

MANAGING CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

by: Marilyn W. Allemann, L.C.S.W., CPC

“People underestimate their capacity for change. There is never a right time to do a difficult thing. A leader’s job is to help people have a vision of their potential.”

-- John Porter

Change is inevitable and never easy. Many people’s reaction to change is based on fear of the unknown and their reactions can be unpredictable and irrational. Change needs to be understood and managed in a way that people can cope with it effectively. Responsibility for implementing change lies with the management and executives of the organization. Because change is difficult, managers logically need to be a settling influence. The manager has a responsibility to facilitate and enable change and can do so by using face-to-face communication to handle difficult or sensitive aspects of the organizational change.

Some changes need to be made quickly, so be sure to evaluate if, in fact, the change needs to be quickly implemented. Quick changes prevent proper consultation and involvement which may lead to increased resistance and other difficulties that take time to resolve. For more complex changes, be sure to consult with those involved to get them to buy in and support the proposed changes, be sure to allow sufficient time to complete the changes and be able to maintain current organizational operations.

An important step in managing change is building awareness about the need for change and creating a desire for change among employees. The initial communication should be typically designed to create awareness around the business reasons for the change and the risks of not changing. At each step in the process communications should be designed to share the right message at the right time. If possible, email or written notices should be avoided as they often are ineffective in conveying and developing understanding of the planned change.

One secret to successfully managing change is effective communication. For example, it is important to define the change, provide the rationale for the change, whom will it impact, be open to questions and challenges, and finally clarify that there is a clear and concise understanding of the change. Making sure that the people affected by the change understand the need for change and have a clear understanding as to how the change will effect them is critical. Participation, involvement and early communication are the most important factors. Involving and informing employees creates a sense of ownership and familiarity among those affected by the change. Additionally, involving employees in designing and implementing the change will increase the chances of success.

John P. Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor and a leading expert on organizational change describes in his books “Leading Change” and “The Heart of Change” eight key principles regarding understanding and managing change. Here is a brief summary of Mr. Kotter’s eight step change model:

- 1) **Increase urgency** -inspire people to move, make objectives real and relevant.
- 2) **Build the guiding team** - get the right people with the right commitment and mix of skills.
- 3) **Get the vision right** - get the team to establish a simple vision and strategy.
- 4) **Communicate for buy-in** - involve as many people as possible, communicate the essentials, and appeal and respond to people’s needs. De-clutter communication.

- 5) **Empower action** - remove obstacles, enable constructive feedback - reward and recognize progress and achievements.
- 6) **Create short-term wins** - set aims that are easy to achieve.
- 7) **Don't let up** - foster and encourage determination and persistence - encourage ongoing progress reporting.
- 8) **Make change stick** - reinforce the value of successful change via recruitment, promotion, and new change leaders.

To successfully manage change remember to focus on maintaining clear lines of communication with your employees so that they understand what is coming and how it will affect them. Chances are they will appreciate you for it and will be more productive both before and after the change.

About the Author:

Marilynn W. Allemann is a highly qualified executive and personal coach, organizational consultant, trainer, and licensed clinical social worker. Following many years in the corporate environment and as a psychotherapist in private practice she founded Masters Executive Coaching. She has worked with leaders of organizations, management teams, sales executives and individuals since 1996. In her role as a coach Marilynn provides individual and executive team coaching and training in the areas of transitions, individual performance, career development, leadership, executive development and team and corporate performance. Marilynn brings a competent and collaborative approach to successfully working with her clients.

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