



Transform Aid
INTERNATIONAL
For a world without poverty

Episode 3: Change Management

Impact Leaders

Leigh Hatcher: Hello and welcome to Impact Leaders for a world without poverty, supporting and equipping business leaders to grow their business, give purpose to their people, and make a transformational impact on global poverty. I'm Leigh Hatcher. In an era of unprecedented career change. Most of us find it all really challenging. Yet, if we look back 10, 20, 50, even a hundred years, there have been so many changes that have made our lives and our world much better. So how can leaders take their people with them when things have to change? Anthony Sell has had a wealth of very practical experience of leading change when people's lives, when whole communities must change to survive. Anthony has had 15 years of experience in overseas development and has seen enormous changes for good. He's director of international programs at Transform Aid International, Anthony, welcome. It's great to see you.

Anthony Sell: Thanks Leigh.

Leigh Hatcher: Do you like change?

Anthony Sell: Ah, yes, when I'm driving it!

Leigh Hatcher: Ah that's revealing!

Anthony Sell: I think, if we're going to talk about change, we're going to talk about its relationship to things like control and hope and fear. And I think when we talk about, do I like change? I like change when it is about being in control. I think for many of us we don't like change because of its relationship to control. And I think too often change will bring about a loss of control or disruption and it's often there that we have those uncomfortable feelings.

Leigh Hatcher: My guess is that's the most common form of change that's outside of our control.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, I think it is. I think that we can be as leaders, disruptors as well, where we're bringing about consistent change, where we're looking to move an organisation or shift their organisation in directions possibly it's never been before. And that will take a series of changes that may not be one single moment, but actually steps of change that are about hitting at the core of sometimes an organisation and its values or its direction can become really important. Particularly if we're working in an organisation where it's needing to reinvent itself. And so I think in those times we're in control, but we are also disrupting. And it's understanding, even while we're doing that, others are experiencing that change and it's out of control for them though we may be in control.

Leigh Hatcher: Disruption is so much the word of the day, the era. Take us into your humanitarian work and tell us about the kinds of change that you've seen. From what to what?

Anthony Sell: I've had the privilege of watching a significant change happen across a number of different contexts, but I probably would talk mostly about the circumstances I saw in southern Philippines. It was a very, very difficult environment where we had across a river from each other, a Christian community and an Islamic community. And if you know anything about southern Philippines there has been a long standing conflict there and it's almost essentially a civil wars that is based on a lot on the religions of that area. And this particular community or set of communities were divided by a river, which one was very much Islamic, one was very much Christian and there was a particularly bad flood that had hit that area. And the way that the flood had struck with a surge of water, so the bend in the river had meant that the Islamic community was very, very badly hit, losing a lot of homes and losing their, their spiritual centre, their mosque. There was a military commander there at the time who was part of the Christian community who was in charge of the humanitarian effort and he saw an opportunity, and the opportunity wasn't simply to recover from the disaster. What he did was go to the Christian

leaders and say to them, this is your opportunity to bring about peace here and I want to mobilize this community to go across the river and rebuild the homes and the mosque.

Leigh Hatcher: Good Samaritan.

Anthony Sell: Good Samaritan, absolutely, but also I think a good political leader and a good social leader who was able to mobilize that Christian community to go and assist in building those homes.

Leigh Hatcher: Against every human instinct?

Anthony Sell: Absolutely against every human instinct. He was counterintuitive in his response and yet his response led to a longer lasting peace. Homes were rebuilt and since there was recovery from the flood, but the greater humanitarian issue, there was violence and what he overcame in his leadership there was a change in systems, change in attitude and a change in culture. That is significantly difficult to do and often as leaders we get provided those catalytic moments where we need to step forward in courage and say, I'm going to go against my intuition. I'm going to go against what I necessarily believe is right here, but what I think is the longer term outcome will be beneficial for all involved.

Leigh Hatcher: And bring about in that circumstance a huge change.

Anthony Sell: Huge change and so often we forget that change happens at multiple levels. It doesn't simply happen as changing hardware or changing structure or changing a set of policies in case of an organisational sense, changes is about the attitudes and minds of those in which those policies and structures are holding people. First the change has to occur in the people. Then even there is the identification and awareness that there needs to be change.

Leigh Hatcher: For a lot of the people you've been involved with change is a matter of life and death.

Anthony Sell: Absolutely it is. And life and death is not always so immediate. I think this is another relationship between change and hope. There's a particular proverb that I love that says hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a long fulfilled is a tree of life. To me that's a very profound Jewish proverb that is telling us that where people are living outside of hope, they will begin to wither the essence of life and their willingness to push forward will disappear. Whereas a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. There's a sense of just vitality there of strength there and I think often in communities, and I think it's the same for organisations, when we start thinking about change, we have to think about where is hope

and what's the relationship of hope in this for people that are working in that organisation. Are we moving forward? Are we growing? Are we moving toward a better direction for the organisation and for our, whether it be our customers or our staff cohort or our stakeholders. Is this moving in the right direction and certainly I've seen teams here in Australia, I've seen teams overseas come to life when hope is injected and yet that could be in the most adverse in challenging situations.

Leigh Hatcher: That proverb is worth repeating. What is it again?

Anthony Sell: Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Leigh Hatcher: There is power there. How open do you think the human condition is to change Ant?

Anthony Sell: I think it's very open. I think the human race has shown that we have evolved and adapted in so many ways and I think that change is only ever increasing. In many of that has been very positive. Obviously, there's been tremendous damage as well that's been done. But disruption is a part of existence. And I think what I'm loving, what I'm seeing coming through in a lot of management and in leadership is this notion of being agile, taking a shorter term view of the things we're trying to achieve looping back and learning from our experiences we implement. So critical, I think gone are the days where we're laying out our five year plan. You can lay out a plan for sure. You can lay out strategic intent. There's absolutely no issue there. But as we know, strategy that's not being reviewed. Strategy that is idle or static is dead strategy. It's not strategy. Strategy has to be living. It's a dialogue. And part of executing a strategy is being a part of a discussion. Being a part of a dialogue of how it's going and how it's moving forward and how are we moving forward. And if we're not, then we need to review that and learn why not and get unstuck. And so for me, change is directly linked to that. And I think human beings will flourish where there's the permission to be agile. While not losing sense of where we're trying to go.

Leigh Hatcher: I've never heard anybody talk about that short term kind of strategy, talk to us more about that.

Anthony Sell: A lot of it's coming out now under the title of Agile Methodology. It's a, it's essentially a project planning approach that I think it's coming out of the IT world and that's an idea of actually stopping and setting a sprint, a short series of activities that are going to get us one step of the way. So you might map out what a number of the steps are going to be, but you don't move beyond the first

step and essentially nailing that and executing that first step. And what you see happens is the more that you build momentum, confidence builds. And again, there is that relationship with hope, hope and confidence have a strong relationship with each other. And so when your staff or your team that you're trying to move through a difficult circumstance, begin to build confidence in the process, you'll see a dramatic difference from where you might set a five year plan where all they can see is they can't necessarily track the progress unless you're good at communicating that. You just keep holding to, well we told you to be five years before we get there. People need to get a sense of yeah, but how am I going now?

Leigh Hatcher: See it's working.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, absolutely. And so some people can do that quite well. But I find most forget, most leaders forget cause they are so busy kind of in the midst of the kind of business as usual that they've lost sight of communicating - look guys, we moved forward today, they may not feel like it, you're exhausted, but we actually moved forward today or we broke through today.

Leigh Hatcher: There is the process of change. So tell us some of the key things that a leader needs to understand about that process.

Anthony Sell: I've loved some of Kotter's thinking on this, particularly around change management and change leadership. So he defines the difference and he would talk about change leadership as having that sense of urgency. So often change and again, when we go right back to your initial question, do you like change. I think if there's a sense of urgency or a greater sense of pain and need or felt need, then people are prepared to change even if they don't know where they're going, they're ready for that change. So urgency is incredibly important. If that's not present, any change that you're trying to introduce will be somewhat questioned and there'll be an immediate resistance unless there is a sense of urgency. I think also that movement empowering people in that sense of what we're talking about before the momentum, creating that sense of my momentum and articulating it, essentially promoting that sense of momentum is really important. Putting people in motion and then being ready to innovate and create. Change management so often ends up being about control and ends up being about trying to lock everything down and reduce all the risk. Engineer everything out of it that could possibly go wrong so that we don't lose any money. So budgets, take control or or even sometimes risk management matrix takes control when in fact what we also need to keep there, certainly we need to exercise a level of rigor. There's no question about that. We need

to execute well, but we have to be prepared to understand that at times we need to shift and be innovative. We need to think outside the box. And that's so easy to say. It's so difficult in the heat of the moment to say that what we're doing here is not working. Is there another way and genuinely asking that question? Is there another way? And then being prepared to listen to the stakeholders that are involved.

Leigh Hatcher: Which is creative, which is dynamic. Which is quite exciting to see.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, and you'll see ingenious ideas that may come up if you've prepared to let a whiteboard be wiped clean. Which is a challenging thing to do because again, our ego and pride is locked into that. And then sometimes as the leader you're trying to keep people to the course. And in so doing we can lose sight of the fact that we've become quite narrow. That summit fever experience of just we've just got to get there.

Leigh Hatcher: And a little bit of empowerment goes a long way.

Anthony Sell: Huge. I've seen tremendous examples of children and youth leading change in communities that would stagger you. The ideas that came that were the most fruitful ideas and the most effective change came from the mouths of children.

Leigh Hatcher: Fantastic.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, we might think, oh, what have they got to offer. A tremendous amount.

Leigh Hatcher: Two questions. You need time for change to be successful. I guess. Talk to me about the importance of relationships also time and relationships. Those two issues.

Anthony Sell: Yeah. Look, Time is so critical for change and it will have a myriad of impacts on the change. One is sometimes having to give time for people to understand the change. Particularly if you talk about collaboration. So often we're trying to include, people we are trying to include relationships. Well that requires time. Collaboration is about the coming together of different needs, different interests and different views on how we might get something done. Four plus four is eight but so is five plus three, so is six plus two there are a number of ways of getting to eight and that ability to stop and hear those different ways and think about how other people's needs and other people's interests can be taken into account in achieving an objective is incredibly important, but that takes time. So you've got to build relationships where there's a level of trust, you've got to build relationships that

there is a level of I'm prepared to follow you because there's credibility in what you're saying and you've shown that in the way you treated me. But in that treatment, it's got to be that consideration of ideas and again, all of that consumes enormous amount of time. And as a leader, I guess we always feel like we're on the clock when we're trying to drive change because we are being judged. Are we getting there? Are we moving?

Leigh Hatcher: How do you overcome fear? Because I expect fear is at the heart of a lot of the resistance to change.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, it is. I often call fear the enemy of change. Most people when they get disrupted, their impulse is to withdraw, is to control, is to shut down and that can feel very natural. And yet a good leader or an excellent manager is executing change is prepared to acknowledge, hey yeah, I'm feeling a tremendous amount of fear here or I'm feeling apprehension, but we are going to move forward, we're going to try. I remember one great leader saying to me once, we were in a very difficult situation after cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and we'd gone out to the islands that had been most affected and they were way worse than what we thought. Some of the first boats to get to some of these islands and they were completely gone. And we're talking about a, a marshland with mangroves to a muddy bank because the waves that had gone through were so powerful, they'd torn mangrove away, which is a difficult thing to do. And the thousand people that were living there, and I remember one of the young humanitarian workers said to the leader of the group, what are we going to do now? Where do we go from here? He and he turned to him and he said, we keep making decisions whether they're right or wrong, we keep making decisions because we must keep moving forward. And that was more for the group than for anything else. That was just a sense of we're all taken aback here, we're all deeply affected that plans are not working out. And sometimes a good leader to says we're just gonna keep making decisions whether they're right or wrong. To me, what I carried away from that, just keep moving because if we stop, our fear will overcome us. And that's what I think. You become paralyzed. And as leaders, that's all too common.

Leigh Hatcher: Here's a question very much for the times in which we live. Is there such a thing as too much change?

Anthony Sell: Yeah, certainly. Too much change or too much change too fast. I think is often very common. I think certainly for disruptive leaders, occasionally I've been accused of being that. I suppose you become a little bit addicted to change. Like you have a couple of

wins, you've got a lot of confidence, you think well and you see the positive results. Having a clear set of objectives.

Leigh Hatcher: There's adrenaline in that.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, there's a lot of adrenaline and again, there's ego and pride under that as well, but I think the wisdom that comes in is knowing. I remember a dear friend of mine said wisdom is about knowing the timing of things, being able to judge the right time for change is really important and the times to back away. Now strangely I've just talked about fear and how that can paralyze us, but there are certainly moments where you have to take on board those stakeholders, those who you're listening to that are going through the change with you or advising on the change or even sometimes getting an objective voice who are not part of the change to give you feedback where you need to say the timing's not right. We're trying to do too much. To begin to think about how we might slow up now. That's an incredibly difficult thing to do that I think I've only seen the wisest leaders charter well, and what I would say they're mostly doing is listening.

Leigh Hatcher: Yes. Which is a critical part of it.

Anthony Sell: Absolutely.

Leigh Hatcher: How will I know if something needs to change in my organisation? What are some of the benchmarks or considerations I'll have my radar up for?

Anthony Sell: We want to see people flourish, whether it be in an organisational sense. Certainly for my team, one of the objectives I have for each team is that they're in a role that they are shining, that they're flourishing in that role. Now some people would say, well, you know, it's just a job, I'm paying the bills. That might be true, but nevertheless, people want to shine, they want to flourish and what you're trying to do, and certainly if we're working in a community or working with any group of people, those people both in the collective will shine and as individuals they want to flourish and so where they're not, where they appear stuck where they appear disorientated, or lost, then I think that's where we discerning some form of change needs to occur.

Leigh Hatcher: What if some things really do need to stay the same? How do I discern that?

Anthony Sell: That's again about wisdom. It's about understanding when to balance being agile and when to balance being persistent and consistent. Again, it goes back to that adage of a good leader has

a firm core and soft edges, you want to be able to say - this is what we're trying to achieve. This is the objectives that we've set for ourselves, holding to those objectives, but then being willing to adjust as you hear and engage those people that are involved in the change with you. So it becomes incredibly important to know how to judge when to move forward and change things and went to stay the course and be persistent and people will encourage you in both.

Leigh Hatcher: And that's where leadership comes in.

Anthony Sell: Yeah, it does. That's where you make the call, you make the decisions, keep making decisions, being prepared to acknowledge when you're wrong, prepared to acknowledge when you lost and seek the right advice.

Leigh Hatcher: From your wealth of experience in these communities overseas that have had to face up to enormous change, sometimes life or death. Give us, just to wrap up another practical example of how you've seen it done well and how that wisdom that you've spoken of numbers of times has played out practically

Anthony Sell: I've had the privilege to get to know a gentleman who's Cambodian. Living in Cambodia I won't name him, I won't identify him because he works in advocacy in that country and it's a dangerous thing to do. And he's been working against a number of the political multinationals in that country that basically are acting without impunity. And it's a tremendously challenging context and he's an advocate there. And so what he's chosen to do is to use his skills to drive nonviolent resistance. And what that means in a country that is steeped in violence is one of the biggest counterintuitive moves that I've seen. And most of the civil rights and civil society organisations in that country are following his advice and getting great outcomes. Now, this is a man who is close friends with Kem Ley, if you may be aware, Kem Ley was an activist and Kem Ley was murdered in 2016 broad daylight in the streets, Phnom Penh. Uh, he was shot dead and there's been no justice achieved in that. So he knows the hardcore reality of being someone who is outspoken in a context like that. And yet what do we see the qualities in terms of leadership and change management? The first is that he speaks out. So he's prepared to have the courage to say there needs to be a narrative change here and he begins to drive that narrative change. He then starts to build a case for the change. And that's so important in change management to understand the why. And a lot of people might feel the pain, but they don't understand, understand why change? So he begins to shape that narrative around the building of the why for the change. And so in this particular case, it starts

to help people by building their awareness of what's happening in these multi national organisations and their behavior or the political corruption that's going on. He then organises people. And then most importantly, he chooses a course. Now that course and that approach is really critical and sometimes overlooked by people who are doing change management. So in his case, it was about nonviolent resistance, which is plugged into his values and plugs into the values of many people in Cambodia who are living from the trauma of the Pol Pot regime and the Khmer Rouge and all that went on there. It was a tremendously violent society saying we don't want that again, we don't want that as we move forward. So he's plugging into national values but then he provides the training. There's that old acronym of KASH Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Habit. And he uses that model to build knowledge and achieve skills and habit in the people that he's working with so that they can effectively use that training to change their sphere of influence. And from there he mobilises. That to me is I think a great anatomy of a change leader. They speak out, they be courageous, they build the case, they build the why. They may enable people by good training and constantly build a narrative around that, about progression, about why the change is necessary, about why they need to keep moving forward. Doing that all the way with his life at risk with a young child. And young wife.

Leigh Hatcher: Wonderful stories. I could sit here all day listening to these and a wealth of wisdom and thanks so much indeed for sharing with us.

Anthony Sell: Great to be with you.

Leigh Hatcher: If you'd like more information on achieving change, you can subscribe to receive useful articles and news from Transform Aid International. It's offered to any business leader who wants to grow their business, give purpose to their people, and make a transformational impact on global poverty. Head to our website, transformaid.org/subscribe.