

Leading Others Through Change

In today's world, change is your constant companion. It often creates uncertainty about your future and the future of your business. As a leader who is responsible for helping others navigate change, you need to understand its anatomy, which moves through three stages: an ending phase, an exploratory

BY KAY CANNON

phase and an execution phase. Resistance to change most frequently occurs when leaders rush to execute reforms without first helping others through the ending and exploratory phases.

The Ending Phase

Change comes in both positive and negative forms, but it always begins with an ending. Something that "was" no longer "is." With an ending, it is perfectly normal to experience loss or grief. Unfortunately, many leaders don't recognize this sense of loss. Instead, they expect people to march stoically ahead.

When these feelings of loss aren't allowed to be expressed, they build up and cause troublesome behaviors in the workplace. Allow your employees to express their grief, loss and uncertainty. It helps them move past their fears and prepares them for the next phase of change – exploration.

Change comes in both positive and negative forms, but it always begins with an ending.

The Exploratory Phase

The exploratory phase of change is filled with questions, confusion and uncertainty. Common questions include: "What's next? What does this mean for me? Where do I go from here?" As the leader, you must help people discover

their own answers to these questions.

Resistance and individual reactions to change are usually tied to the impact we perceive the shift has on our identity, which is defined by various descriptive labels: mother, husband, business owner, young person, old person, teacher, co-worker, employee, volunteer. These labels describe who we are, what we do and how we fit into the bigger picture. With change, these labels no longer fit, and we must re-define who we are and what we do within the context of the new environment. As the leader, create open dialogue about how the change may or may not be affecting people's perception of self. Help your team discover new labels to describe themselves and their roles.

Besides affecting our identities, change also impacts our expectations. We expect to be paid if we come to work. We expect chocolate cake to taste like chocolate. Expectations are learned based upon the outcomes of our past experiences and are

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 26)

interwoven into almost everything we do and feel. Change disrupts our expectations and can leave us feeling angry, confused or disappointed. Help your employees realize that expectations are beliefs – not guarantees or rights. Ask the hard question: “What’s the objective truth in this situation?” Truthfully answering this question helps people remove their personal filters and see how their performance relates to a bigger objective. Change brings new expectations. Clearly outline the new expectations associated with the change and discuss how these differ from prior beliefs.

Our perception of whether change is positive or negative often hinges upon the degree of control we think we have over the situation. The greater the control, the more positive we tend to view the change. As our perceived control decreases, our view of the change also tends to become more negative, and we see ourselves as victims. As the leader, reinforce that each person completely controls the decisions he makes about the change. Although we may not be able to control external events, we do control our reactions to them. All people are free to accept or reject change and assume complete responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. Your role



Help your team discover new labels to describe themselves and their roles.

as the leader is to make sure everyone has the information they need – including the possible consequences – to make an informed decision.

After you help employees identify their own personal reactions to change, ask them to privately answer the following questions:

- What am I afraid of losing?
- What is the truth in this situation?



KAY CANNON helps people master the art of enlightened leadership, create joyful prosperity and unleash spiritual passion and purpose. She can be reached at kcannon@diamondingenuity.com. To learn more about mastering the art of enlightened leadership, browse the library of free articles and discover the amazing secrets behind what makes people do what they do, visit www.diamondingenuity.com.

- What is the first step toward making this a positive experience?

- What information do I need?

Engage the staff in an open discussion about these questions. Identify recurring themes and issues that may represent obstacles to moving forward successfully with the new initiative. Work with your employees to develop an action plan. Encourage your staff to actively explore possibilities with you to create the individual and staff commitment that’s crucial to the success of the final phase of change – strategy execution.

The Execution Stage

The ultimate success of any change initiative hinges upon how well your employees execute the strategy. You may have an inspiring vision and a detailed plan, but if you can’t successfully lead others to execute it, your initiative will fail. Make sure your staff is fully informed, confident and ready to move forward. ■