

Governance: Choices, Pathways, Moving Forward

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Corporate Governance and Business Transactions

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Second in a Series on Governance and Leadership

When we last left our heroes, we mused over the core of “What is Governance.” Of course, this can drive a Type-A hard-charging executive to the brink. Yet, we derive a living, feed a family, and pursue life’s mission from our work at an organization. So, Governance and how we do it are crucial to the life of our company, our family and ourselves.

We devote the irreplaceable commodity given to each of us, time—the thing one spends but once and only once—to an organization. Governance determines whether we win fulfillment and self-respect, or rue what we see in the rear-view mirror. If the Type-A’s don’t have time for it, and the enterprise is sustainable, then someone is handling Governance and managing the process to everyone’s benefit, quite possibly on the sly so as to avoid the risk and hassle of justifying it over and over.

The Governance of any company defines how the people who care about it and its Mission invest or waste limited, precious resources through decisions and actions. Each action, every day, shapes the future. Adapting C.S. Lewis’ oft-quoted version of this law of life to our topic of Governance for Leaders might go like this:

Every time you choose you are turning the central part of your company, the part that chooses, into something different than it was before. And, taking that as a whole, with the innumerable choices you make, you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or one that fails (1)

Genuine awareness of “how and why Governance” enhances the likelihood that we guide our organization toward the light and toward a sustainable future, one that contributes and succeeds.

Getting there may take alternative routes. The Ronald Heifetz team (2) leads us on one such path as they unpack, compare and contrast “Adaptive Change” and “Technical Change.” The CliffsNotes version (for you Type-A’s out there with no time to read) of their thesis:

*Technical Change is something to fix.
Adaptive Change requires that you fix yourself first.*

A “technical change” might be “let’s fix the bylaws,” or “let’s reorganize the department.” “Adaptive change” starts and proceeds with genuine, reflective conversation with oneself, one’s fellow officers and the board; observation precedes intervention. Of course, we need to accomplish technical changes, but we can’t perform them with sustainable competence sans adaptive change.

It matters not whether your board meets six of four times a year. Or whether you get those “leadership outings” and annual retreats just right with expensive speakers and locales. What does matter is that we get over the ever-present resistance to changing ourselves, how we think, observe and relate.

Once we bring great people into our company (a key benchmark for competent leaders), it becomes essential to trust and listen, persistently listen. In Governance, haste does indeed make waste. If we hired the wrong executives and managers, we have problems. If we placed the wrong people on our board, major problems. We’ll look at this down the road a bit; yes, that gets filed in “Adaptive.”

So, breathe, slow down. Choose well. Fix yourself. We’ll get there.

Yours, for Better Governance

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(1) The full text of what C.S.L. really said is far more profound, crucial and interventional: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/111876-every-time-you-make-a-choice-you-are-turning-the>

(2) Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Harvard Business Review Press (2009).