

CHANGING WITH THE WIND

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, WHY FIX IT ??????

Somebody once said about business, "If you're not changing, your not growing; If you are not growing you are not successful." This old adage is quite true but you need the skills of a surgeon to make it work.

Change is a razor sharp tool. In the right hands and properly used, like the scalpel in a surgeon's hand it can produce wonderful results of great magnitude. In the hands of a butcher, change can produce ugly results with negative consequences.

Some in the business will paint the wave pool wall a different color or with a new mural every 5 years or so, they'll change the color scheme in the fun center's building, put up new pendants and banners, select a new style staff uniform, or change the style of music playing at the park in the interest of freshness of appearance. These changes in cosmetics usually work in a positive direction unless you pick the wrong colors or the wrong style!!! As the writer's mom used to say "right idea, wrong attitude".

Successful parks like to put in a new ride every few years, change the food menu, or initiate a driving new advertising theme. The intent is to spark a sense of 'newness' or freshness in the mind of leisure seeking customers and to give established clientele a cutting edge feel.

Change can be good. Change can be disastrous. One has to ask, "what makes change work in a desirable manner?"

The writer is an advocate of change whether it be in hardware, physical plant, or in the inner workings of administrative policy and procedure.....but not change just for the sake of change. Being driven by a deep rooted risk management approach, he maintains that effective tools are available for evaluation of the potential results to be anticipated if change is instituted. Consider the root definition of a risk.....the potential for an unplanned or unanticipated loss!

One manages risk by first identifying those elements (termed 'hazards') which can produce negative results (the unplanned loss) and then further identifying and implementing the steps that can/must be taken to minimize or eliminate the potential. Whether in areas of safety, architecture or policy, one always has the option of 'assuming the risk' but this option is viable only when the risk is both not likely to be incurred or, if incurred, will result in minimal loss. (See Risk Management 101 by the author) Keep in mind that not all potential losses are financially based.

This simple process is often termed 'cost/benefit analysis' particularly when the analysis is money based. The educated/experienced manager knows this process well and applies it automatically to every management decision. In crude terms one simply asks the question "If I do this (or fail to do it) what will go wrong?" In minor circumstances, the process is disposed of almost instantly. With more complex scenarios a long process of investigation, evaluation, and consultation can be required before an accurate assessment is fully developed. As the process is being exercised, the original premise is often revised, replaced, or dropped or new sub points are developed to enhance the process and produce a reasonable chance of success.

Buying a new fleet of go-karts might seem desirable. You know the cost of the karts but what might loom in the unknown? Will new karts give you an edge up on the track across the street? Is there a tax advantage to buying the new hardware? What is to be done with the old karts? Will the new ones be compatible with your track geometry? Will your existing electronic kart control work with the new vehicles? What new spare parts must be inventoried? What to do with the old parts inventory?

If you're changing from bodied to a railed chassis configuration, will your customers object and go away? Speaking of rails, are the new karts compatible with your track guard rails or will they dive under or sail over them? Are the new karts longer or wider than your present fleet presenting storage and pit area alignment problems? Is the restraint system in the new karts going to make loading easier or more complex making pit time stretch out? Given a little more thought this list could stretch a long way.

By asking these questions and challenging the change aggressively, one does not 'buck' or reject change. If there are enough stumbling blocks in the way, reasonable cost/benefit results will dictate modification or elimination of the project. If C/B is positive or nearly neutral, the change can be adopted and implemented.

Change should never be accepted or rejected simply because its change. Knee-jerk reactions and decisions will backfire every time in one way or another. Such is the fate of inexperienced and unknowing 'managers'. It is necessary and appropriate that each proposed change be challenged 'right off the bat' with the question Why Change? This challenge usually produces a litany of positive input and argument in favor of the change.

The Why Change question should be supplemented with "Why are we doing things the way we have been? or "why change it". At times, this kind of probe will convince you the old way is the right/best way so modification is not needed. It pays too, when things are moving along nicely to challenge the status quo.....(Why should we not change xxxxx?) the CB approach applied to existing policies, practices, and hardware could lead you to a new, better way to get a job done.

More importantly, the gnawing question to be answered over and over is What can go wrong? You might know the answer. Someone else might know several answers. Several more might have an answer or two. It is rare that an exhaustive evaluation will not identify some negative consequence..... if everything looks 'rose', challenge yourself because it's very likely you missed something.

Once change is implemented, there must be a period of monitoring and evaluation to make certain its working as intended. Quite often major and minor 'Tweaks' are needed to keep things positive and on the right track. Don't be afraid to change the change.....just stick to the Cost/Benefit Analysis approach..