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Company founders would seem to be a natural fit for change management programs. They are persuaders and visionaries who perceive opportunities and seize them quickly. From airlines to autos, and from TVs to taxis, individual entrepreneurs have upended one industry after another. When channeled successfully, these attributes represent the lifeblood of entrepreneurship and market disruption.

Unfortunately, when founders attempt to apply these skills to their own organizations, they usually aren't as successful: It seems the industry disrupter's virtues are the organizational change manager's vices. Characteristics that are necessary to lead an organization through significant transitions — traits such as patience, consensus building, and adherence to strict processes — don't always come naturally to the best entrepreneurs.

I was reminded of these challenges at a recent portfolio company offsite, when a founder friend confided how he'd been struggling to launch an organizational change process with his team. He expressed frustration that the people who would most benefit from constructive change returned only blank stares when he asked them questions such as "What would make your job easier?" and "What should we change around here?"

The genuine desire to improve employees' work lives and the company's performance notwithstanding, the most original idea was the heartwarming but impractical suggestion that they should get a company pet. We talked further about his process, and for the most part the founder was doing everything right: His goals were straightforward and sensible — do things smarter and make employees' experiences more fulfilling. He scheduled discussions regularly and consistently communicated how much he cared about employee culture and well-being. He included all the company's functional areas and solicited input from levels throughout the firm's hierarchy.

There was just one problem: He was the wrong person for the job. In every case I've observed, the mix of founder personality traits and the power asymmetry between leaders and their employees is a nearly insurmountable barrier to constructive ideation and candid dialogue. Without these, I believe change management is impossible.

This isn't surprising once you consider what employees are up against in a change management situation. Sit any employee in a room with a founder, instruct them to engage in a candid discussion about how to improve the company's operations, and that person's heart rate will accelerate, their blood pressure will rise, and their hands will become clammy. Toss in some office politics and career management interests, and you'll produce the most banal feedback imaginable.

So how do founders achieve the results they're seeking if, for probably the very first time, they aren't the lead resource impacting their companies? The answer is, they can't. Moreover, even if they could, they shouldn't. If founders are serious about change management they must let someone else, preferably an outsider, facilitate it.

I have heard every founder objection to the idea that they should hand over such an important process to a stranger. The most common is "No one understands our business as well as I do, so how could a newcomer help transform it?"

However, this objection conflates a company's unique competitive traits with the organizational capabilities necessary for reimagining the enterprise. And there is an industry of professionals with decades of specialized training, exposure to competitive scenarios, and, most important, an outsider's perspective that exists solely to do the latter. For this group, *not knowing* the specifics of a particular industry is a key asset.

Change management experts may not know the nuances of a given industry, but they offer transformation-minded founders four proficiencies that are more valuable:

Establishing objectivity. Few senior executives recognize their unwillingness to adopt new ideas and creative problem solving, and, as a result, personal itineraries often complicate the transformation process. In contrast, the right facilitator can create and enforce a space to objectively explore what's possible without leaving anyone behind.

Maintaining process integrity. An accomplished facilitator enforces rules and ensures that the team tracks toward its original purpose. They're especially adept at this because, unlike an employee of the company, the facilitator has only one job: to run the process. In contrast, any employee who is participating in the change process while performing the facilitator role is expected to both provide creative input and guarantee process integrity. In that case, neither job is executed well.

Executing proven conflict resolution protocols. Reexamining every previous decision a company has made can surface longstanding disagreements. If these conflicting positions emerge during a meeting, all forward progress will cease. A qualified facilitator is trained to handle these situations and move past them. The average founder is not.

Guaranteeing follow-up, implementation, and accountability. The cliché that "If everyone is responsible for following up, then no one is" is especially apt when ensuring participants stand by their commitments to modify the way things are done after the initial meetings conclude. A single person with no stake in a specific outcome is an essential resource to capture the learnings from each step in a change management process.

Change is never easy. It requires the time to implement, the patience to discuss, and the willingness to have productive disagreements. Although most founders will do anything for their company's success, sometimes continued success requires that they hand over the reins in order to help the organization evolve.

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