Change? Why Change?

Suppose you came upon a man in the woods, working to saw down a tree. He is exhausted from working for hours. You suggest he could take a break to sharpen the saw as it will help the work go faster. He replies “I don’t have time to sharpen the saw! I’m busy sawing!”

People and companies who don’t take time out to “sharpen the saw” – to take a step back and review the way they work – may not be well placed to deal with change when it occurs. Indeed, Abraham Lincoln famously said “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

This is really about working “smarter, not harder”. For time-pressed companies, asking a simple question focused on each of these elements will help to stimulate ideas and anticipate change both in the short-term and the long-term. Some areas to consider include:

**People:** what if... a member of staff leaves the company? Having an interim plan in place to handle their workload, and a succession plan to deal with the situation more permanently, will help the company react to the change without disrupting productivity.

**Financial:** what if... sales drop? There needs to be robust financial contingencies in place to ensure that the company can continue to operate efficiently and effectively in the short-term to allow time to consider the next steps for the ongoing stability of the business.

**Customer:** what if... customer complaints go up? In an ever changing world, customer expectations of excellence also move with the times. Keeping in regular contact with your customers to ensure you understand and anticipate their needs will help the company adapt quickly and pursue excellence for their customers.

There are many more areas to consider, and asking “what if...” is a good start to pursuing excellence through increased flexibility and openness to change.

What do other people say?

Approach each new problem not with a view of finding what you hope will be there, but to get the truth, the realities that must be grappled with. You may not like what you find. In that case you are entitled to try to change it. But do not deceive yourself as to what you do find to be the facts of the situation.

*Bernard M. Baruch, American Financier*

The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything - or nothing.

*Nancy Astor, first UK female MP*

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

*Charles Darwin, English naturalist*

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

*John F. Kennedy, former US President*

If anything is certain, it is that change is certain. The world we are planning for today will not exist in this form tomorrow.

*Philip Crosby, Quality guru*