



## **Delta Gamma Well Aware**

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development

### **Adaptive Leadership: Leading with an Open Heart**

In today's world, change is a constant factor in our daily routine and activities. Books and television programs constantly provide how-to tips on managing change and surviving the constant fluidity of our work. However, the emerging leadership experts indicate managing change is not effective in most situations. Instead embracing change and its paradoxes provides us the framework to succeed in today's evolving life.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) divide change into two categories – technical change and adaptive change. Technical change is when we can prescribe a solution that doesn't require people to change. For example, if your doctor prescribes you penicillin for an infection, the medicine does not require you to change but does cure and alter the infection. Adaptive change in a medical setting is where a patient after open-heart surgery is required to alter her or his diet, begin exercising, and learn how to manage stress. These changes require the individual to make adaptive changes, altering your daily behaviors and actions. Below outline six principles developed by Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie (2001) on adapting to change:

1. **Get on the Balcony** – Spend time reflecting on our work instead of getting bogged down in the minutiae or details of daily tasks. Perhaps carving out 30 minutes each day to go to the balcony instead of the dance floor enables us to make sense of change and see how it is affecting the whole instead of our daily habits.
2. **Identify the Adaptive Challenge** – Learn quickly to adapt to new challenges instead of fighting or resisting the change. The challenge is to identify the root of the resistance instead of responding to symptoms of the change.
3. **Regulate Distress** – Leaders must strike a balance between creating a culture where individuals believe they need to change and overwhelming individuals with change. Directing efforts too far in either direction will cause apathy towards change implementation.
4. **Maintain Disciplined Attention** – Maintaining focus on the tough, underlying questions encourages us to prepare and focus on adaptive change. Identify the distracters that prevent us from focusing on the big questions and work to eliminate or re-prioritize them to lower parts of our to-do list.

5. Give the Work Back to People – Ensuring individuals at all layers feel valued ensures the variety of perspectives are heard therefore letting the organization more easily and quickly respond to change. The key is for managers or chapter officers to support multiple perspectives versus control.
6. Protect Voices of Leadership from Below – When managers squelch the voice from below, it inhibits us from multiple perspectives and therefore missing out on the inevitable change that may result. Stifling feedback and learning prohibits us from moving forward and instead encourages the status quo leaving us unprepared for change.

When leading adaptive change, it is often easy to become cynical, arrogant, and callous as leading this type of change often requires us to develop thick skin in order to survive the questioning, resistance, and chaos that is a normal part of adaptive change. In order to continue leading adaptive change, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) recommend we lead with an open heart and embrace the following three ideas:

1. Innocence – Leaders are often rewarded for making tough decisions, being decisive, and responding to situations. However, adaptive change decisions are not easy decisions and cannot be made quickly or easily. It takes courage for a leader to admit she or he does not have a solution. Instead leaders need to remain innocent, enabling us to maintain hope when situations become messy and difficult to navigate due to uncertainty. This allows us to be open to new possibilities and view situations from a beginner's mind.
2. Curiosity – Leading adaptive change requires leaders to remain flexible and open to new realities. Curiosity permits leaders to remain interested in the fluidity of the change and responsive to the new situations emerging.
3. Compassion – Individuals involved in adaptive change have much at stake making the change emotional. Leaders must respect and be receptive to the frustrations and concerns of others and demonstrate empathy. Showing compassion gives voice to individuals' concerns. It does not mean the leader can immediately squelch these concerns but it provides space for open, honest conversation.

When leading adaptive change, it is essential not to lose our own spirit and sense of being. We must realize that adaptive change is not easy and simplistic but rather complex and messy. The unanswered questions surrounding adaptive change are normal. Being able to recognize this hallmark of adaptive change, provides us a way to make sense of our struggles and lead with an open heart.

## References

- Heifetz, R. & Laurie, D. (2001). The work of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 131-141.  
Heifetz, R. & Linsky, M. (2002). Leading with an open heart. *Leader to Leader*, 26, 28-22.

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