

# Change is GOOD!



**IT'S THE NEW BUZZWORD** of the presidential campaign. Although it has been most closely associated with Barack Obama, when you listen to the candidates who are seeking to become the next President of the United States, many of them—Democrats and Republicans alike—are using the word. The word is change.

Long before the current political campaign began, the call for change in education had already been made. A major way that ACTE spoke out on the issue was through its position paper, *Reinventing the American High School for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in which ACTE advocates for clearly focusing every student for full participation in a spectrum of college opportunities, meaningful work, career advancement and active citizenship.

“We call upon leaders to make needed changes in school culture, instructional strategies and organizational priorities that will support this new purpose,” the document states. In the follow-up paper, *Expanding Opportunities: Postsecondary Career and Technical Education and*

*Preparing Tomorrow's Workforce*, ACTE advocates for systematic changes to the postsecondary education system as well. The mission statement of this paper is, “We must create a system that enables people to access and complete postsecondary education and training throughout their lives that will enable them to secure high-skill, high-wage or high-demand jobs in current or emerging career fields.”

## A Formula for Change

Talking about change is one thing; implementing it is a whole lot harder. Carl Berg, superintendent of the Tolles Career and Technical Center in Plain City, Ohio, understands that the process is not an easy one. He often shares his strategies in presentations such as the one he gave at the 2007 ACTE Annual Convention and Career Tech Expo in Las Vegas. His presentation proved to be a very popular one with 85 career and technical educators in attendance. He called his presentation, “How to Create Change and Live to Tell About it—a Simple and Proven Formula.”

## Six Ways to Accomplish Change

Carl Berg's plan lists six ways to work toward advancing our schools.

- Work toward attaining your vision as purposefully and as directly as you are capable of working.
- Work consciously and purposefully toward the abandonment of “stuff” that does not lead to your vision.
- Work in collaboration, both formally and informally, to the extent that you are capable of working.
- Work using as much research-based instruction as you are capable of using.
- Work actively toward the validation of learning, expressing how you know the students have learned as intended.
- Work in a planned risk-taking mode in relationship to doing your best on the first five.



“NOTHING ENDURES BUT CHANGE.”—HERACLITUS

“CHANGE IS INEVITABLE—EXCEPT FROM A VENDING MACHINE.”—ROBERT C. GALLAGHER

## ACTE Advocates for Change

To learn more about ACTE’s two position papers, *Reinventing the American High School for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and *Expanding Opportunities: Postsecondary Career and Technical Education and Preparing Tomorrow’s Workforce*, visit [www.acteonline.org/policy/legislative\\_issues](http://www.acteonline.org/policy/legislative_issues).

“CONTINUITY GIVES US ROOTS; CHANGE GIVES US BRANCHES, LETTING US STRETCH AND GROW AND REACH NEW HEIGHTS.”—PAULINE R. KEZER

The formula is something Berg first learned about from the Johnson City Central School District in New York, which has made it work for them. It helped that the district had strong leadership through “three marvelous superintendents” as Berg describes them—Jack Champlin, Al Maymary and Larry Rowe. The formula has proven valuable to him over the years.

“There are five questions to ask when it comes to change,” says Berg. “They are pretty simple, and everybody understands them—and if you stick with them, you can get the job done.”

The five questions are:

- What do you want?
- What do you know?
- What do you believe?
- What do you do?
- And later, is it working?

### Passing the Tests

When making a decision that changes the way you do things, Berg suggests that you make sure it passes six tests: educational, legal, fiscal, social/moral, political and trust. Berg jokes that he isn’t sure he has ever had an original thought about change, but he adds that he has effectively used tips on change that he has “begged, borrowed or stolen” from others during his 40 years in public education. He sums up the plan this way: “Have a vision, build a team, share the vision, gather resources, get rid of obstacles and then just get out of the way.” He notes that while many say they believe that all children can learn at higher levels and that their education should be our number-one priority, this does not always happen—for a variety of reasons.

“We all want schools where decisions are made in the best interest of students

who are provided all that is necessary for them to learn at high levels,” says Berg. “Therefore, we should stop doing those things that are neutral or don’t help, keep doing those things that do help, and start doing other things that will improve learning.”

Berg calls his presentation, “How to Create Change and Live to Tell About it” because he says he has found, “Change agents often get eaten up in the process. If you don’t survive, you won’t succeed, so it’s a self-protection piece as well as a success piece.”

Change takes people out of their comfort zones, and that’s another reason so many resist it; but Berg has found that the formula he uses allows people to progress somewhat at their own pace, and it’s non-threatening as it eases them out of their comfort zones. They have been working through the process at his own school for three-and-a-half years, and Berg notes, “Tolles has embraced change.” At this point in the process school officials have decided to follow the High Schools That Work model, which they feel will work best for what they want to achieve. Berg is happy to share what he has learned about the change process with other career and technical educators who might wish to contact him. He can be reached by e-mail at [cberg@tolles.k12.oh.us](mailto:cberg@tolles.k12.oh.us).

Change is a powerful word, as the presidential contenders seem to have discovered, but it’s something that has long been known in career and technical education. As Norman Vincent Peale said, “Change your thoughts and you change your world.” Career and technical educators change the world every day by teaching the students who may change the world tomorrow. ■