



Leading Change

in turbulent and uncertain times

Humans can deal with almost anything if they know what they have to deal with. This is one of the most difficult thing about change → it almost always involves uncertainty. A desire for power and control over one's life is a basic human drive. The uncertainty attached to organizational change almost inevitably produces anxiety and loss of control. We don't know how far away the other side is – or even if there is another side.



About the Author

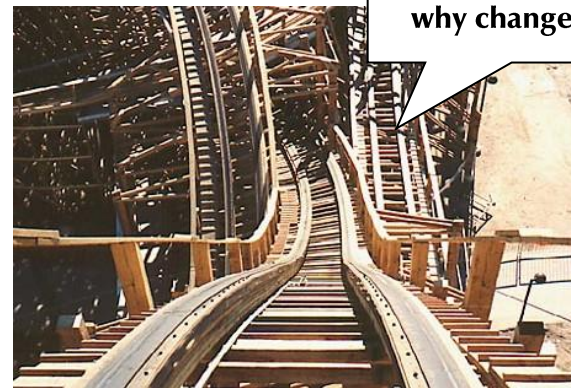
TJ Titcomb has been helping organizations manage change, develop leaders and prevent problems for more than forty years. She holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and a PhD in organizational development. Now mostly retired, Dr. Titcomb is sharing workbooks from presentations she has given at conferences.

The Truth about Change

The one constant in life is change. Humans have been blessed with a tremendous ability to adapt. They are able to survive in a wider range of environments than any other living creature. This is not to say that change is easy for us. The only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper.

Just living with the expectation of change – whether good or bad – can be stressful, perhaps even more than the change itself. We need to be able to remain open and flexible so we can manage the one constant truth of our lives ... **CHANGE.**

**Identify
Seven Reasons
why change is hard**

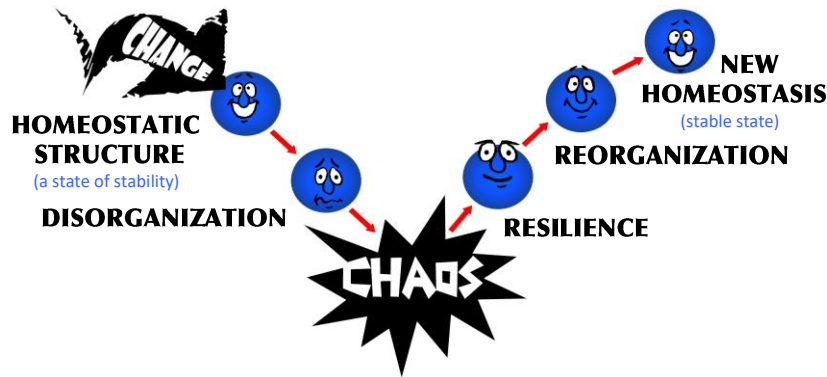


Sometimes it feels like we're on a never-ending roller coaster – and not one of the fun ones. Today's changes feel like a ride on a rickety old wooden coaster with no safety bars or belts.

Is change hard for you? Probably the most honest answer is, *it depends* ...

Process of Change

When biologist Claude Bernard first described the process of change more than 150 years ago, he saw change being followed by a period of homeostasis – stability – where organisms could regroup and gather strength.



Yesterday's changes came at a slower pace. People had a chance to get used to them before the next one had to be faced.

The rate of change is accelerating. Today's changes come so fast we don't get a chance to get used to a change before new ones are dumped on us.

A common leadership mistake is failing to identify and manage **change overload**. Too many changes at one time cause all employees to reach change saturation and doom the change effort. And remember it's not just at work. Many of your team members are dealing with change in various areas of their lives. What warning signs might you see of change exhaustion? How should you respond?

CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- ➔ Don't take it personally.
- ➔ Don't try to make it all better.

Assess Changes on the Job

Identify some of the changes at work in the last 3-5 years. List your **assessment** of each as ● Green (fix a pothole), ● Yellow (planned bridge replacement) or ● Red (close for a road you drive home on for six months) and its **magnitude** (size, importance, consequences) ...

WORK CHANGE	1 ←←← MAGNITUDE →→→ 10
● ● ● _____	
● ● ● _____	
● ● ● _____	
● ● ● _____	
● ● ● _____	
● ● ● _____	

How would other members of your team rate these same events? Different people have different reactions. There's almost always at least one surprise response.



Not every change is hard to manage. Organizational changes can be categorized as

- Red** Light → "why in the world are we doing this ?!"
- Yellow** Light → "I'll wait and see . . ."
- Green** Light → "it's about time!"

Create Barriers to Change

In the workplace, it is often not the change itself that is the problem. How the change is chosen, introduced, explained, and implemented affects how it works out. Think of a change that was handled badly. What made it bad? How did leadership create or add to barriers to the change? What could have been done differently?



The central challenge [in organizational change] is not strategy, not systems, not culture ... The core problem without question is changing people's behavior.

– John Kotter, *The Heart of Change*

CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

The change process is often painful in Burn-Out Prone Environments. Your group may be a BOPE if you ...

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ have consistently high stress levels | ☐ demand perfection |
| ☐ expect more and more from people | ☐ don't reward extra effort |
| ☐ promise things not delivered | ☐ discourage input/feedback |
| ☐ encourage hierarchical relationships and communication flow | |

The Building Blocks

Successful organizational change doesn't just happen.

It is built, block by block, with conscious, planned actions by leaders in the organization.



CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

Continually monitor these seven building blocks as you lead change. Stop and ask yourself, *How am I doing in each area?* Solicit feedback. Make adjustments as needed ...

- ☐ Plan purposeful change
- ☐ Have realistic expectations
- ☐ Share information
- ☐ Ask for and accept participation
- ☐ Encourage and use resistance
- ☐ Work on my own reaction
- ☐ Learn from experience



"There's talk of innovation out here. Winds of change are headed your way. Lock your door, pull the shades and hide under your desk."



Plan purposeful change

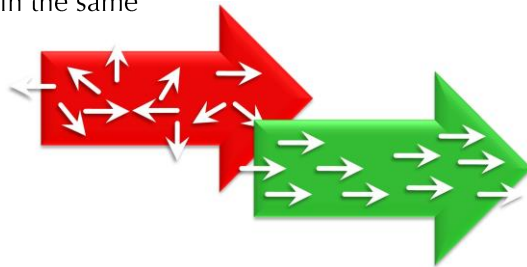
Sometimes employees suspect changes are made just for the sake of change. Purposeful change is always easier to promote. That starts with thoughtful planning. Know – and be able to explain to anyone at any time – the answer to the most important question:

Why is this specific change happening now?

If you don't have a ready answer to that, you're not ready to move forward with change. Planning purposeful change means thinking through issues such as . . .

- . . . what led us to decide a change is needed?
- . . . what alternatives have we considered?
- . . . why was this change chosen as the best option?

Purposeful change happens when you link the change to your mission and goals. That link helps the change make sense and connects staff to the bigger picture. Everyone is working together to accomplish something. In healthy organizations everyone is moving in the same direction with a common vision and mission.



CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- How will this change enhance our services or promote our mission?
- How will it help us achieve our goals?
- How will it benefit our residents, our staff, our community?
- How will it move us closer to our vision?



Have realistic expectations



The plan is the smallest and easiest part of the change process. The hidden part of the iceberg that sinks many change efforts is the people factor.

Organizations are composed of individuals who bring their own distinct styles, perspectives, and responses to change. Change stress is increased if we expect everyone to respond in the same way. It helps to remember that people will move along and respond in their own unique style – and at their own pace. Resilience is also deeply affected by what else is going in our lives.

Don't be surprised by lowered productivity, increased irritability, lowered concentration, more mistakes. It will take time – more than you anticipate – to move from feelings of distress and anxiety to previous levels of productivity and service

VICTIMS

“Life is hard and then you die”

feels powerless – gets stuck
spreads rumors – sabotages
open or subtle anger
hostile to mgmt - promotes
negative responses in others

15%

SURVIVORS

“Hope for best – plan for worst”

plays by the book - focuses
on daily tasks – lays low
avoids risk - shields up
on the fence - can get caught
up in negative politics

70%

NAVIGATORS

“Life is Difficult but Misery is Optional”

rolls with punches - becomes
part of change – accepts +
moves forward – uses
coping skills – looks at
opportunities

15%

The change itself is often hard for team members to deal with. It becomes much more painful if a **“second injury”** occurs. People expect a certain level of help and understanding from leaders. Employee distress increases dramatically when supervisors and managers don't consistently provide this expected support. What are simple, specific things you could do to be **supportive** of your team?

CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- Develop a timetable for implementation that allows sufficient time for people to discuss and deal with their reactions



Share Information

Because specifics are often not available in the middle of change, managers tend to hold off until they have the latest, most complete information. The most common remark from survivors of major organizational change is that it would have been handled better with more communication.

People cope better when armed with information – they need to know **WHAT** is being changed – **WHO** is involved in the change – **WHEN** it will happen – **HOW** it will be accomplished – and **WHY** the change is being made.

Since nature abhors a vacuum, when information is not provided, it will be created. Rumors develop around inadequately explained changes. It is also easier for those already resisting the change to concoct or spread disinformation, especially when there are no concrete facts available.

Front-line supervisors are the critical link. They serve both as the employees' advocate and management's primary information channel. Staff need to trust the supervisor does both these jobs well – and seeing is the only road to believing. What might supervisors say or do to shut down conversation?



CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- During uncertain times, people's hypocrisy radar is extra sharp. Employees will be watching carefully for changes that are not in alignment with the mission or violate core values. How the change is implemented also need to reflect mission/values.
- Tell the truth! If you don't know, say *I don't know*. If you can find out, say you will – and follow through promptly. If you know you can't find the answer, tell them that truth.
- Create a variety of ways to keep people informed. Make sure there are two-way avenues and all sites/shifts have equal access to info.



Ask for participation

People don't resist change; they resist **being changed**. Involving employees from the earliest planning stages increases each person's investment.

Active participation also minimizes people's sense of loss of control. Much of the stress of change comes from feeling no control over what is happening.

How can we involve workers in the changes?

What barriers exist to full participation?

What can we do to get over, under, around or through those barriers?

It's not unusual to have a hard time getting active participation from employees. Many have been burned by past experiences with poorly handled org changes. Employees must believe their opinions will be heard and given careful and respectful consideration.

If you truly want participation, you need to start by not falling in love with your plans. Be open to fresh perspectives and ideas from team members. Be willing to adjust and revise. Your willingness to incorporate employees ideas into the plan demonstrates that participation is worthwhile.

CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- Identify a variety of ways to involve employees at every step in the change process.
- If your culture is not set up to actually use employee input, don't set workers up for disappointment. There are few things more demoralizing than being asked to participate and then having that input ignored, dismissed, criticized ...



Encourage + use resistance

People are likely to resist change for four reasons: uncertainty, concern over personal loss, belief the change is not in the best interest of the organization, and belief that the change is not in their own best interest. Purposeful change linked to mission/goals – done with extensive information sharing and participation – addresses most of these issues.

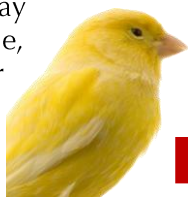
Change theorists suggest there are three kinds of resistance:

- TYPE 1** → don't **understand** the idea
- TYPE 2** → don't **like** the idea
- TYPE 3** → don't **trust** the proponents of the idea

Most people have Type 2 and 3 resistance but managers generally try to resolve issues by focusing on Type 1. They keep explaining instead of truly listening to staff concerns.

Don't try to talk people out of their reactions. The result will be they will feel unheard – and resistance will go underground and become entrenched. Above ground resistance is always easier to deal with.

Keep in mind that what is labeled as “resistance” may actually be knowledge/experience about possible pitfalls and problems with the planned change. Open discussion of concerns should be encouraged. You can use this “resistance” to create a better and more successful change. Also consider that the folks we dismiss as negative may be the canaries in the coal mine, warning us of serious issues or dangers ahead..



CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- ➔ Reduce resistance by making sure people have answers to their most important questions: *What will happen to me? How will this affect what I do? What will be expected of me? Will-FM: What's In It For Me?*
- ➔ Solicit resistance by asking (and being open to any response): *What are your concerns? What obstacles and barriers will get in the way of this happening?*



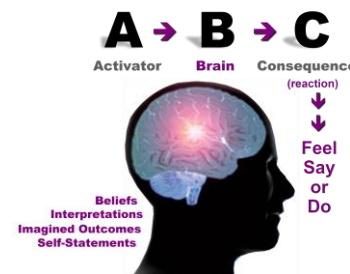
Work on your reactions

Take control of your reactions by challenging how your brain interprets what is happening. Fight the pessimism that flows from the unconscious, hidden beliefs of the 3 Ps:

- **PERMANENCE** – this one event is going to ruin my life for the next 300 years
- **PERVASIVENESS** – because this is happening in this part of my life, everything else is rotten, too
- **PERSONALIZATION/BLAME** – it's all my fault that this is going badly – I should be handling this better

Talk back and talk smart to sneaky irrational thinking. Use coping self-statements – short, punchy, positive comments you make to yourself. “Distanced self-talk” is the most effective approach: *You can do this* rather than *I can do this*.

NOTE: check out the mini-workbook on Stress for more tips



CHANGE LEADER TIPS:

- ➔ Changing your reaction starts with knowing the source of all reactions. Something happens to you [**A the Activator**] your **Brain [B]** processes the event and produces the reaction [**C the Consequence**]. The most effective way to change your reaction is to focus on the “B” step – your beliefs, interpretations, images of consequences and self-statements that happen at the speed of light. Take your brain off auto-pilot and slow down that process.



Learn from experience

Many organizations skip over the last step. When the change has been fully implemented and things are somewhat stable again, get together with the key people involved. Debriefing is a common and effective strategy for any group that handles tough stuff. Take the time so you can prevent problems next time. Talk openly about the change experience. Be brutally honest. Take notes on the discussion and file it where you can find it to help you with the next big change.

What did we do right? _____

What should have been handled differently? _____

What was surprising? _____

What should we start doing, stop doing or keep doing: _____



Some Views of Change

The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence – it is to act with yesterday's logic.

– Peter Drucker

Few things are more important during a change event than communication from leaders who can paint a clear and confidence-inspiring vision of the future.

– Sarah Clayton

Man is disturbed not by events but by his view of them.

– Epictetus

Uncertain times requires leadership that saturates the organization.

– Ron Zemke

I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I say is they must change if they are to get better.

– Georg C. Lichtenburg

The future ain't what it used to be.

– Yogi Berra

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

– Lao Tzu

There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.

– Louis L'Amour

And the US Marine Corps pares its advice on being flexible by encouraging its members to be

Semper Gumby





Track Leadership Actions

m

Keep a record of when you use Change Leader Ideas / Techniques / Approaches / Attitudes

Plan purposeful change: Why is this change happening? Why is it happening now? How does the change fit with our vision, mission and values? How will it benefit customers, team members, the company, and the community?

Have realistic expectations: What have I observed about the style of each of my team members? Who tends to “roll with the punches”? Who is more likely to struggle with change? Who might be vulnerable because of other issues right now?

Share information: What steps have I taken to make sure people know what is happening and when? Have I created a variety of communication approaches? Have I made myself available to all shifts and locations for informal conversations about the changes?

Ask for and accept participation: What have I done to get input from team members? Does every shift and work group have the opportunity to participate? How have I used the feedback and suggestions from team members? How have I let them know that?

Encourage and use resistance: Have I truly been open to hearing contrary points of view? What did I do to make it safe to express concerns? How did I help people move from complaints to problem solving? What did the negative folks teach me?

Work on my own reactions: What specific actions did I take to increase my resilience and manage stress? How did I challenge negative thinking? What coping self-statements did I use? Who did I use as my support system? Did I see a change in my reaction?

Learn from experience: What have I learned from this change process? What worked well? What will I do differently the next time? How will I make sure I remember what I've learned and use them the next time I am called on to lead change?

Resources to Learn More

- Cohen, *The Heart of Change Field Guide*
- Covey, *The Speed of Trust*
- Fullan, *The 6 Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do*
- Hiatt & Creasey, *Change Management: The People Side of Change*
- Kraemer, *From Values to Action*
- Luecke, *Managing Change and Transition*
- McChesney et al, *The Four Disciplines of Execution*
- Seligman, *Learned Optimism*

- UC Irvine, *Change Management Tools*
- [apa.org/topics/stress](https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/resources)
resources from the American Psychological Association

- Jim Hemerling, *5 Ways to lead in an era of constant change*
- John Kotter, *Change Management vs. Change Leadership: What's the Difference?*
- Mind Tools, *Lewin's Change Management Model*
- Simon Sinek, *The Truth about CHANGE*



**True leadership is the art of
changing a group from what it is
to what it ought to be.**

Virginia Allan