

## May 2008 “Ignite”

Increase Involvement to Improve Your Odds for Organizational Change Success

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### Ignite! Newsletter—May 2008 Article

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Even under the best of circumstances nearly 70 percent of all change initiatives fail. And that’s why most organizations never realize the benefits they hoped for with their new culture change, software implementation, or training initiative.<sup>1</sup>

It doesn’t have to be this way according to organizational change expert Patricia Zigarmi, Ed.D., of The Ken Blanchard Companies®.

“Most change efforts get derailed or fail for predictable reasons,” explains Zigarmi. “But many leaders don’t recognize or account for these reasons. As a result, they make the same mistakes again and again.”

#### The main reasons for failure?

While there are many documented reasons why change initiatives fail, the overriding reason is that change sponsors do not involve or address the concerns of the people affected by the change.

As Zigarmi explains, “People have predictable and sequential concerns with change. I first learned about this in the 1980s. I worked on a study to find out why a set of educational initiatives tested extremely well, but then when they were rolled out, they didn’t achieve targeted results.

“What we found out was that nobody had surfaced the concerns of the teachers with regard to the changes. We created a model and ended up proving in subsequent change efforts that reactions to change are indeed predictable and sequential.”

The “concerns model” was created by a team at the University of Texas. This model identifies six buckets of concerns with change, and promises that if leaders would pay special attention to the first three, the rest of the change will, in all likelihood take care of itself.

The first bucket is around information concerns. People don’t want to be sold on the change. Instead, they want to know what it is, what you are seeing, and why things have to change.

The second bucket involves personal concerns. They’re the most ignored state of concern because they sound like whining, but what they really are, are clues to resistance to the proposed change. People don’t want to know why the change is good for the company; they want to know why it’s good for them, and they want to know if they will be able to master the new skills the change requires.

The third bucket is around the nitty-gritty implementation concerns such as system alignment, best practices, and the daily mechanics of making the change happen.

The remaining buckets of concern are impact concerns—does the change make a difference; collaboration concerns—who else needs to be on board; and refinement concerns—what’s even better than what we’re doing right now?

As Zigarmi concludes, “Our core belief is that the best way to implement change is to increase the involvement of the people being asked to change, surfacing and resolving their concerns along the way. Whether you are looking to build bench strength through a training initiative, implement an ERP software system, or redefine your go-to-market strategy, you have to look at the people side of change in addition to the strategic side.”

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### Resistance to Change

With the evidence so clearly pointing toward the importance of increasing involvement and addressing concerns, it is surprising that more change leaders do not build these important steps into their plans. A common reason cited for not including people in the change is that the change sponsors believe that people are naturally resistant to change. Instead of involving people in the process, it seems smarter to “sell” them on the benefits of changing as a way to overcome their resistance. This is misguided, according to Zigarmi.

“The reality is that people are not so much resistant to change as they are resistant to being controlled. When organizations try to sell change to people affected by the change instead of involving them and addressing their concerns, they doom their change initiatives to failure.”

“People are smart,” she continues, “and if you help them understand the change from the standpoint of the person deciding the change, they’ll come to the same conclusions about the compelling reasons to change.”

If leaders do not take the time to specifically address individuals’ needs and fears near the beginning of the change process, they will find themselves fighting an uphill battle later on in the process.

That’s why change leaders need to gain the buy-in and cooperation of the people who are being asked to change. Without that, resistance smolders. This is because people feel that change is being done to them rather than with them.

### Get It Right in the Beginning

Zigarmi believes that the fastest way to defuse resistance is by using a high involvement change strategy. By involving people in the change process—including what it will look like and how it is implemented—you give people who are impacted by the proposed change an opportunity to influence the process, which increases their sense of ownership.

“What we are emphasizing is to get it right in the beginning,” she explains. “We coach change leadership teams to spend more time thinking about two things. One, what are the concerns of people who are impacted by the change likely to be? (And remember these are predictable.)

“The second thing is to spend some time thinking about how you are going to create dialogue and allow for involvement and influence. Because again, people who touch what’s happening to them and can influence the change that they are being asked to make have a greater sense of ownership and buy-in.”

Zigarmi argues that if organizations don’t provide people with the information to resolve their need to know, if they don’t resolve people’s personal concerns, and if they don’t work out the nitty-gritty of the implementation details, then people’s concerns will continue to escalate.

“And it is important to remember that those concerns are there whether we are addressing them or not. One of the biggest mistake leaders make is thinking that these concerns will just go away if ignored. They never do.”