

Change Management Refresher

Change goes against the natural tendency of things and people to settle. Change defies Gravity. But change is an important aspect of success in today's business world. The globalization of business requires flexibility and agility as we maneuver and elbow our way into a competitive advantage in a quickly changing environment. The transition of the flow of information from a paper and mail/fax based system of just 15 years ago to a world of social media, instant tweeting and speed-of-light email, video conferencing, and instant messaging requires that companies adopt a change management strategy as both a method to stay competitive and a force to defy gravity.

To help companies better cope with the methods of change, I have developed the CHANGE method.

C – Commit to Change

H – Have a Strong Vision

A – Activate your Change Champions

N – New is Always Better – Changing the Culture

G – Generate Excitement (through Short-Term Wins)

E – Empower Employees to Change (Adopt a Culture of Continuous Improvement)

Let's go into a bit more detail on each one.

C – Commit to Change

In order to affect change in your organization, the Leadership Team (preferably the C-suite) must be committed to real and lasting change. Short-term change won't stick and is a waste of everyone's time and money. Make sure you know what Outcomes you are expecting from the change. Be crystal clear about them and that they align with your Strategic Vision.

Commitment means more than writing a blog post or announcing it at a Town Hall or Leadership meeting. Commitment means that it guides your decisions and is part of your communications to convince your employees that you mean it and that you are willing to model

the change. You should expect to go through the same Change Continuum as your employees. But you should commit to go through it first so that you can guide them along.

What is the Change Continuum? It is the path that everyone must traverse before truly accepting change. Look at the following graphic. Study it. Do you recognize these feelings, words and actions in yourself? Good! That means you are ready to help your employees by Empathizing with what they are going through.



The curved line shows the path that we all traverse. We all begin with a budding Awareness of the change but are still focusing on the past. We then begin to have an Understanding of the change. But this brings out our feelings of defensiveness as we focus on how the change will affect “me!” Notice the behaviors and words in this quadrant. If you don’t commit to the change before you get here, this might stop you. As a leader, you need to push yourself forward into Acceptance. After all, you committed to the change because you understand the outcomes. It should be easier for you to get through these feelings and steps. Finally, you reach Commitment. This is where you thought you would start. But you’re human, too. You will also have to traverse the Change Continuum.

Each of your leaders and employees will traverse the Continuum at their own pace. The next steps will help the organization have a more successful change.

H – Have a Strong Vision

In his ground-breaking book, “Leading Change,” John Kotter describes vision as having six characteristics. A good vision is:

1. Imaginable
2. Desirable
3. Feasible
4. Focused
5. Flexible, and
6. Communicable

A clear Vision serves three purposes. First, it clarifies the direction for change, second it motivates people to take action in the right direction, and third, it coordinates the actions of different people or groups.

A Vision statement should be communicable in 60 seconds or less. Think of the “Elevator Speech” concept. Your Vision must be easy enough to express that anyone can memorize the content and repeat it whenever the Commitment starts to waver.

A – Activate your Change Champions (include authority and accountability)

You need a team of people who will be given both the Authority and the Accountability to ensure that the change is implemented according to plan. These are your Change Champions. Think of these people as your Super Heroes! They will literally fight gravity, or the tendency of all people and things to remain in place. They will need the authority to bust through obstacles and move those mossy-stone blockers of change. They will need your 100% support as the blockers “escalate” to try to stop the change. Give your Champions firm direction and complete commitment and they will literally move mountains to accomplish the change.

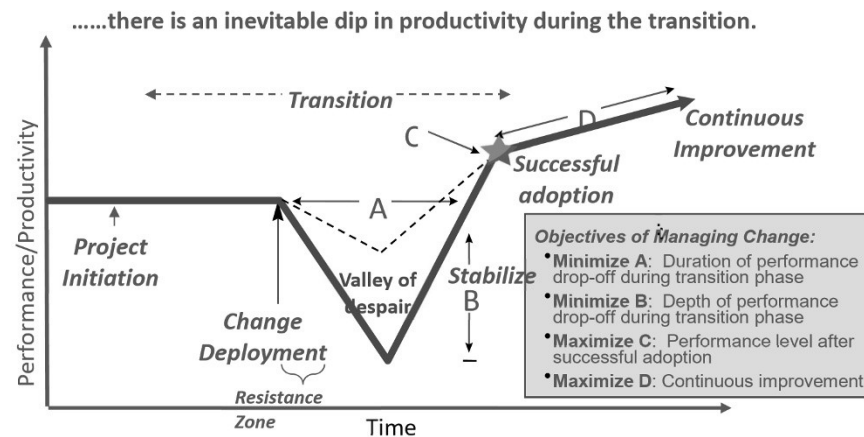
“Wonder Twin Powers – Activate!” Give your Change Champions a community to support each other. There is strength in numbers. Support builds Resiliency, and that is a critical component to have the fortitude to continue when times get tough – and they will!

The Champions will need to have the Accountability to enact the change. In addition to your support with the correct level of authority, the Change Champions will need to be held accountable. Make sure that this effort is part of their “day-job” with goals and milestones that they are held accountable to for their performance evaluation. Change is extremely hard. If there is an incentive, such as a Bonus or a Raise, for successfully implementing change, your Champions will be far more likely to brave out of their comfort zone and know that you “Have Their Back.”

N – New is Always Better – Changing the Culture

Every company has a corporate culture. In almost every case, these have grown up over years, or decades, and are the way things get done. Saying like “We need to Blue Shield-ize everything” or “This is the Coventry Way” contain within them a tacit acceptance of the status quo. Don’t mistake this as the necessary and important work of protecting the Brand. Just like the Vision, the Brand must be protected. But the culture of doing things according to the status quo will be the most difficult thing to overcome.

A very real fear that is likely to come to pass during any change of significance is a journey to the “Valley of Despair.” This describes the dip in productivity that occurs as a new system is implemented or even a new business process.



People are naturally inclined to avoid this dip in productivity. You, as a leader, need to give them permission to traverse the frightening loss of productivity. In point of fact, there is a direct correlation between the level of acceptance by leadership, and the expectation that this will occur,

and the Duration and Depth of the Valley. In other words, if the Leadership gives their teams “permission” to have a dip in productivity as they go through change, the employees will go through the Valley more quickly with less loss of productivity. When a leader expects change to occur without a dip in productivity, the fear in their employees will actually cause a deeper dive into the Valley and productivity will be lower and last longer than expected.

Before you have that freak-out moment, take a short pause. Pull out your cell phone. Is it the latest smart-phone model? Or have you been content to keep the same old flip-phone you’ve carried for ten years because it is so reliable. For almost everyone, you will have to agree that New is Always Better. Now breathe, and recognize that these emotions and this process is normal, it’s part of change, and ‘this too shall pass.’

I once led a program that transitioned a department’s work from five systems of record to one single system with integrations to three down-stream systems. It was a series of very significant changes and the management and supervisors went through the change continuum just a few weeks ahead of the need to lead their teams of employees through the changes. The productivity loss in the Valley of Despair continued to drop throughout the 13-month implementation with no prediction of when the drop was going to end and change direction. But on the day the final integration went into production, there was a noticeable shift toward more productivity. Within one month, it was apparent by all metrics that the climb was underway. And the 13-month slide into the Valley reversed in only 3-months. The team was back to pre-implementation volumes. It took another six months to get the backlogged inventory to “normal” levels. But productivity has continued to rise ever since.

G – Generate Excitement (through Short-Term Wins)

Generating Excitement and keeping the teams engaged is an absolutely critical imperative for the Change Champions, Senior Leaders, and front-line managers and supervisors. Celebrating Milestones along the way as a great way to show that the effort to change is understood and appreciated. To borrow from John Kotter’s “Leading Change” again, good short-term wins are 1) visible, 2) unambiguous, and 3) Clearly related to the change effort.

The very important role of short term wins is that they:

1. Provide evidence that sacrifices are worth it,
2. Reward change agents with a pat on the back which increases morale and motivation.
3. Helps fine-tune vision and strategies,
4. Overcome critics and self-serving detractors – clear improvement in performance make it difficult for people to block needed change,
5. Keep bosses (Senior Leaders and direct People Leaders) on board with the change, and
6. Builds momentum and turns neutrals into supporters.

Celebrations don't have to be extravagant. And, in fact, shouldn't be. They should be equal to the amount of change. A small milestone may be celebrated by a congratulatory email from the Vice President of the division. A larger milestone/accomplishment may warrant buying pizza for the team. When the goal is achieved, public recognition, monetary rewards, and a special memento (mug, backpack, or other Branded item) should be presented to the Change Champions AND the team that went through the change. Of course, size and amount are dictated by contribution, but don't let the opportunity to reward and recognize your team's accomplishment go unused. People need to know that they are supporting the mission of the company and that they can and do make a difference.

It is important, however, to keep the celebrations in line with the achievement. Rewards and celebrations that occur too frequently or are too large can create a feeling of complacency and minimize the sense of urgency to change. People often mistake reward for acknowledgement of completion. It's important to keep the team motivated and focused the remaining work while acknowledging the accomplishments.

E – Empower Employees to Change (Adopt a Culture of Continuous Improvement)

When employees are actively engaged in making a difference it is easy to motivate a Culture change to one of Continuous Improvement. Employees need to know that they are empowered to speak up when they see a possible improvement to a process or the elimination of waste. A company can go out of business because they are “nickel and dimed” to death. Tiny,

sometimes imperceptible, amounts of waste add up to big losses. And, I have to admit that when a team has bonded through overcoming the Valley of Despair, they are hungry for more of that feeling of accomplishment. It is a prime opportunity to put mechanisms in place to allow for the continuous improvement of every process.

Empower employees to make decisions that affect their own jobs and especially when they improve the experience for the customer. Develop a mindset of Change and an expectation within the culture that finding, reporting, and solving inefficiencies in every process is what gets rewarded through promotions and pay. Incorporate continuous improvement in job descriptions and career ladders. This is how you affect permanent change.

Conclusion: This paper is a short refresher on change management. Use the CHANGE method to manage through change: Commit to Change; Have a Strong Vision; Activate Your Champions; New is Always Better – Changing the Culture; Generate Excitement (Through Short-term Wins), and Empower Employees to Change (Adopt a Culture of Continuous Improvement). Take these six steps to heart and affect the CHANGE you want to see in your organization.