

White Paper

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There is only one thing constant in life ...

Solution Focus Areas:

Engagement / Morale
Turnover / Retention
Productivity
Leadership/Supervision

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“There’s Only One Thing Constant in Life...”

Do you ever hear people say:

- “I wish we would just slow down.”
- “Why do we always have to change?”
- “Can’t we just leave things alone?”
- “It’s working fine just the way it is.”
- “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Maybe you’ve even said it yourself. Do you feel like the only constant in your organization’s life is change itself? Well, you’re not alone.

One of the most challenging issues in organizations and business today is change. Some people love it and others hate it. But one thing is for sure, change takes time. We either make change happen so quickly that people don’t have time to get on board and make it happen effectively or we’re not given enough time to do what it takes to see change occur when it needs to.

CHANGE AND TRANSITION ARE NOT THE SAME

- “...to make radically different”
- “...give a different position, course, or direction to”
- “...to replace with another”
- “...to make a shift from one to another”
- “...to pass from one phase to another”
- “...to undergo transformation, transition, or substitution”

These are just a few of the definitions that Webster’s Dictionary provides for the word CHANGE. If you notice, you see nothing about stability, sameness, stagnation, or stopping. Webster’s Dictionary says that the word *change* is a verb. The word itself, therefore, implies movement or action.

On the other hand, one important component of the “change process” that is often overlooked and underestimated is TRANSITION. Webster’s defines *transition* as “passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another...” Sounds a lot like change, doesn’t it? That is where the problem lies.

Organizations and businesses today see change and transition as one in the same. We believe they are very different. According to William Bridges (*Managing Transitions*, 2003), **“It isn’t the changes that do you in, it’s the transitions.”** So what is the difference between change and transition?

First, we believe it is important to understand that change and transition are absolutely connected and inseparable.

Bill has been with the company for 15 years. He has been a faithful and loyal employee. Bill's supervisor, Karen, has always given him very positive end-of-the-year reviews. Bill is a model employee.

On Monday morning Karen announced to her staff that the technology department was going to replace their computers. Karen said they were going to do this the next morning, so they needed to back up any files they did not want to lose. Everyone went back to work, except Bill. He just sat there looking stunned. Later that day Karen noticed that Bill wasn't looking very good. She asked if everything was alright and Bill hesitantly said yes.

The next day came and the technology staff came through and replaced their computers. This process only took an hour or two for each computer. They were very well trained and very efficient at their jobs.

When Bill saw his new computer he was in a complete panic. He could do nothing except just stare at the new monitor. Nothing looked the same. He tried to find his documents but they were no where to be found. A couple of days later Karen noticed that Bill was still not looking well. She asked if everything was alright. Once again, Bill mustered the strength to say yes. Karen wasn't so sure this time, so she sat down with Bill. Karen said she noticed that his work had dropped off over the last few days and he just didn't seem himself.

Finally, Bill broke down and said that he was totally lost with his new computer. He was angry and frustrated that his computer was replaced without even being asked. Bill said that he had just gotten used to his old computer and now he has a new one and can't find anything.

Can anyone relate to Bill? Oh sure, it may not be as simple as a new computer, but have you had change occur without any regard for you? You see, the change (new computer) only took a couple of hours to implement. This is where most organizations and businesses stop. The change has been implemented successfully because they see the new computers on everyone's desk. However, transition has been ignored.

OUR STRUGGLE WITH LOSS

“Change implies making ... an essential difference, often amounting to a loss of original identity” (Webster’s Dictionary). If you notice, in this definition of change, the concept of loss is introduced. When change occurs, loss also occurs. Unless we allow opportunity for people to deal with the losses associated with change (transition), the change never really is implemented effectively. In other words, “change” is the *what* and “transition” is the *how*.

Bill’s computer was replaced within a couple of hours (what), but no one ever considered Bill’s emotional ability to manage this change (how). Some of Karen’s staff were thrilled to receive a new computer and couldn’t wait for it to arrive. Bill, on the other hand, struggled with technology and he had just gotten used to his old computer. The idea of a new one was very scary for him. No one gave Bill the time to deal with the loss of not only his old computer, but more importantly, no one gave Bill time to deal with the fear that came with his new one.

Whenever change occurs, transition goes with it. In order to be effective, we need to involve the people affected by the change in the change process. We need to allow a process to occur which deals with people’s emotions. There needs to be intentional efforts made to allow people to experience their losses and deal with their emotions. However, people are unique. We don’t all adjust emotionally at the same pace or in the same direction. You will always find individuals who accept and embrace change easily and quickly. You will also always find people who need more time and support to work through the change process. Do not assume these people don’t care or are unwilling to get on board with the change. Take the time to involve them, to engage them and support them through their feelings. You will find that some of your greatest advocates of the change you desire will be those who struggled with it the most in the beginning.