

Managing Change

MANAGERS

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

Charles Darwin

A company is only as good as the people in it – and those people have an amazing amount of experience, knowledge, skills and ideas. A recent chat with a senior Director lead us to question what happens when people are promoted. Many people are promoted with little support and they get the job because they are great at the previous job. These people soon realize that the confidence they got from being a high performer does not always directly translate to the new role and, in an effort not to do the wrong thing, they often actually just stop doing anything.

When I was promoted early in my career to team manager, I was beckoned to the post room. There were streamers and balloons and notices saying 'sorry you're leaving!'. I didn't understand. I had just been promoted. I soon understood that they were saying goodbye because other people who had been promoted stopped talking to them and their own teams. It was an important and strong lesson. Just last week an Agent said to me "I've been in this team for 5 weeks and my manager still hasn't spoken to me!"

The key to successfully navigating these rapidly changing times we are in is following the old BT saying: "It's good to talk!"

What can we learn from this?

Without talk, you are isolated. Without being interested in others, no-one will be interested in you or helping you. You are the most positive role model and catalyst for supporting change if you can tear yourself away from the PC and responding to emails and checking out MSN... it's whether you can bring yourself to do this or not!

A manager's job is to get results through their team. And your business is trying to be as profitable as possible which means constant change and adaptation. Therefore the backdrop against which you are managing is constantly

evolving and unless you and your team evolve too, you will be left behind.

We perform so much of our day-to-day routine automatically that it is difficult to step out of it – which means we could be the ones who get left behind. Let's test this out.

Fold your arms normally. Now try to reverse them so the bottom one is on top – hard isn't it..... and that is just a simple physical manoeuvre! So just imagine how difficult it would be to change behaviour or a process systematically.

Why don't you wear your watch on the other wrist for the day and notice how it feels and how long it takes to feel more comfortable. Also notice how many times you look at your watch or rather the space on your wrist where you watch was!

Step One

Take a look at the reactions to change identified below and consider, right now, which ones do you feel about your role in the business? Just make a mental note of it.

1. People will feel awkward, ill at ease and self-conscious
2. People will think first about what they have to give up
3. People will feel alone even if everyone is going through the change
4. People can handle only so much change
5. People are at different levels of readiness for change
6. People will be concerned that they do not have enough resources
7. If you take the pressure off, people will revert back to the old behaviour

These are the seven most common reactions to change.

If you are feeling any of these just imagine how much harder it is for your team.

Often when you feel uncertain, you stop communicating and people sense that.

Step Two

Take a look at the list and identify 1 action you can do as a manager for each of the reactions to help people navigate through change. If you think communication is key, build on this idea to make it more tangible – what exactly will you communicate? How? When? Frequency? Etc. Remember your role is a dynamic one – constantly evolving.

Step Three

Take one member of your team who you feel is not performing as well as they could and using your ideas in step two as a guide, what can you do to make the difference?

Give it a go and jot down the reaction they have to your involvement.

Remember that a one off action will have a minimal effect. It is the constant action that effects a change.

Jot down all the things that work and those that don't work so you can learn for future times.

Once you have supported one person, move on and notice the difference in your team. How much more are you able to contribute and how much happier are your team.

Enjoy making a difference to them, the business and your customers... after all its your job and a great one too when you pitch it right!

Top tips to help you manage change

- Provide a compelling picture of the future
- Work with individuals in the team to identify some quick wins you can make
- Celebrate every time you adapt successfully
- Promote your team positively to the outside world
- Set and monitor goals frequently
- Each time you review goals try to stretch them a little bit more for stimulation
- Ask lots of questions rather than just talking
- Identify your pioneers and use their energy to fire up the rest of the team
- Put the work your team does in the context of the business goals so that the team can see the purpose in what they are doing
- Work out ways to enjoy each others company and show you care