



StickyChange

Top tips for making change stick ...

September 2017





We've worked with individuals, teams and organisations in implementing change for more years than we care to count! And there are definitely ways of 'doing change the right way.' When we were asked to sit down and name our top tips for 'sticky' change, we decided that the following would be our overriding principles of engagement and associated recommendations. They are not necessarily in order of priority. We're not telling stories of change in this article but if you would like to know more about specific battle scars, do please contact us on info@stickychange.com



1. Fire the leaders if they don't role model the change they want

OK, to be clear ,we don't actually mean shoot them but unhappily, we have too many stories of leaders not doing the Ghandi thing of 'being the change you want.' It's insane at times. The leader will instigate and initiate the change required but then fails to act in accordance with the change he or she wants to see. People are programmed to resist on most levels, it only needs the leader not to role model what they want, for everyone to excuse themselves from the responsibility of changing.



So our recommendation: be clear not just about the change you want but the behaviours that underpin your change. Then live them every day. If you are the leader, ask someone you trust to give you regular and honest feedback as to how well you are living the change. Or not, as the case may be.

→ **2. When people resist, leaders must get curious**



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Here's the good news. When people resist it means they have heard the message. No more doing denial. If it is of any comfort to you, our brains are primed to resist anything which we feel 'endangers' us. So it's not necessarily the actual proposed change we are resisting, that might be total logical and reasonable. It's the impact it will have on us; on how we may feel 'endangered.' It may mean that we will be rendered incompetent ... when we've been brilliant at what we do for the last decade; or that the processes we have worked hard on to perfect are now deemed to be inadequate or outdated. (Does that mean we are inadequate and outdated?). Or that the changes you are proposing mean that the work life balance that we have struggled with for years is going to be badly affected – and our partners are not going to be happy about that!



So our recommendation: in short, everyone has a personal story in change. You need to spend time getting curious about what it is. There is no escaping the time that takes but it will be worth it. Ask the questions: 'Where are you at in this change? What does it mean for you? What is stopping you from committing to this change? And finally, 'What needs to happen for you to commit to the change?'

→ **3. When people are asked about change and make some great ..**



3. When people make efforts, always acknowledge them and give feedback

Some organisations we have known do a great job of consulting with their people about change. They get everyone really involved and wound up by asking for their suggestions. Their people come up with a great list of ideas and actions. They get really energised and enthusiastic. And then it's never followed up. It ends up just having been a really good workshop and nothing else.

If you're lucky, your idea is incorporated into the change plan, but it's only by accident that you even learnt this. That is, you overheard someone discussing it at the coffee machine. How the CEO is really keen on the idea. Which gives you a warm glow but it could have been a fierce fire in your heart if only you'd got a little of the credit.

There is an evil even worse than this. The thunderous silence. All that enthusiasm trapped on a photo of a flipchart, with no outcomes or deliverables or measures of success. It's a sad fact that sometimes it is the facilitator of the workshop who ends up being the organisational driving force behind the collective bright idea. Just about the worst way to embed change.



So our recommendation: make it your mission (and that of anyone else within your sphere of influence) to always follow up on bright ideas and actions arising. Put the 'follow up' discussions on your regular meeting agenda. Make it your second item so it never drops off. Never let a workshop end without ascribing owners to the bright ideas and actions (and timelines). If it's not an idea that is going to make the cut, then be honest and tell the person or the team the reasons why. Feedback is one of the great motivators, even when it is a 'No.' The biggest demotivator is being ignored.

→ **4. Leaders go out of their way to see when people are making real efforts ...**



4. Leaders spot people making real efforts and doing things right

So Boss, I've really tried hard to accept the change; I've committed to it and most importantly, acted on it and lived it. And it's as though nobody has even noticed. Not only has no one noticed or acknowledged how hard I've tried, the person sat next to me is getting away with murder. (No, they've not shot the leader – see 1 above). They are turning up each day, doing the same old thing and making no effort to change their ways. And let's face it, it's so much easier that way. So I'm even thinking of reverting to the way I was before, doing it the way I did it before. Not that anyone will notice.



So our recommendation: go out of your way to appreciate and/or recognise people's efforts to change.

Make sure there is a clear process for monitoring these from the outset. And give people feedback when they do and most especially, when they don't. There should be clear and known consequences for engaging with the change. And particularly, great consequences for demonstrating the right behaviours. Celebrate effort as much as achievement. And make sure you do number 3 at the same time.

→ **5. Leaders know to expect resistance ...**

5. Leaders know to expect resistance. It's okay to be emotional

Most of us have studied the Change Curve and know what someone's journey through change can look and feel like. The latest Neuroscience, scientific facts rather than simply psychological observations (the basis of the Curve theory, clearly establishes that we are all emotional beings. Therefore, you cannot avoid managing emotions during change. Yours or others. So it makes sense not to place the issue on the 'too hard to go there' pile but rather to embrace this certainty and look to minimise emotional fall out as much as is within your control.

And boy can it be tiring. And boy can it make you feel that some people need to get a life. Or that they need a good lecture in how bad things really could be if you weren't busting a gut to manage the challenges. And ... And And... And... Breathe. Now is the time to give people a really good listening to.



So our recommendation: encourage people to talk about how they feel. Organise opportunities for them to moan, groan and vent. Do not try to deny their emotions or tell them they are wrong to have them. The one thing that cannot be denied is a person's personal feelings in any given situation. It is real to them even when it feels irrelevant to you. Carry out one to ones assiduously. Again, with the express purpose of helping people to let off steam.

Once people feel that you are a) listening and b) not making them feel wrong to feel what they are feeling, then the need to vent diminishes. The brain is calmed. And as the neural balance is reestablished, the person is more able to access the rational and reasoned areas of their brain, leaving them more open to listening to you and your arguments. We always coach or encourage people to learn to recognise what they are feeling on a regular basis. To acknowledge it. To name the emotion ... And then let it go...

→ **6. Leaders are recognised and rewarded for how they get a change done, not just getting it done ...**



6. Leaders are recognised and rewarded for *how* the change is done, not just getting it done

There is a temptation to be very clear about what has to be achieved and what the change targets are. But the same energy is not invested in defining how the change should be effectively introduced, implemented and embedded. Or how we need to behave better, or differently, for the change to succeed, now and in the long run. In short, what are the behaviours that leaders should be role modelling during the change and how should employees be behaving when it all comes to fruition. It is really painful to see targets being achieved in change but at the expense of the well being and confidence of team members. Leaders, who in their drive towards target oriented success, destroy team spirit and individual morale through the manner in which they lead the change. Or they support or tolerate the wrong behaviours. To our mind, this is not successful change.

So our recommendation: put in place KPIs and recognition and rewards that encourage leaders to behave in ways which will clearly demonstrate to all followers the kinds of behaviours that are expected of them. And that also motivate the leaders to emphasise, encourage and reward the required behaviours in their team members.



→ 7. It can be a pain but you have to over-communicate ...



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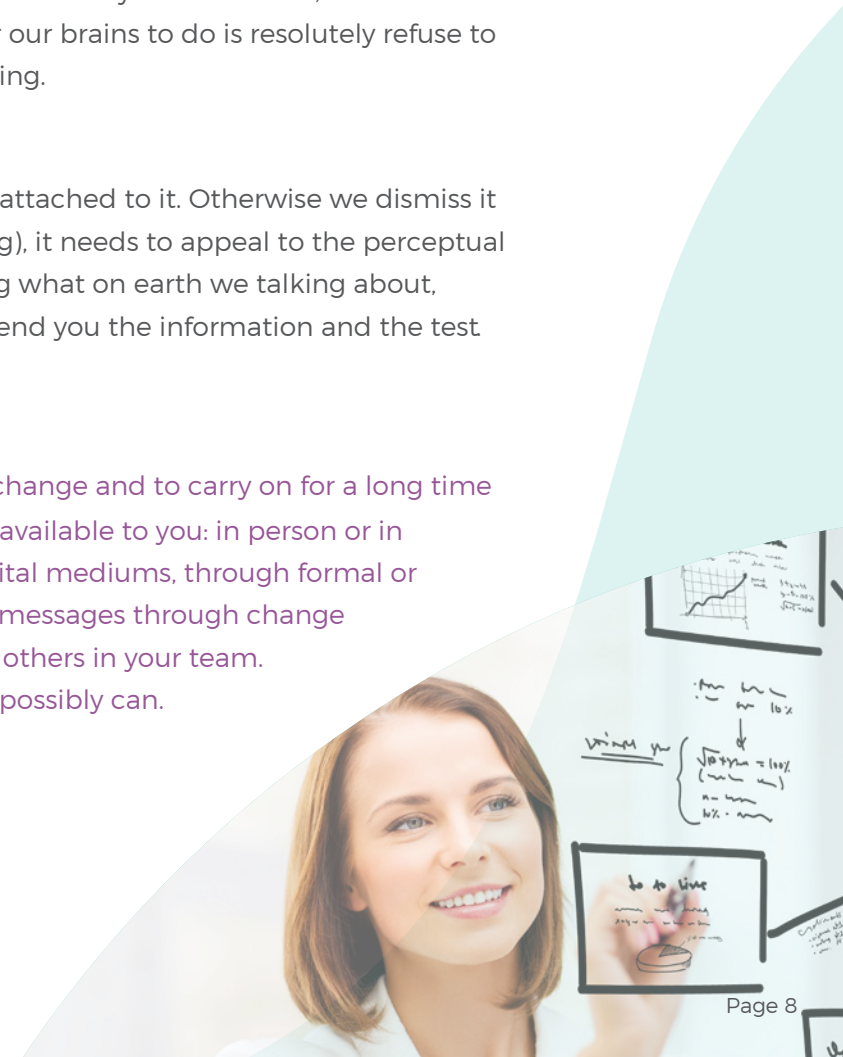
Even when there is nothing to say, or you've already said it ten times, you end up saying it again. How frustrating is this when you've communicated again and again the same information and people still aren't getting it?! It can drive you nuts. Do people not listen?! Distressingly, probably not. For two reasons. If people fervently fear the news, their brains are likely to flee the scene. When our flight mechanisms kick in, the easiest thing for our brains to do is resolutely refuse to take it on board. Ignore it in the hope it will go away. So yeah, they are not listening.

And secondly, for a memory to be laid down in our brains, emotion needs to be attached to it. Otherwise we dismiss it as trivial. So communication needs to be colourful (without being too frightening), it needs to appeal to the perceptual channels that we prefer – be that aural, visual or kinaesthetic (if you're wondering what on earth we talking about, Google Perceptual Channels or email us on info@stickychange.com and we'll send you the information and the test



So our recommendation: plan your communication to start well before a change and to carry on for a long time after. Whatever it is, however small the detail, keep on about it. Use all channels available to you: in person or in podcasts, in written format with lots of visual images. Through digital or non digital mediums, through formal or non formal social media. Charge others with the responsibility too. Cascade the messages through change champion mechanisms. Find your inner story telling abilities or employ those of others in your team. Have lots of 'loud' conversations with as many people as you can, whenever you possibly can.

→ **8. Whenever it is possible to involve the people ...**



8. Involve those most impacted by the change as much as you can

It is a known truth that doing stuff to people is not as effective as doing it with people! And it certainly doesn't prompt the same kind of buy in and commitment to action that you get from actively involving those impacted by the changes, in articulating the vision and developing the cunning plan.

And it can take a leap of faith. It would be so much easier to sit yourself down in a room with a few like minded buddies and drive out the change vision and strategic plan, then roll it out. But we've seen this happen too many times and the outcome is always that ultimately, the time frame is compromised by having to deal with some very emotional and resistant people, who genuinely don't believe in the change or its purpose. Dealing with these people can be desperately time consuming. The other great danger to your success is that people just ignore it (if that is possible) and carry on in the same way as they always have. Thereby, undermining the whole purpose of the change.



So our recommendation: take the time to sit as many people down as humanely possible, outlining the reasons why you need to change and working with them to identify the vision, outcomes and implementation plan. Then delegate the doing to them. Your reward will be brighter and better ideas, faster adoption of new practices and minimised resistance.

→ **9. Make sure what you're proposing is clear ...**



9. Make sure what you're proposing is clear

The vision for your change mustn't be ambiguous and everyone must know what will be expected of them. Particularly those on the ground. Think hard about how to tell the tale.

The more layers there are in an organisation, the more the relaying of a great vision can get diluted if it is systematically cascaded downwards. And you're dependent on all the layers being bought into the change and/or any good at telling the story. If you're not careful, you end up with the scenario highlighted in 6 above, where people are not only unclear about what the change really means to them but more worryingly, don't know what behaviours are expected of them.



So our recommendation: assuming that the senior leaders are well respected, people appreciate hearing about visions for change from the very top. Some of the organisations we know, who have succeeded in communicating clearly and without ambiguity the scope and depth of the proposed change, have rigorously and regularly engaged in round robins of Road Shows to exhibit/put on show the change vision in detail. Prior to the Road Shows, the story is carefully crafted to capture the attention and interest of the audience. And then the story is told and retold. If you're wondering about how to craft a vision, here's some words from the original Change guru: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkot-ter/2011/06/07/how-to-create-a-powerful-vision-for-change/#29018ec12a3c>

→ **10. Sell the problem not just the benefits ...**



10. Sell the problem not just the benefits

Classically, when selling change to our people, we are keen to persuade people of the excellent benefits that await them. And when they express their doubts, we hit them with more and yet more 'but it will be fantastic' propaganda. We're desperate to make them feel more emotionally positive about the whole thing. Slight problem. You see, I'm not that upset with the current situation. I don't want you changing the way I have been doing things for the last two years, thank you. Don't you realise how much effort I have put into getting that team working perfectly. And now you are going to restructure. It's just not necessary, in my humble opinion. I like the status quo however much you might think the future is bright over there. Grrrr...



So our recommendation: without frightening the living day lights out of people, you do have to make it clear what are the negative consequences to not changing, even if it's not palatable news. In our experience, you won't be telling anyone anything they don't really know, they just haven't wanted to acknowledge it consciously. It's just that when we get anxious about handling people's reactions, we tend to err on the positives, convinced that will make people feel better. But our brains are naturally primed to see the negatives. So use that default button to sell the problems of not changing as well as the benefits of changing...

→ **11. Look out for any area of the operation ...**



11. Align processes, systems and people with your desired change

Can be a rookie mistake this one...! We introduce a change but fail to recognise that there are processes in place that actually work against the desired impact of the change. Or the culture in the department just won't support the desired outcomes of the proposed changes. So look out for areas in your business - or people - that have a culture that won't align with what you change. Do something about it.



So our recommendation: you can't be expected to know about everything, so make sure that in the planning phase of change, you involve people from all parts of the organisation. Their job is to tell you when a change you want to adopt will be rendered meaningless or diluted because of processes and procedures that they know are either in place or up for implementation. HR is a great place to start.

→ **12. Plan change but talk about small or immediate goals ...**

12. Plan big change but talk about small or immediate goals

The concept of change can frighten the life out of people for no logical reason at all - that you can see. But sometimes the change that is proposed seems too big, or too far off in the future. Either way, it can paralyse my positive neurons. So while it is crucial to lay down the long term vision for any change, the way to keep people positively engaged is to focus the loud conversations on the short term goals. And be as loud about the achievements of the goals!



So our recommendation: when holding conversations about change, it is good to reinforce the vision, the reasons why you really have to change (see number 10 above) but then in team meetings and in one to ones, the focus should be on the immediate and short term goal or goals. Be clear about what the next steps are and work with people to identify what success looks and feels like at the end of that particular endeavour. When people talk to us about feeling over-whelmed by the breadth of the change that faces them, we ask them 'What is the one thing that you need to do now, in order to keep moving forward?' Our intent is to mindfully take their attention from the long term vista and to focus it 'down' on the doable present.

→ **13. Expect to stumble ...**



what's
Your Next
Step?

13. Expect to stumble. It's the nature of change

Be kind to yourself. Remember that on an aircraft, it is not for nothing that you are told to put your own oxygen mask on first. If you are not in a fit state, mentally or physically, during change, then you will not be able to help others around you. By the nature of most change, we don't always get it right the first time. Depending on how big the change is, it can be a very testing and emotional time with lots of opportunity to kick yourself before even thinking of kicking anyone else. And kicking really doesn't inspire confidence.

And change is a journey. We don't know of any major organisational change programmes that haven't had some divergence en route. In fact, flexibility to the environment and circumstances are invaluable skills and abilities alongside developing resilience. Stumbling doesn't necessarily mean you've failed, but it may mean that you have to dig deep, gather people around you, adjust the vision, smile and keep on going.



So our recommendation: take time to establish a real work life balance through the duration of the change project. This means coming in and going home at inhuman hours is banned. That you take regular brain breaks throughout the day and don't dodge lunch. That you abstain from sending emails at silly hours of the night and weekends. Practise mindfulness. And why is it all crucial? Not just because it is logical to look after yourself but also that you remember the role model rule. Too many of your team will also burn the midnight oil and put themselves under immense stress simply because they see you doing it. So then unproductive brains become endemic. Have a look at this link for more information on what we mean: <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/leadership/the-art-and-science-of-well-being-at-work?cid=other-eml-alt-mip-mck>

→ **14. If there is not trust, you're on a hiding to nothing ...**

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Now here's the tough one. We appreciate that, sometimes, there is no option but to introduce the change. But if it's in an environment where people are, through experience, deeply untrusting of change, it's going to be a real uphill struggle. There have been times when we have advised leaders to wait and work on the organisational climate before introducing changes about which they are deeply passionate but their people deeply sceptical. In short, if you don't have trust, you may be better doing nothing.



So our recommendation: if there is no 'let's wait' option then you would be wise to invest time and money on numbers 1, 8 and 10 no matter what. For more hints, then try this link: <http://www.leadershipnow.com/CoveyOnTrust.html>

→ **Finally, if you're wondering ...**



Finally, if you're wondering how you're going to find the time to do all the above, do at least these three:

- ▶ Focus everyone on listening and questioning as opposed to telling and bemoaning.
- ▶ While at the same time, talk about your vision incessantly. Most especially looking out for the people who will not like the change but have a great influence on others... Be prepared to spend too much time talking to them.
- ▶ And role model the change and the desired way of being like there is no tomorrow, including whipping into shape those leaders who aren't living the change, and do it pretty damn quick.



StickyChange

For lots more hints, tips and hard
earned wisdom, please contact us at
info@stickychange.com



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