

Tips for Leading Change

Why, What, How

You can't motivate people to change a procedure or work system if they don't understand why it is changing, what needs to be changed, and how to make the change.

- Why. Make sure staff members understand the need for change. Show them data to support the need. Make sure they understand the implications of not changing.
- What and how. Make sure staff know exactly what you want them to change, and how to perform new best practices.

Creating an Environment for Change

Staff members come to work wanting to do a good job, but they need to be part of a system that supports their work. Individual performance and behavior change is largely governed by the system the individual works in. Staff members are more likely to support change if they have the time and energy to invest in the changes. Do the processes and systems promote and support staff in carrying out best practices? Does leadership support staff and identify and remove barriers that interfere with behavior change?

Organizational Readiness for Change

Successfully implementing change is easier in an organizational environment that is already employee-oriented, with a high level of trust. Assess readiness in your agency by evaluating attitudes and beliefs regarding level of trust and optimism about the work environment. Does your agency have a history of open communication? Do you share financial information?

Consistent, Continual, Effective Communication

Although resistance to change is the norm, you can counteract confusion and skepticism with effective communication. You cannot over-communicate during a time of change.

1. Develop a written communication plan.
2. Communicate the vision, mission, and objectives of the change effort. Build a memorable, conceptual framework that staff members will understand.
3. Explain how these changes will affect people personally.
4. Communicate to all stakeholders—nurses, aides, office staff, clients, family.
5. Communicate continually and consistently throughout the entire process
6. Communicate through multiple channels (speaking, writing, video, training, focus groups, intranet, bulletin boards, other)
7. Communicate face-to-face to permit a two-way conversation, rather than email or a poster on a bulletin board. People will appreciate the opportunity to discuss and ask questions and that you took the time to listen to them. Allow enough time for people to ask questions and be heard. Make it a true conversation—not just a presentation. Make leaders available to staff members daily when possible.
8. Just listen. The power of real listening cannot be over emphasized.
9. Don't assume that since you've communicated the changes once, that everyone will have received the message and make the changes.

Employee Commitment to Change

To foster whole-hearted support and commitment to a change, staff members who will be expected to implement the change or who are affected by the change must be involved in its creation, implementation and evaluation of effectiveness. Staff members will never whole-heartedly support a change they were not involved in creating. It is not as easy to criticize something if you play an active role. Allow for brainstorming from all levels of the organization and set clear expectations for how ideas will be used or not used. To avoid lack of motivation--and even sabotage--spend time on the front end, rather than policing changes on the back end.

Leadership Support for Change

Mobilize people to do great things. We all have leadership skills that can be developed and honed regardless of our position in an organization. "Leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women . . . extraordinary things happen by liberating the leader within everyone."

What leaders do:

1. **Model the behavior expected of others.** Leaders let people know what they really think and believe and stand up for their beliefs. They are highly visible and spend time with people. They work side by side with colleagues and ask questions to get people to think about values and priorities.
2. **Inspire a shared vision.** Leaders have visions of how things can be. They are confident in their ability to make something happen, and have the ability to inspire commitment from others.
3. **Challenge the process.** Leaders challenge the status quo. They search for opportunities to grow and improve. They seek out and recognize the good ideas of others.
4. **Enable others to act.** Leaders recognize that leadership is a team effort. They foster collaboration and build trust. They make it possible for others to do good work. And encourage a sense of personal power and ownership among all team members. They share power and never make team members feel weak, dependent, or alienated.
5. **Encourage the heart.** Leaders demonstrate genuine acts of caring and show sincere appreciation for the contributions of their team members. They create a culture of celebration and link rewards with performance.

Adapted from "The Leadership Challenge," Kouzes and Posner.

Sustaining Change

1. There must be dissatisfaction with the status quo—unhappiness with the current situation.
2. There must be a shared vision of what you are trying to achieve.
3. There must be an effective communication plan in place to support change.
4. Senior management must walk the talk. They must own the change and lead it.
5. There must be alignment between the strategic demands of the change to the operational demands on managers and staff. Misalignment produces mixed messages, confusion and dissatisfaction.
6. Performance measures must be used to inform management decisions.
7. The skills, knowledge and attitudes required to sustain the change need to be defined so that HR systems—recruitment, performance management, training and development and succession planning— can be focused on building new core competencies.
8. Recognition & rewards must be in place to sustain change.

More Tips for Leading Change

- Continually provide coaching and teaching on the new behaviors
- Understand the impact that the changes will have on an individual's schedule, workload, time, priorities, etc.
- Figure out how behaviors and attitudes will have to change to make new processes work.
- Build people skills so that staff members can communicate openly and effectively.
- Be careful to do what you say you will do.
- Ask for feedback on any changes, and acknowledge and act on feedback.
- Respond to challenges creatively.
- Reward behaviors that you want to reinforce. Do not reward behaviors that you do not want to reinforce.
- Don't denigrate the past. Be respectful – people were doing the best they could with what they knew and the resources they had.
- Provide encouragement and feedback continuously along the way to maintain motivation, to increasing understanding of the importance of the change, to highlight that it is important
- Collect data to assess whether changes are being made, staff reactions to the changes, and the impact of the changes.
- Provide time for staff to focus on improvement efforts.
- Recognize and appreciate staff efforts to improve.
- Celebrate success – allow staff to take pride in improved outcomes.
- Promote cooperation among staff. Understand the changes in one area may impact another area. Promote an environment of mutual respect and encouragement. Everyone must understand the overall goals of the improvement efforts and how it impacts the overall good of the organization. Make sure everyone understands the common purpose.
- Minimize negative talk; focus on the positive.
- Watch your tone of voice when communicating with staff, watch nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, posture, and gestures.
- Don't try to get staff to change by instilling fear or using threats.
- Ask for help in solving problems and making improvements.
- Show confidence in people by communicating positive expectations.
- Recognize that change is a process and happens over time. Change involves learning from confronting the obstacles we encounter. Progress is not linear. We go up for a while, then we start going down. Then we go back up again...