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TAKING CHARGE OF CHANGE

Change. The very idea is exciting to some people, while striking fear in others. Some change is welcome—and needed: for instance, a change of clothes when yours are dirty; a change in the weather from dreary to sunny; a change in a student's attitude from sullen to excited about learning. However, changes in routine, a new job, even a change in your job description or what is expected of you can be devastating. Most of us are creatures of habit, and anything that ejects us out of our comfort zone can

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seem unacceptable, inappropriate, and unbearable. We feel warm and safe in our ruts. Change can be difficult and even painful.

Education is entering a period of unprecedented change. Daniel 12:4 describes a world in which knowledge increases in quantum leaps, causing changes that can be confusing and dis-

tressing for many people. It is, however, an exciting time to be living and to be involved with education. Technology is changing the whole landscape of how we educate. Ian Jukes, one of the presenters at a recent conference of Computer-Using Educators (CUE) at Palm Springs, predicted that we will see increases in technology over the next several decades that will make the past two decades seem backward by comparison. The means to educate the world as well as to spread the good news of Christ's soon return are here, now.

When you think of technology, what

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comes to mind? Satellites? Computers? Modems? Fax machines? Cellular phones? The list can be endless. If you grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, you can probably remember when there were no color TVs, microwaves, PCs, or video games, and when “educational technology” meant spirit duplicators and electric pencil sharpeners. Remember when your school got its first photocopy machine?

Are you excited about the future? Adventist education must be at the forefront or we will soon be outmoded and left behind.

For the past six years, I have been involved in change—radical change. When I became principal of Virgil Hauselt Memorial Christian School in 1988, our technology was limited to eight IBM computer clones, aptly named *Baby XT*. Only one had a hard drive. They were being used almost ex-

clusively in keyboarding class for the ninth and 10th grades. The upper-grade teacher was interested in doing more things with technology. He began a campaign to raise money so that students would have computers in each of the classrooms. While I supported his fundraising efforts, I was also skeptical. I had been at two other schools that attempted, without great success, to bring computers into the classroom. However, as a result of his fundraising, we were able to place a Macintosh LC and a printer in each classroom. As we used the computers, we began to see potential that needed to be expanded.

Reassessing the School Program

The main problem was lack of direction, not just in the technology program but for the entire school. Inspired by several marketing workshops, we began to ask what we wanted our school to be like. We developed a mission statement, modified our name to indicate that we were a Christian institution, and then examined all areas of the school—curriculum, school plant, music department, involvement of community and churches, and the image that we wanted to project.

Things began to change. Enrollment increased. Staff, parents, and church members began to take pride in the school and its program. We began to see computers and other technologies in a different light—not as things to teach *about*, but as resources and teaching *tools* just like textbooks, paper, and pens.

As we studied the research, we saw the need to integrate technology into all aspects of the curriculum in order to fully utilize the great tools that it has made available. As a staff, we committed ourselves to learning all we could about using educational technology and to improving student learning.

As a result of our early, faltering steps, a local foundation became interested in what we were doing. They offered to install a computer lab to assist us in the process of change. We scheduled staff development classes, devoted a large part of each faculty meeting to

The author demonstrates some fine points about technology to several teachers attending summer training classes in the Pacific Union's Model Technology School Project.

learning about technology, and encouraged teachers to attend conferences and workshops.

Out of the Comfort Zone

We were well on our way. The staff was more open to change, the students expected it, and the parents were excited by it, but we had reached a plateau. We were comfortable with the changes we had already made, and needed something to eject us from our comfort zone! The next step was the Model Technology School program.

The Pacific Union Conference Department of Education chose VHM to showcase technology for the union, and asked me to serve as director of the union Model Technology School Project. The teachers at VHM were asked to do in a year and a half what the public model schools were doing in five years. Training, integration, and preparation would occur at an accelerated pace. Technology classes for union teachers would be taught in the summer. Classroom visits by superinten-

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dents, administrators, and teachers had to be scheduled and new hardware installed in the computer lab and classrooms. We had to coordinate, develop, and fine tune presentations by all the teachers. The administrators, teachers, and students had to develop a visitation mind-set, not just once a month but for the entire second semester!

How to Adapt to Change

From this experience, I have gained

several insights into how change occurs and how each of us can fill a role in educational change:

- **Look at all aspects of your school and curriculum, not just technology.** Education is an integrated package. Everything is interrelated. When planning, base every decision on what is best for the student. Looking at the whole rather than the parts will help you make wiser decisions. Technology must be integrated into the entire curriculum, rather than viewed as a separate issue or something that is tacked on.

- **Technology is not a cure-all.** It is just another tool in the teacher's tool box that offers great potential to help students learn. It can make a good teacher better, but it will not do much to improve poor teaching. It will not save time. When you add technology, classroom planning time increases.

Technology can expand our teaching, along with our students' minds and horizons. We must prepare students to survive in the Information Age. But no teacher can fill a student with knowledge when information is increasing so rapidly. With technology, the teacher can show the student where to find and how to use knowledge. But remember that the teacher is still the most important influence on learning in the classroom.

- **Be open to change.** In the next few years, we are going to see more technological advances than in the past 20 years. As our schools feel the impact, we must be willing to move ahead. We should evaluate change and not embrace it just for its own sake, while realizing that progress takes time. It usually takes five years for just one curriculum change to be accepted. We will be left far behind if we do not assess where we are and where we want to be. On the other hand, keep in mind that not every teacher, student, or parent will be able to adapt, utilize, or grasp every technology, nor should we expect them to. Everyone learns just a little differently and changes at a different rate. Don't become upset if change is too slow or too fast for you; just be open and adaptable.

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Seventh- and eighth-grade teacher David Rouse instructs a computer class at the Virgil Hauselt Memorial Model Technology School (VHM).

• **Principals are the most important change agents in the school.** They can affect the process positively or negatively. The principal does not need to know everything about the change, but he or she must be knowledgeable enough to sell it not only to the staff but also to the school board, Home and School Association, parents, and other constituencies. The adminis-

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trator must also be able to provide funding, support, and whatever else is

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Model Technology School students do a cooperative learning project on the computer.

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An upper-grade student at the Model Technology School has scanned some art to include in a class report.

necessary for the change to be successful. The principal must also be open to teacher-generated change and not think that everything must originate with his or her office.

• **Without preparation and teacher training, educational change will not succeed.** This is especially true in the area of new technologies. Before spending money on fancy equipment, software, and installation, make sure that teachers know how to use the equipment and that they understand what needs the technology will fill. Teachers must be trained to use the technology *before* it is introduced into the classroom. They must understand how technology will affect their classrooms and feel confident about using it.

Over the years, we have all seen fads in education come and go, usually because people didn't see the need for them and teachers received inadequate preparation. Spending money on teacher training and preparation will pay great dividends down the road.

• **Work with what you have.** With a little staff training, that old computer, VCR, or donated TV can be made to do great things in the classroom. Although it may not be the latest, fastest, feature-laden, expensive model, it may serve the classroom for many years with just a little knowledge and attention. On the other hand, don't be open to all castoffs. With just a little experience, you can find gold in the information superhighway junkyard.

• **Don't become overwhelmed or discouraged.** You are living in the most fascinating and fantastic time in earth's history. Enjoy yourself as you look ahead. Prophecy is being fulfilled before your very eyes, ears, and virtual reality glasses! ☞

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