



# Are You Leading or Just Watching Change?

*by Mary Kelly*

**Most people don't like change.** Change brings uncertainty, causes anxiety, and is frequently accompanied by fear. With all the change that may be happening in a person's particular role or industry, some workers may fear they're not able to master the skills needed to continue doing the job they were originally hired to do.

How can leaders help others master the skills needed to work in new environments while also acknowledging the difficulties associated with making changes?

- **Prepare your teams for the change with training that actually matters.** I was recently coaching an executive in charge of implementing a new software system. Over an 18-month span they trained employees on the new system. Unfortunately, by the time the personnel were considered sufficiently trained, the final version of the system had radically changed. This forced employees to start the training all over again, creating disappointment with the system before it even launched. The lesson?  
**Keep training relevant.** If not, you are just wasting time, which cause employees to become frustrated, experience change fatigue, and resist the change even more.
- **Once you decide to change, make it happen.** It is important to realize that the change process often works better if it's implemented quickly, like ripping off a Band-Aid, rather than as a prolonged transition. Many organizations suffer change longer than they should because well-meaning leaders tear off the

Band-Aid slowly, hoping to ease people into the transition. This actually prolongs the pain associated with the new environment.

- Create a vision so compelling and motivating that everyone will support the new environment. Remember, all change, even really positive change, will result in some pushback. Common objections include:

“We’ve already tried that.”

“This is stupid.”

“This isn’t going to work.”

“I don’t see why we have to do this.”

It is incumbent on the leader to have a strong enough vision during this time to carry the naysayers along with the tide of change.

- **Remember the J-curve.** Leaders need to understand the normal, J-curve cycle most people experience when there is any kind of change. When undergoing change, people deny the process, then resist, then they explore, before finally committing to the change. This process is natural and normal. It follows the curve associated with the letter J. An idea is proposed and then things get worse before they get better. Great leaders expect the natural J-curve reactions.

- **Show your team that you understand their jobs have changed.** Have employees keep track of how their job descriptions have changed in the new environment and make sure you know how their roles are impacted.

1. As a leader, understanding the new roles and new work involved lets you know some of the unintended consequences and frustrations that have occurred due to the change in technology, policies, or procedures.
2. It ensures that you have an opportunity to discuss the changing scenario and how that person’s responsibilities may have shifted. This is an excellent time for feedback, both for the employer and the leader.
3. It allows you to identify any overlap in job responsibilities. When jobs overlap, there is no accountability. As jobs change, overlap may occur. Keep roles and responsibilities clear!
4. New job descriptions are helpful in making sure people are being paid appropriately and getting recognition for all they do.
5. Knowing what your people are doing on a day to day basis is important for every leader to know, and it helps you mentor and coach your team to their greatest success.

Change is hard for most people, and as a leader, your job is to make it easier.

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