



## Getting Everyone Onboard for Change

*A few simple activities ensure smooth sailing.*

**By Jean Van Rensselar**

The full support and cooperation of everyone is the most important aspect of bringing successful change to any organization

Most people don't like change. In fact, most people would rather die than change. Consider this - among post-heart surgery patients who were told that they needed to adopt a healthier lifestyle (exercise and a better diet) to prevent further heart disease, only 10 percent complied. The five reasons 90 percent of patients gave for not wanting to change, are the same reasons that people generally give:

1. They were happy with the status quo.
2. They didn't think the change would make a difference.
3. Making the change looked painful.
4. They didn't know what steps to take.
5. They didn't trust the person in charge.

Another lesson from heart patients is that frightening people into change doesn't work. Rather, people need to make a deeper connection to the change – in addition to knowing the details; they need to *understand why it's necessary*. Resistance will melt away if someone bothers to explain.

Studies show that radical, sweeping changes are easier than small, incremental ones. People are willing to make big sacrifices if they can see immediate results. For example – heart patients who made only moderate changes to their diets felt deprived and hungry and didn't see any difference.

## Expect, but don't Ignore Resistance

Your company is like the human body. When a change occurs, the body automatically creates antibodies that attack the change. The healthier the body, the stronger the attack. So when you introduce something new, don't be surprised if the initial reaction is resistance – in fact, interpret strong resistance as the sign of a healthy organizational culture.

Most resistance takes two forms - gossip and testing.

Gossip – grumbling and complaining – is a natural way of airing discomfort, so don't try to quash it. Instead, respond to gossip by bringing it into the open and providing facts that counter it. The following five factors actually encourage gossip:

1. Incomplete or complete lack of authentic and official information
2. Prolonged decision-making delays
3. Erroneous information that creates doubt
4. The situation is filled with anxiety and fear
5. Some people feel intentionally and wrongly left out of the loop

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Testing can be passive (not showing up at meetings) or aggressive (openly challenging decisions). The best way to deal with both types is to talk to the person privately, discuss the action, ask why, explain your position, and draw a line.

Odds are, about 5 percent of employees will actively resist the change. And failure to address that anti-change faction is the most common reason why change fails - which brings us back to the five reasons for resistance and how to handle them.

### People are happy with the status quo.

If people believe their needs are being adequately met in your organization, they need to understand that, if change doesn't occur, their needs will not continue to be met.

### People don't think the change will make a difference.

Explain the ultimate goal in terms that are concrete and realistic and be sure to contrast the goal with the current situation.

### Making the change looks painful.

Be sure that the transitional period does not look so uncomfortable that people refuse to join. Be realistic, but optimistic.

### People don't know what steps to take.

Visions and goals need to be supported by clear details and individuals need to know what their tasks are.

### People don't trust the person telling them they need to change.

If you ask people to embark on, what they believe is, a perilous journey, they must have faith in your integrity, your ability to lead, and your capacity to see the change through to completion.

Basically, people who resist change will lower their resistance if they are dissatisfied enough with how things are, if they can see what is possible, and if they know what immediate steps they need to take.

## Creating Cooperation

So how do you create cooperation?

- Use specifics when communicating the change.
- Listen.
- Maintain close contact with everyone involved.
- Distribute responsibilities.
- Wait until everyone understands the big picture before you dive into details.
- Align reward systems with the change.
- Expect everyone to cooperate, without exception.
- Address resistance early and respectfully.

## The Importance of Communication

It takes more than a single meeting to fully communicate the reason for the change, the vision, and individual responsibilities. Continuous communication is important. This means many meetings, newsletters, e-mails, etc. Communications should be energetic, entertaining, and include as much information about people as possible – stories about how fellow employees have embraced the change and improved their work lives.

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## Create Short-Term Wins

Celebrate short-term wins along the way that reward hard work, build momentum, and provide emotional gratification. Global companies with large budgets hold many contests and ceremonies that reinforce their new vision, but the rewards are usually not expensive. Prizes include small things such as lunch with the CEO, tickets to a ballgame, a day off work, etc. – these are incentives all small companies can afford. Celebrations don't need to be held at the finest hotel - cake and small favors in the lunchroom work just as well. In fact, research shows that employees appreciate the recognition more than anything else.

## Anchor Changes in Your Company's Culture

Change sticks when it becomes *the way we do things around here*. Show everyone how the new approaches, behaviors, and attitudes have improved performance – both the company's and their own. Also, be sure that any new managers understand the changes and vision they will reinforce.

## Finally, Don't Declare Victory

It's natural to be enthusiastic about progress, but new changes are always fragile and open to regression. Some people will interpret a victory declaration as permission to return to the status quo. Victory only happens when the changes are fully embedded in your company's culture. This can take as long as 10 years. Instead of declaring victory, begin addressing loose ends – overlooked structures and systems that still aren't consistent with the original vision.