

Successful Supervisor Part 44

Managing Change for Results

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

John F. Kennedy once said, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” In any organization, change is a given, so every supervisor has a choice: she can either choose to endure the changes or she can learn to manage the changes in order to thrive. This article is about the tools needed to manage change in a proactive and pragmatic way.

For the supervisor the challenge is to not only learn to manage change in her own mind but also teach the people who report to her how to deal with change. Simply stated, there is no option to avoid change, but there are effective ways to deal with it. The following tips are things that I find helpful when teaching leaders to manage change.

1. Help people understand the need for change

The best way to describe this tip is the old "boiled frog" analogy. If you place a frog into boiling water, it will feel the heat immediately and jump out. But, if you put a frog into a pan of cool water and slowly heat it up, the frog will sit there and boil to death. It becomes used to the heat and cannot feel the danger until it's too late. Good supervisors make sure that people feel the "heat" early enough.

2. Communicate a compelling vision of the future

It is incumbent on the supervisor to not only let people know they will be better off once they reach the vision but that it is worth the effort to get there. In other words, if the supervisor extols the benefits of the view that awaits from the top of Mount Everest, but fails to generate enough enthusiasm to make the arduous climb worth it, the vision is worthless.

I wrote in one of my books that “Leaders are the artists who paint the vision of the future on the canvass of today’s paradigm.” This means that not only must the image itself be compelling but the supervisor must paint a pathway to the future to make it real.

3. Build an environment of TRUST

Supervisors interact with many people and build trust-based relationships with each of them. Trust between people can be compared to a bank account, where actions consistent with shared values represent deposits and inconsistent actions represent withdrawals. Every action, word, or decision between individuals either adds to or detracts from the balance. It is a very sensitive system that can be affected even by subconscious thoughts or small gestures. Making small or medium deposits is easy, but large deposits are rare.

I advocate a four-step plan to build trust with people that I call “reinforcing candor.”

- a. Start by laying a firm foundation with your team. Identify the values of your group along with a clear vision, behavior expectations and strategic plan.
- b. Encourage people to tell you any time they believe your actions are not congruent with your foundation.
- c. Reinforce them every time they do it, no matter how challenging that is. Make them glad they told you about it.
- d. Take appropriate corrective action or help people think through the apparent paradox.

4. Value diverse opinions

People closest to the work generally have the best solutions. Supervisors need to tap into the creative ideas of everyone in the organization to allow successful change initiatives. This also allows people to "own" the change process rather than perceive it as a management "trick" to get more work for less money.

5. Ability to accept risk

No progress is made without some kind of risk. As a supervisor, you need to empower people so they feel free to try and not get squashed if they fail. Tolerate setbacks along the road to success and don't lose faith in the eventual outcome. Try to manage the risk so the consequences are minor, if failure occurs. For example, have a back up plan in place for changes that involve risk.

6. Build a reinforcing culture

Many groups struggle in a kind of hell where people hate and try to undermine one another at every turn. They snipe at each other and “blow people in,” just to see them suffer or to get even for some perceived sin done to them. What an awful environment to live and work in, yet it is far too common.

Contrast this with a group that builds each other up and delights in each other's successes. These groups have much more fun. They enjoy interfacing with their comrades at work. They are also about twice as productive! You see them together outside work for social events and there are close family-type relationships in evidence. Hugging is spontaneous.

Let your reinforcement be joyous and spontaneous. Let people help you make it special. Reinforcement is the most powerful elixir available to a supervisor. Don't shy away from it because it's difficult or you've made mistakes in the past; embrace it.

7. Integrate new methods into the culture

Document new procedures in a user friendly way; avoid long complex manuals that nobody has the time to read. Have a check list for new employees and make sure they understand the culture. Reinforce consistent behaviors.

8. Foster constancy of purpose

Effective change programs require constancy of purpose. Avoid the "flavor of the month." Expect setbacks as part of the process and don't jump ship to a new program when things get rough. Don't call it a "program". Instead refer to it as our culture.

9. Understand the psychology of change

If you think of change as a **system**, you can help people through the process more quickly. Recognize there will be times of confusion or anger, and use the energy to propel the process forward rather than slow it down.

I favor using the Kübler-Ross Model of the five stages of grief to help teams move through the phases of dealing with change. The stages are: 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Bargaining, 4) Depression, and 5) Acceptance. I have found that using this model to explain why people are struggling at times with a change helps them move toward acceptance much faster.

Being a supervisor carries a mandate that you help manage the change process so improvements can be made without having the people become dysfunctional in the process. It is your responsibility to accomplish change on a frequent basis. Using the nine tips above will make it possible for you to excel at this critical leadership skill.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Successful Supervision." The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003),

2. *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online* (2006), 3. *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind* (2009), and 4. *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change* (2014). In addition, he has authored over 500 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763**