

How to Win Friends and Influence Change

"It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory."

*W. Edwards Deming
- American Statistician
1900-1993*

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The Challenge of Change

They say there are no guarantees in life, but one thing we can count on is that things will never stay the same.

We understand at a certain level that things are always changing. But we need to recognize that while change can be exciting, we also yearn for stability.

As leaders, we need to get better at managing the destructive side effects change can bring, at the

same time as leveraging the benefits the change was designed to produce.

Our understanding has to begin with the fact that things will always get worse before they get better. Productivity will drop before it will rise and a talented leader knows how to ensure the 'bad times' are short lived and that the team itself understands how to break through quickly.

It is believed in many organizations that the leadership team is responsible for managing their people through change. Well, that's true, but it's an incomplete picture.

A more accurate understanding includes another dimension of change, called *Transition*. A great leader knows they must manage both change, and transition.

Change vs. Transition

William Bridges, a leading authority on transition, says to think of change as the external situation, and transition as an internal process.

Change is 'the thing.' It's the new equipment, the new boss or the new building. It's the new car or the new spouse.

Change can be negative, like the loss of a job, or positive, like the welcome birth of a child.

Transition, on the other hand, is the psychological process people

go through in order to come to terms with the change.

It's the frustration associated with having to learn how to use a new piece of equipment, knowing it will take longer to get your work done. You'll have to work overtime and your family life will suffer.

Transition is the period of time you feel resentful toward your employer for moving the office to a place that has no access to public transportation. You'll have to buy a new car (change) and

then deal with the embarrassment of not being able to afford dinners out with friends (transition).

Transition is the time it takes you to get on board with the new policy. You know the one that was sprung on you without warning, was decided without your input and negatively affects the morale of your team. It's the frustration over the wasted time and energy as you now try to re-energize the team around a change you don't even understand yourself.

Why Do We Resist Change?

It's actually more accurate to say that we resist transition, than it is to say we resist change. The real source of the resistance is the fear of loss that is associated with the change. It's that loss that we have to come to terms with if we ever hope to overcome resistance.

For the most part, everyone resists. How it manifests itself is different for everyone, and depends on several factors. These factors would include the degree of change, the level of personal impact and the amount of involvement we had in the decision.

A new baby is a major adjustment for anyone, but imagine how the experience could be very different for two women. One new mother excitedly welcomes the new baby and has supportive family and friends to help out. Conversely, another new mother faces the reality of an unwanted

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teenage pregnancy, kicked out of her parent's house to live a life on the social welfare system.

How does this relate to the working environment? Does it?

Consider a middle-aged worker with many years experience in the same company. She's the indispensable go-to person who

knows more about the inter-relatedness of process in the department than anyone. She designed many of the current procedures herself and was often consulted before major decisions were finalized.

Enter the new manager, who has limited understanding of this

woman's contribution. The younger boss makes major changes to procedures and organizational structure, and the long-timer finds out via the same email as everyone else.

Our worker goes from being the expert who knows everything to the dinosaur who knows nothing.

All the while, the new boss is utterly confused about why our tenured friend is not embracing this fabulous new opportunity to learn, grow and try something different. By all accounts, this employee was considered to be a star contributor. The new boss is not similarly convinced.

Process Transition Effectively To Get Buy-In Quickly

A drop in productivity is inevitable whenever the organization, team or individual is dealing with a change... even a positive one. The job of the leader is to help people get through the transition as quickly as possible.

To achieve this, you must proactively engage in activities that move the team forward in a timely, but a healthy, fashion.

William Bridges describes 3 phases of transition in his book *Managing Transition*. Activities in each phase are designed to help individuals process psychologically so they can be ready to go through the necessary steps in each of the subsequent phases.

ENDING: When the change is first announced it is important to get clarity about what is ending. Leaders must be available to answer questions and to talk to people, even if they don't have all the information. What exactly is ending, when, why, and what (if anything) will remain the same?

It's important for the leader to realize that everyone processes change differently based on many factors including other simultaneous changes and the individual's resilience.

Over-communicate! In the absence of accurate information, people will make up their own story. You want them to buy in to your story, not someone

else's. Communicate the same message multiple times. People will be 'ready to hear' at different times. Be sure that when they're ready to hear, you're still talking.

NEUTRAL ZONE: In the 2nd phase, expect conflict at every turn. Deal with it effectively so it doesn't fester. People need training, time to learn, and the opportunity to make mistakes. View failures with the same wisdom as Thomas Edison who considered them successful discoveries of what doesn't work.

In the midst of the chaos lies the greatest opportunity for creativity. Ideas and opinions that went unheeded in the past may be very welcome now.

Reward those who are adapting and displaying the desired behaviours and continue to communicate as the need for direction from you will be high.

BEGINNING: While life is not yet perfect, productivity and morale are on the rise as people begin to figure things out. They are reaping the fruits of their labour and are more energized and engaged.

Now they need a clear vision of the future and some help to rebuild the team. When people go through transition they go into survival mode. Now they're ready to move their focus from self-preservation (me), to team commitment (we).

Jettison Old Baggage

Unfortunately many leaders underestimate the importance of managing transition both for their people, and for themselves. As a result people carry around old baggage. It weighs them down and makes them difficult to lead.

As leaders we often inherit the after-effects of poorly managed

change. The good news is that it's never too late!

If you have someone who needs to let go of the past, help them re-process old baggage by walking them through the phases of transition.

Determine if people are stuck by

listening to their complaints.

Resist the urge to turn off and tune out your 'chronic complainer.' Give people time to process their resistance in a healthy way, but also have the managerial courage to take the necessary steps when they simply refuse to move on.

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