

Be A Champion Of Change

As leaders, it isn't enough to adapt to change; we need to champion change. We change in response to industry changes, the strategic plan, customer expectations, the economy, inefficiencies, etc. Leaders need to identify the need for change quickly, understand and communicate the business impact, and get buy in at all levels of the organization.

Leaders who don't have an effective approach to championing change fail to get buy in and to execute effectively. Costs in terms of time, money, and morale are significant. The five strategies below will help you take the necessary steps toward developing the leadership competency of championing change

1. **Clearly explain the change.** Explain exactly what is changing and why in the terms your audience needs to get them on board. If you are influencing senior leaders to buy into a change you believe is necessary, focus on the key points, the business impact, and the return on investment. If you are influencing the front line to buy in, it is important to connect the reason for the change to company vision, mission, goals, or values so it isn't perceived as arbitrary. It is also critical to give far more details than you would need to give leadership. The better you are at adapting to your audience when you communicate the change, the more successful you'll be.
2. **Clearly communicate the benefits that come with successful change.** As a leader, you have a good understanding of why you are championing a change and are passionate about it. Others likely don't have that same understanding and will need your help to get energized around the change. For example, the accounts receivable team may not know that while they'll need to overcome some challenges initially when implementing the new technology, it is expected to cut the time they spend writing their reports by 50%. The sales team may not know that the new sales process will increase qualified leads which will enable them to increase their close ratio and commission. Whether the benefit is in the change itself or in successfully executing the change, it is the leader's responsibility to communicate that benefit.
3. **Communicate the cost of doing nothing.** Understanding what we may lose has been shown to be a more powerful motivator than what we may gain. Change can certainly be challenging, but failure to change can be even worse. Living in a world that is constantly changing means that if we don't keep up, we will get left behind. Failure to meet new customer expectations may mean we lose our customers to the competition. Failure to adopt a more efficient procedure may mean we waste time and money on inefficiency. Failure to upgrade technology may mean we lose credibility by creating a perception that we are out of touch. Make sure you communicate both the costs and benefits.

4. **Be honest about the costs and benefits of change.** Resist the temptation to exaggerate costs or benefits to make a stronger case for change. Exaggerating costs in order to scare people into getting on board can create an atmosphere of fear that may lead to increased mistakes, inhibit communication, and hurt morale. Exaggerating benefits or trying to spin a negative change into something positive will hurt your credibility as a leader, making it less likely that people trust you the next time you need their buy in. Establish a reputation of always communicating honestly when it comes to change and people will be more likely to listen.
5. **Be positive and resilient.** Everyone is watching you to see your reaction as a leader during times of change. Do you celebrate successes or simply move on to the next thing? Recognizing small victories energizes people and leads to an effort to get another victory. Celebrating big milestones lets your team know you appreciate them and that they are on the right track. Do you bounce back quickly when there is a setback or become frustrated and negative? As a leader, you set the emotional tone for your team. If you want them to be resilient and find a way around obstacles, it starts with you demonstrating that mindset.

With the need to repeatedly come back to employees to get buy in for more changes, it is in everyone's best interest to take the time to champion change effectively the first time. Is championing change a competency you would benefit from developing?

For more strategies for how you can champion change effectively and to get an opportunity to practice those strategies with other leaders, join us for *Superior Leadership*. You will have an opportunity to develop the competency of championing change as well as 11 other core leadership competencies. For more information on Superior Leadership, contact:

Dr. Heather Johnson at 651-322-7821 or heather@klassenperformancegroup.com