

The Pathway to Companywide Change

WAYNE DYER, a famous American author and motivational speaker once said, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

While his words are inspiring and captivating, they are also scary. On a personal level, change is hard, there's no way around it. But making a change within a company can be downright daunting. Yet change is inevitable. If an organization doesn't change, what happens to it? It gets left behind.

To be able to celebrate a successful change at work means every person in the organization needs to change his or her habits and mindset, a tall order for a collective group. **It all starts (and ends) with communication.** Having a communication plan is a huge part of the success. When a change is being initiated, frequently it's not the change itself that is the issue, it's how the change is communicated, or unfortunately, how it's not communicated.

The Road Map to Change Management

Learning the skills, behaviors, and knowledge needed for effective, successful leadership, includes change management. A popular and often-referenced tool is the eight-step change management model by John Kotter, a leadership and change management professor and author. Imperative elements of the model are:

- **Have a sense of urgency.** When your leaders talk about the change, employees should feel like *"We've got to get going on this now because it's so important!"* If you don't have a sense of urgency everything slows down, is more difficult and more frustrating.
- **Form a powerful coalition.** A strong group needs to lead the change, not just manage it. Bring together a team of influential people who are leaders in the organization (and not just in title). It's a must to have their commitment to be on board with a positive attitude. A change leader with a negative attitude will only sabotage the company's efforts.

- **Create a vision.** Paint the picture of what's happening—produce what the change will look and feel like. This is not the time to shoot from the hip as you go.
- **Communicate the vision frequently.** Regular updates are important as is talking about the change often. Be transparent and keep it alive as you sell the benefits of the company's transformation.
- **Smooth out any obstacles.** There are many "could-be" obstacles when it comes to a big change. Maybe change leadership doesn't have full buy-in or employees are resistant. Whatever the case, barriers need to be minimized for a positive transition.
- **Create short-term wins.** Promote short-term targets to get the small wins. It will help support positivity about the progress being made.
- **Build on the new change.** Focus on what went wrong AND what went right, then adjust.
- **Anchor the change in the company's culture.** With the new way of doing things in place, make sure it becomes a part of the company's core culture. Leaders need to continue supporting the change and progress should be talked about often.

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Watch for the Roadblocks Headed Your Way

So, you have a great plan on how to bring an organizational change to your company, that's fantastic! Not to burst your bubble, but you should also have a plan on how to deal with three of the most common challenges that arise.

- **Sticking to the communication plan.** Big problems happen when companywide communication is few and far between. Make sure the organization's communication plan covers the months leading up to change as well as the months afterward. Over-communication is not possible here. And use all the avenues available—email, intranet, mailings, and in-person meetings (making it a conversation, not a lecture, with the opportunity to have employees share any concerns).
- **Employee resistance.** Many workers are often quite comfortable with their status quo and are suspicious of what a change means

for their work life. During the change process, be sure to be as transparent as possible, reminding people why the change is happening and the benefits the change will produce for them at work. Make sure necessary training is available so employees are confident heading into what's coming.

- **Implementing new technologies.** A common hiccup during a workplace change is bringing on new technologies. Begin the process of switching over to any new technology weeks or months ahead of time with a lot of training opportunities available. The *Harvard Business Review* suggests getting a "network of champions" to promote the new technology, answer questions, assist with problems, and promote the benefits.

Change is hard. Knowing the proper steps to work through can make it easier. ■



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