

Jumping the S Curve

By J. David Schmidt

In God's engineering of the universe, the earth, and especially our lives, there's a management principle at work that's about to reshape the future of Christian Management Association. It's counter-intuitive in content and application in life and work. Here it is:

Nothing is permanent.

- Rivers cut through beautiful valleys to create rugged canyons—that keep changing.
- Trees rise 100 feet into the sky, only to be cut down by loggers, fire or beetles—to be replaced by new seedlings.
- Brilliant flowers light up the desert in spring and then fade into brown.
- Even stars centuries old die.
- Churches die and the buildings are converted into condos or restaurants

Following our Creator's design, we grow seeds and cattle to maturity, only to eat them. We build cities on the ruins of the prior city taken in battle. We take oil from the ground to run our vehicles and create plastic things. Then we consume it to transport ourselves, or grind the plastic into beads for toys and playgrounds.

And then, of course, there are our lives—the most obvious and clearest testimony that the pattern of God's world and creation runs on this principle—nothing lasts. Kids grow up and leave home. Christmases change as families change. Jobs and careers take different paths. Those we love are taken from us by death. As the Bible says:

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.
 (James 4:14)

Nothing is permanent, except for God himself. In fact, Jesus explains this lack of permanence this way:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (Mark 13:31)

Interestingly, this lack of permanence doesn't bother us—until it starts to mess with the order of our lives. When our sense of the stable and permanent is challenged, upset or even destroyed, then every human emotion can occur. We may like variety—but few of us like disruptive change.

As a management principle, “nothing is permanent” doesn't seem like good management. We'd think that the essence of ensuring that things in our organizations are stable and running predictably well for as far as we can see is the essence of good management.

Yet, in fact, this “nothing is permanent” truth is in dynamic tension with our desire to create stability and permanence. We **do need** stability in our organizations—but not at the price of effectiveness.

■ When mission impact declines because we're so busy trying to keep things the same, we run the real risk of missing out on our preferred future.

■ When our memories of the past are greater than our vision for our future, our organizations are in trouble.

One way this is illustrated is with an **S curve**. When an

organization starts out and is in a predictable pattern of growth and impact, or when it's at its prime with all organizational cylinders firing, you can easily be lulled into thinking these are permanent states. But then things can occur that slow growth or lessen an organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Unless changes are responded to appropriately, the "permanence" of the organization is threatened. Something must be done.

As an organization, Christian Management Association has enjoyed over 30 years of existence and service to managers and leaders of all types in Christian organizations and churches. Talk to John Pearson or Sylvia Nash and they'll tell you things were always changing in CMA. That's true, too.

On the surface, there's a perception of permanence. And one truth says: keep everything in its place. Order is good. More of the same, but done better or worked at harder, will get CMA into its future. But in truth, CMA has come to an inflection point. It has come to the end of an S curve of effectiveness and impact. What has been somewhat permanent is now about to change.

Author Andrew Grove defines an inflection point as "a time in the life of a business when its fundamentals are about to change." These inflection points occur when "the old strategic picture dissolves and gives way to the new."

CMA: Thinking a Member Ahead

Since Frank Lofaro's arrival in the

spring of 2006 as CEO of Christian Management Association, a great deal of reflection has gone into CMA's history and future. This issue of *Christian Management Report* celebrates God's faithfulness over 30 years. There could not be a future of CMA if past leaders and volunteers and members had not been faithful to the mission of CMA.

But in order to preserve the vitality and impact of the mission, CMA must jump its own S curve. In their book, *Jumping the Curve*, authors Nicholas Imperato and Oren Harari suggest, "Jumping the curve means leaving one stage of development for another, leaving one pattern of behavior for another." That's where CMA is.

CMA has a responsibility to fulfill with future managers and leaders—not just those who know CMA for what it is today. The rules are changing for how an organization like CMA can help and serve a broad cross-section of managers and emerging leaders. Unless it's willing to wade into uncharted waters and try new ways to deliver its mission, its ability to keep on serving Christian managers is jeopardized.

So CMA has come to the end of an era. A new era—a new S curve—is about to begin. The question is: Who are the next thousand, the next five thousand members of CMA? Who isn't part of the CMA family—but should be? Where will they come from? What are their needs? What can CMA do to serve them effectively?

As the answers to these questions

have been emerging, so has the realization that what many of us have known as "permanent" in CMA will need to give way to a new order of things. And in contrast to this being a bad thing, it's a good thing. In the months ahead, and at the March conference in Palm Springs, more details will be unveiled which point to CMA's emerging future.

CEO Frank Lofaro says, "The Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes that there is a time for everything in life. I don't fully understand God's timing for CMA, but I'm confident that as we move into a different kind of future together, he will go ahead of us, preparing the way. It's my prayer that, as we jump to a new S curve, his favor will be upon us. I invite all who are in any way connected to CMA to bring their minds and hearts to this effort, as we journey into the future together of serving Christian managers and leaders."

Editor's Note: During the writing of this article, David's own dad passed away and went to be with the Lord of the universe. In a new way, he understands that, by God's design, "nothing is permanent."

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