



Leading Change in Today's Work Environment

One of the most popular and demanded programs from the Learning Dynamics library of learning topics is called *Leading Yourself and Others Through Change*. Surely, the rate of change within organizations has not slowed down, and in many cases the types of change that leaders are dealing with are different and unique from those in the past.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges that leaders face in the current world of organizational change is the feeling of helplessness among employees that change can cause. So, it is not surprising to see that one of the learning objectives in Learning Dynamics' program is: *Increase personal ownership of responses to organizational change (management of self)*.

Recently, we heard from one of our clients who recounted a discussion he'd had with one of his most trusted high performers. When a change to the software format they would use going forward was announced, the employee announced that he felt paralyzed or frozen in his job. His quote was, *"if they can change that with no input from the people who use this format every day, they can do anything they want to me. I am helpless to know how to move forward out of fear that another change is looming."*

Research shows that reaction to change, especially when the change comes from the top of the organization with no warning or discussion, often results in the sense of victimization the employee feels. For the leader of that employee, the goal becomes how to help the employee move from victim to manager of self. Helping the employee accept the change quickly and learn

how to make it work in his/her job becomes an ambitious goal for the leader.

There are three factors that govern rate and success of organizational change. One is speed of the transition. The second is assuring that everyone is prepared to work with the new reality as soon as possible. The third is communication. When employees feel like victims within a change scenario, these factors are in jeopardy.

For many of us, our first, almost unconscious reaction to change is resistance. We would simply rather not have to change, especially if we are good at our jobs. The longer we stay within the emotional set of resistance to the new way to operate, the more we slow down the transition as well as prevent ourselves from learning new behaviors. Also, the research shows that when employees are feeling resistance to change, they seek others who feel the same way. So, not only is just one individual slowing the process, if enough time elapses without leadership intervention, whole departments or teams can become affected too.

For many leaders this process of resistance slowing down the transition is difficult to deal with. Is the "noise" of resistance just normal griping, soon to calm down and dissipate? Or is the noise evidence of something more serious and widespread?

Of course, the answer to those questions lies in the communication relationship between employees and their boss. When the boss is in touch with the team's communication process, she/he can more quickly ascertain what is needed for communication

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to support the change and move the transition forward. The most effective leaders we've seen know not to try to dissuade the employees from what they are feeling. In fact, when the boss can relate to how the employees are feeling with his/her own experiences, the dialogue that follows such a revelation often shifts to problem solving and exploration.

We often teach the "Feel, Felt, Found" method to support that employee discussion. It might sound like this:

*"I hear how you're **feeling**. I **felt** the same way when this was announced. But now that I've had a chance to study the new information, I've **found** that it can have a positive effect on our work."*

The ultimate solution to speed up the transition lies within the change target itself. Often, the resistance is simply because a change was announced. That reaction is immediate when faced with change. The antidote lies within the details of the new behaviors and content. When leaders can send employees to study and learn about the new way and assess the actual impact of their jobs, we are well on our way to supporting and contributing to the new goal.

So, the goal for leaders is to find a way to help their employees move from "I feel helpless if you can change things whenever you want," to "OK, I understand that we're changing. I need to find ways in my job to move this change along."

