

Breaking Paradigm Paralysis

By Ed Walker
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As Christian leaders we not only have to break through spiritual blindness but also communicate clearly across lines of corporate and social cultures. Every organization and every society has its culture with its presuppositions. Every culture has its worldview that determines the meaning they give to whatever is communicated no matter how clear and precise the language employed might be. Often the preconceptions of a particular worldview, the paradigms, so distort the meaning that what the leader thinks they are communicating is 180 degrees out of phase with what the listener understands.

Piaget in the book, *Mental Imagery in the Child*, proposed that previous knowledge incorporated into the worldview of the child provides a structure for inferring and filling in the gaps when the instruction or text is not completely explicit. It is also a framework for classifying concepts presented so that the concepts are more easily retrievable from long-term memory. Incorrect prior knowledge often hinders forming a correct conception when new concepts are presented. Incorrect prior knowledge must be refuted before any attempt is made to teach a new concept. This is true of adults also.

Is this really so new? Did not our Lord often in His teaching say, “You have heard it said that..., but I tell you” He also used parables for this same purpose.

Paul in Romans 12:2 taught the same principles as being taught by a number of modern students of human communications. Let me give you my expanded translation of this passage.

Do not allow yourselves to be conformed to the age in which you live—its culture with all its preconceptions of ultimate reality, truth and what is right and wrong—but be metamorphosed in the way you think in order that you might begin to discern the will of God which is good and acceptable and perfect.

How does all this apply to our giving due diligence to decision-making and planning in our church, ministry or company?

We’ve all heard the last seven words of a dying church – “WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY.” These are also the last seven words of any dying organization. Healthy organizations are forward looking and proactive. Our unconscious preconceptions can keep us from seeing accurately not only the present but also cause us to fail in discerning key future trends. It is possible to be caught in a paradigm paralysis and therefore fail to make timely changes. We must constantly keep our mission looking forward, in line with biblical mandates and with current and future realities.

This is biblical. In itself, change is neither friend nor foe. The danger lies in our failing to understand the times in which we live, so as to plan and proceed with discernment. We need to be like the sons of Issachar, "...who understood the times and knew what Israel should do..." and like David, who "...served his generation according to the will of God."

We live in a rapidly changing world. Only God, His truth in the 66 books of the Bible, and the laws established by God in His creation and sustained by Him are unchangeable; everything else is changing rapidly. (God can even change His laws of creation; when this takes place we have a miracle.) In this context of change, we as leaders must be proactive if we wish our church or organization to continue to be healthy and effective.

God has given humans as His regents on earth, two sources of knowledge that we are to use as stewards of His creation in carrying out His cultural mandate. One is His special revelation, and the other is truth He reveals through the observation of His creation. What we learn from observation of His creation is always to be interpreted in the light of His special revelation the Bible. Nevertheless, due to our finiteness, false preconceptions and faulty thinking, we can misinterpret both the Bible and that which God has created. This should make us humble and dependent on God for His supernatural illumination. This is one reason why there is wisdom in having a multitude of counselors so we can correct one another. Also, decision making should be done in the context of corporate worship and seeking God's guidance through His Word and in prayer (Acts 13:1-3).

Let us therefore, humbly in prayer, recognize the probability of faulty preconceptions and need of renewal in our thinking so that we might discern God's will for our church or organization. Let us ask God to save us from paradigm paralysis so we might be proactive in our constantly changing global and domestic contexts.

Let us pray, therefore, asking God:

- To free us from false presuppositions that would distort our thinking
- To free us from the tyranny of the worldviews of our own age
- To give us a biblical worldview
- To save us from paradigm paralysis that would hinder us from being innovative; adopting new solutions to old problems
- To supernaturally superintend our thinking so we might discern His will both individually and corporately
- To give us wisdom from above that is first pure, then peace loving, gentle at all times, willing to yield to others, full of mercy, showing no partiality, and always sincere.

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