

## **Continuous Improvement**

### **by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

I am writing a new book on trust. For some inexplicable reason, I do that every three years or so. One chapter is about change and why organizations feel compelled to change. The quote at the start of the chapter is by Lao Tzu, "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."

The quote tickled my funny bone enough to use it in the header for the chapter. Now, as I reflect on the issue of change and continuous improvement, I have an additional insight that may be helpful. We do not need to worry about the myriad of decisions required to chart the future. Rather, all we need to do is verify we are heading in the right direction. That will free us from over-planning and allow our creativity to determine the exact pathway to our future.

The wonderful thing about a vision is that it pulls us along from one revelation to the next one. We simply need to remain true to the vision and verify that each decision is pointed the right direction. The rest will take care of itself.

Lou Holtz uses the word WIN, which stands for "What's Important Now." It allows him to focus on the vision and do the right thing at every step to take him in that direction. He does not worry or hope or fret about all the details, he simply asks if what we are doing right now is consistent with the vision. If it is, then the step is correct.

Continuous improvement is the same way. We do not need to psychoanalyze all possible avenues ahead of time. We can take actions immediately as long as we are pointed in the direction we wish to go, and we will eventually achieve our goals.

Some people will say, "Yes, but what if there is a better choice, then you might miss the opportunity to do that." People who continually say "Yes, but..." can find themselves searching for the ultimate perfect path and die from analysis paralysis or starvation. Far better to step out on the right path and keep moving toward the goal than spend years searching for the perfect path.

In "Success is a Journey," the great Brian Tracy recalls how, as a young man, he traveled from Vancouver all the way to South Africa with some friends. It took them over a year to do it. The most harrowing part of the journey was when he crossed the Sahara Desert. For one 500 mile stretch called the Tanezrouft, the road was marked by oil barrels every 5 kilometers. It turns out that that is exactly the curvature of the Earth, so at any time he could see exactly two oil barrels: the one he just passed and the one directly in front of him.

As soon as he would pass one oil barrel, the one behind him would disappear and a new one would pop up on the horizon in front of him. So the way he crossed the most dangerous desert on the planet was by taking it one oil barrel at a time.

So it is with reaching any difficult goal. You can do it by simply making sure you are heading in the right direction and taking it one oil barrel at a time. I believe that is a good way to visualize continuous improvement and a great model for achieving your goals in life.

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