

Is this Change Worth it?

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

Don Draper, the fictional advertising guru on the television show “Mad Men” says, “Change is neither good or bad. It simply is.”

Good luck convincing your team or staff of that.

At some point, every leader has to introduce change. It could be something relatively simple, such as changing the time or location of a monthly chapter meeting. Or it could be something incredibly difficult such as raising chapter dues.

Regardless of the scope, we all want the change we introduce to be accepted based on the inherent trust of our followers that we are always acting in the organization's best interests. But it doesn't normally happen that way, does it? Despite our best efforts to explain the rationale for and benefits of a change, there will always be those who respond with resistance.

It is unlikely that you can completely prevent or short-circuit all resistance, but you can minimize it by understanding the difference between a good change and a bad change from the perspective of those hearing the message.

7 Ways to Increase Buy-In

We all view change through a lens of perception and past experiences. If we perceive a leader positively and recall a past change experience as good, we are likely to support the new change with little resistance. If either of these is questionable, resistance increases.

Your chances of gaining buy-in for change increase substantially when you address and effectively communicate the answers to these seven questions:

How does the change affect me? A new meeting registration process will be a good thing if it makes it easier for you to sign up. It will be a bad change if it adds complexity or extra steps. On the other hand, if the change doesn't affect you, you won't really care or will have little more than a passing interest.

How much influence can I have in the change process? People support what they help create. It isn't always possible to involve everyone in planning

every detail of the change. If that's not the case, explain why. And consider adding opportunities for input if it will increase support.

How does it move us toward something that we want or need? Does it add value or move you and your team toward a goal that is important? If that's the case, you can expect only passive support or even resistance.

How does this change affect my overall ability to function and cope? The best leaders are in tune with their organization's capacity for additional change. There are times when a change that is widely acknowledged as useful will be resisted because of diminished capacity to cope or function.

Are the costs of changing less than the costs of staying the same? Put another way, is the pain of staying the same greater than the pain of changing? Pain creates urgency, and there will be those who evaluate any change that doesn't solve an immediate problem as a waste of energy and resources, even if the long-term payout is significant. The challenge is to make the benefit outweigh the cost.

How much do you know about the change and how much credibility does the person who is communicating it have with you? The national debate over healthcare reform in the United States is an excellent example. One person's Affordable Healthcare Act is another's Obamacare. It is the same legislative change, but support is different based on, to a large degree, the credibility of the person framing your perceptions about it.

Did the change actually produce a result that is different and valuable? This observation from a seasoned manager rings true today: “Just because things are different, that doesn't mean that anything has really changed.” Changes that don't produce results lose support. Define results early. Measure them often and fine-tune as needed.

Change, by definition, causes some level of discomfort because of disrupted expectations. If there is no discomfort, there really isn't much change. You can minimize resistance and increase the buy-in for change by successfully addressing these seven questions. ★



Randy Pennington helps leaders build cultures committed to results, relationships and accountability. He is the author of *Make Change Work: Staying Nimble, Relevant, and Engaged in a World of Constant Change*, among others. Contact Randy@penningtongroup.com. Follow his blog at www.penningtongroup.com.