



Making Change Happen

Today, change is not an option. The pace of change has leveled out at constant. For some small business leaders this means playing catch-up with the competition, for others, it's a matter of keeping up, and for the very few, it's a matter of setting the pace.

Change comes in all kinds of forms, some that seem tiny, and others that are fundamental. The key to successful change is about perspective, and remembering that as a decision-maker, you choose the change. That means by the time you want your employees to change, you are already there.

And change is hard on people no matter how small it is, or how easy it looks, or how necessary. You create the change, and now you need to make sure your employees are able to embrace the change, rather than feel like they are victims of it.

Changing sounds simple. You can change behavior in your employees by working with them and keeping the lines of communication flowing.

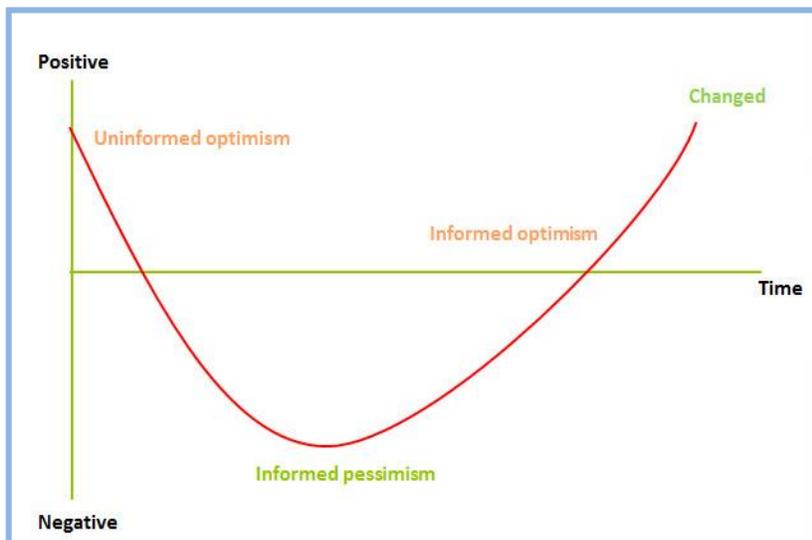
The whole problem is that people aren't all the same and this isn't the only change going on in their lives.



The Reality of People & Change

No matter how eager or resistant people are to change, they go through stages. The people eager to change may pass through the stages quickly and without assistance. The people resistant to change will need to be led through the change, and may get stuck in the stages.

The stages of change



In these stages, people will act differently and make assumptions. The assumptions made at each stage will either help or hinder progress through change.

Uninformed Optimism: This is the stage where employees will assume they know what's coming and, for the most part, will feel comfortable. Your assumptions might be that the employees know what you are planning and since they seem okay, you'll have an easy time getting them to the new reality.

Here's the challenge. Both assumptions will increase the barriers to change. In this stage, the employees are cementing their opinion and when they get to informed pessimism, you are going to be faced with changing the assumption. Since you assumed they knew the facts, you may not communicate the change effectively.

Uninformed Pessimism: Though the facts are made clear, this time the employees are facing reality and the magnitude of the change. They will be making assumptions that range from "this will be fine" to "the end is nigh."

You may assume that the resistance has gone up because they were on-board before. The reality is that they weren't on-board. To get through this stage, you will need to shift their reaction to a positive one that is informed and willing to change.



Informed Optimism: This is where you've made progress, and some of your employees are changing. Others are dealing with the reality and trying out the new methods.

You may assume the biggest barriers are behind you. This is true if you keep moving people through the change.

Changed: This is when the old way of doing things is over; the change has been implemented and everything seems fine. The employees may be assuming that it's over, they've changed and now everything will be stable. You may be planning the next change and assuming that, since the employees have gone through it once, they'll take the next change on with less resistance.

The Reality of Change

The reality is that change happens the same way every time. Your employees will fall into one of three categories for every change.

20% of the people will not change. They are happy with the way things are and don't understand or value the benefit of changing.

60% of the people will be ready to change. They need to be convinced. They will take their lead from both sides of the table.

The final 20% have already changed. And they are wondering what is next.

A word of caution; it may seem like you can strive to change the mix from 20/60/20% to 80/20%, but the reality of people and business is that change is always happening. The mix will always be 20/60/20% and every change you create will need the same steps to bring people along.

The Change Management Process

The process to change the behavior of your team is based on communication.

You Inform: Your employees as early as possible. Your communications will be more detailed as you develop your plans. The first communication can be that you are not sure of the details, but this change is coming.

You Listen: To all three groups. You react differently to the 20% who won't change than you do to the 60% who need guidance. And you keep the 20% who have changed engaged.

You Inform: People hear different messages in different ways. You need to be delivering the message frequently and in varied methods.

You reinforce: Through resistance, you need to keep the end goal in mind. Keep constant with your expectations so that people know what you really want.



You manage: Resistance is sometimes a test of your conviction. Employees who will not change need to understand the consequences.

You celebrate: Even small steps in the right direction can be recognized. Celebration of successes will reinforce your messages and continue to move people along the change curve.

The People

When it comes to dealing with the three categories of reactions to change, there are some tactics that have proven to be successful.

The 20% who won't change: need to be listened to or they will just get louder.

If you listen to the problems they raise, you will find yourself defending the change. Even more important, this group will use the time you could be spending with the people who will change.

Don't get distracted by thinking these employees represent the way the entire group feels. Remember, that even though this group of employees is not going to change, they may be performing the job they were hired to do. Don't be tempted to simply dismiss them.

What do they say and do?

The people who won't change say things like, "I don't understand why we are doing this, it doesn't apply to me. Why are you doing this to us?" They may avoid meetings or give vague answers to questions.

Remember they influence the 60% who are on the fence. Their goal is to slow or stop the change.

Not engaging in their concerns is about not making promises to fix things. If you do, they will latch onto that as an indication that you will stop changing things. The tricky part is that sometimes they will couch their resistance in words that sound like they want to change, but don't simply understand the benefits of doing it.

The response that will help you avoid being entangled in debates about change is to repeat the benefits to them and the benefits to their customers.

The 20% who have already changed can be your champions. They are excited about where you are taking them. Recognize their enthusiasm and encourage them to champion the changes with the other employees.

What do they say and do?



The people who have changed will ask questions about what's next. They'll ask "What about the next cool thing?" or "Can we do this new innovation?"

They influence the 60% and you want them to do that. The thing to remember is that they frighten the other 20% so the two groups tend to stay apart.

Sometimes interacting with this group can be exhausting. They always want to try something new while you are struggling to get people to adopt the current change.

You need to encourage them and focus their energy on being champions of the change and create a partnership with them to manage the 60%.

The 60% who might change is where you do your work. They are as likely to be pulled into the 'I won't change' group, as they move along the change curve. Listening to their concerns and answering questions will help them join the 'already changed' group.

What do they say and do?

The people ready for change will ask similar questions as the unchanging group. The difference is that their questions are more about how to change or about clarification so they know exactly what's expected.

They won't say 'why are you doing this'. They are more likely to say 'how will it work?' This group is seeking information to help them decide how to change. And your actions need to be about clarifying the information and building their enthusiasm for change.

The Meetings

To get your employees to embrace change, you need to meet with them.

When you do that, remember to display the behavior you want from your employees, because you communicate the expectations in every interaction.

If the change you are implementing is about becoming more environmentally conscious, having a meeting with paper plates and plastic cups is going to undermine your message.

Communicating the change is about information and seeking feedback. Depending on your business culture and your working environment, you can communicate the change through different channels. Employee newsletters, intranets, one-on-one, group and online meetings are all great channels.

As you move through change, remember that in-person meetings are a great way to really connect with your employees.



Change

In a check-in meeting, you are asking the team how the company is doing in its journey. Ask if the changes are clearly aligned with what you said you wanted? Listening to the feedback is a great way to keep your actions on track with what you announced as the goal.

In a temperature check meeting, you are asking how the employees are doing with the changes. A temperature check is just asking where they are on the change continuum. Are they confident in the progress? Are they living the change? Do they have challenges that need to be addressed?

By keeping in touch and listening for the successes and challenges of your employees you can make the change faster than by just expecting them to change because it's their job.

Change management is often a high-touch process. And many business people, small business and large, get frustrated when they hope for change, but things just stay the same.