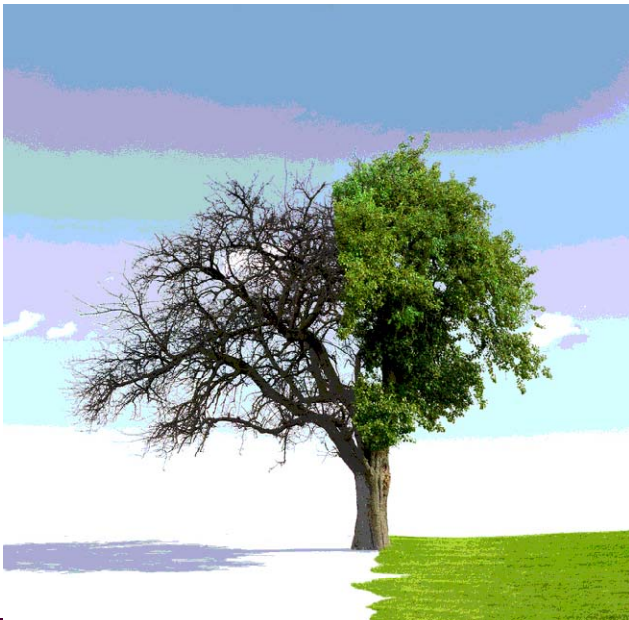


# Six keys to **successful** change

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How to make business performance  
meet objectives



Change is never going to be easy, but an experienced business owner understands that every organization will need to undergo change at some point in its life. With a carefully executed plan, change can be both powerful and sustainable.

Change is difficult to apply and even harder to sustain in a business. Yet all seasoned business owners understand its importance. At some point in the life of every organization, it will be imperative to successfully execute change. The prosperity and even the survival of the business will depend on it. Here are six ways to implement positive, sustainable change.

### **1) Be truthful and weigh the impacts.**

First, focus on the facts that directly impact your business. Misguided changes can come from well-intentioned leaders who attempt to implement the latest strategic management concept or react to broad fears in the national marketplace. Stay focused on the things affecting your business and your specific market.

Second, it is imperative to understand the magnitude of any change. Don't change for the sake of changing. You may quickly recognize that a particular business function or process is not as efficient as it could be. However, change has a cost. Without a clear understanding of its value, it will be difficult to sustain the commitment and energy needed for change if you do not consider its cost.

### **2) Create an inspiring vision.**

Significant, lasting change requires inspiration and motivation. There must be a connection between the benefits of change and the desires of those it impacts. This may include your customers, your vendors or your employees. Before committing to any change, you must

consider the challenges and benefits it presents to stakeholders. If you do, you will be able to anticipate resistance and promote the opportunities involved. This is crucial to driving the acceptance of change.

Whenever possible, include affected individuals in the change process. Asking, "would this make your life or your job easier?" will empower others to participate in the change process, rather than become victims of it. People will not take ownership of a change if it is forced on them and they have no reason to believe in it. Without a connection, there will be no motivation.

### **3) Identify action steps and assign ownership.**

In order to turn a vision into real change, specific action steps must be clearly defined, and each step must be assigned to the appropriate people. Each step should be specific, measurable, and time-bound. Many leaders struggle with this level of detail. It is difficult to make the transition from a concept to actions and results, but it is in the execution of these detailed tasks that change actually happens.

### **4) Plan your work and work your plan.**

Due to the dynamic nature of change, there will always be obstacles. It is important to discern the "speed bumps" from the major obstructions that require a detour. Diligence in planning and tracking your progress will allow you to recognize the need for additional resources or adjustments to your course. The more detailed your plan,

the more accurately will you be able to make adjustments.

In order to execute this level of planning, create a culture of accountability within your team. All members should be expected to do what they have agreed to do. When they don't, the team will hold them accountable for making new commitments and keeping them. Accountability for successful change exists when a team makes promises and holds each member responsible for keeping them.

The earliest sign of trouble that I see when working with teams occurs when members arrive late or completely miss meetings. "Competing priorities" is a frequently accepted excuse for this behavior, but the missing team member's lateness or absence is only a part of the problem. The larger danger is that without acknowledging this as a "broken promise," the team slips into a subtle complacency. Little by little, the commitment of individuals and the team is weakened, and eventually the integrity of the entire change process erodes, one promise at a time.

#### 5) Share your successes.

Since change can take a significant amount of time, it's important to share successes along the way to maintain motivation and commitment. It can be as simple as a discussion of results produced since the last meeting. Whatever the means, always acknowledge progress. When extraordinary results occur or major milestones are reached, take time to do something extraordinary. Organize a group

lunch or arrange tickets to an event. Do anything possible to make the process fun and recognize people for their successes.

#### 6) Measure results and re-establish action steps.

Finally, check in from time to time on your vision and the pulse of those involved. Do the results still lead to the benefit you desire? Are your people still committed to change? If not, make the necessary adjustments. And remember, you're not just measuring performance; you're checking the inspiration and commitment of your people to making change happen.

**Change** is never going to be easy. But with a well-considered plan, committed employees and a disciplined approach to sustaining progress, you will be successful.

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