Leadership & Changing Your Mind

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How difficult is it for you to change your mind? When was the last time you changed your mind? Do you consistently challenge your own thinking, or do you wait for others to bring the challenge to you? When your thinking is confronted, how do you react? I’ve often said the rigidity of a closed mind is the first step in limiting opportunity. I can think of no better definition for a closed mind than someone unwilling to change their opinions. In today’s post I’ll share my thoughts on why it’s much more valuable to step across mental lines in the sand rather than draw them.

Let me begin by suggesting that changing one’s mind isn’t necessarily the same thing as being wishy-washy. The difference is found in the motivation underpinning the change. If your opinions change with the wind based on little more than the court of public opinion, you’re not a leader but just someone else trying to fit-in with the cool kids. There is a big difference between taking a principled stand and trying to be liked. There’s also a big difference between standing on conviction vs. just wanting to win an argument. When evaluating your position on any given topic are you trying to learn something, or are you just trying to justify your opinion? Having strong convictions is a healthy thing so long as you’re convicted by the truth and not your pride or your ego.
Here’s the thing – no one has all the answers, so why even attempt to pretend that you do? Show me a person that never changes their mind and I’ll show you a static thinker who has sentenced their mind to a prison of mediocrity and wasted potential. If the world is constantly changing, if the marketplace is always evolving, if the minds of others are continuously developing, how can you attempt to be unchanging and still be relevant? The smartest people I know are the most willing to change their mind. They don’t want to be right, they want the right outcome – they want to learn, grow, develop, and mature. Think about it like this – it takes no effort to cling to your current thinking, however to change your mind requires you to challenge your mind. I’ve believed for quite sometime the most profound and commonly overlooked aspect of learning is recognizing the necessity of unlearning.

Smart leaders don’t tell people what they should think, they surround themselves with great thinkers and then consistently seek their insights, observations, and opinions. Subjecting yourself to dissenting opinion allows you to refine your good ideas, weed-out the bad ideas, and acquire new ideas. Moreover, it’s the ability to evolve and nuance thinking that leads to the change and innovation your organization needs to survive.

A leader’s ability to change their mind demonstrates humility, confidence, and maturity. It makes them approachable, and it makes them human. People are looking for authentic, transparent leaders willing to sacrifice their ego in favor of right thinking. Bottom line – when you fear being wrong more than being proven wrong you have arrived as a leader.

Now it’s your turn – I’m interested in ways you’ve found to become more open-minded, examples of how changing your mind improved your circumstances, and yes, even those dissenting opinions on why you’re not buying the thinking espoused above...Thoughts?

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