

Approaches to change - no pain, no change

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Suppose you want to move from Point A to Point B. Point A is where you are. Point B is the desired outcome that you want to achieve, or that's been imposed upon you.

For confronting significant, challenging, disruptive change, the process can't be left to chance.

You increase your success of moving from A to B by effectively managing a change campaign. During the campaign, many things are in transition. People don't feel comfortable. They resist. The campaign represents upset for many people; it is a departure from what they were doing.

The effective change manager helps people adopt new operating procedures, exhibit new behaviors and develop new attitudes that all support progress toward the desired outcome.

Keeping a change campaign moving forward is only likely when the pain of the present state is greater than the cost of the transition state. For example, it would be exceedingly costly to abandon your car if it were stuck on a railroad track. As a train approaches, it would be even more costly to not abandon the car!

Many organizations want to keep offering the product or service that has brought them healthy profits in the past. Yet, as the competition strives to offer superior products or services, and as the marketplace becomes more aware of opportunities to upgrade products and services, there is simply no standing still.

Some people regard pain management as the greatest single motivator for people to achieve what they want. By extension, pain management applied to a change team may be the greatest single motivator for the group to achieve the desired objective. Unless you associate sufficient amounts of pain with your current situation, in a week, a month or a year from now, you will find yourself right where you started. You likely will be surrounded by all of the unpleasant aspects of your current situation, because you won't muster sufficient impetus to break through the transition state to get to the desired end result.

Personally, as well as group-wide, if the level of pain is not high enough, there will be no change.

Since change campaigns are initiated by sponsors, and sponsors inherently feel some level of pain, it behooves the sponsor to convey an appropriate level of pain to the change manager, who will then convey such to the change targets. If an organization, department or team seeks to change because they will lose out on a fun or interesting opportunity otherwise, will the level of pain be sufficient? In most cases the answer is no. If failing to make a change will result in some minor upset, hurt feelings or other temporary negative situation, then once again, the pain level is insufficient.

What then, constitutes appropriate and sufficient pain? How much is enough to motivate a sponsor to initiate change, to cause a change manager to feel the heat and to pass on the intensity to the targets of change on whom the responsibility falls? As it turns out, the answer is not crystal clear.

Pain is subjective. The amount of pain and the form it takes impacts people differently.

Never underestimate the power of fear as a motivator to change.

Psychologists will tell you that following a person's divorce, he or she has the greatest incentive to get back into shape if more than a "few pounds" have been added over the years. The newly divorced person fears that he or she will not attract a mate commensurate with his or her desires.

So too, organizations that fear for their viability as a result of virtually any stimuli are inherently primed for change. Initiating sponsors have fewer hurdles to clear to get a change campaign in place. Sustaining sponsors more readily have the ear of change managers, who in turn more readily have the attention and participation of staff.

An organization-wide fear can be harnessed by sponsors and change managers to great effect. It is not as if they brought about the situation, but they can make use of what has occurred.

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