

Raplexity—Coping With Rapid and Complex Change

By Leonard C. Albert

Many of us can remember the famous words of Captain Kirk of Star Trek fame at the end of an episode when he would say, “**Warp speed, Mr. Sulu!**” That’s what’s happening these days with knowledge and technology in the world we live in. We live in a time of unprecedented changes that are both rapid and complex and they are coming at us at “warp speed.” This has prompted management guru Peter Drucker to coin the word “raplex.” Warren Bennis, the world’s preeminent writer on leadership, in his book, *Old Dog’s, New Tricks*, coins the word “raplexity” to signify *organizations and individuals who have to deal with the rapidity and complexity of change*. Raplexity is a reality to us because of the intrusive and unrelenting pace of modern technology.

Here’s just a glimpse of some of the changes that are happening all around us:

- Soon China will become the number one English speaking country in the world
- India has more honors kids in school than America has kids
- The top 10 “in-demand” jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004
- The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today’s college student will have 10-14 jobs by the age of 38
- There are 31 billion searches on Google every month (where did we go for information before that?)
- The amount of new technical information is doubling every two years
- The first commercial text message was sent in December of 1992. Today the number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the total population of the planet.

What about all this change? It seems to me that just when we get use to things along comes a whole new set of rules, principles and technologies that are the “must have.” I just get “single core” and I find I need “core duo.” I finally get “Wi-Fi” and find that I need “Bluetooth.” I get a cell phone and find that I need a “smart phone.” The list goes on. Many churches are just now getting used to using Power Point and now we are being told we need to use video services and social networking sites like Twitter and Face Book. It’s tough for many of us “old guys.” John Nuveen, a business leader from “yesteryear” said, “You can judge your age by the amount of pain you feel when you come in contact with a new idea.”

That’s really the problem isn’t it—it’s all this change. What I am saying here is we have to recognize it and learn to cope with it. The futurist author Alvin Toffler said, “The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

Here are some pointers that have helped me:

Don’t Fear Change

Did you hear about the man who walks into a psychiatrist’s office? He says, “Doc, every time I see nickels, dimes and quarters, I have a panic attack! What can my problem be?” “Oh, that’s easy,” the doctor answers. “You’re just afraid of change.” You can’t be afraid of it and you can’t deny it—it is inevitable. You will hear many leaders who are so “yesterday” say, “Well if it was good enough in my Granddaddy’s day, it’s good enough now. Here’s the real truth: if your granddaddy was here today he probably would accept the new and get rid of the old.

Don't Reject Change

It goes like this: "If the King James Version was good enough for Paul, then it's good enough for me." God has given us this technology to advance His kingdom. If we embrace change and let it work for us we can use it to spread the Gospel around the world with blazing speed. We can impact the unsaved, win more people and disciple them with greater efficiency. All we have to do is stretch ourselves a little bit.

Don't Delay Change

Churches can jump on bandwagons, but they rarely do so in a timely manner and usually only after protracted and pointless debate and study. Many in the church are still debating the merits of methods and technologies that are now already obsolete. We are faced with the challenges and opportunities presented by newer social media vehicles immensely popular right now, such as Face Book and Twitter. Do you remember what our denominational growth consultant, Dr. Conrad Lowe said? He said, "If the 1950's ever come back, I know many Churches of God that will be ready." It upset me at the time but the more I travel and work with local churches, the more I realize that many are stuck in a time warp.

What are we to do?

The world of raplexity is a different world indeed. We can't continue with business as usual. Indeed, our churches which do God's business are being transformed whether we like it or not. Like the dinosaurs, we are discovering that when the environment radically alters, such that the old way of being is no longer appropriate, the choice is fairly clear: evolve, or go extinct. History proves that the dinosaurs didn't fully understand this.

In short form, we need to come to grips with the epochal change as our culture transitions from a modern world to a postmodern world. We must adapt to advanced technology and learn from it every day. Generation Y and Generation X were raised on technology and churches need to take advantage of it. Our leaders are going to have to be comfortable with technology and learn to embrace it.

I'm not talking about abandoning the past. Just like when we drive and regularly look in our rear view mirror. We cannot forget the past, but we can't navigate the future if we live in the past. I'm not talking about the "unchangeables" either. The Word does not change, our doctrine does not change. Nothing can take the place of anointed preaching—it never grows old or outdated. A great PowerPoint will never help a lousy sermon! Nothing can take the place of great worship. There is no technology on the planet that can take the place of one mighty move of God.

Let me give you some examples of what church leaders can do to cope with raplexity:

Embrace the Technology

So many preachers spend way too much time fighting culture. Andy Stanley says we should see it as the wind, something to be harnessed. I first heard of Twitter from Dr. Leonard Sweet at our last General Assembly in San Antonio, Texas. He was conducting a workshop and told how he sent out "tweets." I thought, "This is really different." Now 80 million people visit and use the site every

month. There is understandable resistance to using new technology in a ministry sense because we fear that which we do not understand.

It is important to understand the limits of social media---what they can and can't do. A "tweet" is only 140 characters long but it can convey a powerful message about God. The KJV of John 3:16 is only 117 characters! You can't preach with it but you can converse with it. Just think what would happen if every one of your members could get a "tweet" from you about your upcoming revival or sermon series, or prayer needs or any other exciting information? Also, Rev. Rick Warren of Saddleback fame now has 34 thousand followers on his Twitter account. Imagine the potential.

Keep Learning

Take a computer course. Learn a software package. Buy a video projector. Go to You Tube and find some powerful (and free) video clips. Send your church leaders to some technology seminars. Get a high speed internet connect for the church. Get rid of that old "steam driven" computer and buy some new equipment to help in getting the Gospel out to those who need to hear it. Make changes needed to make it easy for people to experience God in your church

Find a Technology Mentor or Coach

If you are the one who is in the know, start coaching others. If you don't have a clue about where to begin, find someone who can help you. Identify people who are good coaches and mentors in your church. Get guidance from these people. Learn from those who know and understand technology what can be accomplished if you use it. After church one Sunday night I was speaking with a brother in the church and telling him the difficulty I was having in just setting up a computer printer. When he began to talk I recognized that he really knew computers. That was 15 years ago and the assistance, information, teaching and understanding about technology that I have received from him is priceless. He helped me with a Bible program that has 463 study books included with it. It has 17 commentaries, five dictionaries, hundreds of sermons, book titles, maps and photos. There is a "learning curve" here but once you know how to use it you will never go back to the old ways. There is nothing that can equal its power to teach and assist you in Bible study.

Learn to Stretch

Subscribe to a tech magazine. Give other leaders around you "stretch assignments." Read new books, learn new ways. Don't be afraid to try new methods. When you consciously embrace change wholeheartedly as an inevitable part of your life, and align your focus to creatively seek ways to utilize new changes to make your life (and that of your church) more abundant, easier, and fulfilling, your life will evolve with a more graceful flow. You will experience change as an opportunity for growth and new experiences. You will energize your spirit with possibility and wonderment, God will be glorified and His message will go forth with power and anointing.

We need not fear change, rather we should embrace change with God's help because as the world changes His love and presence with us will never change.