

# Debbie Nicol: Embrace change and manage it wisely

Debbie Nicol

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Change can confound, intimidate and downright scare people at all levels of an organisation. When a manager finds himself at the helm of corporate upheaval, a warning bell should go off, a reminder that any action taken must simplify rather than burden the process. While it is essential to apply structured processes, complexity will only increase resistance levels. These tips have all brought tangible benefit to an often-intangible process:

### • Planning is the key to success

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail would be a great motto for any major turnaround project. Nothing should be hit and miss but rather guided by an executable strategic plan with milestones along the way. Ensure this planning is not done in isolation of your environment, allowing that plan to be part of an enterprise-wide approach. Investing time in this vital phase allows a strong foundation to exist for the remainder of the project. It will also illustrate a priority to real results with a 'no compromise' approach, thereby endorsing the necessity of adequate resources such as time, budget and dedicated assistance. This may seem like common sense, yet why then is it not always common practice? Without proper planning, there's often a flurry of unexpected activity. Due to the nature of this, many people react and go with the flow to survive, yet unfortunately when time moves on, resistance will emerge, eradicating opportunity for real results.

### • Remember to share the responsibility

Whether you are an operations manager or part of the change team heading the project, share the load and responsibility. Collaboration is vital for success with change, often fostering a community aspect in a non-communal situation. Specific roles must exist across all levels of the organisation with each dependent on another. This will forge a cause and effect relationship, with all parties aware of the essential contribution they make, and the consequences of not fulfilling their role.

### • Be clear on current and future state

It is all well and good to announce a restructure is pending because of a merger, or a new sales process will involve the team gaining revenue, yet whoever is leading the initiative must have clarity in their mind's eye. What does the current picture of a sales person working with the existing sales process look like? What challenges does that bring and what opportunities is it losing? See it, feel it and ensure you can describe it, as that's what people will relate to – it will provide reason for them to escape the comfort zone and dare to move to the new or future state. Change should represent hope for a better future, meaning one that is quicker, faster, more efficient, easier. Know, understand and describe the future in vivid and visual terms. Let the people's excitement build as they feel the way this new future will make their lives better.

### • Invest time in sending messages

While any activity must be linked to the level of risk the change poses, communication is one activity that never disappears from the list. There will be so much information to share at specific times, by specific people, in specific ways. The surest way to encourage the rumour mill is not to communicate. Communicate the same message in several formats so consistency will reinforce its importance. Provide ambassadors and first adopters a chance to be part of the communication. Design your messages with the needs of those who will enact the change in mind.

### • Ensure you, the change leader, has an impartial person to connect with on a personal level

This person will assist you in many ways. While strategies and action plans will support you, there will be times when you will feel lost, drained, overwhelmed and simply needing time out. This person will be able to be the shoulder you need to lean on, the eyes you need to see through a different lens. Transformation projects can become a quagmire of resistance and stress. By linking up with this impartial person, you will be able to breathe fresh air, reinvigorating yourself and clearing the mind. In the middle of these initiatives, you must identify progress and when remaining in the centre of the change, this cannot easily be identified. Remember, the team relies on you, and for that they need a strong and active leader showing strength and resilience.

Change is a corporate leader's function. Encourage confidence in a future with hope. By keeping the approach easy, regular and consistent while also building a common language, you'll not only serve yourself, but also those who are the core of your results.

*Debbie Nicol, the managing director of Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant working with strategic change, leadership and organisational development. Email her at [debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com](mailto:debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com) for thoughts about your corporate change initiative*

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