

*Helping Leaders Be More Effective & Organizations Reach New Heights In Performance*

## Leadership Solutions Newsletter

**Congratulations! Because of our past relationship** you are receiving our newsletter...*at no cost to you!* If this is your first issue, then welcome! We appreciate the opportunity to share best practices in leadership, management, personal and professional growth, recruiting, retention, and other areas critical to your success.



In this issue, we offer three articles in this issue:

- Lessons from Leaders
- Build Commitment, Not Resistance
- Three Keys to Successful Transition Management

If you have ideas for future issues, share them with us! Again, thanks for your readership.

Enjoy your newsletter!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Merle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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### LESSONS FROM LEADERS

There is much to be said about learning from others. In my quest to learn more about leading change, I have interviewed a number of people who have been recognized as successful in bringing about change in their respective organizations. Here are some interesting thoughts that others have shared about leading change.

Sheriff Ed Bonner, of Placer County, says, "Don't let your ego get in the way." Sometimes we as leaders have an idea that we want to implement and believe we know how to best implement it. In our hurry to implement the idea, we may be closed to other ways of accomplishing the

goal. When we refuse to let go of our way of implementing the idea, we may alienate others and miss better solutions. Hence, our ego gets in the way and may be the demise of our idea.

Mike DiMiceli, Assistant Executive Director, California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, said that many leaders run aground while trying to lead change. He offered several examples.

First, leaders can underestimate the nature and scope of a change and find themselves not being able to balance the demands of running day-to-day operations, while at the same time leading change efforts that require significant amounts of time and energy. Often they give too much time to one at the expense of the other. One way to deal with this is to assign someone the responsibility of guiding the change effort that can give it the time and attention needed.

Second, leaders may assume that the approach used to lead one change effort will work in leading another. The key is recognizing that each change may involve different people who have different perspectives. Since change is all about people, we need to use an approach in leading change that will work for each group of people. What works with one group may not work with another.

Third, leaders may recognize the need to influence outside stakeholders, but feel that they can direct inside stakeholders. Directing inside stakeholders, like employees, is rarely as effective as influencing them to support the change.

San Jose Police Department's Chief Joe McNamara, retired, talked about the power of allowing others to participate in the decision-making process. Chief McNamara established a Participative Management Committee comprised of anyone who wanted to help bring about change.

He believes that approach enabled him to make changes that would never have been possible otherwise. One example he shared was setting a limit on the amount of time a detective could remain assigned to investigations. After the established period of time, a detective had to move to another assignment outside of investigations. This was a significant departure from past practice, as well as unique within the profession.

**What are some lessons you have learned? I would really like to hear what lessons you have learned about leading change! Please take a few minutes and e-mail me your thoughts.**

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## ***BUILD COMMITMENT, NOT RESISTANCE***

Commitment is to change what prevention is to risk management. If you are going to get change, you need commitment, just like if you are going to manage risk you need prevention.

As I do training about leading change, I start the day by asking participants to share a word or phrase they think about when they think of change. Frequently the responses include these words: resistance, fear, why, and not again.

Rarely do I hear the word “commitment.” Why don’t we think about commitment when we think of change?

I believe the answer lies, in the fact that most of us haven’t really grasped the importance that people play in change. Change, or better yet transition, is all about people coming to terms with the change.

You can have a great idea, great technology, great facility or anything else, and if people don’t buy into it you basically have nothing. That’s the reason most change efforts fail to deliver what was anticipated.

Further, my experience is that most of us leading change really don’t understand it. Most of what I have learned about change, as I was coming up through the ranks, was learned on the job trying one thing and then another...muddling through. And I think most people in leadership have had the same experience.

In fact, my experience is that no more than ten percent of people in any kind of leadership position have had any training on change.

By way of comparison, consider the amount of training required by people entering many professions. For example, a new police officer attends a 6-month academy. After graduation, he is assigned to a training officer for another 4-5 months for training on the street. Hence, he generally has at least 10 months of training before working solo.

Later in that individual’s career, if promotion comes along, he/she will be responsible for providing leadership for some number of people. Upon promotion, the person attends a 2-week supervision class that likely will not address leading change.

In fact, it is highly probable that he/she will never attend a class that deals specifically with change and/or transition. And yet, that person will be involved in leading change(s) regularly. Further, the success of the organization will depend on many others, like this person, who are ill equipped to lead change. It’s no surprise that change efforts frequently fail.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that we often associate resistance with change, rather than commitment. A high level of resistance is what we often experience when we don’t take the time to build commitment.

Let me hasten to say that resistance is normal and, in fact, part of the process people go through to come to a place of commitment to a change. However, the intensity and length of resistance can be significantly impacted by our efforts to build commitment before change is actually implemented.

Recently, I wanted to get a new program started. In order to build commitment, I sent some people to visit three other organizations. We talked about it and I drafted a document with our ideas. A larger group discussed it and I made more changes.

I brought in some people from outside our group to talk about their experience in doing the new tasks. I brought in customers who shared what the added service would mean to them. Finally, I met with the staff who volunteered to be a part on the new program and we came to a consensus on how the program would run, including how to monitor it. The end result was a much higher level of commitment.

If you spend a little more time building commitment for change, you’ll spend less time wrestling with resistance.

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## THREE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Donald Kirkpatrick in his book, Managing Change (1), identifies these three elements as key to successful transition management: empathy, communication and participation. Regardless of the change model one employs, I believe that if you effectively employ these three elements when you begin to think about making change, you will be more successful in implementing change. Let's take a closer look at each element.

Webster's defines empathy as, "The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another... (2)" Essentially, empathy is putting yourself in the shoes of others. This makes more sense when you realize that when change occurs, people lose different things. Examples of loss could include familiarity of the routine, relationships, power, security, and competence.

Are you familiar with the word misonephobia... probably not? It means an inherent fear of change. There is a little of this in all of us. When change occurs, people often have a fear of rejection, failure and/or looking foolish. A wise leader realizes that people with whom he/she works will experience a certain degree of fear when things change around them.

Realizing that change means people will experience some degree of loss and fear, and expressing appropriate empathy is an important step in the change process. It is a way of expressing concern for those whose world is being impacted, perhaps in a significant way. To some this may seem soft. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Effective change involves both seeing the change implemented, as well as the process that people go through on the journey to the change.

William Bridges, in Managing Transitions (3), calls this latter aspect "transition" and defines it as, "The psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation."

This aspect of change is where leaders often have difficulty. This is the people part of change, which is the hard part. Change is both science and art, and dealing with people is an art.

In many organizations, especially those that are very hierarchical like law enforcement or the military, a leader may make a decision and expect his/her command to be carried out without question. This approach usually misses the empathy key.

Effective change must take into account that people will experience loss and fear. A leader can help prepare his/her people to move forward by expressing empathy. Failure to do this may contribute to some people having difficulty moving beyond the loss and fear, as well as developing resistance that can undermine the change effort.

The second key element is communication. In times of change, leaders often under-communicate. In my own experience, I have talked to groups of people regarding an upcoming change and put information out in writing, but it wasn't enough.

The literature says that we often under-communicate by a factor of ten (4), which creates an information void. Often, people do not know why the change is occurring, how the change may impact them, or what the benefits are.

When there is an information void, people will seek to fill the void and create a sense of knowing. You have probably found that people turn to less credible or accurate sources. The result is confusion, resistance and upset people.

A few years ago I was working on a project and was interviewing an executive with the Calgary Police Department. During the interview, he told me that success in implementing a new program could be summed up in three words, “Communication – Communication – Communication.” He emphasized that communication up, down and outside of the organization was essential.

Do not forget that communication is a two-way street. A leader needs to listen, not just talk. A part of listening involves giving due consideration to what others say. Consider the following:

**When people feel heard... they don't care that what they said was implemented.**

Mark Kroeker, former Chief of Police, Portland Police Department, has found that the message needs to be communicated repeatedly using different venues. Some people learn through visual messages, while others benefit from auditory messages.

According to Bruce Boles, HP uses “listening groups.” These groups have helped to surface many good questions, ideas and concerns.

A good communication plan will consider these variables and others.

The third key element is participation. Participation is getting others involved in developing and implementing the change.

A study printed in the Journal of Applied Psychology (5) reported that nurses who were involved in the development of a new shared governance program at their hospital were less resistant, more likely to believe management's explanations for the change and exhibited a much higher level of support for the change than those who did not participate.

Think about it. If you help create a program, not only do you have a stake in the program, but you are more likely help it to be successful.

Participation is an important step in helping to build commitment for change. The more commitment one can build at the front end of change, the less resistance later on in the process, and often the best ideas to bring about change are out there in the minds of your line-level staff.

This Chinese Proverb puts it well:

**Tell me and I'll forget,  
Show me and I may remember,  
Involve me and I'll understand.**

I regularly tell new employees that I do not have a brain-lock on all the right answers. Hence, I need them to share their perspective about upcoming changes, or other ideas on how things can be improved. People will participate when they feel their input and help is valued.

These three key elements – empathy, communication, and participation – are critical for effective change. They focus on the most important part of any change...the people who ultimately determine how successful the change will be. If you work at employing these three key elements, you will be more successful in facilitating change.

**Notes:**

1. Donald L. Kirkpatrick, How to Manage Change Effectively, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), p. 112.
2. Merriam-Webster Inc., Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc.
3. William Bridges, Managing Transitions – Making the Most of Change, (Reading: Perseus Books, 1991), p. 5
4. David Baum, Lightning in a Bottle, (Chicago: Dearborn Financial Publishing, 2000), p. 26-40.
5. Denise M. Rousseau and Snehal A. Tijoriwala, "What's a Good Reason to Change? Motivated Reasoning and Social Accounts in Promoting Organizational Change," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 84, No. 4, 1999, 514.

**About the Author:** Dr. Switzer works exclusively in the field of leadership. He holds a Doctor of Strategic Leadership with an emphasis in Leadership Coaching. He has worked with numerous organizations across the U.S. and has spoken at nearly thirty state, national, or international conferences. More recently, he has worked with leaders in Ecuador and Cambodia.

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