



Thought Paper:

Strategies for Turning Change Resistance into Positive Action

People are the key differentiator between successful and failed change efforts and represent the only sustainable competitive advantage (Reinstein, 2007; Weidman, 2002). Therefore, selecting the right people who can create the future rather than protect the past is critical for organizational success (Collins, 2001; Kotter, 1996; and Reinstein, 2007). Having the right senior leaders who can help drive the change through the organization is only part of the solution; subject matter experts (SMEs) from within key functions must be engaged also as visible ambassadors throughout the organization (Reinstein, 2007).

SMEs can be valuable eyes and ears for identifying actual and potential resisters. Similarly, real change leaders (RCLs) need to be gleaned from mid-level and frontline manager ranks since these members are close to the heart of the organization's people system, i.e., the skills and behaviors of the employees who drive corporate success (Katzenbach, 1996). Since RCLs share a "determination to achieve better results through people" (Katzenbach, 1996, p. 156), these employees along with SMEs are in the best position to identify and ferret organized resistance within an organization.

Strategies for overcoming impediments are necessary for managing change; these strategies operate simultaneously at several organizational levels. According to Duck (1993), "Managing change means managing the conversation between" change leaders and those "expected to implement new strategies" (p. 100). Thus, effective change requires dialogue and communication throughout an organization; this fact is evident within some of the following strategies. Although space constraints prevent a comprehensive list of strategies, the following examples are worthy of deeper study; therefore, the reader is encouraged to seek out and review the references attached to each of the strategies.

Organizational Strategies

- a) CEOs need to appoint effective senior leadership teams that embrace "the paradox of top-down direction and upward influence" (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). "Upward influence" is exercised by trusted employees who are ready and willing to communicate openly with leaders about positive and negative aspects of the change process.
- b) Senior leaders need to create a clear and compelling change vision, i.e., a purpose to believe in, that can be easily understood by all employees (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Kotter, 1996; Lawson & Price, 2003; Pietersen, 2002).
- c) CEOs need to establish Transition Management Teams (TMT) with a Transition Chief Operating Officer (COO) who reports directly to the CEO. The TMT must have the necessary authorities to oversee, manage, and coordinate the change process throughout the organization (Duck, 1993).
- d) Leaders must demand excellence of themselves and other leaders, modeling the way and desired new behaviors, while rewarding those who perform with the right behaviors and dealing swiftly with those who do not (Jarrett, 2003; Katzenbach, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Interpersonal or Group Strategies

- a) Leaders must be developed at all organizational levels with RCLs and SMEs engaged as change agents as well as ambassadors of change (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Collins, 2001; Katzenbach, 1996; Weidman, 2002).
- b) Fact-based, two-way, open and honest communication must be established among teams as well as with key stakeholders whose core interests underpin change efforts (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Cicmil, 1999; Reinstein, 2007; Weidman, 2002).
- c) Leaders must implement small things quickly to generate small wins, through which teams gain confidence for larger efforts and believe they are capable of bigger successes (Collins, 2001; Jarrett, 2003; Kotter, 1996; Pietersen, 2002).

Individual Strategies

- a) Leaders should require changes in behaviors, starting with their own behaviors (Duck, 1993). These behaviors need to be specified, communicated, and incorporated into performance management systems to ensure consistency of effort.
- b) Employees must recognize their personal obligation in helping their teams perform and excel since team success is in the hands of employees as much as those of leaders (Duck, 1993).
- c) Employees must become actively engaged in the learning process through which new knowledge can be created and individual value to the organization can be increased and appreciated (Duck, 1993; Reinstein, 2007).

This thought paper is intended to evoke ideas within the reader through which an introspective understanding of change within one's organization can begin to evolve. The reader would benefit by reviewing a related paper titled "Understanding Impediments to Change" which can also be found within the GuideStar Library.

These strategies are representative of an array of available options; this list includes only a few of the most critical options in the three categories. Yet these options are sufficient for starting a thoughtful self-assessment. Hopefully, the reader can gain an appreciation for the breadth of available options for turning impediments to change and employee resistance into positive rather than negative action.

According to Benedetto (2008), "These strategies do not stand alone...strategies at the organizational level may require implementation of an individual strategy first or in parallel" (p. 7). Therefore, organizational leaders need to be aware that many strategies exist for creating change and these strategies may act synergistically for turning impediments into allies for successful change. To learn more about converting resistance to change into a positive element within your organization, contact GuideStar, Inc. at (630) 301-9646 or (312) 371-1095.

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