



## THE LEADER'S ROLE IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT CHANGE

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“Wisdom lies neither in fixity nor in change, but in the dialectic between the two.”  
--Octavia Paz, poet

*During times of change, people need to understand how the change is going to affect them, how they will be kept informed, and what opportunities exist to influence decisions. People don't resist change itself – they resist being controlled and uninformed in decisions that affect them.*

### 10 REASONS LEADERS DON'T COMMUNICATE SUFFICIENTLY ABOUT CHANGE

1. Have misconception that announcing a change is sufficient to implement it
2. Don't yet have definitive answers - haven't figured it all out yet
3. Assume people are being kept informed by their supervisor
4. Don't want to set unrealistic expectations by communicating too soon
5. Uncomfortable talking about change in front of those affected
6. Struggling with own emotions about change
7. Afraid to get locked into a publicly stated position—no room to change later
8. Fail to understand the emotional impact that change has on performance
9. Expect stoicism—“they need to suck it up”
10. Don't yet have the perfect communication plan

### HOW TO SUPPORT PEOPLE THROUGH CHANGE – WHAT PEOPLE NEED AND WHEN

#### 1. Share the basics to build **awareness**

**What people need:** When first hearing about a proposed change, people want information about the change and have a chance to ask questions; they do not want to be “sold” on the change or told why they should accept it.

**What Leaders should do:** Clearly communicate what is known and provide direct, honest responses to questions posted. Provide information about what is happening and why the change is necessary with as much detail as is available at the current time.

#### 2. Get more specific to build **understanding**

**What people need:** Right away, people will wonder if they have the skills and resources to be successful with the proposed change. People need to understand what the change means to them personally and professionally.

**What leaders should do:** Provide more detailed and specific information in terms of what the change means to each group and department. Don't ignore personal concerns. Communicate how the change will impact roles and responsibilities and address individual needs and concerns.

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### 3. Focus on building **commitment**

*What people need:* After you have briefed people about what and why, they will be concerned about how they will be involved. They want information specific to their department and opportunities for input and discussion.

*What leaders should do:* In as much detail as possible, explain how the change will be implemented, how people will be involved, and how they will be kept informed. Solicit practical feedback that can help ensure a successful implementation.

### 4. Build **ownership**

*What people need:* People want to be involved in contributing to successful implementation so they don't feel as though it is being "done to them." They want to know what progress is being made, they want to know what difference the change is making, and they want to share their perspectives.

*What leaders should do:* Provide periodic updates and provide opportunities for involvement whenever possible. This will serve to both encourage shared ownership of the change and minimize skepticism.

## WHAT TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CHANGE

- What the change is and what the end result will be.
- Why the change is necessary at this point in time; clarify what has happened internally or externally to prompt the change...why now.
- What is at stake personally and organizationally if we don't change.
- What the impact of the change will be on the individual, the group and the organization.
- How the change will be implemented – what's the plan to get there & who's responsible for each component.
- How people will be involved and/or kept informed during the change process.

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CHANGE

Provide periodic updates. There may be long periods of time when you don't have much to say. Without information, the rumor mill gets busy. Consider the following:

- When you don't have new information, say what you know at the time. When you run into a delay, explain. Tell people what you are doing about the problems causing the delay.
- Acknowledge this is a difficult time and encourage them to hang in there. (Don't say, "trust us," "be loyal," or "stop complaining.")
- Express your thoughts & feelings. People appreciate hearing your personal reactions and perceptions.

## HARD WON WISDOM – WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

- Have a clear strategy for communicating up front about the change.
- Recognize that resistance (certainly "theirs", maybe your own) is a normal part of implementing change.
- Create involvement and opportunities for input whenever possible.
- Be creative in how you solicit feedback and engage people.
- Model the behaviors you are asking for in others. As Gandhi reminds us, "We must be the change we wish to make in this world."