

## REDUCE RESISTANCE TO CHANCE

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In relation to change, there are two types of organizations: static and dynamic. Static organizations rarely change; their management mantra is, “It worked in the past, so it should work in the future,” or “We have always done it this way.” By contrast, in dynamic organizations, change is a way of life – not just tolerated, but positively anticipated. The management mantra is, “What did we learn today that will help us to be better tomorrow? We can’t improve and become better without change.”

What type of organization is yours? The truth is, if you want to stay in business, you don’t have a choice. To become static is to perish; to become dynamic improves your chances of survival. Notice I didn’t say that change guarantees success, because not all change is progress. But failure to change in a dynamic business climate ultimately guarantees failure.

Given the above, below are two techniques that will help you reduce employees’ natural resistance to change to a manageable level.

### **Highlight What Won’t Change**

When change is necessary, be sure to mention a few valued standards that are not going to change. For example, let’s assume you are changing your computer software. Your employees have become skilled and comfortable with the old software. Their knowledge and capability with the old system has resulted in good performance, positive reinforcement, fewer errors, and, therefore, high self-esteem. Remember, self-esteem and stress run inversely; as self esteem goes up, stress goes down. Announcing that the old software is being scrapped ignites the following thought process, conscious or unconscious, in employees:

“My excellent skills, quality output, high self-esteem, and low stress are linked to the old software. The new software is going to reverse all that. . . Hey, wait a minute!”

To minimize this normal resistance behavior, emphasize the benefits of the change and what is not changing. You may offer the following:

“This new software will not only improve efficiency, reduce your workload, and be less expensive to support, but it allows us to continue to:

- \* Use our current database
- \* Use our present support systems, which are totally compatible with the enhanced software
- \* Use the same report content and format

When we highlight what is not changing, people tend to view the changes in a broader context (one standard is changing, but three are not). However, if you fail to remind employees of those unchanged standards, they often view the change from the wrong perspective: “They are changing everything at work. . . .”

My friend, Jim Jacobus, said it best: “The price of progress is the pain of change.” Always sell the benefits of the change to those who must deal with the change and anchor the change in a larger, more stable context.

### **Unlock Category II Decisions**

A second technique I have used with clients involves employee decision-making in accordance with the two categories of change. Category I decisions are not negotiable; they are the “givens” that are not open for debate or discussion. Category II decisions are negotiable; they are on the table for discussion and debate.

Senior executives sometimes fail to appreciate the important distinction between Categories I and II. They feel that the process used for major change decisions, Category I, also applies to the smaller decisions. As a result, everyone below the top executives believes they have no say or input in the change. As a result, employees feel they are being changed – change is happening to them. This belief causes negative feelings and responses that delay or inhibit the smooth implementation of change.

The truth is that most people in these circumstances do not like being altered; they see themselves as victims, swirled frantically about on the winds of change. They feel helpless, uninvolved, uninformed – and stressed. In addition to maintaining valuable standards, there is much less resistance to change when people are involved in the decision-making process, which gives them a modicum of control over their world.

In contrast, if senior management fences Category I decisions off but offers the next level some Category II latitude, junior management can help make decisions, influence policy, and become involved, which creates a sense of ownership, better communication, and less resistance. Junior management can, in turn, fence off any Category I issues at their level and involve their subordinates in the Category II decisions. The cascading effect turns many people, who would otherwise have been “victims,” into proactive partners.

For example: If top management announces the company is going to move its headquarters to XYZ building and will open for business in the new location on July 30, 2009 (Category I), the following Category II decisions can be left to department heads:

1. Exact timing of the move
2. Choice of moving company
3. Modified work schedule during the move

Let’s assume that the department heads decide the dates of the move will be June 20 – 30 (Category I – Exact timing of the move is no longer negotiable), but confer Category II

status on items 2 and 3, allowing those decisions to be made at the next level; i.e., branch managers who will, in turn, claim some Categories I decisions for themselves, but move some Category II decisions to their subordinates for action. This cascading effect allows the total decision-making process to involve many people at several levels. Such a decision-making strategy works wonders in getting people in the “change boat,” because participation is widespread and control is shared.

In my consulting career, I have seen many companies adapt these two strategies to maximize the progress and minimize the pain. You cannot eliminate resistance; it is human nature. But, skilled leaders focus that “resistance energy” toward positive changes.