

Paradigm Changes

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It seemed like I was the only one listening as Jacek, the youth leader from our church, gave his report. I couldn't help but be disappointed that nothing was said about the group of new believers now meeting regularly. All the other reports given at this annual "tell all" congregational meeting had included endless details of the ministries of the church. But this new group of youth wasn't mentioned. My mind tried desperately to assess why. Was it because they hadn't been baptized yet or they don't attend on Sunday mornings or what? Whichever direction I went, it didn't really explain what had happened.

Months later, a discussion with our pastor opened my eyes. It's not the "church's" ministry unless: it's pastorally initiated; it's on Saturday night, Wednesday night or Sunday morning; it takes place in the church.. .and he list goes on.

I had helped introduce this new, wonderful ministry, ("wonderful ministry" is a direct quote from one of my last prayer letters) but it simply didn't count. Why? What do I need to do differently? Is it a cultural thing? Is it an 87 percent thing? Is it a church thing? Do I even have to understand it to initiate change? Is change really possible? Is there another battle more essential even than this one? Has Mark produced an instructional video that can solve this?

The Paradigm Shift

A "paradigm" is a dominant pattern, a set of rules and regulations that both establishes boundaries and dictates behavior within those boundaries. A softer way to say it is, "Establishing boundaries within which a given view must fit and describing successful behavior within those boundaries." Modern interest in paradigms started about thirty years ago when writings such as Toffler and Clarke.

The most frequent example cited is when Copernicus first theorized that the earth revolved around the sun rather than the other way around. This had major theological implications and was not easily embraced. When a paradigm shifts, you have a whole new ball game, a new field and a revised list of rules. These changes are revolutionary ones, not incremental ones.

If you asked anyone in 1968 who would dominate the watchmaking world of today, the answer would have been Switzerland. They had ruled the industry for sixty years. But by 1980 their 65 percent hold on the industry had fallen below 10 percent. Why? A change in the fundamental rules of watchmaking - a paradigm shift. Exit springs and enter electronics-and Seiko. Ironically, it was the Swiss who invented the electronic quartz movement, but when its creators introduced the new technology to their own watchmakers back in 1917, they couldn't see it. Seiko, however, saw it differently.

We are working in places that are in need of change. Poland has a population of 42 million, an estimated Protestant population of 70,000, and a conversion growth rate in the minus figures. The other day a pastor stood up and announced with deep pride that his church had ended the year with the same number of believers it had begun with. This was success!

The need here is somewhat obvious to us, but what brings about change in this situation and the many others rolling around in my right now?

Change

It's what is needed. But seeing the possibilities and assessing the times doesn't automatically produce it. It seems that three things must be true before a shift is realized:

First, it won't fit into any existing boxes. Job's three friends actually did a pretty good job explaining within their paradigm. Read it again as if you didn't know the ending. But after all the talking and discussing, it was too big for Job to grasp. Five words change everything: "Where were you when I..." It's all in perspective. A shift. But the problem demanded a new category that his friends couldn't produce.

Second, you can't disregard it. There's something about it that makes it too difficult to simply explain away. The man born blind said, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind and now I see." And later, "Nobody has heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." Ironically, a response was required by the Pharisees—they threw him out!

Thirdly, it's too big to ignore. Youth for Christ and Young Life took over youth ministry in the 60's. Finally, in the 80's the church had no choice but to heed the wake-up call. It seems the seeker movement is producing a similar shift. When the process of shifting is instituted, there will be three stereotypical responses:

The first is to try to integrate the change into existing systems. In Poland, retreats are a denominational event, not a local church event. The impact of one group going away together is quickly diluted by the "open invitation" that naturally occurs once the retreat is announced. The "new" retreat is only viable in the context of the old system. Next thing you know, it's not new at all.

Another example of this is performance evangelism. Our youth group has agreed to an evangelistic camp with most of their attention going towards program planning so they can finally do it the way they want to. The "new" idea of non-Christians at their camp is crammed into the model of "let's put on a show for you."

The second response is to try to discount it. It's an effort to explain it away so no compelling change is required. Hal Sperlich had a brilliant but short career in shifting paradigms. He is the one who fathered the minivan, the front wheel drive box on wheels, that changed the habits of the carpooling housewife (and the face of missions?). The breakthrough came with the concept of front-wheel drive which made it a large capacity, yet easy-to-handle vehicle. It met stiff resistance all the way. Unable to sell the minivan at Ford, Sperlich abandoned a twenty-year career at Ford and moved to Chrysler, taking his belief in the minivan with him. Two years later, Lee Iacocca came over and backed development of the idea. "The fundamental policy in product development strategy was that they lacked the confidence that a market existed because the product didn't exist." He further commented that "...in Detroit, most product development dollars are spent on modest improvements to existing products while research money is spent studying what customers like among available products." The ridiculous arguments come to my mind here that were directed toward Sonlife in the early days as they championed personal evangelism.

The third response is to ignore it. At a recent ministry team training retreat in Czech, the attendees experienced a paradigm shift in the area of evangelism. A decision was made to hold an outreach meeting in two areas. The participants were deployed into the streets to actually interact with and invite people to the program. It was a success, which forced some to alter the conclusion they had long held about the receptivity of Czech youth. Similarly for me personally, an extended personal study of Scripture significantly altered the conviction with which I viewed the strategy of Jesus. I

can no longer ignore the implication of what my Jesus did as recorded in my Bible. There has been a significant change in the degree of confidence I feel as I teach and follow these examples.

Paradigm Shifters

John Huey in *Fortune* says, "... a paradigm shifter is someone who throws out the rules of the game and institutes radical, no incremental change. . . a leader who provokes revolution, not evolution." He goes on to say that typically, paradigm shifters come from outside or the fringes of existing organizations (40). Lloyd ??? of *Leadership Paradigms International* says, "New paradigms often emerge when an outsider, someone unfamiliar with existing paradigms, applies himself to the problem. Often they react intuitively without waiting for reams of data to back up their decision." We are in unique positions to facilitate new paradigms. Though we have our liabilities by being "outside" our culture, they are precisely our advantages as well. Remember how many times William Carey "moved" before he was positioned to make the difference through the grace of God, which provokes us to refer to him as the Father of Modern Missions. "

Here are five practical thoughts that have developed for me:

1. Thinking about change is important, but I must realize that paradigms don't shift by thinking about them. At best, the plan is 20 percent of the game.
2. Yes, nerves of steel are needed, but we also need to back them up with an arsenal of data to support our claims. Carefully prepared information influences supporters and critics alike. Produce the right kind of data and it will be received. One of the most influential series of data that provoked action on the subject of evangelism for one of our students at the Warsaw School of leaders was a mathematical chart contrasting addition and multiplication-the numbers couldn't lie. Let your information do the work for you. In order to do this, you must be prepared.
3. Arouse interest in your breakthrough ideas at the grass roots level first. Build momentum quietly among the real decision makers. The inventor of Post-It notes made sure that the 3M secretaries had prototypes to tryout. It wasn't long before they couldn't live without them.
4. Realize your tendency to hold too tightly to your ideas and thus limit the scope the paradigm shift could actually achieve. When a German scientist synthesized Novocaine, he intended it for major surgical procedures. Surgeons preferred general anesthesia for major surgery, but Novocaine found a ready appeal among dentists. The inventor spent his life travelling to dental schools, making speeches that forbade dentists to misuse his noble invention.
5. Ponder the general areas where paradigm shifts seem to be needed in your context. I see three in my context in Poland:
 - * Authority. Frustrating, out-of-balance thinking seems to make lay ministry and ministry teams almost impossible.
 - * Inseparability of Polish identity with Catholic identity. This seems to be beginning to change. It seems to me we can predict somewhat where it's going and be positioned for the time when more drastic changes occur.
 - * We want to see significant changes in the church. It seems to me we can predict somewhat where it's going and be positioned for the time when more drastic changes occur. It generally is in no shape to handle caring for new communities and it truly could be. I honestly wonder if it's significantly any different from all ministry professionals. I have decided it is.

I look forward to the day when most pastors in our country stand up in from the their congregations and see the faces of newly redeemed believers and lead their congregations in rejoicing that they are part of the body. I'm praying for these kinds of paradigm shifts.

Works Cited

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