

# Change and Community Evolution

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It has been said that the only constant in life is change. Times change. People change. Societies change. Values change. Everything we know and love changes. Our kids grow up. Our friends grow old. Our own bodies shift and slide in strange ways. Our minds soften. The world around us changes. Political parties shift right and left. Governments rise and then fall. Programs disappear or are replaced. Power changes hands. Change changes us all, and yet, we do everything to resist it, ignore it, condemn it, and deny it.

One of the interesting things about change, however, is that it keeps coming at us, despite our resistance to it. In fact, the pace of change is increasing exponentially. 20,000 years ago, we were hunters and gatherers, and our lives remained relatively unchanged until the discovery of agriculture 5,000 years ago. Once we moved from being nomads to farmers, not much changed for thousands of years until the industrial revolution 300 years ago, which changed everything about our world again. Now, the technology revolution is transforming every aspect of our lives, dramatically more so every day, but it only began about 30 years ago.

The other interesting thing about change is that we typically resist it as individuals, but as a society we adopt and adapt to it very quickly. I think that is evidence of evolution at work. Collectively, we adapt better and adopt more than we do as individuals. An individual that resists change dies, either literally or metaphorically; yet society and culture adapt, evolve, and carry on. As the world changes, those who are prepared to adapt prosper, and the resisters perish.

The same applies to communities. There are so many changes coming, and they are coming quickly, that we will see our communities forced to adapt to more in the next 20 years than they have in the last 100. Those that adapt will live on and prosper, passing on their community's mentality and attitudes to the following generations of communities, while those who resist will see their communities perish. We can all hear the arguments they make: "These changes aren't good for society"; "I like the way we have always done things"; "These changes are making life worse for everyone." We heard the same arguments about printed books, about computers, about vehicles, and about the invention of dentistry. Yet, society embraced each one with complete disregard for the critics, and each has given society some advantage and helped us progress.

That is the important word: progress. In evolutionary terms, some animals perish because they evolve the wrong way, while others prosper when they evolve the right way. As a silly example, in ancient forests, squirrels that develop claws to climb trees would survive because they could escape predators, while squirrels that develop webbed feet would make a nice light snack. For people, those that invested in VHS recorders were rewarded with larger selections of movies, while those who invested in Beta were rewarded with obsolescence. For communities, those who are prepared for the future will attract new generations, new businesses, and new opportunities for growth, while those that don't will perish.

Many communities don't realize the challenge they are facing. They are working hard to modernize their community and prepare for the future, but their intent is to modernize it to today's standards and ideas. By the time that great work is done, it may already be too late. As the pace of change increases, we need to be leap-frogging the current frame of mind and preparing for what may be coming next, or we risk spending a lot of time, energy, and money investing in the present, which will already be obsolete

tomorrow. Yes, there is a risk in moving in the wrong direction, like the squirrel that evolved webbed feet. However, we have to remember that the squirrel that didn't evolve at all was guaranteed to be lunch. You may die if you evolve the wrong way, but you are certain to die if you don't evolve at all.

Managing change can be difficult, especially when everything around us is changing so quickly and so constantly. You don't have to adapt to everything, however. You simply can't be everything to everyone. If you have identified where your real strengths are, and what opportunities you can invest in to help you grow, you can find the right place to adapt your community for what is coming.

*This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit [www.13ways.ca](http://www.13ways.ca), or we can start the conversation at [info@13ways.ca](mailto:info@13ways.ca).*