8 Reasons not to change.
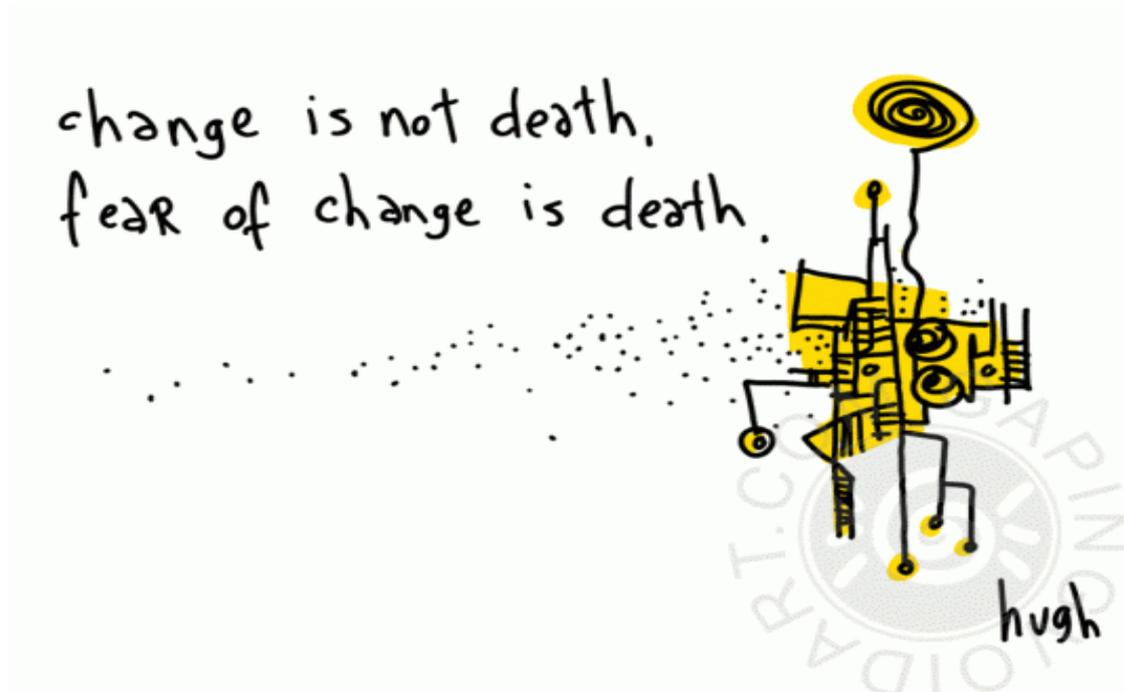
by strategyaudit | Nov 13, 2017 |

We all understand the power of 'Not broken, don't fix' sort of thinking. When things are going OK, even if that is not as well as you would expect, the temptation to leave the status quo in place is compelling.

No risk in that is there.

I see reasons not to change all the time, and find that change is easiest when all concerned see that there is simply no option, and even then, it is sometimes hard, as any improvement is put down to the status quo delivering as it always has, not to the changes made.
Here are the reasons I hear most often, each with their own variation.

- **We are doing OK, do not rock the boat, there are sharks out there.**
  Counterargument. The success to date is no indicator of success into the future, in fact we do know that the future will not look like the past, so we better get on with shaping our own future or we will end up being shark-shit.

- **We are really busy getting stuff done, in order to make these changes, there is a whole bunch of work we do not have the resources or time to do.**
  Counterargument. If we are so busy getting stuff done, that is a sure sign that what we are doing is suboptimal. In a world where knowledge is king, unless we are sufficiently curious to think about and try new stuff we will just get busier, and busier, and end up not seeing the wall before we hit it.

- **We tried that, and it did not work.**

  Counterargument. It may not have worked, but do we understand why it did not, and how with the benefit of hindsight we would go about it a second time? Perhaps things have changed sufficiently for it or a variation of it to work today.

- **If we improve what we are doing just a little bit, we will have a huge improvement, so let's concentrate on that.**

  Counterargument. Having in place a process of continuous improvement is great but not enough to be sustainably successful. Continuous improvement is a core management responsibility, not an option, or reason for celebration, as at best it optimises existing processes, which may be poor process in the first place. The challenge is to seek new ways of achieving the result that create new sources of value, or indeed, create a new result.

- **Our customers do not seem to think that we need to do it that way**

  Counterargument. Customers usually see things in their existing context, and so long as the product or service you provide continues to be competitive, often see no reason to change or push you for improvement. However, when an alternative supplier turns up with a better solution, they will move. Steve Jobs famously quipped that he never asked customers what they wanted, simply because they did not know, and Henry Ford observed that if he asked customers what they wanted, the answer would be a faster horse. Don't get caught having the best horse stables in town when the residents are all driving cars.

- **Change is risky, what if it all goes to hell?.**

  Counterargument. Change is risky, and it can easily go pear-shaped, so the smart managers avoid betting the farm while changing as quickly as practical and possible.

- **What if we are wrong?**

  Counterargument. Being wrong can and does happen, indeed, being wrong some of the time is a part of learning how to improve. The key is to plan the changes, understand the outcomes required, monitor the outcomes as they emerge, and be prepared to make adjustments quickly as necessary. You could also ask yourself 'what if we are right, but did nothing. What would be the cost of that inaction?

- **We do not have the skills or experience to make these sorts of changes**

  Counterargument. Few do when they start, that is what change is all about, and what makes it so challenging. What is required is a dose of leadership, someone who inspires the idea that change is necessary, communicates the need widely, then is seen to be 'walking the walk' and leading it. Besides, there are plenty of advisors out there with a lot of experience and knowledge, pick someone who can help by guiding, mentoring and advising.

Initiating and managing change is the biggest challenge a leader faces. It impacts on every corner and crevice of their business. Most shy away, and very few are able to see all the forces at work themselves. Change is necessarily collaborative and highly 'leadership sensitive'. An appropriate dispassionate and experienced outside resource, often teams of them, always add value to the process.

Header cartoon credit: Hugh McLeod at gaping Void.