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BE A CHANGE AGENT

LEADERSHIP IN A TIME
OF EXPONENTIAL CHANGE

DR. DELE OLA

FOREWORD BY
VERN F. CAMPBELL

BE A
CHANGE
AGENT

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Published by The Prowezz Company, Inc.
7 Beddington Street
Winnipeg MB R3Y 0K2, Canada
Email: theprowezzcompany@gmail.com

Be A Change Agent / Dr. Dele Ola First Edition 2021

ISBN

978-1-7779645-0-4 (hardcover)

978-1-7779645-1-1 (paperback)

978-1-7779645-2-8 (e-book)

1. Business & Economics / Leadership
2. Business & Economics / Strategic Planning
3. Psychology / Industrial & Organizational Psychology

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FOREWORD

Dele and I first met in February, 2015, when Dele was enrolled in my advanced scientific problem solving course (Lean Six Sigma Green Belt). From our first meeting, Dele impressed me as an eager and passionate learner, a person with integrity, passion, and compassion—in other words, a leader. The Green Belt project he selected to meet his certification requirements was with an advanced aerospace manufacturing company. The problem was extremely challenging. Even though he was an “outsider” to the organization, Dele persevered, building his credibility as he led the team and developed strong working relationships both within the team and across the organization. Through his perseverance, demonstrated competence, and his ability to engage the cross functional team, Dele and the team achieved their improvement objective, and Dele completed the requirements for his Green Belt certification. Through my experience coaching Dele, I was impressed by his many broad leadership attributes and his future potential. As time has passed, Dele continues to inspire me with his intellect, his curiosity, his passion to contribute, and his desire to share his valuable perspectives through his teaching and coaching to help develop other potential leaders.

Dele is in a unique position to offer stimulating thoughts and guidance on leadership. His advanced educational background combined with his diverse life and career experiences, including his position at the intersection of future technologies and manufacturing at the Technology Access Centre for Aerospace and Manufacturing, provides him with a unique outlook on the ingredients for leadership success now and into the future. This background, combined with his character trait of being a thoughtful student of leadership and change to benefit all stakeholders, enables him to share his valuable thoughts, insights, stories, and perspectives on leadership.

In this book, Dele offers guidance for leaders at all levels, and in all walks of life, for these turbulent times. We are in unprecedented times. In our current challenging environment of global pandemic, trade tensions, social issues, political issues, environmental issues, and just the overall pace of change, leaders need to think and act differently to adapt and lead their teams. As Albert Einstein stated: “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind thinking we used when we created them.” The current environmental uncertainty and resultant pace of change requires organizational stability, agility, and strong leadership. As Jim Collins stated in his groundbreaking book *Built to Last*, leaders need to: “Preserve the core and stimulate progress”. Leaders in these tumultuous times are like explorers. The journey forward, as described in the book, will not be a straight path. There will be many unknowns that will require organizational courage, adaptability, agility, and resilience.

Dele offers an overarching systems approach to leadership as compared to leadership by the latest Harvard Business Review article or fad, which unfortunately is all too common. There is no “silver bullet”. This book adds to our body of knowledge and offers many thought-provoking ideas and concepts to aid leaders as we work to adapt in this uncertain, complex environment that we live in, and to the unknowns of the future ahead. I would recommend that this book be used as a workbook with a study group of other leaders or for your leadership team to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts presented, and how these concepts might apply to your organization. Then go take some action; test your organizational leadership improvement ideas so that you may further learn and build your knowledge through repeated Plan-Do-Check-Act cycles. Have fun and enjoy your leadership development ride!

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CHAPTER 1

IT'S A MOVING TARGET

You cannot be the same, think the same, and act the same if you hope to be successful in a world that does not remain the same.

— John C. Maxwell

On my 24th birthday, I wasn't exactly where I wanted to be. In fact, I was a bit daunted by the future. I needed something to hold onto; I decided I needed a plan. Instead of celebrating, I sat down and tried to chart a course for myself through the next 16 years. Yes, I had a plan that would take me from the age of 24 to the age of 40. This act of visioning surprised me. It lifted me up. In fact, it was on my 24th birthday that I discovered myself—I found that I had the potential to change the world. I knew that I could become who I was designed to be.

And yet, the currency of life, time, does not ask for our permission before getting spent. It is expended at a constant rate, and is beyond our control. When I turned 40, I pulled my plan out of an old notebook. I had actually hit most of the major milestones in my plan; but the details of the journey did not work out as I had expected. I had to make adjustments all along the way, because everything changed on me. As I made effort, it seemed like there were forces working against my plans. Had I not made adjustments along the way, I would not have done so much. Through those years, I learned that the pathway to success is not an expressway, and that the trip to greatness is not

via a rollercoaster. I found that things change so constantly that we need to strive to stay ahead or we get overwhelmed and give up on our dreams. I became stronger through my experience. I learned maturity through the changes and the uncertainties of life.

As I grew older, my interests changed, my ambitions changed, my passions got shaped differently, and, most especially, the whole world changed significantly. I started defining success differently. I could see the world through the lens of constant and inevitable change. The most astounding part of my experience is the fact that I could actually cause a lot of change that resulted in different outcomes. I found that I could change a significant part of the outcomes of life, and that I could change my attitude about the things I could not change.

PLANNING IS INVALUABLE—PLANS ARE EXPENDABLE

You know that dreaded interview question—where do you want to be in five to ten years? It used to be a very important question used by recruiters and employers to weed out interview candidates that were perceived as not having a definite vision or plan for their career.

I graduated from university in 2004, and remember answering that question during many of the job interviews that I attended. It seemed that knowing where you would be or what you would be doing in five years indicated your sense of career planning, vision, and dedication.

If you were pursuing a career in advertising in the 1970s, it would not have been difficult for you to know where you would be in your career in five years. In your innovative mind, you would probably be at the very fore front of the latest technologies in radio, TV, and audio and video cassette. You might even have had the goal of leading a team that was capable of flooding an average human mind with a few hundred ads per day, such that a few dozen would be consciously noticed by an individual, and the individual may consider taking action on a couple of the ads. Change was happening then, but not so fast.

If you were an executive in a top ad agency in America in those days, you would wish TV manufacturers and TV marketers the best of fortune, such that an average home would be equipped with a color TV so that they could have access to excellent commercials in full color. Does that description take you back in time? I would suggest that the question “Where do you see yourself in the next five years?” also takes us back in time.

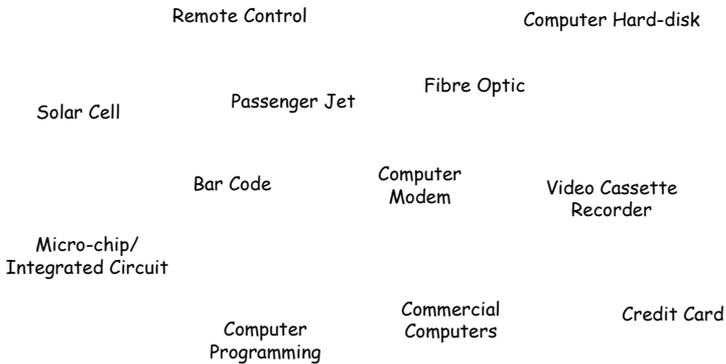
Let us be frank, this question cannot be answered today with a lot of assurance or certainty. Saying that the world is changing rapidly is an understatement. The rate of change in the world is actually accelerating astronomically. This exponential change is always upon us and will come irrespective of what we do or neglect to do. The future outlook is not really that long anymore.

It shouldn't be surprising to know that it is becoming challenging for the younger generation to choose what to study in college or university. It seems that the unprecedented rate of change that we are experiencing could mean that certain disciplines will become obsolete within the years required to complete a college diploma or university degree. Many of the traditional courses of study may soon disappear from our curricula and be replaced with new content.

If your knowledge and skills are limited to the traditional disciplines and programs, you may not be prepared for the jobs of the nearest future. This applies to almost all fields of work—technology, engineering, business, law, medicine, sports, entertainment, and so on. Knowledge is growing very rapidly and our ability to adapt to the change will be the differentiator between success and failure.

Let us talk about an area of change that we can easily relate to—technology. Let us assume that we are currently living in the 1960s. If I carried out crowd sourcing of information from a group of enlightened individuals in, say, 1965, asking them about the technologies that will shape the future, I would have received responses similar to those in the figure on page 4.

BE A CHANGE AGENT



Some technologies of the mid- and late- twentieth century

You will find this to be true by just conducting a simple Internet search. These technologies truly revolutionized how businesses were conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and even into the 1990s.

Availability of personal computers was a big deal. TV remote control changed the user experience. Mass production of commercial jets changed how businesses were carried out all over the world, with the ability to reach many parts of the world with unprecedented cost-effectiveness and timing. There was no need to travel by ship for business anymore. Bar coding was a major revolution for industries. Advancements in computer network technologies provided a leap for many organizations, with wired LAN and dial up connections. Solar photovoltaic advanced rapidly.

Toward the end of that era, the Internet was invented, Microsoft Windows arrived, and a large population of businesses and homes got connected and were equipped with the Personal Computer. What a change! What an advancement! I salute the courage of the innovators, the change leaders and change agents, the visionaries, the doers, and the technology drivers of that time.

Now, let us fast forward 30–40 years later. I would like to present my personal experience. I was invited by Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba to speak at one of the professional development sessions

It is apparent that we are now in an era of developments in artificial intelligence, augmented reality and virtual reality, large scale renewable energy and clean technology, quantum computing, autonomous machines, nanotechnology, Internet of things, advanced robotics, big data analytics, and many more. The changes that we have seen within the last ten years in the areas of technologies that will shape our future are exceptionally more rapid than the changes experienced 50 years ago.

The speed of data acquisition, manipulation, and analytics that we are capable of today is unprecedented in history. The time frame within which available information doubles is unbelievable. Our current capacity for data storage is intriguing as you can hold several terabytes of data in devices that you can hold in the palm of your hand. The field of robotics has moved from industrial robotics to collaborative and socially intelligent robots. The speed of business execution is now in real time.

Business decisions are not only being made in the boardrooms anymore—they are also being made instantaneously by machines using artificial intelligence and big data. Our factories of the future are smart and completely interconnected. More control is being given to machines, while humans continue to stretch the limits of technological advancements in all areas. It is now a more interesting world.

The truth is that the result of this same poll will be different in 20 years' time. It will not be surprising to see an entirely new list of technologies emerge as we journey into our wonderful future. Let us conduct the experiment when we get there.

A report issued by Deloitte in November, 2015, highlighted ten of the most promising advanced technologies transforming the global manufacturing industry, using data from the United States. These technologies are those of the 4th industrial revolution, with the innovation agents identified as governments, national labs,

academia, businesses, venture capital and entrepreneurial start-ups, and include the following.¹

- Predictive analytics
- Smart, connected products
- Advanced materials
- Smart factories
- Digital design, simulation and integration
- High performance computing
- Advanced robotics
- Additive manufacturing (3D printing / scanning)
- Open-source design / direct customer input
- Augmented reality

Industry 4.0 revolution is not like the big-bang. It is a subtle, brisk, and systematic experience that will continue to shape the future. What a change! What an advancement! I am impressed with this generation for the great leap in technological advancement. Human beings have invented an advanced and connected future for themselves.

Aside from technological changes, we are also experiencing rapid changes in the economic, social, and political landscapes. We can feel the impacts of globalization on most local economies, whether positive or negative. Concepts such as equitable distribution, trade liberalization, religious tolerance, world politics, gender equality, and racial identity are taking on new meanings.

In addition, we can feel the impacts of change in various aspects of our lives. Oil slump, climate change, global pandemics, economic instability, unreliable monetary systems, contentious socio-economic policies, systemic racism, trade wars, and civil unrest are having much more effect than ever before.

There are too many parallel and expeditious efforts around the world in every area of human endeavor, such that change is always upon us. For example, the success of businesses in the market place

is now more a function of time to market, the relevancy of the solution, and continuous adaptability to the constantly changing business climate. The marketplace and the global supply chain in every industry are now more volatile.

So, where will you be in the next five to ten years? You probably don't know. In fact, no one in the current time can answer this question with any degree of certainty. It is more important for us to be able to adapt quickly to change than to be able to accurately predict or predetermine the future with any level of certainty. Meanwhile, we surely do have choices to make regarding our own future. We must choose to embrace and lead change.

My objective here is not to make you apprehensive, but to establish a context for the current state in which we now live and for the future that is imminent. Now, where do we go from here? We need to get our heads wrapped around the following facts before we get into the “meat and potatoes” of this book.

THE DESTINATION KEEPS CHANGING

One frustrating issue for nations, organizations, communities, and individuals is that the best of our plans and the best of our abilities devoted to fulfilling those plans do not necessarily guarantee the expected results in the long term. Let me illustrate this with a simple example. An individual who attends college to study business may graduate in the middle of an unforeseen economic meltdown, which may limit the individual's ability to get a job at the time of graduation. In this case, an external change affects the expected outcome, requiring the graduate to reconsider his or her goals and adapt to the change.

External changes, which we do not usually have a direct control over, affect our future. In most cases, we can only mitigate the effects of external changes by modifying our plans, taking alternative actions, and adapting to the change. Just look at the measures the COVID-19 pandemic caused in the world in 2020. Such an unexpected incident

changed the destiny of so many individuals, organizations, communities, and nations, some temporarily and some permanently.

I cited technological advancements as a major change in the 21st century, alongside many other changes in the world. Technology has become a constantly changing external force, shaping the future, changing the goalpost and moving the target for many. You do not need to look too far to realize this. Just consider how frequently you need to change and/or update your connected mobile devices. If you owned a TV 40 years ago, you would not have worried about changing or updating it for 10–15 years. Moreover, if you grew up in the 1980s or earlier, your family probably owned only one TV throughout your childhood. That is not the case today. In the very near future, we will not even need TVs.

External changes are inevitable, but also unpredictable, turning our future into a dynamic one that changes much more frequently. In addition to external changes in the world, natural processes and some social factors also create changes in every individual. Examples of such changes include body and health changes, family and relationships changes, change in life stage, lifestyle changes, change in economic status, and changes in our perception of the world around us.

It is important to plan for the next 10 or 20 years. However, it is much more important to plan for today, next month, next year, and the next two years. Our idea of change should consider the seriousness of big changes within a short period of time. How do we adapt? How do we lead through change?

One thing that is certain is that we are here, living in the present that we know. However, the gap between the present and the future is also

It appears that tomorrow's destination is fast becoming a moving target, and only those with the ability to adapt will eventually reach the "Promised Land."



shrinking rapidly. The future seems to be just here today. Everything is changing at a rate faster than ever before. The key is to become nimble. It appears that tomorrow's destination is fast becoming a moving target, and only those with the ability to adapt will eventually reach the "Promised Land".

WE ARE AGENTS OF CHANGE

A change agent is someone that has the capacity to influence decisions, cause others to take action, translate ideas into activities, push a boundary, connect people, or contribute a form of personal effort—in other words, to embrace change, support change, or lead change.

Change does not just happen. You and I have the potential to cause change and effect many aspects of change. Change is not just what we experience in the world as an external force, but we also have the potential and/or capacity to respond to change or, in fact, change the change. In other words, we are agents of change.

We need to build a generation of change agents—leaders, teams, and individuals—that will influence the future by causing the needed change and respond to the inevitable change with vision and the ability to positively transform various aspects of human experience. The truth is that whether we are conscious of it or not, every-

We are always in the middle of change, and our daily choices, work, relationships, and other aspects of our lives affect our collective future.

one takes part in change. In fact, being passive and letting the world go by is not an option. There is always a cost associated with doing nothing.

We are always in the middle of change, and our daily choices, work, relationships, and other aspects of our lives affect our collective future. Then, we have the ability



to deliberately influence the future. This book provides the change agent with what they need to know to effectively lead change, lead through change and/or embrace change.

WE MUST CHANGE OUR MINDS

Anyone can learn to lead change. Irrespective of your area of work, your current stage or status in career or personal life, your previous experience, your aspirations and plans for the future, this book is for you. This book is all about transforming the mind to embrace positive change. Change is positive if it is favorable and constructive, and provides hope, confidence, and a sense of assurance of good things for the future.

The reason many individuals are unable to change, effect change or adapt to change is because of a fixed way of thinking, a rigid mental inclination, and a strongly established set of attitudes, or “mindset”. A particular mindset in and of itself is not a bad thing. However, one’s mindset becomes a problem when it does not give room for change and growth. When our minds are fixed on the way we have always done things, we are unable to change. Many of the old ways do not solve today’s problems.

The results that we produce in our lives are unlikely to be greater than the quality of our minds and our thoughts. When we preoccupy our minds with change and continue to think about our response to change, we begin to see opportunities. Real positive change is first conceived of as an idea. It all starts with the way our minds are working. To embrace change, our minds must first be open to change. We must change our minds.

The results that we produce in our lives are unlikely to be greater than the quality of our minds and our thoughts.



BE A CHANGE AGENT

Change is happening in every area of human endeavor. We have the potential to predetermine the future by predetermining change. Dare to change. Dare to do things differently. Get ready to take charge of change and take charge of the future. If change is inevitable, we should be part of the change in order to secure our own future. We are responsible for embracing change and for creating positive change in the world.

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<https://www.deleola.com/beachangeagent.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dele Ola is the award-winning author of *Be a Change Agent: Leadership in a Time of Exponential Change*, publisher of the *Prowezz Leadership Newsletter*, a change leader, and an accomplished professional engineer. His passions include corporate leadership, personal growth, skills development, and technological innovation.



Dr. Ola started his leadership journey with Accenture, a global Fortune 500 company before earning his Doctor of Philosophy in mechanical and manufacturing engineering from the University of Manitoba, eventually transitioning to applied research in aerospace and manufacturing at Red River College Polytechnic. After many significant contributions, he became Director of the Technology Access Centre for Aerospace and Manufacturing, serving as a major contributor to applied research leadership.

Dr. Ola has held many leadership positions and served on the board of several prominent organizations. He won the 2016 Research Excellence BRAVO Award, and his book, *Be a Change Agent*, won the business category of the 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Awards.

An active leader in innovation and applied research, Dr. Ola continues to lead change in his work. His vision is to develop change agents who will challenge the status quo, take charge of the future, and evolve into what they are meant to be in life.