

Don't Cave to 'The Cave': Embrace Change One Step at a Time

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Have you ever watched someone try to change a habit? It is a difficult journey for one person to change something about themselves.

Have you ever watched a company try to change its culture or even just a simple process? It is often either a comical series of foreseeable events or the saddest thing you've ever seen depending on your point of view.

One of the elements of change in business that makes it fail so often is the idea of a "psychic prison," a situation in which everyone inside "the cave" holds the same belief system — that what they are currently doing is good and efficient, and since everyone agrees, nothing should change.

The cave is safe. The cave is free of conflict. Outside is bad. Outside is dangerous. Things could go wrong! Leaving the cave could threaten what we have, even if what we have is dwindling. Things may not be perfect here, but the unknown could be worse!

When one person then decides to go outside (learn something new) and see the world for himself, everyone inside the cave immediately writes them off for dead. "He's going to try something new! She went to a sales meeting and will bring back a new idea — the horror! How do we stop her from adding a new inspection?"

Miraculously, that one person then comes back and says she's seen the light and change is good. "Look, I survived!" Yet everyone in the cave is still... in the cave. They just can't see it. They rely on other cave dwellers for support (like an enabler). "We've never done it that way before," or "What if sales go down/it rains/it doesn't rain/it snows/aliens invade/insert any crazy scenario here? Then what?" they say.

It's an amazing phenomenon to watch, really. I have asked dealers this question countless times: "Why doesn't anyone at this store sell road hazard?" And the answer I get is always some variation of "Nobody buys that stuff around here./We tried it a hundred years ago and it didn't work."

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Then you bring in a new kid who doesn't know any better, and ask him to sell a road hazard warranty. He's never been in the cave before, and at the end of the month, he's added \$1,000 to your gross profit. Same for flushes or alignments or bulbs.



“The new guy doesn't know any better. Silly new guy,” say the dealers who are afraid of change. Ask the people who have worked at the dealership forever and they

say it's beginner's luck or a fad. You name it, the people in the cave have the same reason it won't work or last: “It never has before.”

You need a compelling reason to get everyone out of the cave. No one is allowed to stay. Sometimes you may need to set fire to your cave and force people out of it. If it didn't work before but it works everywhere else, “We are going to keep changing things until we get the right combination.” For example, change the warranty terms, change how you sell it or how much you charge for it. Heck, you might even want to start changing who is trying to sell it. Sometimes it's the owner who keeps everyone in the cave.

Psychic prisons are tough on people. I don't recommend “setting everything on fire” before you try other things. First you need to build yourself a little fire. Show people they have a choice. They can comfortably walk outside on their own decision and control the speed of change, or they can be forced out when you eventually pour gasoline on the fire. However, one option that is not on the table is staying in the cave.

Keep pressing during times of change, and be unrelenting in your drive for results. The outside of the cave is never as scary as those who have never been there think it is. How we get there and how long it takes depends on who is coming with us. The issue isn't whether or not we will get out, but when. Staying in the cave is not an option.

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