

# Get the team on board when company changes occur

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Organisations, in their simplest form being a collection of people who can resist change, are in a conundrum. There's an indisputable business case for upgrading, downsizing, realignment and replacements. Yet plans are to be executed with a resource that doesn't believe it, understand it or want it.

Business leaders are rarely aware that the level of success with change depends on them being active and visible constantly. They know it's important to contribute the required resources and take certain decisions, yet once the provision is over, many feel the remainder of the change project is the responsibility of only others. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Business managers and supervisors are rarely willing to be the "meat in the middle of the sandwich", a state that has them needing to believe in the change from above and needing them to influence others in their team to work differently, even if they themselves don't believe in it. They are expected to be a coach, a shoulder to cry on, a formula for implementation success and to give their hands, minds and hearts to making the change happen, all while ensuring productivity is not negatively affected. Is it any wonder resistance exists in the middle layer of an organisation?

Employees receive word about an impending change through channels ranging from the team briefing through to the grapevine. Either way, the message is interpreted according to their own hopes and future. For example, the employee's immediate priority is the looming deadline; the hope is to win employee of the month and the extra holiday day that comes with it; the future dream is to be promoted. Switching gears to complete any tasks relating to the change might make him miss the deadline or introduce a new process that he won't understand and/or excel at. Barriers and blockages abound for all – even for leaders who are employees themselves.

A human response to change will have an impact, more often than not, facilitating the state of a sacrificial lamb. No matter which level of an organisation you operate from, any corporate shake-up will be viewed through our own lens and evoke a range of emotions from joy to fully-fledged fear. For example, Jill Abramson, the former editor of The New York Times, viewed her recent redundancy as an opportunity to explore fresh horizons, whereas an employee may be fearful of a similar redundancy, wondering where the next pay cheque was coming from.

So which characteristics can help ensure change will not destabilise an individual but rather open opportunities?

- **Self-reliance:** The American author Bruce Barton describes self-reliance as a trait that allows us to discover something within us that is superior to circumstance. When self-reliant, nothing external can derail us. A young consultant lost the contract unexpectedly after many years. Being self-reliant, she not only decided to set up online resources in an academy to

help others in her field, but continued to research opportunities – an enterprise that became the bridge to the next big contract.

- **Resilience:** Resilience is the ability to get up time and time again when support systems collapse around you. Not only does a resilient human bounce back on their feet, but they rebound higher, faster and stronger each time. A young bright-eyed Starbucks employee forever experimented with new recipes. As economic conditions worsened, spare blenders became sparse. Not being one to allow obstacles to affect creativity, while working with her own blender she unknowingly concocted the now- famous Frappuccino.

- **Optimism:** look for the good in the long term and if it arrives, all is positive. If it doesn't arrive it will open up more channels than previously thought. A young graduate remained optimistic even when missing the promotion he had applied for, ensuring the additional time at the previous level would gain measurable results.

- **Ability to be fungible [fuhn-juh-buhl]:** adjective (especially of goods) being of such nature or kind as to be freely exchangeable or replaceable for another of like nature or kind.

In the words of Ms Abramson, we must all accept we are disposable. Look for change, accept it will knock on your door sooner rather than later, and accept it as an opportunity and not a threat. Accept that today is “replaceable” by tomorrow. Be ready to accept new skills and environments as new opportunities.

Without the people fully on-board, a well-intended financial investment will simply not yield return. How does your organisation identify and reward self-reliance, resilience, optimism and “fungibility”? After all, they are the traits that will take your organisation and people forward.

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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