

Why change fails



How to take people with you through change

How could you be among the one in 10 people who successfully communicate and manage change?

There are a few key rules that leaders often forget, according to **Campbell Macpherson**, author of *The Change Catalyst*. He says they are:

1. **Emotions rule our decisions.** Logic alone is never enough to persuade someone to change.
2. There are **immense psychological barriers** to change that need to be addressed:
 - Our fear of failure
 - Fear of the unknown
 - Fear of blame
 - The comfort of victimhood
 - A distrust that the new future will be better/worth the effort
 - As individuals, we need help to change - and often none is forthcoming
3. **Clarity is essential:** where are we going - and why
4. **Culture is everything** (to quote Louis Gerstner, a former CEO of IBM)
5. **Listening is the most powerful form of communication.** Preaching from the corporate pulpit achieves very little. Many leaders think that strong leadership means that the leader must have all the answers. This is nonsense.

So, to take your people with you through any sort of change, the first thing a CEO needs to do is realise that your people are **THE KEYS** to successful change - **it simply will not happen without them.**

Only your people can deliver your strategy. It doesn't matter how clever the new plan is - if your people aren't fully behind it, it will not happen.

Campbell, who is CEO of Change & Strategy International

change is inevitable. Unfortunately, successful change isn't. 88% of changes fail. And the key reason why change initiatives have such a spectacular failure rate could be summed up by the leadership's inability to take their people with them on the journey.

1. **Care about your people.** The first thing you need to do is genuinely care about your people. And I use 'genuine' on purpose. We can all see through insincerity. We see and hear politicians mouthing platitudes every day that we know they don't believe - it is no different in business. Your people will detect the slightest hint of insincerity.

3. **Listen to them.** The second thing is to understand where your people are coming from - their current attitudes towards the company, the strategy and the leadership - to gauge their understanding of where the change is headed. You also need them to understand the reasons why this is necessary - and finally to unearth the fears and concerns.

Broadcast-style corporate communications pieces are completely inadequate for this purpose. I have seen too many CEOs and change leaders spend countless hours and tons of money on a glitzy town-hall style conference session that lays out the new future complete with motivational music and a celebrity MC - and think 'Job Done!'

That's not communication - that's just preaching accompanied by strobe lights.

Genuine engagement requires a multi-tiered approach - anonymous surveys, intranets and forums, Chatham House style workshops, one-to-one conversations, ...and yes, town-hall meetings have their place too.

3. **Genuine engagement.** The third thing is to genuinely engage your people in the meat of the plan - in either working through the details of the new plan, mapping out the likely implications of the new plan, planning the implementation of the new plan - or preferably all three.

4. **Make sure the managers are engaged.** To accomplish 2 and 3 above, you will have first needed to engage your managers - unearth and alleviate their fears and concerns about the change. Because the number one influencer of every one of your staff is their line manager. You will need the help of your people managers and HR professionals to address the very real fears

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concerns of every one of your people. They'll be the key change agents that will ultimately affect the success of the change.

5. Find the emotional triggers. You will need to find the emotional triggers for your managers and in turn for every one of their staff members. In 2004, the Corporate Executive Council in the US, surveyed 50,000 employees, and found that, for engaging employees, emotional commitment is four times more powerful than rational commitment. Four times!

And they also deducted that the most powerful source of emotional commitment is an employee's line manager. And if we have learnt anything from Brexit and Trump - it is the power of emotion to guide our decisions.

All of this could be summed up by the 'C' word - **culture**. To enable all of the above on an organisation-wide scale requires an environment where people eagerly look for improvements in the way things are done, are allowed to question the status quo, are encouraged to learn from failure, and are open to new processes, procedures and structures.

It requires change-ready culture. The ever-increasing pace of change in the modern business world means today's leaders must be able to take their organisations in new directions swiftly and decisively when the need arrives.

But before all of that comes another 'C' word - **clarity**. The CEO and the (aligned!) leadership team must be crystal clear about the over-riding purpose of the organisation. **The company must be clear about what wants to change, why - and the implications.**

The leadership also needs to be crystal clear about how success will be measured and who will be accountable for what.

It is the combination of clarity and culture that will enable success. And to achieve all that, the CEO will need to appoint a 'change catalyst' to help the leadership drive the change through to delivery.

Then the change has a damn good chance of being the one in eight that succeeds.

***The Change Catalyst* by Campbell Macpherson is published by Wiley.**

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Why do you think change in your organisation has failed in the past?