deeper than both those elements; is about changing their DNA. It is about ensuring that we have the DNA that will allow us to thrive into the future. In any biological DNA evolutionary process three fundamental things happen: the metamorphous is shaped by what to *keep*; what to *discard*; and what to *rearrange*. 'What to keep, discard and rearrange?' is the underpinning question to be engaged if your company is to successfully meet the challenge that the unfolding future poses.

## **But what does this all mean for you as a leader? How do you lead in such times?**

Of course there is no simple answer to that searching question but there are three pointers for you as a leader that are worth noting.

### **1) Experience is overrated.**

This was the provocative subtitle on the cover of a recent Harvard Business Review on Talent. It is true. In a world in which the challenges that leaders are encountering are nothing like those previously encountered, the past offers little help in finding solutions. This is what Ron Heifetz of Harvard refers to as an 'adaptive challenge'. An adaptive challenge can be defined as, 'knowing what to do when you don't know what to do' and as such, any solution requires 'new learning'. In an adaptive challenge even the problem itself requires 'new learning' – or it needs to be defined because the very nature of the problem is not immediately apparent. It is about getting to the 'real problem' – and the first step demands thorough diagnosis.

The danger is that too many leaders believe that they can solve adaptive challenges through their own – or the companies, experience. In fact to suggest otherwise is not always kindly received and it is often taken as an insult or interpreted as being dismissive of the road travelled and the many lessons learnt along that journey. To say experience is overrated is not to imply this nor is it to be dismissive of the past; it is merely saying that tomorrow's challenges will not be solved by yesterday's solutions.

Instinctively we all know this and yet we cling to experience as the means to navigate the future. It is like driving down a fast paced highway looking only in the rear-view mirror! It is only a matter of time before we have a fatal accident.

## 2) Questions are the answers.

Smart leaders ask a lot of questions and I would go as far to say that the quality of the questions you (as a leader) are asking will determine the quality of the solutions and strategy going forward. The willingness to pose questions that go to the very heart of purpose, motivation and objectives; questions that are given permission to venture into territories that previously have had large 'no entry' signs posted; questions that go both 'inwards' and 'outwards' – these will be the means by which we find our way forward through the turbulence, complexity and ambiguity that obscures our way. Questions serve to open the conversation and thinking. They invite others into the conversation and as we get more used to asking them – and more comfortable, so too will we get better at 'holding' them, engaging with them and strengthening the process towards new learning and solutions. Do a 'questions audit': At your next meeting, pay attention to the number and quality of questions being asked. What does this reveal about your team and company's readiness to be what we in TomorrowToday call, 'futurefit'? 3) Adapt or die.

Smart leaders understand that they need to become an 'adaptive leader'. They know that they need to build organisational cultures that are agile, nimble and responsive and they are preoccupied with how best to do this. Well, the short answer is: It starts with you. You need to be an adaptive leader; you need to model what this looks like and by so doing, give permission to others to follow suite. It is about becoming 'futurefit' and as in any attempts to 'get fit' - hard work and discipline is required. Unlike the many 'magical' or quick-fix solutions being offered to get in shape physically – becoming futurefit is not something that can be achieved overnight but it is possible and is attainable when given an intentional focus. It will require both a mind shift as well as behavioural practice before it roots and becomes something that is recognisable. Achieving these tangible outcomes may be better served by acquiring a 'personal trainer' and that is why we have developed a 'boot camp' – a drip-feed digital programme to help leaders become futurefit. The programme is to help you become an adaptive leader and not merely a 'good leader' but rather a 'great leader'. *But enough of the promotional plug (you will see how to acquire this futurefit programme elsewhere in this e-zine or simply contact TomorrowToday for further details).*

Leading in today's context is tough and it is not going to get any easier. The kind of organisations that we have built from the past will resemble little likeness to those that will stand in the future. There are too many things changing for us to really believe that

what has got us here will be sufficient to get us to where it is we need to be. Technology, societal value shifts, globalisation, new threats and opportunities and a host of other forces and elements will ensure that our current ways of managing our enterprises will have to change.

Recognising this reality and shaping the future **is** the leader's responsibility. It is your responsibility and a fair question to be asking is, 'so what are you doing about it?'