



## Powerful Communications The Cornerstone to Gaining Commitment to Change

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**According to renowned change guru, John Kotter (2012), 70% of change initiatives in organizations and businesses fail. One of the major obstacles that hinder the overall success of change management programs is ineffective communications. This is partially due to lack of communication. When you are leading a change, you live, breathe and may even dream about the change. You are so engrossed by the change that you may feel it is not necessary to keep repeating it. However, the reality is, you cannot “over communicate” the change. When individuals do not know what is happening, what is expected, or even why the change is occurring in the first place, they will likely make up the reasons – and their stories are usually far worse than the truth.**

### Communicate Change Often

Telling people once that the change is coming and then sending an email to inform them that the change has been implemented, is simply not enough. Any change needs to be communicated often. It is recommended that change initiatives be communicated at least 7-15 times. This may sound like a lot, but when people receive hundreds of emails a day, work on multiple projects, and have competing demands, there is struggle for their attention. Using approximately seven different mediums to communicate the change will help to increase the likelihood that individuals will be notified that the change is coming and what to expect. These can range from simple emails, reports and tweets to one-on-one meetings, town halls, and multi-stakeholder events.

### Creating Compelling Change Communications

Effective leaders recognize and understand that resistance is greatest when change is unexpected or unexplained. As a result, they take a proactive approach by developing strategies to minimize resistance and help individuals move through the change curve. Leaders must seek to understand how stakeholder groups will likely respond to change. It is important to first acknowledge people's losses as a result of the change and honouring the past before launching into all of the great benefits of the proposed change. Individuals and groups impacted by the change will likely want to know what is going to remain the same, what is going to stop, what needs to be improved, and what will be new as a result of the change. By anticipating stakeholder reactions, leaders can craft change communication to 'mobilize' stakeholders and achieve the appropriate level of engagement in the change process.

For a leader to build employee commitment towards change, there are four elements to crafting compelling change communications: Inform, educate, support and commit. These four steps will assist in moving individuals and groups from denial, through resistance, to acceptance and then commitment.

### Step 1: Inform

- Share the change vision
- Describe the factors leading to the changes and the approach the organization or department is taking
- Create a sense of urgency for the change
- Review the business case for change
- Emphasize that the change will happen

### Step 2: Educate

- Build understanding of the change
- Be transparent in your communications to help build trust and commitment
- Acknowledge the legitimacy of anger or frustration
- Explain the change and show how the change will benefit the organization and affect the team

### Step 3: Support

- Clarify the personal meaning and impacts of the change
- Address issues and concerns
- State your confidence and support of the changes to come
- Tie the change to benefits for the organization and for the team

### Step 4: Commit

- Continue to provide a series of specific next steps and follow-up frequently
- Continue to reinforce positive actions that individuals can take
- Provide recognition for individual and team efforts
- Ask them for their support for the change



## Step 1: Inform



## Step 2: Educate



## Step 3: Support



## Step 4: Commit

Often times when change happens within an organization, it is not communicated enough. The better your ability to communicate change, the more informed, aware and accepting your team will be, especially when given opportunities to engage in two-way dialogue. Whatever concerns may have existed (e.g., decreased morale, decline in performance, etc.), will be overcome quicker when timely and consistent communications from a trusted leader are delivered.

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Kotter, J. (2012). Leading change. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.