

# Locking Change for the Future

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*If you work for a company that doesn't look forward to change, that views change as a threat not an opportunity, then your company is failing, and it's failing faster every day. You now have competitors that will get stronger from the turbulence, and over time, they will win. — Seth Godin*

## Introduction

Change in corporations continues to be a growing reality. Change is also one of the major challenges in terms of leading human capital. The purpose of this brief is to provide leaders with a checklist of several key considerations for effectively implementing change.

One of the best lines I have read lately about change was written by John Kotter, author of *The Heart of Change*, who explains, “change does not happen by making people think different, it happens when you appeal to the person’s heart more than their mind,” meaning that people need to buy into any change personally and own it. If they do not, change can be labeled as being a very negative experience.

Below are ten key strategies for locking in new desired change(s). It is important to note that regardless of whether it is a small or large change, all of the points below are applicable. They are listed in a sequential progression.

## Checklist

- 1. Decision and Outcome Established.** It is important that the scope of the change has been clearly determined through a detailed decision-making, risk management, and assessment of needs process. Once the corporation has done its homework and has a clear picture of what the end will look like, then and only then is it truly ready to start the process for implementing effective change. In this process, the vision of where, why, what, who, and when the change will happen has been determined, as well as a strategic change map that clearly outlines the action that will be taken. Another way to look at this point is where the research and the game plans are designed.
- 2. Implementation Plan.** Once the destination is determined, it is time to start the implementation process for the determined change(s). To begin this process, leaders will need to ensure they have spent time and energy preparing and designing a well thought out internal marketing campaign. The outcome of this campaign is to provide all parties who will be impacted by the change with the proof, established needs, logic and rationale for the change. This process must be done with a sense of importance and immediacy. This is the

information stage, and in times of change that impact people's lives it is important to ensure that there is a meaningful flow of information. Information will empower people and reduce fantasy and frustration that can create a great deal of unrest.

- 3. Establishment of Change Team and Mandate.** Effective change is much more difficult without the establishment of a change team and mandate. For example, change cannot possibly happen effectively when the management team is not working effectively and has resistance within the leaders themselves. This combination will never lead the corporation to its desired destiny, as it leaves the front line personnel on an island of uncertainty. The purpose of this step is to find the talent among the present leaders who have bought in and are committed to the rationale and need for the change. They also need to be willing and motivated to be a part of the change team that will pace the change(s). It is best when the change team members are viewed by the majority of their peers as a competent. They should have a detailed understanding and awareness of the company's internal operations, be strong communicators, present themselves as being non-judgmental, have strong coaching and leadership skills, have proven themselves to be reliable and consistent over the test of time, and have a clear understanding of the change needed. Once the team is in place it needs to be given a very clear and exact mandate with clearly defined outcomes, objectives, reporting structure, authorizations, timelines, and other pertinent information.
- 4. Commitment to a Balanced Vision.** To have a balanced vision in place, the corporation needs to ensure it balances the following three pillars in any period of change: action steps (outcomes), interventions (how the outcomes will be obtained), and money (balancing the cost of the change process and daily operations). The three are connected, however, they are clearly different. Too often, intelligent leaders hyper-focus on money and budgets, and lose sight of the big picture. Change cannot be just a budget activity and the only measurement used in the change process. The proof is the number of companies that start the process of change but stop because of budget restrictions. Budgets are important, however, so are the other two pillars of the vision. For change to take hold, the process needs to be fast paced and moving, and have clear outcomes and objectives. Once the process starts, it is important for leaders to not become over analytical. The point is that change has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Change is a process and leaders need to be aware of the end and deal with the storms as they come,. If they do, they will find the end as long as they are implementing all the steps in a logical order and hold a steady course.
- 5. Proactive Vertical Communication.** The next critical step is to establish a clear and congruent process that will enhance communication within the organization throughout the entire change process. The purpose is to assist employees in developing their personal motivation, as this will impact the success in employee percentages to accept the change

and take the appropriate actions to eventually own it. For this to happen, companies need to help the process by having forums where individual questions and answers can be dealt with in real time and with precision and respect. This will help defuse anger, negativity, and pessimism. This is where the change team is very important, as it will run these forums. Professional development seminars to help employees develop core competences, as well as the use of internal coaching programs and EAP, are core tools for helping employees deal with change.

- 6. Address Unmotivated Managers Quickly.** Be aware of managers who are negative and not motivated for change. It is important to have a proactive plan to assist negative managers to become positive about the change. To do this, leadership will need to ensure they quickly approach the roadblock manager and provide them an opportunity to understand and take ownership for the change. If they do not want to come on board and after coaching and extended creative efforts to get them involved, the alternative may be taking away their power, which often can result in a demotion or replacement. Sending them to a course may be helpful, though this will never replace one-on-one time of meaningful and honest conversations. Any interactions must always be done respectfully. The goal is to first work to bring them on board. Very often, with a little extra work, they can become significant advocates for the manager. Leaders need to allow people to choose their destiny and move on with people who can be positive and committed to the change. The final point is that negative managers need to be dealt with. There is no alternative; they may intentionally or even unintentionally undermine a great deal of progress.
- 7. Deal With History.** Be aware of other major roadblocks, such as past history, as well as what I call “doubting Tom thinking”. The key point here is to expect negativity, but do not accept it. Model to employees that the change is going to happen, that this is not talk, and you are working to build a new future, not reinvent the past. In the change process the company will need to follow old protocols as well as the new ones for a period of time until the change is in place. This may create a great deal of discussion about why we are doing this. As soon as possible, eliminate duplication and unwarranted work. Employees will buy into change much more quickly when the change appears permanent. For this feeling to occur, there needs to be a clear elimination and separation from the old.
- 8. Celebrate Success Along the Way.** Track small wins and publish these wins throughout the entire organization. It is important to share success and be proud of it. Too often, good work does not get celebrated within organizations. Understand that celebrating small wins is important, but does not mean the work is done. Ensure that good work gets, at the very least, strong emotional feedback and support. People like acknowledgement and feedback, especially when it is good news. In times of change, one of the biggest incentives is acknowledgement of value; it will bring more goodwill than most traditional incentive programs. Whatever the company chooses as acknowledgement (e.g., gifts, bonus, or

employee-of-the-month bulletins), it must be done in a respectful and meaningful manner. It is normal and can be expected for wins to be easier in the early stages. Very often there is a backlash period that companies need to be mindful of and ready for. Leaders who are clear, have courage, commitment, persistence and patience will do fine. Remember, change is a process and there will be challenges, however, focus on the wins and where you are going.

- 9. Never Lose Your Focus and Desired Outcome.** Follow through and keep your focus, day in and day out. You may need to remind yourself that change is a process with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Many companies spend a great deal of energy in the early stages and lose their intensity, focus, and commitment later in the process. It is important that leaders stay committed and ensure that they follow the change through the entire process. This can only happen if it is made important and monitored. Getting off the ground metaphorically is only the start; it does not mean the mission is complete. Avoid this pitfall, as the fall for complacency is great! Also, when a leader follows through it helps to eliminate negative thinking for the next change. Since change is always going to happen, this process helps employees understand that change that is slated to happen will happen.
- 10. Lock in Change.** This simply means that there is no turning back and there are clear checks and balances to keep all employees up to speed over time. It also means that there are clear protocols to bring new employees up to speed. Once a change starts, it will take time for it to become a habit. That is why it is important to have a process to support the human capital to deal with the change. Everyone deals with change differently and some may not challenge it for months. With good form, consistency, time, and practice, the change will eventually be fully assimilated.

## Closing

This brief provides an overview of ten important considerations for leaders who are implementing change to help decrease the fear and frustrations that change can bring. With a model and preparation, change can be locked in effectively. These steps will save time, money, and frustration over the long term.