

## **Proven Strategies for Implementing Change**

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### **Introduction**

Transforming organizations through conscious leadership is what Dan Miller has been doing for over 35 years. His experiences as front-line supervisor, HR/safety director, training director, and organizational consultant have provided him with real-world perspectives on the challenges of implementing changes. In his work with over 3,000 organizations of all shapes and sizes, he has seen the powerful results of intentionally managing the process of change. When employees, supervisors, managers, and senior leaders take healthy responsibility for their contribution to the change process, safety, quality, and productivity are impacted in positive ways.

### **Change Agents**

In this paper, the term “change agent” will refer to two different roles that people can play in the change and transition process. The people who are directly involved in implementing a change of some kind play a significant role. Some examples are a manager rolling out a LEAN process, supervisor leading the introduction of a behavior observation process in their department, safety committee members helping to support a LO/TO procedure change. They have responsibility and accountability for the change to produce the desired outcomes of improved reliability, increased percentage safe work practices, or better quality. Implementers need to be mindful, aware, and conscious of how their approach to change management impacts others.

Change agents often overlook the necessity to take care of themselves. People need to be aware of, and in touch with how the changes that are coming their way are impacting them both physically and emotionally. Whether you are an implementer of change or the person receiving the change, having strategies to support yourself is essential. Unfortunately, most people do not take the time to self manage the change process, which negatively affects themselves and others.

The turbulence and disruption that accompanies the change process can leave people disoriented and needing support in a variety of ways. Change agents should be constantly aware of the human condition, its complex nature, and the need to get support for themselves and provide it to others.

## **Principles of Change and Transition**

There are decades of research that support the notion that change and transition are quite different. Change is defined as a physical event that occurs in an organization or to an individual. Examples include:

1. A child graduating from kindergarten and beginning first grade.
2. A person transferring from one department to another.
3. The size of a company changing from 150 employees to 225 employees.
4. The department going from 500 workers to 350 workers.

Change is linear in nature. Implementing a new work process requires training to happen or software to be installed by a specific date, and the new forms on the shelf by this point in time. Change agents employ techniques that help themselves and others along the Gantt chart journey of change management. People like to know who is doing what by when. Transition, is defined as the psychological experience people have in response to the physical changes going on around them.

Unlike the linear aspects of change, transition is organic in nature, having a variety of phases that people move through. These phases are described as endings / the neutral zone / new beginnings. There must be an intentional effort to help people disengage from the old ways, capitalize on the chaos and confusion of the change, and ensure the new way of doing things becomes fully engaged throughout the organization. Change agents should be keenly aware of the three phases of transition and use strategies that support themselves and others through the emotional releases, endless confusion and all aspects of the human condition that get triggered by the psychological responses to change.

## **Organizational Impacts**

Decades of research conducted by some of the most respected organizational development professionals report that 35% +/- of changes that were implemented with the intention to improve reliability, reduce waste, or positively impact other operational indicators actually leave the organization performing at lower levels and its employees frustrated, confused, and de-motivated. The costs associated with this level of performance takes a toll on both the bottom line and the human condition. When people at all levels of the organization approach the change and transition process using strategies that enhance understanding, there is less resistance, increased engagement and the desired outcomes are accomplished.

## **Human Needs-Based Approach**

The human condition is always present during the change and transition process. In the long run, it is the people on the floor, in the field, and at the office that will be implementing the new process, procedure, or program. It is these people who will say good-bye to friends / co-workers, learn new computer programs, change physical locations and be impacted in a variety of ways.

Change agents understand that people have a variety of needs like contribution, purpose, appreciation, creativity, support, cooperation, understanding, clarity, empathy, safety, communication, relationships, friendship, order, independence, and harmony. During changing times, the stability of human needs become challenged, resulting in peoples needs being unmet. A key role of change agents is to be present with the emotional expressions of themselves and others, help connect the feelings with the underlying needs, and support individuals or groups in creating strategies to get their needs met.

Another important consideration that relates to the emotional component of change management is the grief cycle. Once again, there are many models that depict the different phases people experience when they are exposed to change. Whether the life event or stimulus is moving your home and family, making different health and wellness choices, or pursuing a new job, the human psyche reacts, feelings are released, and people need change agents to help them navigate these sometimes painful moments. As people move in and out of the five stages of the grief cycle their ability to listen and absorb organizational messages is reduced creating disconnection, resistance, and miscommunication.

The intention of this paper is to help change agents increase their ability to have intentional discussions in ways that effectively support the change and transition process.

## **Strategies for Leading Change and Transition**

### Sell the Problem

Has the problem been “sold” – are people aware of why change is necessary? When people understand what is driving the change, resistance is reduced. Let people know about market conditions, resource availability, operational costs, financial performance or whatever is needed for folks to realize there is a problem and things need to change. An example is a new software program is installed and the users report they didn’t know there was a problem with the old one. The flip side of selling the problem is letting people know what is at stake if we don’t change. What are the consequences to me personally, the department or the organization if the problem is not resolved? Selling the problem requires an enormous amount of communication in all directions.

### 6 × 3 Communication

#### Tell–Show–Do

This strategy is about telling people 6 times in a variety of ways about the problem, the vision of the future state or what ever else they need to hear to get the message. It’s about showing people 6 times in a variety of ways about the purpose of the change, the plan moving forward and whatever else they need to see to get the message. It’s about people doing the new behaviors, operating the new procedure, etc. 6 times for people to integrate the new beginning and make it a way of life. There are two reasons for this strategy. First, when people are in denial, shock, bargaining, depression, or feeling all of the emotions stimulated by the grief cycle, their ability to hear change messages is clearly reduced. It requires a variety of approaches and a multitude of times to increase the probability that the message sent is received in this defensive rich environment. Secondly, we know that the communication process is complex, and only about half of what is said by the sender is not received accurately by the listener. When this occurs, and it

happens frequently, information is misinterpreted, gossip levels raise and interpersonal dramas escalate to unproductive levels. It is essential that the organization build in feedback loops to prevent these things from occurring. Three questions that need to be asked frequently are; what do you want more of, what do you want less of, and what do you appreciate that we have been doing?

### Conscious Listening

A key part of having intentional discussions face-to-face is the opportunity to listen and hold the space for people to express themselves and be heard. Too often, small concerns snowball into insurmountable obstacles, simply because no one took the time to listen and resolve the issue. Major breakthroughs in a change process start to take place when people feel heard.

Remember the following when you are listening and interacting with another.

1. Mirror listening: Repeat back to verify that the message was accurately sent and received. “What I heard you say was ...” “to be sure I understand you ...” You may need to request more specific information or examples of their concerns to gain more clarity.
2. Needs and feelings: Helping people connect and identify their needs in a judgment-free environment is a tremendous gift. When people are stuck in the drama produced by change, they are often struggling to express their needs and feelings to someone who will listen from a place of understanding and compassion.
3. Requests / agreements: In the spirit of inviting people to take responsibility for their part in the change process, it is important that all parties involved understand clearly what is expected. Being clear on specific times, places and desired behaviors is essential for successful change. When people express confusion, change agents make every effort to provide clear expectations of the path forward in measurable and observable terms. They also encourage others to make clear requests to the appropriate people with the intention to contribute to the well being of themselves or others. In terms of agreements, do what you say you will do, when you say you’ll do it, and follow up.

### Face-to-Face Communication

One of the most powerful strategies for creating effective change is face-to-face interactions. When people are the grips of the grief cycle, or lost in the chaos of the neutral zone, or trying to figure out their role in the new beginning they need the kind of connection and listening that only happens in person. Face-to-face communication provides a wonderful opportunity to be aware of non-verbal expressions, tone of voice and the numerous messages that are exchangeable only in person. To ensure change messages are being sent and received effectively, change agents must get out of their offices and listen. Sometimes face-to-face means one to one and other times it may be in a group setting. High-tech communication tools tend to hinder, rather than improve the process of communication. No one has ever successfully changed an organization by communications via e-mails, faxes, websites or power point presentations. If connecting in person is not possible, the phone can be a powerful tool for sharing.

### Full loop Communication

The change process increases the quantity and intensity of questions, rumors, concerns, solutions, and discussions of possibility. Each and every conversation holds enormous weight in the eyes, ears, and hearts of those needing clarity, understanding, direction, and support. The purpose of full loop communication to follow-up with each and every person and provide them with as much

information as possible regarding their concerns, ideas or what ever was discussed in your conversation with them. Full loop communication reduces rumors and gossip in addition to meeting people's need for security, understanding and being valued. When change agents listen fully, obtain answers and information to the best of their ability, and provide people with a follow-up conversation combined with more listening, the change and transition process is smoother and more effective.

### Engagement and Involvement

Representatives of the effected groups need to be involved in the problem-solving process before the changes are decided on. There is a direct connection between involvement and commitment. When people are engaged in creating their future and provided the opportunity to share their ideas they usually have more buy-in. These representatives often become the change agents in their work groups and departments. Another aspect of involvement is selecting the right people for the transition strategy or change plan task. Example: If there is a relationship issue between people, it is best to send a change agent with effective people skills to help resolve the situation. On the other hand, if a work group or individual is having a difficult time accepting the problem, then utilizing a change agent who can share data on the business impacts can be very effective. Another aspect of the engagement strategy is to empower those organizational members with fire in their bellies and a real desire to make the change a reality. It is important to know they may not have the most seniority or tribal knowledge. These change agents can be found at all levels and roles in the organization. Seek them out and get them involved because they will bring essential energy and focus to your change effort.

### The Marathon Effect

In marathon races the people with the fastest time trials start at the front of the pack while those who are slower are placed in the back. The starting gun goes off and those in the back don't hear it, they only get the wave of information that the race has started. As the race proceeds the distance between the faster runners and slower ones gets bigger. At some point in the race the fast runners cross the finish line and start thinking about the next race while the slower ones are still struggling up the hills and considering bailing out entirely. This analogy holds true in change and transition management as it relates to the leaders in an organization. Leaders are usually the first ones to hear about the proposed changes or they may even be the originators of the change initiative. Because of this fact they discuss it with their colleagues, share the ideas with friends, or simply mull it over in their minds hundreds of times. All of this activity provides them with time to integrate the concepts related to the change and start them down the transition process ahead of everyone else. This integration and reflection time puts them considerably ahead of others when the change is finally implemented. For everyone else involved in the change, it may be the first time they are receiving the message about the change. What happens is that the leaders become frustrated that things are not moving as fast as they would like. Meanwhile, the rest of the organization is floundering because it is their first exposure to the proposed changes and they are just beginning the journey. Implementers need to be aware of the marathon effect, and meet people wherever they are in the transition process rather than charging ahead and blaming people for not being further along in the change journey. Leaders, to be effective change agents, need to meet people where they are in the three-phase transition process and be aware of when they are getting ahead of their followers.

### Transition Management Group

There are people in the organization that can provide valuable insights and feedback to the change agents. This group should include representatives of those being affected by the change, and have effective links with the decision makers. Often, they are the informal leaders closest to the people implementing the change and are trusted by their coworkers. This trust provides a conduit for learning how folks are feeling and responding to the changes in real time. They hear and see things that the leaders will not. In short, they have their fingers on the pulse of how people are handling endings and letting go of the past, where they are in the chaos of the neutral zone, and how they are handling the struggles of adopting new behaviors and using new processes.

### Change Management Plan

The human need for security is universal. When people know what the plan is to implement the change(s), their security levels go way up. Developing a Gant chart or some other tool to let people know who is going to do what by when can go a long ways towards reducing anxiety, opening communication, and producing the desired results. Once again, the change plan needs 6x3 communication, full loop communication and an abundance of listening. When the plan is modified, let people know why and as soon as possible.

### Who is losing what

In the endings phase of transition, people lose relationships, power, status, control of their destiny, identity, turf, influence, time structure and many other aspects of their life. These kinds of losses, if not addressed effectively, can put people into a tailspin of confusion and resistance. This is exactly why change agents and the transition management group need to be connecting with people face-to-face, listening actively and providing full loop communication in an effort to help them deal with their losses. There needs to be a process in place to identify who is losing what and provide support to deal with these losses in healthy ways. In addition to internal communication outside resources like councilors or employee assistance programs can be very helpful.

### Purpose, Picture, Plan, Part

Throughout the transition process, people will need to be reminded of the reason why the change is being implemented. When the purpose for change is consistently communicated and the why is clearly understood, motivation levels increases. Paint a picture as clearly as possible of how the future will be different from the past. Help them connect with the future by taking field trips, viewing videos, or simply having intentional discussions clarifying what people will stop doing, keep doing and start doing. Provide 6 x 3 communication of the change management plan. People appreciate knowing the road map for their future. The plan, complete with who is responsible for doing what, by when must be clear to everyone. Provide special emphasis with specific details relevant to affected groups or departments. Knowing what is going to happen, by when and who will be involved helps reduce stress. Revisions and adjustments to the plan must be communicated consistently and clearly. Change agents help people see how they fit into the new beginning. The better people know their part in the change process the sooner things move forward.

## Intentional Discussions

- Truth telling
- Active listening

Successful change requires people to behave differently than they did in the past. Until there are intentional discussions around what exactly people need to STOP doing, KEEP doing, and START doing there is little chance for the desired outcomes to become a reality. There are processes, behaviors, mind-sets, beliefs, and approaches that may have served individuals or the organization as a whole in the past. Getting clear and intentional around what groups, or the company needs to stop doing is essential. This is where everyone needs clear expectations as to what needs to be extinguished to support the future state. The reality is, if these approaches are carried forward they will negatively impact the future. People need to be clear about the consequences and impacts if we don't stop the processes, behaviors, mind-sets, etc. that will not serve us in the future. Another component to letting go of past practices and behaviors is not rewarding folks for continuing to operate as they have in the past. This is where leaders need to set clear expectations, let people know how they will be measured, and provide timely and specific feedback. This is another opportunity for 6 x 3 communication.

There are processes, behaviors, mind-sets, beliefs, and approaches that need to be carried forward. These are the work practices and approaches that we need to keep alive in the organization. This is another opportunity to have intentional discussions and be crystal clear about what needs to continue and communicate the consequences if we don't. The third area of discussion focuses on what processes, behaviors, and mind-sets need to start occurring for the successful implementation of the change. For example, people may need to start interacting with coworkers differently, following newly adopted procedures, or using new computer programs that require personal development.

Having intentional discussions that clarify what individuals or groups need to STOP, KEEP, and START doing is extremely helpful with managing the three phases of transition.

## Ceremonies and rituals

When people in transition can integrate the fact that the old way of doing things is over, finished, and gone forever the easier it is for them to let go of the past and place their attention on creating the future. The use of rituals and ceremonies becomes very valuable in helping people through the endings phase of transition. Having a graduation ceremony for kinder garden students is a classic example. Whether it is a cupcake party, pizza lunch, or a trip to the zoo, the special event helps students integrate the reality that this phase of their lives, these friendships, and this schoolroom routine is over. Having a retirement celebration is another ritual that benefits both the person retiring as well as those who will be going back to the job. Ceremonies and rituals help people integrate at a cellular level the magnitude of the change and its impact on themselves and others. In some ways, it awakens people from the grief cycle and helps them connect with the realities of the change. It is important to remember that rituals and ceremonies need to be developed by those who are affected by the change. This prevents the experience of something being done to them.

### Celebrate successes

Change agents are constantly searching for people performing in ways that support the change and providing appreciation feedback. They reinforce the correct use of the new processes and procedures. One positive feedback at a time, desired behaviors are recognized and accomplishments are acknowledged in meaningful ways. When people succeed at trying something new, celebrate their success.

## **Summary**

The strategies I have described in this paper are but a slice of the change and transition management process. I have focused on strategies that support people in their change journey, an area that is often overlooked or executed poorly. My hope is that whatever your role is on or off the job, you will embrace your responsibility as an agent of change and be conscious of your impacts on others.

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