

# Business Change Is a Personal Thing



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We have all experienced, I'm certain, the phenomenon of leadership declaring a new way of doing business that will improve work life and performance for everyone. The declaration is followed with organizational re-alignment and some training. Soon, the promised change isn't happening as expected or desired so there are some "adjustments" made within the middle ranks of management.

Eventually there is some more training and possibly some more organizational adjustment. Finally there is some acceptance that either the small change, accompanied by a perceived façade of change because of different language or metrics, is what is realistic, or there is acceptance that the change will simply take a very, very long time.

After the arguments over whether the change ever really took place have worn thin, a new idea or proposal or leader appears and the whole process starts over again. I know that this sounds familiar to readers. It's so common it's become the norm. In fact, when that new program is announced, what I just described sums up our expectations.

Why does that happen, over and over again? A certain level of "insanity" is to blame for the over-and-over part of the question, because we "do the same thing and expect different outcomes." So, why does the change itself fail?

Simply put, the change fails to occur because the behaviors of the people in the organization and, therefore, the behaviors of the organization don't change. Granted, if I have a new boss, my interaction with my boss will adjust to meet my

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new leader's expectations. However, that doesn't automatically mean that I become good at solving problems or eliminating waste or controlling variation.

Similarly, just because I've been trained in tools and techniques for product development, Lean, or Six Sigma there is no guarantee that I will use them, or that I am good at using them, or that I will use them correctly. In fact, if I don't feel a need to use them, or if there is no perceived benefit, or if there is a perceived pain that accompanies using them, I won't. In this, I'm no different from any human being.

So let's talk about what does make change successful, and we can begin with that individual. Ok, so I've been trained. Now, assuming that I am compelled to go forth and use my training, I must find a willing victim — I mean subject. You are that "subject" by the way. How do you feel?

I've never done this before and you and I both know it. You and I both know that if my attempt fails, either of us, or both of us, could be punished for the failure. How eager are we likely to be to go forth and really sink our teeth into a meaningful problem? More likely we are going to take something simple and make a big deal out of fixing it. Do you think that is what was really envisioned when the leadership declared this new program? Me either.

So, here is the million-dollar question. What is missing that drives that undesirable behavior? (Play thinking jingle here while we consider it.) The answer is ... trust. If you said, "courage," or "faith," or "confidence," those are similar, perceptive, and acceptable answers.

We two, who are stuck with the dilemma, do not trust our leadership to give us the freedom to make a learning mistake. That is because our leadership does not trust their leadership to allow a mistake and also because our leadership does not behave like it trusts us. You do not trust me, because I'm new at this and have never done it before. I do not trust you because I sense your guarded apprehension and reluctance. So, we take as little risk as possible and, at the same time, do our best to show everyone that we are succeeding.

Do you notice that none of the trust issue, or the behavior and interpersonal relationship described has anything to do with training or organization? So why should those two things make us change or succeed? They don't. Sure they are an element of the change, they can help facilitate the change, but they do not *cause* the change.

Back to trust. The trust issue is just one behavior that we can examine. There are many, many behaviors that must change to drive a change of performance, but the trust issue is the best one I know to use as an example; to portray the importance of the personal level of change implementation or change management.

Why is there no trust? One answer that appears in many leadership books and courses is a good one for this discussion, I think. That answer is that at least one of two components of trustworthiness is missing. They are as follows:

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1. Integrity or Character.
2. Credibility.

I like to add a personal observation to that age-old leadership definition of trust. It is that *those who do not trust cannot be trusted*. Perhaps that phenomenon applies to the character element, but I find it clear enough on its own to be worthy of stating.

Let's look at it. I am not trustworthy in this example because I am not credible. I have no experience doing what I have been tasked to do. Would you trust a guy with a freshly printed certificate and no experience to redesign your process, for which you are responsible and held accountable?

In the example, I do not trust you because I sense you don't trust me. Likewise, our management doesn't behave like it trusts us, or perhaps our management displays elements of poor character.

I use the trust issue, as I said, for a very good reason. It clearly demonstrates that behavior is not driven by organizational re-alignments or training. It is driven by personal characteristics and interpersonal interaction.

If we want to introduce a new product development methodology, a new process improvement program, a new business operational philosophy, or even a new enterprise software system, for that integration to be successful, we must change people's behaviors. That means we must address the change at the interpersonal level.

Here are some thoughts to help you gage your current effort, or to keep handy for your plans for the next change:

1. To accomplish the desired metrics, focus not on the system, but on the behavior.
2. Leadership, interpersonal relationships and influence, drive behavior.
3. Peer pressure, another form of interpersonal influence, is a powerful behavior changer.
4. Change agents must possess both elements of leadership: choose them based on character, if the credibility is lacking either give them the freedom to make mistakes or provide them with a credible mentor or both.
5. Leaders must also be trustworthy, must possess both elements.
6. Set expectations on behavior more so than metrics; the metrics are merely the evidence that the behavior is adjusting.
7. Be bold, not timid: create an environment of fearlessness through trust, eliminate an environment of risk averseness through lack of faith.
8. Leaders must model the desired behavior: make those "adjustments" to the management organization based not on success or failure, but only because one refuses to model the behavior.

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Whether you are a change agent, a leader, or a player caught in the middle, the advice above can make the difference between success and failure of a change initiative, or your survival of the change. Let me sum it up.

You must make yourself trustworthy. If you need credibility, point it out to your leadership and get their help through more experience, mentorship, or both. Exercise your influence on those around you, especially if you are the change agent, to the greatest degree you know how. Influence other trustworthy personnel to do the same.

Above all, model the behavior that is needed. Leaders, not only must you model the behavior, you must make it clear to everyone else what that behavior is and set the expectation that they demonstrate it too. If you see others, peers, those reporting to you, or leaders who are not modeling the behavior, politely point it out.

Chances are if someone is unwilling or unconcerned to adopt the correct behaviors, it is because they do not have faith, or do not trust in the initiative, the program, and/or their leadership. Use your interpersonal influence to influence them, and the causes of their resistance.

Organizational alignment and training make the change possible, but they don't make it happen. To make change happen, adjust everyone's behaviors. To do this, exercise the interpersonal influence of yourself, the leaders, and the change agents. Understand that that influence is only made possible through trust. Do not doubt that driving change is a very interpersonal and, therefore, personal activity.

Stay wise, friends.

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