

THE ROLE OF GREAT COMMUNICATION IN ANY CHANGE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Implementing change is much, much simpler if you have a sound communication strategy. Leaders often underestimate the role of communication in change management, forgetting how important information is to employees in times of uncertainty. The more information that people have, the better they understand the reason for the change, the more comfortable they feel about it, and the likelier they will be to support it. Communication is central to successfully getting a change initiative off the ground.

Here are three principles for devising and implementing a communication strategy that will galvanize employees in support of the change.

1.

DESCRIBE WHERE YOU ARE & WHERE YOU'RE GOING.

The first step is creating a straightforward, clear-eyed description of your organization's current state. Use terms that employees identify with, or that they're accustomed to using. The language should set you up to describe—in simple terms—the desired outcome of the change. For example, a company might say "We're a market leader with 41 percent share" in order to describe its current state, and in order to describe its end goal, it might say "We will have 50 percent of the market share." Using clear, measurable terms in order to describe the change focuses employees' energy in the same direction and has the added benefit of allowing you to track progress using metrics with which everyone is already familiar.

It's also important to describe how achieving the goals of the change will feel to employees. They should be dissatisfied with the current state and excited to move in the new direction. For example, the statement "When we get there, we will be able to celebrate our position as market leader, with enough revenue to begin to invest in the future and not only create new products, but also provide a greater measure of job security" explains why employees should be personally invested in change.

2.

COMMUNICATE EARLY & OFTEN.

No matter how well it is managed, organizational change disrupts people. But that disruption can be minimized by communicating as much about the change as possible, as early as possible—preferably well before it actually happens. This way, employees will feel less threatened by the change, and can begin to adopt a change-ready mindset and make relevant changes in order to prepare for the future. If constant and comprehensive communication is occurring on a regular basis, then the transition from the old to the new will feel relatively seamless to employees. Early and frequent communication about change gives employees:

- Time to understand the rationale
- Time to prepare
- Opportunities to ask questions
- Time to adjust
- Time to become emotionally supportive of the change

3.

GIVE EMPLOYEES INFLUENCE OVER DECISION-MAKING WHERE POSSIBLE.

Another benefit of keeping employees well informed (and well in advance of the change) is that it gives you opportunities to ask for their input and feedback. While this may not be feasible in all situations, actively involving employees in decision-making where possible will assuage their fears about the change and build their personal commitment to it. This, in turn, will harness their energy making the process go more smoothly.

Individuals who have not been consulted in the course of organizational change tend to disengage. They sit back and think, "Well, they made the decision; let's see if they can make it work." This does not mean that employees will sabotage the change; it just means that their commitment — their personal conviction that the change is needed — is lost. To lose the engagement of even one employee is to lose greatly in realizing the full benefit of the change.

CHANGE COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

When devising the initial communication about the change, be sure to include these basic details. Give as much information as possible on each point.

☐ GIVE A DETAILED OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGE.

What, exactly, is changing? Explain the organization's current state and its destination. Spell out what's changing using specific, measurable, and actionable language.

☐ GIVE THE RATIONALE FOR THE CHANGE.

Why is this happening? Most likely, your employees are rational, logical people with the organization's best interests at heart. If they understand the reason for the change, they are more likely and better able to support it.

☐ PROVIDE DETAILS ON TIMING.

When will the change occur? If you can break down the change into phases, do so. Provide estimates on how long each phase will take, deliverables, deadlines, and so forth.

☐ EXPLAIN ITS IMPACT ON PEOPLE.

Who will be affected and how? Employees will want to know how their current responsibilities and tasks will change and how their careers might be affected in the long term.

☐ EXPLAIN NEW PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS.

Once employees are clear on how the change will affect them, they will want to know if and how their behavior is expected to change. How will their performance be assessed differently as a result of the change?

☐ PROVIDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES.

Where can employees turn for help? Employees will inevitably have questions about how the change affects their day-to-day work (and long-term prospects). They may also be wondering about opportunities for training and professional development. Be sure they know where to go for this information so that they always feel supported and in the loop.