

CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

Shifting congregational culture is change, and not the superficial kind; you're changing habit-strength subconscious autopilot thinking, collectively, one person at a time. That's heavy-lift, make-sure-you're-focused-and-committed change; the tough kind that is only worth doing because of the impact that it can have.

While the Shadow of the Leader program is designed to give you leadership tools to guide that culture-change journey, as well as a course map to follow to accomplish it, your unique situation means that the journey will be uniquely your congregation's own. Fortunately, there is a change model - Rider • Elephant • Path - that is applicable regardless of the culture change being pursued and which can help you structure that change to make it both easier and more likely to succeed.

RIDER • ELEPHANT • PATH

Rider • Elephant • Path is a framework designed to make changing the status quo easier.

While there's a whole book about Rider • Elephant • Path (**Switch** by Chip & Dan Heath; it is on the Shadow of the Leader Reading List), the model itself is simple enough to remember and practical and flexible enough to use in many different situations. As you contemplate a culture change journey and customize your congregation's course, understanding and applying Rider • Elephant • Path will usually steer you in the right direction.

Rider • Elephant • Path is based on the fact that any successful change effort needs to succeed at both the emotional and cognitive level; in addition to being logical and reasonable, it also needs to motivate people on an emotional level. In the Rider • Elephant • Path model, the Rider is the intellectual or rational response, the Elephant is the emotional side, and the Path is the change journey undertaken.

- Reach the Rider but not the Elephant = Understanding without enthusiasm.
- Reach the Elephant but not the Rider = Passion without understanding.
- Either reluctant Elephants or unconvinced Riders ensure that nothing changes.
- When Riders and Elephants move together, change becomes *much* easier.

USING RIDER • ELEPHANT • PATH - THE 3 ES

If you want a change to occur, you must appeal to both Rider and Elephant. Rider provides planning and direction; the Elephant provides the raw power. To recall the Rider • Elephant • Path framework and use it to make changing the status quo easier, remember the 3 Es: Equip, Engage, and Ease.

- **Equip the Rider** – The Rider needs to be equipped with understanding about why this is being done, how we are proceeding, what exactly do you want someone to do.

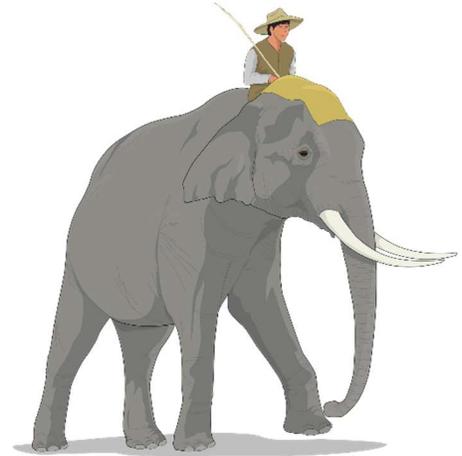
Clarity = an equipped Rider.

- **Engage the Elephant** – An engaged Elephant is one with a feeling of “we’ve got to get this done!” Note that this is a two-fold mission: (1) generating the emotional buy-in and (2) not generating feelings (e.g., fear, disappointment, etc.) that might disengage the elephant from the path.

Enthusiasm = an engaged Elephant

- **Ease the Path** – Making the path shorter, easier, and more focused makes the change more likely, so does blocking the on-ramp to the old thought habit.

Focused, short, simple = an easier Path



RIDER

Sitting on top of the Elephant, the intellectual response of Rider holds the reins and seems to be in charge. In reality, the Rider’s control is limited – anytime the rider and elephant disagree on the course to be taken, the Rider will be overpowered by the 4-ton Elephant. For the Rider to have any chance of directing the Elephant, he can’t be uncertain; he needs to be fully equipped with all the relevant information and facts. (Also note that some folk’s Rider needs more information than others!)

The Culture Change Course Map is designed to assist in equipping the Rider. Follow the process and you’ll provide answers that the rider needs. Some examples:

- Why change our culture? To support our efforts to fulfill the purpose for which God has gathered our congregation together. (If that’s not crystal clear, start with the REFOCUS step.)
- How might our culture be hindering our ability to do that? Let’s clarify that in the EXPLORE step and spell it out in a clear FROM | TO.
- For a given FROM | TO, what’s the end state look like and how do we get there? Develop DOS for TOs and a Build plan in the TARGET step.
- How does this specific FROM | TO support our purpose? Go through the relevant FROM | TO Bible Study in the BUILD step to reiterate that.

What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. If you want people to change, you must equip their Riders with crystal-clear direction.

The Rider’s ability to steer is always somewhat limited. Realize that that ability to steer will ebb as the rider gets tired. All change is tiring and it is even more so when changing behaviors that have become automatic, i.e., thought habits. Since culture change means shifting thought habits, this change will

require extra attention by the Rider – i.e., it will definitely tire out the rider. Unfortunately the Rider gets tired out not just by steering the elephant through the culture change – any instances of self-supervision (making difficult decisions, managing our spending, juggling a hectic schedule, in short, all the stuff in our life that demand our intellect!) also drain the rider’s battery.

Having a focused, short, simple Path will help the Rider have the stamina to fully traverse the Path.

ELEPHANT

Nothing happens without the Elephant. It might not feel that way, but it’s true. Create an awesome plan, spell it out for everyone; yet miss the emotional connection and it won’t get far enough down the path to succeed. The rider cannot prod / steer the Elephant long enough to build a new thought habit. While the Rider provides planning and direction, the Elephant provides energy to actually make the change. In fact, the Rider can get caught in “paralysis-by-analysis” mode; an emotional Elephant is sometimes needed to get the Rider “off the schneid”.

The Culture Change Course Map creates a framework to support **engaging the Elephant**. (By its nature this is a bit different than how the Culture Change Course Map supported the Rider. Think about it: when working to provide clarity, a step-by-step process can be very helpful. However, when working to generate enthusiasm, a step-by-step process isn’t the first tool for which you’ll typically reach.) That said, the Culture Change Course Map is designed to help you identify and highlight those things that will generate enthusiasm:

- Use the EXPLORE step to find the resonant items that promote emotional buy-in – these are more likely to be unique to a congregation. The last question on the every member visit and focus group forms is an area to mine for this; if 65% of folks say essentially the same thing, there’s something resonant there.
- Employ Summary Presentations as an opportunity to highlight the emotionally resonant items, not just clarify things.
- Find folks during the EXPLORE step that have enthusiasm for culture change. You’ll want some of these folks on the Congregational Culture Team (CCT) so their enthusiasm can rub off on others. (The CCT needs strong Riders too, since they are creating the Do for Tos that provide clarity for others’ Riders, as well as shaping the path to make it easier to traverse.)
- Hold frequent Culture Conversations to provide an opportunity for herd “enthusiasm resonance” to occur.

All these things help in **engaging the Elephant**, generating enthusiasm so we can tap into that energy and get the Elephant moving in the direction we want. That’s critical for culture change. There is, however, another aspect of the Elephant that we also must address when looking to change the status quo: the Elephant can at times be skittish.

The Elephant is POWERFUL, a strong emotional response can overcome ANY steering by the Rider. Everyone's Elephant is different, but anything that scares, startles, frightens, upsets the Elephant and drives them from the Path is to be avoided. The Culture Change Course Map has a few spices in the recipe that are intended to help address this:

- **Involve everyone.** Since culture includes everyone, the Culture Change Course Map strives to have everyone involved and participating in the culture shift. But this also addresses one thing that can alarm the Elephant. People want to know that culture change is happening *with* me, not *to* me. A perceived lack of control can set off the Elephant.
- **No surprises.** The Culture Change Course Map involves a lot of asking, informing, and discussing. Part of that is just the nature of culture change – discussion and reflection is needed to form and develop new ways of thinking. Another aspect of this discussion and reflection is giving people time to absorb the change. Surprises can startle Elephants.
- **Test change.** (The “try before you buy” in the BUILD step) – testing something new isn't as scary as permanent change, permanent implementation of a tested change isn't as scary as permanent implementation of an untested change.

So, engaging the Elephant means generating enthusiasm so we can tap into that energy and getting the Elephant moving in the direction we want, but also avoiding anything that might drive the elephant away from the path. The Culture Change Course Map is designed to help with both.

One last thought on the Elephant: there can be a cultural element of how change is viewed (as a growth opportunity & essential part of stewardship vs. something to be avoided or minimized) that makes any change scarier for the entire Elephant herd. If that is the case, ramp up your curiosity to explore things, go slow, and be extra aware of Rider • Elephant • Path throughout your culture journey.

PATH

So the Rider is equipped with an abundance of clarity, the Elephant is engaged and even exuding enthusiasm, you're on guard for anything that might scare or upset the Elephant - culture change is a shoo-in, right? Nope. The Elephant's enthusiasm can wane, the Rider can tire and you can still come up short. So what else can you do to get to the finish line? Concentrate on the Path.

The Path can be considered from the macro viewpoint: the overall journey of culture change that the congregation is undertaking. The Culture Change Course Map assists in keeping the macro-path easier various ways, e.g., not starting the habit-changing until the BUILD Step (shortening the path), having folks focus on one FROM | TO at a time, etc.

However, the concept of easing the Path is most powerful when you think of the micro-path. This is the situation for the specific moment when, instead of acting based on old FROM thinking, we are looking to act in accordance with the new TO thinking. Remember, you are shifting thought habits. The autopilot,

default thinking is the old FROM. No action is required to slip right into the old way of doing things. Doing so will feel natural, comfortable. The key is to **ease the Path** to help you shift and act in accordance with the new To thinking. This is done by changing the situation. In the TARGET step of the Culture Change Course Map you examine the micro-path – the specific situation, including the surrounding environment and all relevant cultural artifacts in which the behavior occurs - and look how to make things easier. Here are some of the ways that is done:

- Focus – There are a gazillion ways for the new FROM thinking to show up. The Do for Tos are a few specific behaviors that embody the new TO thinking.. By choosing just a few, folks get concentrated mental reps and don't need to be 24/7 diligent on the To. 24/7 diligence tires the Rider.
- Artifacts – Artifacts can put us in a different situation – from one where altering our thought habits represent a difficult change to one where the new behavior is the easiest path to take. Sometimes that will be done by eliminating an anchor artifact that triggers the old thinking, other times by putting in place an activator artifact that promotes the new thinking.
- Timely Reminders – Anything that appears right when you are about to take either the FROM or the To thinking path is powerful. This is in part the idea behind the “Stacking Habits Techniques;” by coupling a new behavior with something you already do, you get a free reminder to think and act differently.

In every case, easing the Path means changing the situation so the new thinking is activated or occurs with less mental effort. Less cognitive load means the Rider won't tire as quickly.

Changing the situation to ease the path will look different for different FROM | Tos and different congregations will change the situation in different ways for similar FROM | Tos. This means you'll need to come up with the specifics for your situation. The *Culture Change Consideration* section on *Culture Artifacts* and the *Target Deep Dive* will give you some ammo; you'll still will need to line up and take your shot.

Because **ease the Path** is so situation specific, it is perhaps the most nebulous of the 3 Es to describe. *Sidebar: One Example of Using Rider • Elephant • Path* devotes more time to the Path than both Rider and Elephant combined to help flesh that out for you.

Sidebar: One Hypothetical Example of Using Rider • Elephant • Path

Based on the comments from the Explore Every Member visits

, it was pretty clear that the congregation was looking to swipe a specific FROM | To for the WELS Long Range Strategic Plan. That FROM | To was

FROM: Ministry is accomplished through our called workers, with support of the members

TO: Ministry is accomplished by our members as equipped by our called workers

Members were excited about how embracing their calling as Christ's ambassadors would impact the congregation's ministry, especially in areas of growing in faith, sharing their faith, and spiritually leading their family.

The Congregational Culture Team (CCT) had this FROM | To formally given to them in their charter. As they looked for items for this FROM | To's DO for Tos list, they decided that daily home devotions in all households was a good candidate and they discussed it terms of the Rider • Elephant • Path framework.

It seemed the elements for the Rider were straightforward. They came up with the following answers to **equip the Rider** and provide clarity

- Why? Supports our ministry and the targeted FROM | To
- What? Daily Home devotion
- Who? Each household, the entire family
- When? Whenever works best for your family

Part of the reason they had selected this was that it already seemed to **engage the Elephant**. The idea for daily home devotions in all households came from the group brainstorming at the EXPLORE Summary presentation and it seemed to resonate with a lot of folks. (Although at least one group muttered a trifecta of “we tried that, it didn't take”, “folks are busy, schedules are hectic”, and “all households?”)

Since they had heard a few of those cynical comments at the EXPLORE Summary presentation brainstorming, they knew they needed to focus hard on **ease the Path**. Providing the materials for the devotion (one less thing for each household to do) was their first focus. Thinking about changing habits they decided to use the “stacking habits technique” and recommend each family pick whatever time works best for them but do it in conjunction with something that already has an established routine e.g., breakfast, dinner, bedtime, etc.

The CCT talked about timely reminders being helpful but struggled with how to do that. Buddy systems, daily email, a phone tree all seemed like MORE work; not easing the Path. Finally, someone asked what about a daily text - sent at a time of the family's choosing - with a link directly to the devotion. The CCT liked that because you didn't need to find where you had laid the devotion book yesterday; it felt like another thing to ease the Path.

A CCT member agreed to investigate the daily text possibility and at the next CCT meeting she reported that for the 32 households in their congregation, a daily text at the time of each family's choosing could be set up for less than \$60/month. The CCT decided to run a trial test for one month and then get feedback on whether to continue.

While the goal was home devotions every day, they initially framed success as home devotions for 80% of the days because they thought immediate perfection as the goal would lead to discouragement when someone inevitably missed a day and they didn't want to disengage the Elephant. They decided to give everyone a calendar to track their daily devotions – that was a pretty animated discussion as more than a few members of the CCT didn't see it easing the path at all. The idea carried when someone pointed out that tracking your behavior can help in habit building. They then decided to have each family text a photo of their calendar after 2 weeks so that they could summarize the intermediate results to share at a 2-week check-in and use that to facilitate some culture conversations about home devotions and what was working for folks.

At the 2-week check-in, it was pretty clear that this idea was a keeper. 2 families - including one family which had never had home devotions before - had hit every day; folks talked about how the second week was easier than the first. (One CCT member had noticed that nearly every family hit more days in the 2nd week than they had in the first so they had shared that data as a means of encouragement and asked people to reflect on why that might be the case.) The CCT mentioned that the cost would be even less if they signed up for an annual texting plan. Folks smiled and said that was a win-win. On the way out more than one person thanked the CCT and said they were looking forward to the next FROM | TO. The council authorized the expenditure for the annual texting plan that afternoon.

USE RIDER • ELEPHANT • PATH TO FINE-TUNE YOUR CULTURE JOURNEY

If Rider and Elephant aren't in agreement about which way to move, successfully changing the status quo is in jeopardy. The Rider can exercise the willpower - tug on the reins - to get the Elephant to go along for a bit, but he'll eventually get tired. And if you're in an unhealthy state of mind or if the elephant *really* wants to go in a certain direction, well, you know who wins that tussle.

Fortunately, the Rider • Elephant • Path framework is richly embedded in the Culture Change Course Map, the 5 Principles of Culture Change, and other Shadow of the Leader materials. But the Culture Change Course Map is not one size-fits-all. Adjustments are provided for congregation size and other factors. Even then, changes are likely needed to make it work for the unique aspects of your congregation. As you go about your Culture Change journey, make sure you **Equip the Rider** by providing clarity, **Engage the Elephant** by generating enthusiasm, and **Ease the Path**, by keeping the BUILD step focused, short, and simple. Using the Rider • Elephant • Path model will help you make custom alterations for your congregation's unique journey and successfully change the status quo.