

No lack of reading material about how to institute change

The trendy 1998 book by Spencer Johnson turned the expression, "Who moved my cheese?" into an office commonplace for frustration about change.

"Keep the Change," said an anti-Obama bumper sticker seen around town last fall. Irrespective of politics, human resistance to change is natural, maybe even inevitable.

As leaders continue to grapple with the difficulty of making positive changes, the books and techniques keep coming.

"Change the Way You Lead Change: Leadership Strategies that Really Work," by David M. Herold and Donald B. Fedor, focuses on why many changes, and change leaders, fail.

"Changes that don't make sense, suffer from lack of leadership, or push people beyond their capabilities will not succeed no matter what methods are used to implement them," they wrote.

Herold and Fedor analyzed 300 change situations, primarily at the CEO level within large corporations and government organizations. The model they created looks like something off a bad PowerPoint chart, with input/output boxes for the who, what, how and context (environment) aspects of change, plus the mandatory feedback loops.

More instructive are brief case studies that visit all the reasons people, organizations and business environments resist or sabotage change initiatives. Examples such as Carly Fiorina's brief tenure at Hewlett-Packard and Robert Nardelli's at Home Depot illustrate that even when the majority in an organization sees the need to change, resistance can be enormous.

They conclude that, "Smart change leadership is about recognizing, diagnosing, tailoring, balancing and otherwise adapting one's hoped-for outcomes and implementation strategies to the realities of the situation."

To do this, you must consider everything about an organization, its people, and its environment before you start making changes, walking methodically through the chapters and stories to help highlight similar issues in your own organization.

Particularly insightful is their discussion about the power of organizational cultures and the toll that change takes on organizations and individuals.

They offer valuable advice that is seldom if ever encountered in a book about leading change: Sometimes the only change that is possible is change that happens very slowly, affecting only a few things at a time.

Sometimes the optimum solution from a business standpoint is impossible from a human standpoint, so taking the next best solution that people will embrace might be the best option.

If the analytical, methodical style of these professional types doesn't speak to you, a more visceral and emotional approach might appeal.

"The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations," by John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, approaches change leadership from the premise that emotions drive behavior.

Case studies, written by members of the subject organizations, illustrate the principles of their eight-step change process. The heart of their model, the process "see, feel, change," is the key to overcoming resistance to change.

"People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings," they wrote.

The authors contend that change leaders must show, in a visual and powerful way, why change is needed.

For example, the CEO of a company that had a decentralized and inefficient buying process called the regional managers together and displayed 424 different kinds of gloves they were buying on the boardroom table. The argument is that seeing the gloves (versus a report or spreadsheet or slide about the issue) drives an emotional reaction that in turn creates a burning desire for change.

Kotter and Cohen repeatedly emphasize the need for creating a sense of urgency in making change, showing the value of communication, empowerment and visible short-term successes to sustain that urgency.

In "Change the Way You Lead Change," Herold and Fedor repeatedly discuss the perils of bringing in outsiders to implement change because they don't understand the culture or have the trusted relationships required.

Kotter and Cohen, on the other hand, see change at the top as often essential.

"Any change must speak to the 'hearts' rather than minds of employees." The emotions that undermine change include anger, false pride, pessimism, arrogance, cynicism, panic, exhaustion, insecurity and anxiety," they wrote. "The facilitating emotions include faith trust optimism, urgency, reality-based pride, passion, excitement, hope and enthusiasm."

Because leaders understand and inspire people, an understanding of the power of these emotions can help.

Kotter and Cohen discount the power of analysis and reason, assuming the way to everyone's heart is through these emotions. Perhaps that assumption is more valid for some personality types than others.

Although they acknowledge Kotter's influence, in "Change at the Core: Unleash Your Team's Energy to Drive Results," Woodland Park resident Wendy Mack and Myron Radio contend that change leaders must adapt leadership and communication techniques to various personality types. Based on the popular DISC personality assessment, Mack and Radio provide a number of worksheets for adapting change strategies to the four different types they call driving, steady, influencing and careful.

Each personality responds to different types of information, deals with change differently, and brings different assets and liabilities to any team they are on. Mack and Radio take Kotter's ideas and expand them into strategies that reach all personality types.

For Mack and Radio, leading change is all about energy. Leaders must understand where their followers get their personal energy.

"Effective leaders recognize that being an energizer is not about 'projecting' energy as much as it is about uncovering and unleashing energy to achieve a specific result," they wrote.

Leaders must constantly take action to keep that energy high — momentum and urgency are keys. Energy is also required —

time and resources to administer the DISC program — for leaders at every level to have an intimate knowledge of their team's personality styles.

In addition to short exercises where readers can outline their own change scenarios, Mack and Radio have a number of case studies to highlight their approach. In many of them, Mack or Radio were involved in the situations as consultants and trainers, making their insights more personal and compelling.

Unlike "Change the Way You Lead Change," Mack and Radio do not examine how leaders decide "what" to change. The focus is entirely on overcoming resistance to change, and using each person's energy

to facilitate change.

And while the first two books focus more on the CEO-level perspective, Mack and Radio emphasize personal relationships as integral to change leadership.

All three books are worth the read if you have some change issues in front of you. The integral theme is that change efforts are just that — efforts.

Effective change cannot happen easily or in a hurry, be launched and forgotten, or neglect a hundred small but important details.

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