

5 Necessary Actions for Change

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Adopting new behaviors on projects and in organizations is one of the toughest actions we take as leader-managers. In this special report we offer you an approach to make your change efforts successful. The first thing to know is these are *necessary* but often not *sufficient* conditions. If you skip one of these actions you are assured of failure in the long-term. However, performing all five actions doesn't guarantee success. Very often a situation demands additional actions to ensure success, e.g., changes to systems or acquisition of new skills. Use the outline below as a point of departure for planning your changes. Do the planning in a group and be open to multiple approaches rather than one "right" answer.

1. Be clear why change is necessary in terms that make sense to the individuals:
 - State clear consequences for continuing with the current state. We often think of consequences in terms of threats. However in a changing competitive environment missing opportunities can be greater consequences.
 - Make assessments of the value for changing. Share your view of how new value can be created by making a specific change. Be ready to offer why you have confidence in making your assessments.
2. Declare an initial set of standards for measuring performance and get agreement that people will set out to perform to those standards. Begin a practice of checking.
 - Be public with your standard-setting. Make the opportunity to explore the standards with the people who will perform to those standards.
 - Create alignment with the group that they will hold themselves to the new standards. Alignment doesn't mean that everyone agrees. Rather, alignment means that people are willing to conduct themselves in accordance with the declaration.
 - People are accountable when there is a customer holding them to account. Being a good customer entails checking-in with performers in the midst of their performance along with standing ready to help them achieve what it is that you are setting out to do differently. Finally, good customers show their appreciation for results and efforts. In the case where people are making changes, appreciating early nearly successful efforts will fuel individuals and the team to continue giving their best efforts.

3. Show how it is done. People need to see that it is possible to be successful performing a new (set of) behaviors. Talking about it -- merely "Jawboning" -- doesn't work. People learn in the "showing" and while they are in action.
 - Video is such an effective learning aid because it allows people to see what they otherwise can't see if they are paying attention to what they need to pay attention. (Think of golf – eye on the ball keeps one from noticing whether the elbow is bent on the back-swing.) People need to see actions performed correctly to give them confidence that it is both possible and for a model of how it is to be performed.
 - Put each new person in action while you are introducing them to the new behavior.
4. Measure, acknowledge, reward new behavior, and be clear on the consequences. Put yourself in the position to catch people doing it right. Be with them in their work-setting while they are working. This also gives you the opportunity to coach or adjust unsuccessful action.
 - People need encouragement and redirection while they are learning. Make yourself available for that.
 - Keep the context of the change – consequences of not changing and the new value available – in the foreground for performers. Telling people once is never enough. Remind your team and yourself with regular stories of why this change matters.
5. Work with them on improving. This fifth action is the one that cements the change. Often people put up with little dissatisfactions during a change telling themselves that it will get better once they are familiar or competent. The truth is usually the opposite. The annoyances are only magnified by the frequency of action. Commit yourself to continuously improve the changed situation for the benefit of the participants, the customers, and the company. That action telegraphs the importance of the change.

Commit yourself to success. Nothing beats a passionate determined individual. Let your passion show to the people you lead in change. Stay engaged with them so they see first-hand that the change is a priority for you, not just them. And be consistent with that involvement.

Remember, people know what is important to their managers by how they spend their time, particularly changes to how they spend their time. Err on the side of spending extra time when you set out to make change.