How to Lead Change
By John Kotter

How can Ford Motor Company recover from declining sales and a diminished image? How can a troubled financial sector right the ship after an onslaught of home foreclosures? How can airlines escape their perpetual flirtations with bankruptcy?

In his classic text, *Leading Change*, John Kotter offers timeless insights into the mechanics of change. In particular, he explores the following eight fundamental qualities of successful change leadership.

#1 - Establish a sense of urgency

Wise leaders realize that people have an aversion to change. Unless prodded to make adjustments, most people won't budge from business as usual. Since leaders are likely the first ones to sense the need for change, they must convey a sense of urgency by convincingly identifying the threats of staying the same.

#2 - Gather a guiding coalition

Before making the case for change to the entire organization, a leader should persuade fellow influencers of its necessity. In every company, a small group of stakeholders lay claim to a majority of the influence. Unless a change agent rallies these key decision-makers to his side, he will have difficulty garnering enough momentum to shift the organization.

#3 - Create vision

Before launching a movement for change, it's essential to formulate a compelling vision to support it. The vision should clearly spell out the rationale for making a change, and it should paint a picture of the preferred future that will arise as a result of the change. On a practical note, the vision should be refined and simplified until it can be shared in five minutes or less.

#4 - Communicate vision

Human emotions tend to be drawn toward the discomfort and inconveniences of change. For this reason, it's critical to make every effort to communicate the value of change. Leaders too readily fear repeating themselves when they should be more afraid of their people misinterpreting the vision or losing sight of it.

#5 - Empower others to act on the vision

First and foremost, build margin for change. People's responsibilities continue in addition to their involvement in major change initiatives. Give them space to internalize the change and readjust their focus. Changing is a difficult endeavor. Be sure ample resources, meetings, and man-hours are being devoted to make it happen.

#6 - Plan for and create short-term wins

Oftentimes, the scale of a needed change can be overwhelming. Whittle it down into bite-sized bits, and be sure to celebrate every milestone accomplished. Build upon small, short-term victories to infuse the team with momentum so that they can carry out the full extent of the

desired changes.

#7 - Consolidate improvements to extend change

At first, changes are fragile. They need nourishment and protection in order to take root in the organization. Be vigilant of hard-fought changes, and recognize that many of them will take years to be fully ingrained in the organization.

#8 - Institutionalize new approaches

As the best leaders know, change is not a once-in-awhile proposition. The process of change is ongoing. When leaders manage change effectively, they gain respect and earn the right to craft a culture where change is a regular, even welcome, aspect of the organization.

About the Author

For more insights from John Kotter, pick up a copy or his book, *Leading Change*, or stop by his website.

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