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Leading in change

Times of uncertainty and change, not unlike the world we've all experienced over the last couple of years, can make it hard to maintain a continuous focus on the task at hand. Are we focusing on the right thing at the right time? Do our small accomplishments matter in the grand scheme of things?

An effective strategy allows people to be comfortable with constant change because, in the main, it can absorb the turbulence of the day.

Like many things, it all depends on your perspective. Imagine a driver whose vision extends no farther than the end of the bonnet. For this person, driving is terrifying; unseen changes in the road conditions happen every second and the driver makes panicked manoeuvres in reaction to the changing conditions. For the driver who stretches the eye to the far distance, rapidly scanning near and far, there are very few surprises. Early warnings are spotted, the rate of change slows down, calm adjustments are made, and the destination is reached as planned.

This is the perspective of a leader. The leader is the one looking furthest ahead, scanning the horizon for change and checking progress against the long view; the strategy. The strategy should be detailed enough to be clear but general enough for the team to take their own route to the destination. The effective leader, within the boundaries of resource and risk, empowers the team to plan their own journey.

The leader's most important task is to put time into articulating the destination. If leaders do this well, they will have built the words (and often the pictures) so that their people, on difficult days and without the ability to talk to their boss, are driven by the clarity of their destination. From fitter to fellow, this approach of looking ahead will always help us cope with change. It is no different for our professional sectors and for the SOE as a whole.



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