

Twelve Principles for Change in the Established Church

[Sam Rainer](#)

October 21, 2020

Change efforts are never unanimous. Change efforts are too often reactive instead of proactive. Resistance to change is high. Ministry leaders can push too hard for change among the wrong people, at the wrong times, and in the wrong ways.

I might be understating the quandary of change in established churches.

If we believe in the body of Christ, then ministry leaders must be change agents. Leaders quickly understand what needs to change, but the how of change is just as important. I've been guilty of rushing the what of change without taking time to consider how change should happen. Below are twelve principles to help ministry leaders understand how change needs to occur.

1. **Begin with prayer.** If you don't pray through change, then you will rely on your abilities instead of God's sovereignty. Change without prayer is dangerous and foolish.
2. **Love people more than change.** Loving change more than people is not leadership. It's selfishness.
3. **Choose your battles.** Everything may need to change. But if you want to change everything all at once, then you demonstrate two undesirable leadership traits: Unwillingness to compromise and an inability to prioritize.
4. **Admit your mistakes.** No one changes everything perfectly. Don't pretend like you've got it all figured out. No one would believe you anyway.
5. **Affirm traditions.** Not everything in the past is bad. Speak positively of past traditions that still work.
6. **Build on successes.** Give credit to others for successes. Take personal responsibility for failures.
7. **Allow for open discussion.** Do not withhold information. Give people time to digest your proposals. Let the people have a voice.

8. **Be wise in timing.** Change can be emotional for people. Create buffers. Keep a long-term perspective.
9. **Stay focused.** When change needs to happen, don't let distractions derail you.
10. **Allow for a trial period.** Change-resistant members can be comforted if the intrusion into their comfort zone may not be permanent. At the end of a trial period (I recommend one year), one of three decisions can be made. Extend the trial period. Reverse the change. Make the change permanent. In most established churches, after something has been going a year, most will say, "It's the way we've always done it."
11. **Expect opposition.** Some people will never be pleased. Some will initially push back. Work with those who are willing to listen. Pray for and love those who never listen.
12. **Evaluate change.** Not every change is good. Not every change will work. Be willing to admit it and move forward with new ideas.

All growing, healthy churches change. Every new person added to the body is a change. Great churches change. Great leaders know how to lead the change.