



Tribe HR
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Achieving Successful Change

Posted on October 08, 2015 by Stephanie Reyes

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Change. We fear it. We fight it—or fight for it. Some of us crave it, while others just wish it would stop already! And, as electioneering abounds, we find that politicians are happy to use the need for it as a weapon against each other.

Wherever you stand on change, your chances of avoiding it are slim to none; especially in the workplace.

The external forces impacting organizations of all kinds are unyielding and unlikely to diminish. Add to that the internal drivers for growth, profit and/or sustainability and we all face a perfect storm of change.

Why Employees Resist Change

When change is introduced into the work environment, resistance of varying degrees is the default reaction for most employees. Typically, the strongest resistance comes from front line workers for a variety of reasons.

Research conducted by Prosci Change Management Learning Centre consistently identifies the following top five reasons employees resist change:[\[1\]](#)

1. Employees were not aware of the underlying business need for change.
2. Lay-offs were announced or feared as part of the change.
3. Employees were unsure if they had the needed skills for success in the future state.
4. Individuals were comfortable with the current state; they wanted to maintain the personal rewards and sense of accomplishment and fulfillment provided by the status quo.
5. Employees felt they were being required to do more with less, or do more for the same pay.

Career Coach, Lisa Quest, has a different perspective drawn from multiple conversations with her own clients. She cites the following five main reasons people resist change:[\[2\]](#)

1. Fear of the unknown/surprise: When change is implemented without warning the affected stakeholders before the change occurs.
2. Mistrust: Mistrust [of a manager] can manifest itself into resistance to change.
3. Loss of job security/control: Fear among employees that they will lose their jobs or be moved into other positions without their input.
4. Bad timing: Too much change over a short period of time. If change is not implemented at the right time or with the right level of tact or empathy, it usually won't work.
5. An individual's predisposition toward change: Differences in people's overall tolerance for change. People who are temperamentally opposed to change resist it in any form.

Biggest Obstacles to Successful Change

In a 2013 benchmarking study, Prosci identified the following most significant obstacles to success when implementing change initiatives at work.

- Ineffective change management sponsorship
- Resistance to change from employees
- Insufficient change management resourcing
- Division between project management and change management
- Middle management resistance

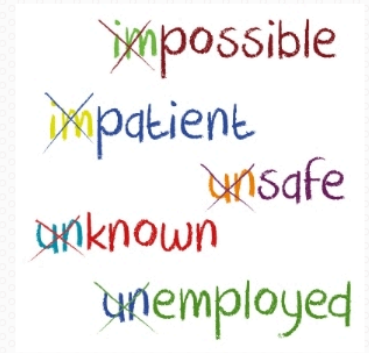
Interestingly enough, poor communication, identified as a top obstacle in prior years, did not rank in the 2013 study. An optimist might conclude that change leaders have mastered communication around change.

Greatest Contributors to Successful Change

In the same benchmarking study, Prosci identified the greatest contributors to successful change as:

- Active and visible executive sponsorship
- Structured change management approach
- Dedicated change management resources and funding
- Frequent and open communication about the change and the need for change
- Employee engagement and participation
- Engagement and integration with project management
- Engagement with and support from middle management

Active and visible executive sponsorship ranked number one, as it has for their past seven consecutive studies. The only new factor identified in this most recent study was "Engagement and integration with project management," which reflects the flipside of "Division between project management and change management" (#4 above), which was identified as a major obstacle to success for the first time in the 2013 study.



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Leaders Who Succeed at Change

As the research shows, whatever the reason for change resistance in an organization, the single biggest factor in whether or not a change initiative succeeds is executive sponsorship, or leadership. According to leadership expert, John C. Maxwell, leaders who succeed at change share certain qualities and character traits.^[3] He lists the following nine qualities as critical for leaders who want to achieve change. According to Maxwell, a change-savvy leader:

1. Considers Conditions
2. Builds a Coalition
3. Communicates Urgency
4. Champions Rewards
5. Risks Failure
6. Initiates Action
7. Endures Criticism
8. Celebrates Wins
9. Puts Setbacks in Perspective

Some organizations seem to thrive in spite of chaotic markets and amidst constant change. They have reputations that seems timeless and they consistently produce innovative products and services that provide value. Their people are dedicated and motivated and enjoy contributing to a dynamic environment. For these organizations; for their leaders and their employees, stature and success endure, even while their competitors struggle to keep up in a world of change. Why? They have mastered the art of achieving successful change, by consistently embracing change as an opportunity to evolve. Understanding the most common obstacles and contributors to success, as well as the leadership qualities needed to succeed at change, can help you do the same.

Photo credit: Image by sattva, courtesy of freedigitalphotos.net

[1] Best Practices in Change Management. Prosci Change Management Learning Centre <http://www.change-management.com/best-practices-report.htm>

[2] Summarized from Lisa Quast, Forbes, Overcome the Five Main Reasons People Resist Change <http://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2012/11/26/overcome-the-5-main-reasons-people-resist-change/>

[3] John. C Maxwell, Be the One: Change. http://www.johnmaxwell.com/cms/images/uploads/ads/Be_the_One_-_Change.pdf



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