



10 steps to managing change in changing times

by Paul Shearstone

There are only two types of people in business today... the Unemployed and the Over-employed.

Companies that survived the 1990s did so by down-sizing, right-sizing, realigning and strategic outsourcing. Individuals lucky enough to weather the austerity trend now find themselves with added responsibility to do more in less time. Combine that with the fact companies and industries are still changing faster than ever and you'll quickly find the reasons why the vast majority of people are so exhausted and stressed.

Whether to change is no longer an option for companies that are serious about survival. How to manage change -- and how little or how much -- are the challenges we now all must face.

'Now,' however, is a misnomer here. Change is not new nor is the need to address it. Granted, the pace of change may differ, but in the end, it's just a fact of life or business. What is new is the way we cope with change and judging by the legions of zombie-like workers and stress related health-claims, it's not a stretch to believe we're not doing a very good job. Many companies today have a non-sustainable work environment. They are literally burning out their employees.

My point is, the fundamentals of psychology, human behavior and motivation have not changed, and likely never will. Any successful formula for change and managing that change must include support for these principles. Otherwise, the process is destined to fail.

Whenever asked to comment or speak to groups regarding a blueprint for successful change, I advocate the following:

1. Understand that the success of any change is integrally linked to the ability of leaders to clearly identify, communicate and garner acceptance from those whose responsibility it will be to affect change.
2. Educate all leaders regarding all attributes of change: Scope, Magnitude, Timing, Expectations, Accountability and Corporate Commitment.
3. Employ a stratagem designed to clearly demonstrate:
 - a) that all aspects of the organization are and were considered in the planning process for implementing change,

b) the importance of groups working as one complete entity for the success of projected outcome/s.

4. Expect, recognize and communicate the message that there is and will be some discomfort in establishing a willingness / readiness for change, and, the importance of getting people to buy in to the new approach/s quickly.

5. Identify immediately paradigm-shift-specialists and transformation-champions who are by nature unafraid of change. This elite group of Change-Leaders will serve to lead those who experience trepidation. Understand the critical psychological importance for people to see 'leaders' – other than management – buying in to the vision and benefits of change.

6. Establish a team approach that incorporates and delineates all stakeholders in the change process. Share power with Change-Leaders to expressly encourage the implementation and acceptance of change protocol and practices. Appreciate the importance for speedy implementation to ensure people never lose interest or motivation.

7. Make specific plans, but encourage individual participation in contributions designed to embolden the plan. Those who feel they have ownership in the success of the plan out-perform those who feel out-of-control with it.

8. Invest strongly in strategic training and staff development. Training programs should include progressive developmental sessions in tandem with one-on-one coaching strategies to ensure that employees' development is in sync with corporate change criteria.

9. Recognize that change has varying emotional effects on managers as well as subordinates. Managers sometimes need help in developing a measured understanding of new practices. They must be prepared for execution-lag, with progress often (temporarily) taking a backward step before improvement is realized. It is psychologically important leaders know the company expects them to take a longer view and realize that the company understands some changes take time and need not be forced.

10. Know that the fastest way to effect successful change and corporate acceptance is through ample recognition and reward. Too often, reward-based incentive programs are relegated to sales teams at the expense of effective gains resulting from enthusiastic contributions of other groups satisfied with – in most cases – simple recognition.

Change-Ideals versus Change-Management

I am always quick to point out one caveat when asked to share my views on change. Leaders must understand the difference between the motivating factors of altruism and the human-behavioral laws of change in actual practice -- or as the old cliché says, "when the rubber meets the road."

For example, when Johnny marches off to war, he does so for unselfish reasons. He believes in good versus evil and sees himself on the side of the angels. Altruism is a

powerful motivator, as evidenced by those brave men and women willing to leave the comfort and security of their homes and families to defend their principles, knowing they may be called upon to pay the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. Their intentions, however noble, quickly take a back seat the minute the first battle begins and bullets start to fly. Success and survival is then immediately predicated on two factors:

- a) How well they – each individual – serve their group, and,
- b) Whether the group prevails.

In business, successful companies embrace the motivating power of altruistic principles but understand altruism has a short lifespan and is used accordingly. Too many unsuccessful leaders think things like a good Mission Statement or a Good Cause will carry the momentum needed to see organizations through the sometimes arduous tasks of change. They won't.

Enlightened leaders support the fact that it is natural for people to do things for personal gain – and there is nothing wrong with that – but the challenge is and will always be to ensure individuals see that any personal gain can only come by means of their contribution to the success of the group.

To be clear, when Johnny comes home from the war, he is not decorated based strictly on how many enemy he killed, or promoted based on what the other side thinks about him. He is decorated and promoted based on what his group thinks of him, which is based on how they believe his individual efforts contributed to the success of the group's mission.

Similarly, businesspeople do not rise based on what customers who don't know us think of us, but rather on what those who work along side us -- managers and colleagues alike -- think of our individual contributions to the company in its ongoing campaign for change and greater success.

The Bottom Line:

The motivating principles that idealize change are different from those needed to manage change. The good news is that both disciplines are distinct and well rooted in the static fundamentals of human behavior, psychology and motivation.

Much like the art or science of successful selling, the formulas are in the end, not all that mysterious. On the other hand, ask any successful salesperson they'll tell you, "understanding it is one thing ... successfully applying it is quite another!"

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