

Be a Change Champion Your Leadership Role



By Barbara Higgins

An  **MSBCOACH** Leadership Resource

501 West Main Street Charlottesville VA 22903 | 434.293.5758 | www.msbcoach.com

INTRODUCTION

Great leaders love and champion change...well, at least that's what most business articles would have you believe. I believe that the question begs a more complex answer to provide true guidance. As managers, we can each "champion" change, what we need to explore is how to develop our personal skills and how this becomes part of our leadership journey.

So what do we mean by "championing change"? Change Champions are leaders selected and trained to manage the inevitable uncertainty that is bound to arise within your team when faced with a program of change. To consider your role, I will examine change at three core levels: Championing a Quality Culture for Change; Leading your Team through Change; and Your Role as a Change Champion.



1

Championing a Quality Culture for Change

The most powerful way for a Change Champion to implement change is to advance a culture of continuous improvement. Dr. W. Edward Deming advanced an approach using the cycle of continuous improvement to “**Plan – Do – Check – Act**”. Dr. Deming’s cycle explains that employees should be empowered to suggest, assess, and implement ongoing change to benefit the organization.



The cycle illustrates the stages of brainstorming and planning, implementing, checking results, and adapting the implementation plan... and then the whole cycle starts again. This culture of improvement ensures that as our team learns, we adapt and update our approach to evolve for future success .

Dr. Deming communicated not only a procedural solution but a behavioral one. By setting expectations that change was not the anomaly but the norm, he systematically proved that innovation was the lifeblood of any organization. Change becomes a part of the culture, and each employee is accountable for improvements. Innovation leads to a higher-quality product and better service to the customer, and builds a financially successful organization.

As leaders, if we understand Dr. Deming's work, our role in change becomes a responsibility.

Implementing this type of culture takes time and effort. We need to ensure a process to plan, do (test your suggestions), check (gather feedback), and act (incorporate feedback)—and to do this on an ongoing basis. This is the essence of a culture of change. The Change Champion leads the way by advocating a continual search for better process and better quality.

2

Leading Your Team through Change

The most successful organizations excel at creating a culture of change, but this can be an elusive and challenging goal. Many times, change comes not from a collaborative discussion but from a management edict. We don't always have the luxury of engaging everyone in the decision process. Our success depends on activating our team toward effective implementation. To do this successfully, we need to understand how different personality types react and how to gain the necessary support and acceptance to move the team forward.

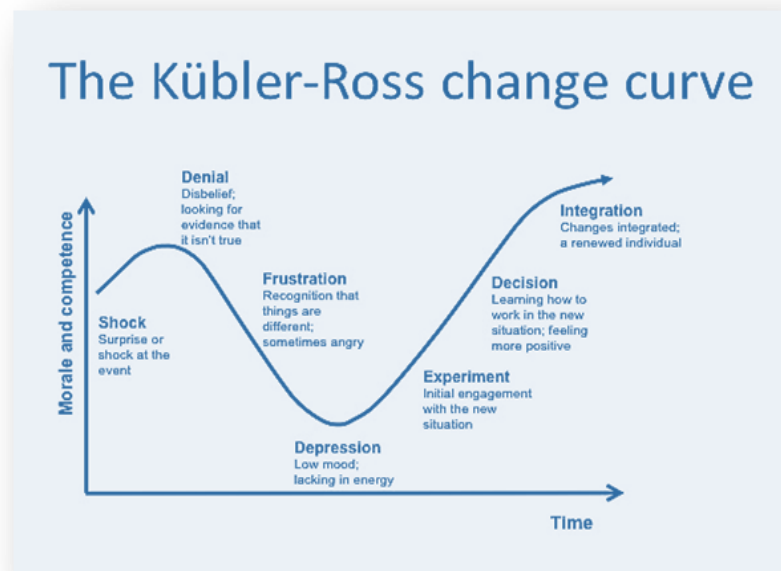
You may be familiar with how business characterizes individual reactions to change. Research tells us to identify those people that will be both the adopters of and the detractors from change. Leadership training tells us to leverage the help of early adopters to communicate change. Similarly we should carefully manage the negative energy created by detractors knowing that this affects the whole team.

How do we learn to activate our team and transition to implementation?

Some theories of change reference Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's research on the stages of grief to apply to management of change. The concept is that significant change can be very much like a personal shock that happens "to" us. Like the impact of reacting to death, we experience change through a variety of emotions before moving toward a final phase of acceptance where we are again at peace. Although most changes in business do not have the intensity of Dr. Ross's research, understanding various emotional stages can inform our process. If we recognize the behavioral need for our team to vent frustration, push back, and express other emotions as part of the acceptance process, we may be able to release that emotional pressure and move more quickly to accept change and return to positive productivity.

Dr. Ross's research has been adapted to recognize the adoption curve for change. Our goal is that rather than ignoring behavioral reaction, we will allow an outlet for these emotions. This doesn't include wallowing indefinitely in anger or denial, but does allow some safe space to acknowledge staff

frustration and reasonable time to vent these emotions. Alternatively, consider the lost productivity and morale problems created by a process change that people continue to complain about over an extended period.



To lead change in a positive approach is to draw your team into a discussion that allows for honest feedback and engages them in moving more quickly to accepting and supporting the new reality.

Understanding your different staff reactions can be a powerful tool in leading them through change. A diverse team is an amazing problem-solving resource, but to harness that power a leader needs to understand behavioral differences. Some team members may prove to be your champions, embracing the excitement of trying new things.



Other staff reactions may need more time to work through implications and concerns before they can finally adapt. Understand that one negative team member can

bring down the emotions of a whole team. This makes the extra effort to gain their support even more important. While people who are more reticent to change may take more time to adopt change, their valuable feedback and eventual support can be a powerful implementation tool.

3

Your Role as a Change Champion

Organizations tend to be focused on short-term outcomes. Change Champions bring vision and change that is critical for evolving and succeeding in the long-term. Confidence and trust are vital for the leader's toolkit.

1. Define a confident vision for the positive impact of change to communicate future benefits to your staff. This creates the energy to lead people through the current discomfort with a future view.
2. Respect the time needed to process change and for your team to understand and accept the new system.
3. Practice your listening skills so your staff knows that their concerns have been heard.

With your efforts, team trust in your leadership will emerge.

You can redefine change from something that happens “to us,” into the confident process to steer and champion change. There is no doubt that this takes practice, time, and effort for leaders. However, by expanding our talents to better encourage and manage change, we can be more creative and more collaborative and

deliver better quality.

The MSB Coach team can help if you want to get started on your new role. Our approach is the ADKAR® model for change. This model is based on practical research from varied organizations about how to create lasting change. ADKAR is simple to learn, makes sense, and focuses on the actions and outcomes required for change.

The ADKAR® Model for Change:

Awareness of the need for Change

Desire to support the change

Knowledge of how to change

Ability to demonstrate new skills and behaviors

Reinforcement to make the change stick

Embrace your leadership role as a Change Champion. This is how you can truly lead the organization of the future.

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

George Bernard Shaw

For more information on the ADKAR model check out:

<https://www.prosci.com/adkar/adkar-model>



Barbara Higgins

Leadership and Strategy Consultant

barbara@msbcoach.com

Barbara is passionate about helping to develop effective leadership solutions for your organization. Her broad experience in strategy, operations, and leadership translates to creative and relevant solutions for your leaders. Mission driven organizations and measuring long-term success, is a specialty for her with experience in the Balanced Scorecard and Strategy Maps (The Balanced Scorecard; Kaplan and Norton; Harvard Business School).

Barbara's current focus includes experiential and engaging learning techniques for continuing education and corporate training. She teaches a Quality and Productivity Management course at Piedmont Virginia Community College as an adjunct business professor gaining insights from her students about interactive learning. She is similarly passionate about bringing her experience to local non-profit organizations to help with strategy and business planning.



501 West Main Street Charlottesville, VA 22903

434.293.5758

msbcoach.com | info@msbcoach.com