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Shuswap Community Conversations

Conversation 4: “Managing Change”

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Despite manifestations, by the general public, of support for social change as means of enriching life, social change remains the prime cause of social conflict. The primary argument against any form of social change is that it is not in keeping with the established social traditions of the community and that “When in Rome, one must do as the Romans.” It would appear we all support change provided it is on our terms. Yet, social change is inevitable: the natural result of a number of individual needs and social forces coming together to demand change. The real question is how we can manage and accommodate social change.

Ethnic and Religious Diversity: Historically, Canada’s ethnic diversity consisted primarily of a collection of different European ethnic cultures segregated in the separate settlements each reflecting the ethnic culture from whence they came. Religious diversity generally consisted of a variety of Christian religious denominations. Residents belonging to other cultural or religious traditions were so few in number they didn’t threaten the status quo and, as such, were permitted to live on the margins of the community.

Generational Change: Generational changes in dress, outlook, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs have always been a source of social conflict. Efforts to contain and control youthful rebellion are part of all religious teachings, social discipline and educational practices. Historically, successive generations lived within close proximity of each other. The advancements in transportation technology provided conditions that allowed for the family nucleus to become geographically severed without breaking contact. Recent advances in information technology and the creation of cyber space has created a greater threat to the traditional family unit. The ability for multiple virtual spaces to exist within a common physical space means that different generations can live together without ever needing to rub up against each other. Whereas, generational conflict resulting in change traditionally was the result of a continuous generational friction, today it is more likely to occur sporadically in response to seismic shifts.

Technological Advancement: When technological advancement were primarily mechanical in nature and developed to serve industrial and defensive purposes, adults were the most experienced and adept in its application. Today, with the advent of social media and the development of countless new computer applications, conventional ways of communicating for personal and work purposes have changed dramatically. Whereas youth, who have grown up surrounded by computers, maneuver with ease within and between various applications, adults possess less intuitive adeptness in the use of this new medium. As a result, in this Edward Snowden era, authority and responsibility for the management and control of technological advancements is shifting to a younger generation no longer dependents upon or directed by a more seasoned generation of elders.

Education and Change: Education both prompts change and promotes the acceptance of change. Education comes in multiple forms including: formal learning, recreational and leisurely learning, experiential learning, and performance learning. Learning takes place at both the intellectual and emotional levels. Learning outcomes are the indicators of change. Each lesson learned marks an altered state of learner awareness. The more one learns the more receptive one becomes to the change process. Whereas traditionally the ability to memorize and recite often passed for education, today increasing attention is being paid to the cognitive process that accompanies learning.

Personal Security and Change: Change brings with it social and physical risks. One's ability to venture change and the risks that accompany change is proportional to one's social and physical security. We are by nature social beings. How we see ourselves and are seen by others defines us and determines how we see ourselves and relate to those around us. A change in even one aspect of our social or physical security forces reconsideration of the necessity of change. The greater the congruity between our perception of reality and what we experience, the greater our sense of security and the less inclined we are to risk change. When we sense a threat to our physical or emotional security, we are more likely to venture change in an effort to restore our sense of security. This reciprocation between states of security and uncertainty provides the readiness and necessity required to undertake both public and personal change in an incremental way. However, massive threats to our social and physical security can overwhelm and lead to mental lockdown.

Tradition and Change: Tradition is the accepted way of doing things. Behaviors dictated by cultural, religious or social requirements become, with repetition, the accepted and unquestioned way of doing things. Such traditions come to be seen as part and parcel of who we are. We have a natural tendency to view events through the lens of our traditional paradigm. It is when established tradition is seen to be challenged by change that conflict arises. Such a sense of threat is generally rooted in the expectation that multiple traditions and cultures can't cohabitate the same space without one coming to dominate. The idea of a country as a cultural melting pot is the product of such thinking. The concept of the viable development of a multicultural society where diversity is embraced and celebrated is an example of the ability to accommodate both tradition and change.

Summary: Managing change is becoming ever more necessary with the advent of increasing need to accommodate increasing demands for change. To do so will require a readiness to: welcome diversity, bridge generational perspectives, accept new ways of doing things, educate ourselves at becoming more "other centered", enhance individual social and physical security, and respect multiple cultural traditions. Conversation is an effective means of doing so.

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Facilitator of Shuswap Community Conversation #4