

Going through the Change? What every manager needs to know.

By Paul McGee – The SUMO Guy

Benjamin Franklin once said “There are only two things certain in life, one is death, the other is taxes”. I think if he was alive today, he would add a third, change. The big ‘C’ is now constantly on the agenda both in and outside the workplace. It’s an exciting time to be alive with unprecedented opportunities for discovery and development. Yet there is also a flip side. With change comes uncertainty and anxiety. Despite our insatiable appetite for the new and the different, we also cling to the comfort and security of the familiar. The clash of these two worlds means we live in ‘crazy times’ where excitement, stress, advancement and breakdown co-exist like a typical family gathering at Christmas.

So how do people respond to change in the workplace? Lets explore six responses.

- 1. The Cynic.** They have seen it all before and are convinced the change will never work and may question the motives behind the change. However, despite this verbal resistance, cynics invariably and begrudgingly go along with the change.
- 2. The Camper.** This person sits on the fence and is neither positive or negative about the change. They seem prepared to ‘sit it out’ and see how others in the team respond.
- 3. The Co-operator.** They seem resigned to yet more change, so you rarely hear complaints, but are more likely to hear “Oh well, it’s going to happen so we might as well get on with it.”
- 4. The Champion.** Openly welcomes and promotes the change. It might have been their idea, or they see a direct benefit to themselves. Whatever the reason, they are definitely on board.
- 5. The Confused.** The change seems to overwhelm them and they feel unable to respond either positively or negatively. They struggle to grasp the implication of the change and may well go into denial as a way of coping. Of course their confused state may also have something to do with the lack of clear communication surrounding the change.

- 6. The Conspirator.** Seeks either covertly or overtly to resist the change. This person simply doesn't believe the change is a good thing and they are committed to ensuring it doesn't work. They may employ a number of tactics in order to sabotage the change, from 'forgetting' to pass on important messages, 'losing' documents or being openly cynical of the organisation to customers.

What Can We Do About It?

The good news is that in most cases, people's responses to change are not permanently set. You're dealing with people made of clay as opposed to concrete. Having worked with organisations around the globe over the last ten years, here are my top ten tips for managers to help staff deal more positively with change.

- 1. Sell the reason.** People need to understand the reasons for the change and you may need to spell out the consequences of not changing.
- 2. Don't flee to the trenches.** As a manager be visible and available. Conspiracy theories flourish in a vacuum.
- 3. Involve people where you can.** Seek ideas on how best to implement the changes. When Clive Woodward took over the England Rugby Union Team, the players decided what the consequences would be for players being late to team meetings. He introduced the ideas, the team implemented the detail.
- 4. Go for quick wins.** Nothing is more demotivating than seeing things getting worse as a result of change. Margaret Thatcher wanted a quick win during the Falklands conflict. Despite being of no real military significance, the Capture of Goose Green provided the quick moral boosting win she and the commanders craved.
- 5. Lance the boil.** Don't allow staff's cynicism and negativity to fester beneath the surface. Address the issues head on and draw them out into the open. This may be appropriate to do in a group situation, but is often more effective done face to face behind closed doors. Remember, if you fail to tackle the issue, your silence or denial of the problem gives people permission to continue their negative behaviour.

6. **Allow some Hippo Time.** Not all change has a clear benefit to employees. Acknowledge that people may need time out to wallow and reflect (Hippo Time) to air their grievances and talk through their issues.
7. **Listen up.** Avoid hijacking peoples Hippo Time. Allow people time to express openly their feelings and frustrations. Give them your attention and determine to 'listen to understand rather than defend'.
8. **Go Greek.** When Greece won the 2004 European Championships they did not have the best football players, but they had the best team. Do all you can to encourage the team to come together, work together and have fun together.
9. **Don't ignore your stars.** During change, the trap many managers fall into is to spend all their time with the cynics and the conspirators. They cannot be ignored, but don't take your champions for granted. It might only take four words to make them aware you value them, "I appreciate your help".
10. **Remember to S.U.M.O.** Despite all your best efforts and intentions, mistakes will be made and not everyone on the team will positively embrace the changes. But there comes a point when we all need to **Shut Up, Move On.** (If you want to download 7 questions I devised to help people S.U.M.O. visit www.TheSumoGuy.com)

Change can be a challenge but by adopting some of the above approaches, it doesn't have to lead to a crisis.

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