

# Salesmanship for **Change**

## Utilizing WIIFM & Understanding Employee Needs

By Tracey L. Cekada

**W**hen confronted with change, autopilot automatically drives people to think, “what’s in it for me?” Realistically, most want to understand the context of what is being asked of us, and personal context is typically the greatest concern. That is not to say people are necessarily selfish by nature, rather that they try to determine how the suggested change can provide some benefit to their career, business or personal life. The motto, “What’s In It For Me (WIIFM)” has been the basis for helping implement change in business for many years. If an OSH professional can show how an individual (or group) can benefit from the request, they are more likely to accept it. Whether change must be implemented on the production line or to policy, procedure or roles, one of the first filters used to consider the change request is to determine WIIFM.

The term *WIIFM* was initially coined from a marketing perspective, that a salesperson should always address the benefits that customers would get from the product or service (Doyle, 2011; Jordan, 2016). More recently, the term has come to be used as a concept in integrating change management. It is a shift from the traditional way of think-

ing in which employees are expected to do what they are told to a more fetching approach in which employees make the decision to adopt the change on their own.

When asked to embrace change, people’s typical reaction is to ask, “How will this affect me now? How will this affect me tomorrow or the next day? How will things be different? Will I like this change? Will this change make my job (or life) easier or harder?” Therefore, it is critical that OSH professionals show employees the road they will be taking and how they will travel down that road. Essentially, create a vision of what is to come and how it will affect them, both negatively and positively in the short and long term.

Enabling employees to identify the benefits to them can help to overcome resistance and, as a result, act positively on the request. According to Locker and Kaczmarek (2007), benefits should be “1) adapted to the audience; 2) based on intrinsic advantages; 3) supported by clear logic and explained in adequate detail; and 4) phrased in you-attitude” (p. 115). They also suggest that when trying to identify worker benefits, one should consider benefits as part of a two-step process: 1) consider “feelings, fears and needs that may motivate,” and 2) consider how “features of your product or policy could benefit the audience” (p. 116).

When a new policy or procedure requires change, it is vital to help a worker identify the benefits to them. Consider the situation in which a new process is starting up that requires the use of PPE. Many employees may be reluctant to wear PPE. Beyond providing the basic training and education to employees that addresses how the specific PPE is designed to protect them, and beyond revisiting corporate policies about how the wearing PPE is enforced, OSH professionals must find motivators that will encourage its use.

### IN BRIEF

- Soliciting change in the workplace is often met with challenges and resistance.
- This article examines using the age-old tool of “what’s in it for me?” and understanding employee needs at various stages of their life to help them get what they want.
- The author develops a framework of best practices that one can use to help sanction change in the workplace.

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Helping employees identify the features of the product that provide a benefit to them is helpful. One way is to ask employees to identify personal reasons for wearing PPE. For example, they may want to avoid personal disfigurement, need their fingers to play catch with their kids, or want to hear the sound of their children's laughter. Employees may be trying to exercise more or eat healthier. Similarly, wearing PPE protects health. A catcher wears shin guards, chest protector and a helmet in their job. Explain to employees that their jobs can be equally dangerous and ask them what PPE they would want to wear in their job and why. Sell these strategies to employees and let them identify the benefits they see from wearing PPE.

Simply answering the question, "What's in it for me?" does not necessarily mean that the change request will be successful. Challenges and concerns come with the philosophy of WIIFM; one is that OSH professionals cannot solely depend on WIIFM as a means to motivate. Dangling that carrot and telling employees their benefit does not guarantee buy in. People are motivated differently. Some are motivated intrinsically, some extrinsically. Focusing solely on extrinsic motivators results in simply bribing employees to make a change. Employees must recognize the benefit they receive from accepting the change, and it should come from within (Jordan, 2016; Koro, 2017; Maden, 2013).

Another concern with thinking that answering WIIFM will guarantee success is that we may be looking too closely at the individual. By nature, people are social; they like to be part of a greater whole. So, do not assume that simply selling something to the individual is enough. With people's desire to be a part of greater things, selling the change as part of a bigger picture may be necessary. This means enabling employees to reach the conclusion of how the change not only benefits them but the team, the organization or even society. In essence, OSH professionals must fulfill their needs.

### Road to Success: What to Know to Solicit Change

Many factors are important when soliciting change in the workplace. This article examines three key areas: effective communication, understanding adult learners and understanding the roles that others play in promoting a message.

#### Communication

Effective communication is the building block of an organization. We use it in our daily lives to form relationships, build friendships and function as team members. It is a life skill that helps us connect with others (Reference.com, 2018). In a work environment, we use communication to "get the job done." We use it to motivate, to persuade and to influence. The value of good communication cannot be understated, whether sending a written message, delivering an oral training session or us-



ing leadership skills to inspire. Effective communication can help build and sustain relationships. It can help build cohesiveness within the organization, which can enhance morale and innovation, improve productivity and result in quicker implementation of policies and changes.

Effective communication depends on:

identifying and establishing common ground between you and your audience. Choose information that your audience needs and will find interesting. Encode your message in words and other symbols the audience will understand. Transmit the message along channels that your audience pays attention to. (McGraw-Hill OLC, 2018, p. 28)

#### Understanding Adult Learners

Understanding the motivation strategies for adult learners can help break down resistance in the workplace. To be successful in soliciting change in the workplace, OSH professionals must be discerning. In other words, we have a keen insight and understanding of the people around us. We must understand the individual, but we also must understand adults in general and what makes them tick. Understanding adult learners can help us to prepare for those knee-jerk reactions to change and help us communicate changes more effectively.

Adults need to know the value of what they are being asked to do. They are more likely to put time and energy into learning or making a change if they see its direct benefits to them. They can then make a quick assessment of the cost of taking the time to make the change or learn the lesson compared to the cost of not doing so. This answers WIIFM.

Also, adults typically like to take on responsibility and be challenged. They like to feel that they are re-

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**FIGURE 1**  
**Characters Involved**  
**in Soliciting Change**



*Note. Adapted from "In Times of Change, "What's In It for Me?" Is the Question You Need to Answer," by R.D. Duncan, Fast Company, Sept. 14, 2012.*

sponsible for their decisions, that they are in charge of their lives. Remembering this when requesting a change can be the difference between employees jumping on board or jumping off the ship altogether. Adults also have a wealth of information. Tap into their individual experiences. Realizing employees' potential and the benefits that their experiences can have on our change request can be instrumental in making it a success (NHI, 2018).

#### **Understanding the Roles Others Play in Promoting a Message**

Finally, it is crucial to be aware of the different roles that employees play to be successful in soliciting change in the workplace. Employees will play a key part in making changes successful or unsuccessful. The proposed change may affect many people. It is important to understand those who will be a part of the journey. Duncan (2012) identifies four characters involved in soliciting change (Figure 1):

- champions: those who want the change and gather the necessary resources and commitment;
- agents: those who execute the change;
- sponsors: those who authorize and express ownership for the change. There can be two types of sponsors:

1) Authorizing sponsors have adequate organizational power or influence to initiate commitment of resources.

2) Reinforcing sponsors promote the change at the local level.

- targets: those who change their behavior or practices (Duncan, 2012).

In a typical organization the champion may be the president, CEO or top management who see the benefit to productivity, quality, sales or safe-

ty. The agents are people with a direct relationship with those who would actually carry out the change. For example, this may be line managers who need staff to implement and follow a new procedure. The sponsors must have adequate resource power, so these individuals may include mid-level managers or project managers. Finally, the targets are employees being asked to make the change. Depending on the organizational structure, this is typically a line worker or first-level employee.

Understanding these roles and how they are all connected is critical in being successful with change. It is important to understand how to drive or inspire the change not only with the targets (those with a direct hand in carrying out the change), but also with those at all levels. Those above you may be the creator or initiator of the change, or they may be the resource supporter of the change. Those below may be responsible for seeing the change through.

#### **A Framework for Soliciting Change: Understanding Your Audience**

Critical to sanctioning change is understanding one's audience. In an article on audience analysis, Dunn (2015) presents steps based on Markel's (2010) framework:

- 1) Identify the primary audience;
- 2) Consider the audience's professional experience and job responsibility;
- 3) Consider the audience's attitude toward the information;
- 4) Define the audience's literacy and education levels;
- 5) Consider how the audience will use the information. (Dunn, 2015, p. 31)

Locker and Kaczmarek (2007) established a similar audience framework that revolves around understanding:

- 1) their knowledge about your topic;
- 2) their demographic factors, such as age, gender, education, income, class, marital status, number of children, home ownership, location;
- 3) their attitudes, values and beliefs;
- 4) their personality;
- and 5) their past behavior. (p. 30)

From these audience analysis frameworks, a new framework has been created that encompasses the components that are most important to understand when sanctioning change. Figure 2 describes this framework as a tool for incorporating best practices in soliciting change.

#### **Conclusion**

Remember, employees invest a lot of their time at work. It is important not to view them solely as a means to getting the job done. Instead, work to establish partnerships with employees and find ways that both parties can benefit from their time on the job. This may include working closely with workers to set them on track to meet career or educational goals, involving them in leadership development programs, or finding ways to create an enhanced

sense of belonging within the organization or community. Doing this allows an OSH professional to move beyond focusing merely on WIIFM and instead grasp the intrinsic motivators of each individual. This in turn will bring change. **PS**

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FIGURE 2

## Best Practices Framework for Sanctioning Change

**Information to Gather:** Job responsibilities/tasks and experiences

### How Having This Information Can Benefit

- By understanding responsibilities and specific job tasks it can be made clear how this new policy or procedure will directly affect employees' responsibilities both positively and negatively.

- By understanding their experiences (including knowledge about the topic), the employee can be positioned to help carry out or be an advocate for the change.

### Best Practices

Provide the employee with specific examples of how making this change will alter his/her work and life. Describe how it will affect the business process, systems, technology, roles and responsibilities. Show benefits, value, return on investment and outcomes. Be up front about the added time required initially to implement this change. Encourage employees to share their perspectives and concerns about the proposed changes. Encourage employees to share in their vision.

**Information to Gather:** Life cycle information (understanding demographics, including education, literacy levels, age, gender, marital status/children status, income)

### How Having This Information Can Benefit

- Employees' ages can directly affect perspectives and priorities, as can their education level and desire for continued education.

- At-home commitments can change at different times in their life cycle (e.g., child raising, spouse, caring for the elderly).

### Best Practices

- Ensure that the change addresses employees at various stages through their life cycle. What is important to a younger employee (e.g., free time with family, flexibility in job) may be different from an older employee (e.g., pensions, retirement). Different age groups also face different challenges with level of work commitment, ability to use technology and physical abilities. Ensure that these challenges are addressed and offer solutions for these challenges, when practical.

- Grooming some employees for promotion or leadership roles could be important to some at different stages in their life. Be cognizant of these options and discuss employees' personal goals and how the change initiative may tie in to these goals.

**Information to Gather:** Attitudes and values

### How Having This Information Can Benefit

- Understanding different attitudes and appreciating values can help you anticipate roadblocks, respond to obstructions effectively, achieve cooperation and mobilize assistance.

- Realize that employees' attitudes toward change can influence the way they may feel about change. Some embrace change and enjoy new experiences and risk. Others prefer stability or may be unengaged. Unengaged employees often can be dubious of change or fear that they will not get the support they need to carry out the change.

### Best Practices

Be prepared to be roadblocked against change. The best preparation is to gain an understanding of employees' attitudes toward different topics and prepare a defense that may bring them on board. A good defense may include explaining the added value of the change, and being open and honest about the challenges ahead, both good and bad. Explain how the changes will affect or benefit them from within. Address concerns through transparency, communicating regularly and openly to build trust. Be open and honest about explaining the company's direction and vision.

**Information to Gather:** Alliances

### How Having This Information Can Benefit

- Understanding personalities can help in selecting individuals or teams that will work well together.

- Understanding the dynamics of these individuals and how they interact with others will improve success in initiating change.

### Best Practices

Putting teams together or selecting people to join your coalition or alliance should not be downplayed. Selecting the right individuals to carry out the change is critical to its success. It is important to identify those who will make a difference and keep the momentum going. Identify those who will work well together, motivate others, accept challenges and work to counteract pessimism.