

**Messages from the Video World---Using The Movie Hoosiers To Better Understand the Role of
“Change Agents” in the Club Environment**

Change Agents and The Clash of Cultures:

Organizational and social cultures have a momentum of their own. They don't like to be upset, they don't like their core values questioned and they don't take kindly to those who generate “creative dissonance” within the culture. These truisms are self-evident to club managers and boards of directors. Managers want to keep their jobs, so they're hesitant to upset the powers that be. Boards want to enjoy their visits to the club and don't want to listen to tirades from irate members. Both the policy makers---that is, the board---and the administrators---that is, the general manager and their team---are constitutionally adverse to rocking the boat. They both want to avoid the curse of living in “interesting times.” They want to be loved, admired, honored and respected. They want to achieve great things and be memorialized in myth and legend. And they'd like to accomplish all that without confrontation, hysterics or sleepless nights. Ain't going to happen-----

But the boat needs to be rocked occasionally and change agents are needed to make it happen. These brave souls need to be steeled against the social pounding that accompanies change. How best to prepare yourself? How best to thicken your skin, clarify the message, stiffen your resolve?

Each of us draws strength from knowing that others have gone there before. Seeing another's person experience cultural collision makes your own less frightening. Reading about them is one thing. Seeing the pain on the face of the change agent, feeling the animosity they generate from “the fans” and witnessing their uncertainty can be a comfort. We're not alone. This path has been trod before. You can survive.

If you're interested in becoming a change agent, you need to watch the greatest of all management films---Hoosiers. Let me explain why.

Change Agent Themes from The Movie “Hoosiers”:

Every change agent encounters similar themes. Although the details will differ, the big issues are recognizable to anyone who's tried to move employees, committees, boards and members from where they are now to where you'd like them to be. Hoosiers has some terrific scenes which can be enjoyed on two different levels---as entertainment and as learning tools. Give the movie another look while thinking about the club world and your place as a change agent within it.

On the surface of it, the movie is a simple tale of coach, basketball and community---a new coach comes to town, fans are suspicious, coach changes everything, team loses, fans get hostile, an epiphany occurs, team begins to win, coach becomes loved, team wins the big one, coach is enshrined in the pantheon of great coaches. Gene Hackman is the coach, Barbara Hershey is his antagonist, small town Indiana is the setting. You've probably seen the story line before, or something quite like it. But Hoosiers is a far bigger film than that, made so by the actors, the story line and the multi-layered messages about change that are woven into the writing.

It's Going to Get Mighty Lonely: The movie opens with a haunting melody, lonely roads, a solo car ride at dawn, being lost in an unfamiliar countryside. Imagine yourself as the new manager or board member. You've replaced the old manager of thirty years or you're the first board member under fifty in the ninety year history of the club. You think things should run differently. Get used to being lonely.

You Gotta Have Vision, You Gotta Articulate and You'll Need to Defend: Hackman, the new coach, meets with the town people who want to examine his vision. Man to man or zone defense? He walks out

without commenting but thinks to himself--Who are they to question his vision? Bad move---articulate and defend and defend your position. Work on “buy-in” by those who have the option of buying in or not.

Hackman’s first day of practice was a different matter. He was in control and he was king---no need to defend, my way or the highway, buy in or be gone. The interim coach had a different vision---gone. Two players had a different vision---gone. The Change Agent needs to get rid of the roadblock generation---those who remain wedded to the old system and are hostile to change---and begin molding the new. He was clear about his vision---team, fundamentals, discipline, preparation, conditioning---, was able to articulate that vision in clear and understandable language and would defend that vision with action against the roadblock generation.

Articulate and defend. Cultivate “buy-in” at every level not just with the team, but with the fans as well.

People Are Gonna Give You the Third Degree for Changing the Old and Bringing in the New: The first half of the movie is about nay-sayers within the school and community. The barber shop meeting---this is how we do things around here. The substitute coach---you don’t want to change things too quickly since these boys already have a routine. The players who exit---the other school down the road has the type of program we want. The fans at the first game under new leadership---booing because the players aren’t shooting. Don’t expect support for changes you make or even suggest. People will give you a knee-jerk reaction and the reaction will always be “no” before it is yes. “Nay saying” is great fun. Stirring the pot even more so. Get used to it. Figure out if you’ve got it in your emotional constitution to be a target for your beliefs.

In a Closed Community, Change Agents Become the Focal Point Of Conversation---And What People Say May Not be Pretty:

Not much to talk about in the town of Hickory. Not much to talk about in most clubs. Change agents excite passions and opinions especially in a “small town” environment. People are examined in detail---motives, methods, results. You’re public property, highly entertaining and an easy target. Don’t want to be talked about by the fans? Don’t coach in a small town addicted to basketball. Don’t want to be talked about by members? Then manage a club where maintenance is everything and projects are nothing. Talk is a stimulant---sometimes that’s good, sometimes that’s bad but most times it’s ugly. Accept that it goes with the turf and thicken your skin.

Changes aren’t changes until they become Muscle Memory: Practice, practice, practice. Coach, coach, coach. Practice, practice, practice. Hackman started from ground zero---his vision was deeply at odds with the “muscle memory” of his players and the “expectation memory” of the fans. It’s easy to set things right once and walk away. Change agents understand that changes don’t stick until people make those changes part of their biology. They will drop back into their old ways the moment the change agent’s back is turned. This is the frustrating, tedious part of the change agent’s role. Some want to believe that you simply identify the vision, provide a little instruction, point them in the new direction and get on with the next change listed on the list of changes. It doesn’t happen that way. Change agents define the vision, teach tactics, observe execution, then deliver the vision again, work on the tactics again, observe the execution again, again and again and again in an endless circle. They’re out and about, observing, critiquing, inspiring. Changes may start in the office but they become “muscle memory” in the trenches. Change agents amongst the members, staff, committees and boards need to accept that repetition, oversight and continuous preaching are needed to make changes more permanent than the paper they’re written on.

You Will Get Discouraged and You Will Question Yourself---Stay the Course:

Hackman was getting bruised by a whole host of characters; the players, the fans, his fellow teachers, the elder statesman who hired him---“I sure hope you know what you’re doing.” Losing is lonely business.

You start second guessing yourself, chinks appear in the armor. You wake in the middle of the night and brood over your decisions. Is my vision right for these players, these circumstances, these fans? Discouragement is often the result of interim feedback---changes have begun, results are “down the road,” progress has slowed. Change agents need to accept that building foundations is slow, unglamorous work and that the impatient fans---or members wanting to have great food, cheap, right now ---don’t always have the clubhouse’s best interests in mind. If you believe in the vision, then you need to believe in the process. Discouragement is part of the process because it forces you to continue asking the big questions---is this the right idea, am I going about doing things the right way, is there light at the end of the tunnel. The alternative is arrogance, which leads to tunnel vision. Stay the course, but accept that you need to ask yourself “the great why” throughout.

Expect Respect When You Earn It---Creating a Goodwill Bank Account:

Hackman was a mystery man---where had he coached, what successes had he known, where is the proof? They don’t know who you are, don’t know your past, have no evidence of your successes and failures. You’re an unknown. Jimmy Chitwood, the greatest basketball player Hickory had ever produced, wouldn’t even say “hi” when the principal introduced him on the basketball court. “I’m not playing for this character, no way.” Experienced change agents have a goodwill bank account to draw upon. People tend to give known change agents the benefit of the doubt when they’ve managed past changes successfully. But if you’re new--- as coach or manager or as president---people will be suspicious. You are what you do and not what you say. Don’t expect “strokes” until you’ve shown them the beef. Earn your respect with results. Jimmy Chitwood joined up when he saw what the coach was doing, that he’d stay the course, that his vision was sound, that he was a man of principle.

You Can’t Do It Alone--- Change Agents Need Good Lieutenants:

Hackman’s first move was to fire his assistant. He had the whistle and wasn’t going to share it with anyone. But he needed lieutenants to hold off the townspeople, to give him “the low down” into other teams, to keep the stats so he could do his coach thing unencumbered with detail. He couldn’t do it without lieutenants. Choosing those people made a strong statement about vision and its execution. Leaders not only have a vision but they have the ability to create a management team loyal to the execution of that vision. Hackman had an interesting group---a drunk who knew the ins and outs of the game, a father who knew the ins and outs of the community and a preacher who had a conduit to God. But in their own strange way each of these characters was complementary. Change agents need a rainbow coalition of lieutenants, supportive but critical. Fans and members get suspicious when the lieutenants are clones of the coach. And you will be judged by those you choose to help you execute your vision.

Change Agents Become Single Combat Warriors Whether They Like it Or Not:

Hickory was a small town. Basketball was an emotional symbol of that town’s status. The coach is a symbol of the team’s success or failure. On the coach’s shoulders rested that town’s definition of itself to the outside world. Not so much different from a private club whose golf course is a symbol of its greatness and whose Greens Committee Chairman, Greens Superintendent, Pro and General Manager are symbols of their success---or failure. People look up to their leaders to carry them forward, to slay the dragons, to make them proud to be who they are as a community. Whether the change agent likes it or not, they become a single combat warrior, symbolizing “the new direction.” If the new direction succeeds, the change agent becomes bigger in their minds than he or she deserves to be. If the new direction fails, they become the object of scorn, ridicule and rejection. Change agents must be visible to do their work. And someone amongst those people---manager, board, greens superintendent--- will become that symbol for better or worse, visible to all, the symbol of success or failure. People need someone to raise on their shoulders or fling into the mud. What’s interesting is that many people who are too small---for whatever reason---to step forward will often resent those single combat warriors who do. Change agents who hide behind others will never become single combat warriors---nor will they become as effective as they might otherwise be.

When the Journey’s Over---Will the Project Coach Leave for the Next Project:

The big question at the press conference before the final game---“Are you coming back to Hickory next year?” For teams and clubs, this is a big issue to consider since the people who are change agents often are not the ones to become “maintainers of the change.” Churchill, who changed the very way England chose to fight the Second World War, was kicked out of office the moment the war was over. Hackman changed the way Hickory played basketball. Did he need new teams to change, new conquests to make? Would he be the right one to maintain and polish what he had created? The same might well be said for managers and presidents, committee chairs and staff who fought for change, achieved those changes, made them a success---are they the right people to carry the torch forward? Is a new type of leadership team needed? Can change be institutionalized, can change agents become happy pursuing continuous though incremental change? Does the manager stay, or does the manager go---for his good and that of the club?

It’s All About Relationships Made, or Relationships Lost:

Hackman won the big game. He was the conquering hero. But the journey was about something different than the winning. It was about the relationships created and explored during the process: the substantive encounters with his players (“I love you guys.”), the once hostile teacher (Barbara Hershey giving him the big smooch and the hugs), the drunk assistant (in rehab, beginning the new life, discovering the traumas of change on the micro level), the fans (the opportunity to speak during the town meeting, the discovering of the need to articulate vision). The ultimate journey is about the process---the people encounter, exploring life’s complexities, working together to achieve--- and not the end. As Nietzsche once said---“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” Change agents look beyond the details, see the big picture and understand that the “people journey” trumps all.

Steeling Yourself for Combat:

Hoosiers is only an abstraction to the innocent. None who are reading this article are that. You know what it’s like to be a change agent whether on the operational or the policy level. Hackman’s journey might well be your own so prepare yourself for the next opportunity to become a change agent. Dress code in the dining room? New subsidies for the youth program? An assessment for the new irrigation system? A new pro for the golf operation? A general manager versus a clubhouse manager? It won’t be easy, it won’t be fun, it probably won’t be pretty but it will always be entertaining.

Prepare for your coming role as a change agent. Watch **Hoosiers** and review these Hoosier Themes. Anticipate what’s going to happen when the changes start happening. Align your expectations with the coming reality. Prepare yourself for the journey and enjoy the ride.