

GROWERTALKS

Paul's Pointers

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Change Is Constant, Change Is Good

Paul Pilon



PAUL PILON

Over the years, I've learned a lot about how important change is to both our personal and professional lives. Change is constant and nearly everything changes over time or is influenced by other factors that have changed around it. Change comes in a variety of sizes, shapes and flavors, but believe me, it's always occurring.

With change constantly happening around us, I'm surprised by how many people have difficulty dealing with change. Perhaps it's a mental barrier we put up that causes us to view change in a negative manner.

This negative connotation likely stems from how we use this word in our everyday language. For example, how many times have we threatened our children with phrases such as, "If you don't change your behavior, I'm going to take away your phone (or other privileges)." I'm sure you can think of other

examples in your day-to-day lives or in athletics when the word "change" has been used with a negative context.

I can't deny that in many instances change does bring about some type of negativity or abrupt adjustment that we have to deal with. This type of change may not be able to be avoided altogether, so please allow me to shift gears and focus on changes that result in some type of positive benefit. Beneficial changes can often be planned for in advance and are generally easier for most people to swallow than the outcomes of unplanned circumstances.

It isn't possible to cover every type of change businesses in our industry encounter in this article, but here's a list of several beneficial changes I frequently observe:

- Current trends in the industry or worldly events often influence what growers produce.
- Many growers aim to gradually change their offerings by adding several new varieties into their production schemes each year. Adding new varieties while removing poor-selling plants is a good method for keeping profitable product offerings.
- There are several cultural practices that can be modified to obtain certain benefits, such as decreased disease incidence, improved quality, reduced shrink and decreased production costs.
- To save time and address their labor concerns, many operations look for opportunities to improve their efficiencies by improving their production practices using technology or with processes, such as Lean Manufacturing.

There are many justifiable reasons to embrace change. Opportunities are created when change is allowed to occur.

The fear of change

The fear of change is mostly in our heads. For some reason, maintaining the status quo is in most people's comfort zone. I get it—we're creatures of habit and doing the same thing over and over again is easy and familiar. However, I'll argue that doing things the same way forever isn't usually in the best interest of any business.

I often say, "If it's not broke, don't fix it." In other words, don't make changes just for the sake of making changes. There are many things within our businesses or as an industry that are being done right. However, I really believe that there are almost always ways to tweak or make small improvements to existing processes.



Pictured: In the past few years, several growers have reduced the cost of their growing mixes by changing to mixes containing HydraFiber.

Some of the most successful companies are those that are always looking for ways to do things better. I really appreciate working with companies who continually look at themselves with the goal of improving their practices. Over the past 15 years, I've never had anyone who utilized my consulting services say, "Please tell me all

the things we're doing right." It's usually quite the opposite—I'm usually asked to be brutally honest and asked to let them know what they're doing wrong and where improvements can be made.

I hope your mindset is on the same side as these businesses: change is good and is necessary to move forward and grow your business. I totally get it if you're not quite there yet.

To help shift your mindset, I encourage you to think of change as an opportunity; it's the harbinger of possibilities. It always occurs and change is exciting. Your attitude has everything to do with how you perceive change. It's only scary and uncomfortable when you view it that way. The fear of change is a feeling you CAN change.

If it's not the fear of change that prevents you from moving forward, perhaps you're stuck in your ways. I can't tell you how many times I've inquired about why current processes or practices are in place only to hear comments such as, "We've always done it this way." Please forgive me for being blunt, but this isn't a good response. You should know exactly why you do everything you do. Your current methods may very well be the best way of doing the task, but you absolutely must understand the reasoning behind it.

Getting buy-in

I think we can all agree that the world around us and our businesses are constantly changing. Some changes we can control, while others we cannot. There are definitely some changes that will have negative outcomes. In this article, I focused on the types of changes we can control; the ones that would have a positive influence on our businesses. Many people struggle with change—either they're stuck in their ways or they generally fear change and getting out of their comfort zones. In many instances, our attitudes about change greatly influence how well we adapt to or even pursue beneficial changes.

There are a few things we can do to help our employees and managers overcome their barriers to change. Perhaps the best way to get managers and employees interested in change initiatives is to get their engagement and buy-in for the changes. Bring them in on the process, allowing them to see the value inherent in the changes from the inside out. Making them instrumental in the process nearly guarantees they'll be on board.

When possible, demonstrate the benefits or value the changes will provide to their roles in the organization or to the

company as a whole. Demonstrate that their roles are essential in the process; when they see themselves as being instrumental to the change and to the business, they'll view themselves as partners rather than resisters in the change process.

In short, utilizing a "hands-on" approach that includes employee engagement, input and feedback provides a sense of involvement and ownership that usually results in their acceptance of change. This simple approach breaks the resistance and fear of change, and allows companies to evolve or change more at will rather than out of necessity.

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Paul Pilon is a Technical Manager at OHP, Inc. and editor-at-large of the Perennial Pulse e-newsletter. Feel free to contact him with article topics or to address your production challenges. He can be reached at ppilon@ohp.com.