



## Implementing Change: People Hold the Key to Success

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Good plans and strategies often fall short of our expectations. Why? Generally it is because we make the mistake of focusing solely on strategy and planning. That is thinking about change, not "implementing" change. Implementation is far more difficult because it involves people.

Everyone views change differently and the less they understand, the more negatively they view the change. Self-interest causes different reactions and points of view. People can decide whether to help and by how much or they can decide to hinder or ignore any change initiative. They spell success or failure.

### **The Hallmark Skill of Change Agents**

Successful change agents have a common vital ability. They understand the importance of gaining support for any change initiative, and they are able to obtain people's "willing buy-in" to change. They recognize that people's emotional reactions as well as their logical reactions are critical to gaining commitment. They recognize where potential followers' attitudes are in order to determine how best to connect and adjust in a way that makes sense to their potential follower. Only then are they able to link people's best efforts to the execution of a sound plan to reach the intended goals and results.

Buy-in is powerful and worth the extra effort. It takes people out of analysis or skepticism and causes commitment - the emotional resolve to act and see a task through to completion. Without it, change initiatives are doomed from the start. With it, you get people on board (leadership) and working in sync (teamwork) and taking ownership to reach the desired outcomes on a consistent basis.

### **The Actual Skill Set**

Top performers throughout the world operate on this insight - in order for buy-in to occur, **confidence** must be achieved—not merely logical understanding of ideas, solutions or technical benefits. Nobel Prize-winning research in economics, conducted by Herb Simon in 1976, supports this conclusion. The way people actually do business and make decisions is in a *pursuit of comfort or confidence, whether or not logical cost-benefit-payoff is optimized!*

The skill that sets top performers apart is the ability to do business with people in a way that causes mutual buy-in to some tangible action by the end of the conversation. This ability involves three major components that blend together as if they were a single skill.

The skill set is an explicit ability to:

**Probe** - See it from others' points of view, both facts and feelings.

**Align** - Connect in a way that makes sense to others.

**Raise** - The level of confidence to co-ownership and commitment.

These are not soft, vague or incomprehensible abilities. They are specific and measurable.

1. **Probe:** Exemplary performers accurately read emotions first, logical content second. Why? Because the only way you tell whether or not buy-in is occurring is to see degrees of

positive, neutral, or negative inclination during decision-making conversations. Willingness levels are different and logic is different depending on people's feelings about an idea. For example, nurses will reason differently if they are fearful that the change will negatively impact patient care as when they are interested because they believe the change will raise the level of care. Logic is not fixed. Instead, logic is relative to our willingness level or emotional state at any moment in time. In medical terms, **Probe** is similar to **Assess**.

2. **Align**: In business the ability to empathize is fairly useless without the logic to make a business connection. The hallmark of top performers is their ability to **connect** logic to the viewpoint of others. People recognizable for their ability to obtain buy-in and a following have the ability to link logic to emotion all the time. It is a well-defined and measurable skill. It causes alignment, teamwork and concerted action. So in the case of our risk-adverse nurse, connecting requires both the ability to empathize with the risk but also create a logic path that will minimize or eliminate the risk of patient care deteriorating. Align would relate to the DIAGNOSIS in the medical world
3. **Raise**: The ability to **inspire** others to see, hear and to feel higher, more positive points of view is the third skill element and the payoff skill for effective change agents. This is the ability to lead conversations in increasingly more positive directions by linking logic to higher, more positive points of view. People who can do it get far more cooperation and tangible action from others. No one has succeeded in business as a change agent without this ability. It now can be developed to a higher level of conscious competence. Raising is obtaining the patient's co-ownership of the TREATMENT not simply compliance.

The above three-part skill set is the benchmark skill set of all successful people who demonstrate an ability to get a following. This skill set succeeds regardless of job title or job function. It is a common characteristic of superior performance and patient care in the administration office, intensive care unit, emergency room, nursing station and the bedside of the patient. This is the elusive "missing link" skill some people refer to as the "art" of implementing change.

### **Acquiring the Core Skills for Change**

Our research and experience helping our clients implement change successfully shows that a number of important factors ensure that the skills of gaining buy-in to change, practicing leadership and causing teamwork are acquired and consistently used.

1. **Make the skills explicit and learnable.** One problem many organizations have when attempting to give their people the skills necessary to implement change is that these are "soft" skills, not easily defined or tested. However, there are specific measurable skills that go into gaining the buy-in and support of others. These include listening skills, rapport-building skills, analytical skills and the skill of gaining commitments and action from other people.
2. **Coach the skills; don't just instruct them.** Simply telling people about a skill set is ineffective in building proficiency in these skills. The best methods for causing skills to be acquired to high degrees of performance excellence are the same hands-on methods used to make a surgeon proficient, an IV insertion less painful or the admission process simpler -- coaching.

Coaching causes people to acquire "the feel" of a skill not just an understanding of it, and consequently, they're more likely to make the skill habitual and apply it to real work situations. This doesn't have to be done individually. Group skill development can and should involve actual coached practice of the skills, step-by-step, in a supportive environment that builds on people's strengths and successes.

3. **Spread these skills throughout your hospital or organization.** The ability to implement change is eventually needed throughout the ranks in a customer-driven organization. Work teams need the skills as much as any manager. After all, work teams exist to implement change on a continuing basis. Individual contributors also need the skills if they are being asked to serve or obtain customers within or outside the company.

In short, the skill of obtaining buy-in and support is the core skill of doing business with others. Enhancing this ability in your staff will cause change initiatives to be successful and lead to tremendous payoffs in effectiveness, efficiency, cooperation and business success overall.