

INSPIRE

On Leadership

Winter 2017

Leading Change

“When something new begins, somethings old and familiar ends.”

Leading change efforts in organizations is rarely easy. And from what research tells us, it’s rarely successful.

The human factor is where leaders need to focus!

Much of what gets written about focuses on change from the organizational level - the strategic execution of the change effort. Our view of change is often formulaic. If we plan, communicate and implement well enough, everything will fall into place. The reality is that successful change requires people to change. So, as leaders, if we want to be more successful at leading change, we have to be better at helping people overcome their disappointment, fear and resistance.

Example: A local organization built a beautiful, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. The female assembly workers struggled to accept this change, because they now had to keep their purses in lockers, and the restrooms were a good three-minute walk from their work stations.

Example: In another organization, a multi-million dollar software implementation was compromised, because employees were upset by their discomfort with the system and, even moreso, with the lack of support AND empathy from their leaders. The lack of care from the leadership led to resentment and an adverse impact on productivity.

In both of these situations, organizations spent millions of dollars on the change itself. Neither invested in equipping leaders to effectively respond to the predictable concerns or pushback of the employees.

In all change situations, leaders need to be equipped with an understanding that employees may struggle. The most effective leaders will proactively do the following: 1) Listen to what the employees are feeling; 2) Show empathy and support; 3) Involve employees in shaping change or the implementation of change; 4) Provide praise and encouragement; and 5) Provide training and support.

The human side of change is your key. For your employees, the little things are the big things.

Aleta Norris provides an ongoing column on developing better leadership skills. She is a leadership expert and Principal at Living as a Leader LLC.

