

WHITE PAPER



LISTEN! COVID IS TALKING TO US ABOUT CHANGE

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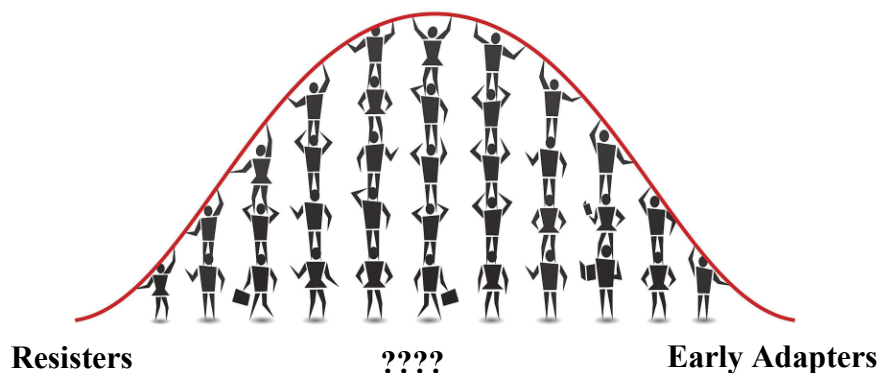
Yes, COVID is a double-edge sword. One the one hand it is a terrible disease while on the other hand it is very sensitive and potentially explosive subject. So why am I writing about it? Whether we like it or not, COVID is providing us an excellent opportunity to understand critical dynamics inherent in the change process. We're bombarded with news about COVID and I hope you find it interesting to learn how the change dynamics that I'm about to explain can help move your dealership to a higher level of performance. You can decide what you are going to do about COVID. But if we're going to experience it, we might as well learn from it. Remember the time-worn cliché — when the student is ready the teacher appears. I hope the readers of this article are ready to accept its content as a teacher about change.

The virus epidemic is screaming about the dynamics of change. We only need to listen. There are three categories of change: 1) planned change of what we want to achieve, 2) forced change like those brought to us by the virus, and 3) passive change resulting in the 10 pounds I've gained over the past 18 months. This paper deals with the first two change categories. The third category is my personal problem.

A major source of energy to change is the propulsion to do something differently when remaining the same is no longer an option. Imagine sitting in a movie theater when suddenly everything goes black, including the exit lights. Then you begin to smell smoke. At that point, the decision to change is easily made as everyone is rushing to find an exit. Hopefully, none of us will have this experience.

Experiencing COVID symptoms is that blacked out theater and provides an excellent analogy to help us see the light to successfully change. The vaccine offers the opportunity to change and with any change there is going to be a percentage of people who will refuse. This resistance gets louder as social media gives resisters a voice as they shout their reasons to encourage others to likewise resist. A similar experience occurs in the dealership with employees voicing their opposition to an announced change.

Examine the following normal curve which illustrates the three groups of accepting change whenever and wherever the setting.



In order for resisters or those wondering what to do to move to the right is to understand that remaining the same is not an option. But, remember there will be a percentage that will continue to resist either actively or passively. I've encouraged resisters in dealerships to be active because it provides an opportunity for those supporting change the opportunity to continue discussing the reasons driving change. Remember, the resisters are telling us they fail to see the benefit of change for themselves. So, it is the responsibility of the dealership management structure to help resisters understand the benefits of any change. Hopefully, the resisters will listen with an open mind to objectively evaluate the facts. Again, there may be a percentage that refuses to accept the facts driving the need to change for whatever reason.

In contrast, early adapters recognized the vaccine as an opportunity to remain healthy and, hopefully, return to a more normal lifestyle. It served as a magnetic pull. The pull was so strong that people traveled for miles just to get vaccinated. These people made personal decisions that, *"I've got to get vaccinated to promote health."* And this is exactly what needs to happen in dealerships. The benefits of change need to serve as a strong magnet to pull people to change.

Fast forward. Now look at what is happening. How many stories have we heard where unvaccinated COVID victims exclaim, *"If only I had received the vaccination"* as they lie in bed while COVID is ravaging their bodies?

Inherent in such testimonies are two critical change elements: 1) accepting responsibility to make the best decision and 2) recognizing that remaining unvaccinated was not the best choice. There is a "come to Jesus insight" while the patient lies seriously ill and potentially dying but, it is too late to be vaccinated. That "come to Jesus insight" can occur within the dealership as well. The good news with these "come to Jesus insights" is that these people can become a megaphone encouraging other resisters to change.

Here are the critical change points. One is that in spite of the magnetic pull, it is not strong enough to overcome some of the resisters' beliefs. Second, as we have seen, a tragic event must happen before some people decide to change.

Here's the leadership lesson: When employees resist change at your dealership in spite of your best efforts to sell the benefits, the challenge is to offer a tragic consequence to push the change agenda. Yes, in some instances, the lack of job security for not changing may be the key to open the door to change. But if you play that card, then you need to follow through and wish the person well. Unfortunately, come hell or high water, there is a percentage of individuals who may never change their minds simply because they don't want to; their stubbornness to see the truth provides them a benefit. I can't tell you the number of times I've discussed employees habitually arriving late to work. I try to help managers realize that accepting that performance is lowering the expected standards for everyone.

When I ask those attending one of my leadership courses, “*Where do you want to be on scale from 1 – 10 with 10 being the best leaders*” I routinely hear 10 or at least a 9. Don’t become angry when I write this, but I silently wonder which ones are lying to themselves?”

One of the more difficult challenges that all of us must confront every day is being open-minded, that is, the willingness to listen to or accept different ideas or opinions. Having an open mind is so critical for our personal and professional success that it’s a favorite topic of researchers and authors (see *Think Again* by Adam Grant and *Multipliers* by Liz Wiseman).

Stop for a moment and think about your thinking. It’s an amazing gift that can either promote your well-being or lead to your demise and even trick you into doing things that are detrimental to your well-being. I’m asking you to be open-minded and think about what is required to successfully implement change. That leads us to how we can be open minded when confronted with the need to change? Keep reading.

Your Personal Think Tank

Aware: Psychological self-awareness has been labeled as one of our greatest challenges and being open-minded begins with being aware of our attitudes and the realization that our attitudes are created by a variety of environmental events, e.g., social media, religion, politics, a person we admire, our parents and, yes, even our levels of self-esteem and self-confidence to name a few. Awareness is attending to our thoughts, feelings and actions. All of us have conscious and unconscious biases that influence our actions. So, challenge yourself by asking, “*Are my thoughts based on facts or is it possible that fiction is driving what I think are facts?*”

Facts: Facts or fiction? In short, all of us are victims of our imaginations and falsehoods because the more frequently we hear fiction; the more likely we begin to think they are facts. That speaks directly for us to evaluate content with an open mind.

The change message imbedded in this fact/fiction phenomenon is the need to continuously discuss that which you want to institutionalize within your dealership, e.g., the dealership’s mission which fuels high performance.

Challenge: Here is the kicker. You must have the psychological fortitude to be willing to have your thinking challenged. Just recently I listened to a series of false statements being made as if they were true about situations about which I had first-hand knowledge. I challenged the speaker’s words because he was spewing untruths. No, he didn’t like being challenged, but being challenged earlier in his life could have prevented him from mistakenly spreading rumors.

Narcissistic thinking that our fictitious ideas are “right” is playing psychological Russian Roulette as far as COVID is concerned. The beauty of being challenged leads to better

thinking and better ideas. Be proactive and take advantage of the multiple opportunities to challenge your thinking or risk that a dire consequence does that for you.

Listen to Understand: The challenge of listening to understand is the constant control that is required over your automatic internal chatter to discount what you are hearing. When you automatically start discounting another person's opinion, give yourself instructions to listen to fully understand the opposing point of view. An antidote could be to ask yourself, "*Could what I'm hearing be true?*" I know that is difficult to do instead of continuing to discount the presenter of information that is contrary to your opinions.

Evaluate: COVID is demanding that we evaluate what is best for us and our families? Each of us will make that decision. Change in the dealership can be threatening and every employee needs to objectively evaluate the terms with the same question, "*Is the change best for me and my family.*" Doing so means giving the subject an honest evaluation by examining the ratio of advantages vs. disadvantages of staying the same vs. those of supporting the change.

Normal Curve: We must accept the fact the normal distribution tells us about change. At the risk of being redundant and in spite of the best facts available, there will be a percentage of people who will stubbornly hold onto their stubbornness because of the personal benefits derived from their *way of thinking*. I've read that *not changing* is the reason the world has lost its dinosaurs with the exception of the lowly cockroach that adapted to the ever-changing environment. The choice is ours – be a dinosaur or a cockroach?

Forced Change

Now let's turn our attention to the fact that COVID has forced us to change our rituals that have produced considerable frustration and heightened depression three to four times compared to the level of pre-COVID depression. Many times, we're going to be forced to change, e.g., someone bangs into our car, we didn't receive the promotion that was promised; even the dealership can force changes we're unhappy about. We need to learn how to use forced change for our benefit.

So, what do we do with our backs against the wall? We have two options: 1) continue being disgruntled risk loss of health or perhaps leave the dealership, or 2) adapt to the change as best as we can and hopefully grow from the experience.

COVID has trapped us because it's everywhere. Our survival instincts have two primary goals to maintain psychological and physical safety. We think remaining in our comfort zone is the safest place, but not necessarily when confronted with forced changes that threaten health,

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even life. John Calipari, the University of Kentucky basketball coach, recently admitted being afraid of needles. yet he's encouraging those locked in their comfort zone to get vaccinated.

As I stated many times in leadership classes, *"Leaders are comfortable with being uncomfortable to do what must be done."*

There are times when forced change takes a victim. As of this writing, a friend of mine is making the painful decision about how many hundreds of thousands of dollars is he willing to lose with

the hope his business will rebound from the forced COVID downturn or declare bankruptcy. COVID may take another business victim.

Routines: Our rituals provide considerable security that encourages us to stick to them like glue during uncertainty. Forced change often wipe away the rituals and force us to make dreadful decisions. No longer do we have close contact with family and friends.

I'm no exception. I very much enjoy training/consulting and business travel. COVID has drastically reduced on-site work. So, I'm taking advantage of the change to strengthen my exercise routine. Another very effective ritual for me is a designated time to read excellent leadership content. I'm doing better, but I want back on the road. You need to establish your routines and hopefully not over-indulge in alcohol which only serves to make one more depressed. Trust me. I know.

Support Group: Support groups serve as excellent mental health tools. Multiple support groups are offered by churches and nonprofit organizations. Thank goodness for a church sponsored support group a friend joined after her husband had a devastating stroke. She has been his care agent for the last 11 years, and her contact with people outside of her family is credited with her maintaining her emotional health.

The dealership serves as a support group. Stop and think about it. The dealership offers physical and social contact with friends who are sorely needed by all of us during trying times. It's okay for groups of employees to discuss the disrupting impact forced changes have in their lives. It's cathartic and feels good to know you are not alone. But in the work environment, prolonged discussion of forced company changes can have catastrophic consequences that lead us to a very important ingredient to conquer the consequences of forced changes – optimism.

Optimism: Optimism is the decision to look for the good when adversity strikes. Multiple studies have reported the many positive consequences associated with being optimistic, e.g., improved health, longer life span, job promotions, and financial rewards, to name a few.

Optimism returns us to our discussion of self-awareness and taking control of our thoughts. Yes, when we get hit in the stomach with adversity, it may take our breath away. Behavioral psychologists suggest that we enter the closet and start screaming or beat the hell out of a pillow to release our frustrations. Ultimately, though, we must exert the necessary self-control to make good decisions. Are we going to become victims of the adversity and allow it to control our lives or use the adversity as a teacher and grow through the experience? The survival instincts tell us to grow. All of us have seen people

who made the decision to be victims of their adversity, and that is a sad option. Unfortunately, these individuals are blind to the many blessings of life.

An optimist will ask, *"How can I benefit from experiencing this adversity?"* Optimists know they will finalize the answer because they:

1. Believe there are benefits and their brain will generate the answers,
2. Expect their brain to generate their personal list of benefits, and
3. Will borrow this phrase from Dale Carnegie, *"If you want to be enthusiastic, act enthusiastic."* So, optimists will *act optimistically to be optimistic.*

Our brains begin to generate answers. I hope that I'm not complicating matters by sharing with you the debate if these answers are spiritually inspired...or does the mind generate answers to remove the tension created by the question? Believe as you may, but it's important that you record your answers as they appear in your conscious mind. Putting thoughts on paper serves to solidify them in our brain. For many years I've benefited from the affirmation that *today's struggles are the footsteps leading to tomorrow's successes.* Then there is the popular cliché, *"What hurts you today makes you stronger tomorrow."* Optimists use pain to further their personal and professional development. Learning to act and to be optimistic when working with a forced change has its own reward as forced changes are going to be a constant companion in our lives.

Your list of advantages is personal. However, there are times when group discussions can be beneficial. Listening to others stimulates thoughts. In other words, we often think of things during group discussions that we may not have thought by ourselves. COVID has created several advantages in the workplace. ranging from what an employee told me, *"I learned that I really need to be around employees,"* to companies that have learned that employees can be just as productive working from home and, thereby, reducing the real estate costs for office space.

In Conclusion

I hope that neither you, your family, or friends become COVID victims. There are too many sad stories. On the other end of the sad/happy spectrum, I hope this paper provided you with information to help you make changes in your personal life as well as within your dealership.

About the Author



Larry Cole has a Ph.D. in psychology and successfully integrates the psychology of human behavior with courses he offers through the Dealer Institute. Larry has worked in the agriculture industry for over 20 years and 15 + years with equipment dealerships. He has developed and delivers a range of courses in leadership and organizational development, the psychology of selling and transformational customer service.

As an author, he has published 10 books and numerous articles in professional and trade publications. As a researcher he is currently working with the Dealer Institute regarding the motivational basis of company loyalty and employee engagement.

About Dealer Institute

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Developing People to Grow Your Business

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