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DEAR CHIEF: I’m an academic administrator at a college and am wondering why staff workers are always so resistant to change. Every time we change a process to make the college more efficient, almost everyone fights it tooth and nail. How can I get people to get on board with our push for new and improved processes that will keep our college thriving with enrollments? After all, don’t staff workers see how they, too, can benefit from these changes? Don’t they realize if we remain stagnant that we will be left in the dark by our competitors?

TIRED OF RESISTANCE



DEAR TIRED OF RESISTANCE: You are right. Change is usually necessary for organizations to survive over the long-term but there are also times when change isn’t necessary. The need for change always must be analyzed and weighed against the need for continuity and then balanced accordingly.

Quite often an implemented change will work if an organization has effectively evaluated and understands its internal strengths and weaknesses as well as its external opportunities and threats. This means the implemented change will either utilize a strength, eliminate a weakness, exploit an opportunity, or avoid a threat.

When an organization hasn’t done such an evaluation, then the implementation of a change may do nothing more than hinder the organization’s effectiveness and reduce morale.

It’s natural for individuals as well as organizations to resist change. People are creatures of habit. With all of the vast and complex decisions we have to make every day, it’s nice to rely on habits

or programmed responses for continuity. When we’re confronted with change, our feelings of safety and security that accompany our habits become threatened and we don’t like it.

Additionally, some individuals fear that proposed changes will have a negative impact on their personal income, causing an economic fear—especially when pay is closely tied to productivity.

Furthermore, sometimes people resist change because they don’t like to be inconvenienced. This happens quite often when people don’t know the value of the change as well as how they can benefit from it.

Organizations, on the other hand, are very conservative by their nature. Group inertia, threats to member expertise, power relationships, and established resource allocations result in active resistance to proposed changes. This is why organizations have built-in mechanisms to produce and maintain stability: things like standard operating procedures, job descriptions, and employee selection processes are all constructed to achieve and maintain stability and continuity in an organization.

When change is necessary, you need to have a strategy to communicate its purpose and to implement it. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, said “change should be accompanied by a clear vision of where the change will lead to.” This gives people an idea of what the desired end state will be after the change is implemented.

Your approach in implementing organizational change should be accompanied by one or more of the following courses of action:

1) If feasible, offer employees a reward for accepting the change. Perhaps a bonus for increased productivity or extra paid vacation days.

2) Communicate the reason

why the change is necessary. Do this in person, in presentations, memos, letters, or on-line forums. Whatever method you choose, make sure your communication is sincere, clear, and enthusiastic. Remember, you need to win over people’s hearts and minds—so an effective sales pitch may be necessary. Throughout your communication effort be sure to anticipate what people’s fears and concerns will be and address them, along with the benefits, at precise times to alleviate those fears and concerns.

3) As much as possible, include people who will be affected by the change in the process on deciding the need for change. If they participate in your analysis of a given situation, they may see the logic that cements the need for change. In this manner, they will not only feel they are part of the decision for change but will believe they are driving those decisions. And when this happens, they will better support a decision for change from its announcement through its execution. People usually support a decision when they believe they came up with the idea!

Try these three techniques with your staff workers and there’s a great chance you’ll have increased “buy-in” and support for the changes you want to implement.



Are you someone striving to achieve your maximum potential, develop your leadership and/or management skills, enhance your professional development or self-improvement efforts, or improve your professional relationships? If so, then get advice from a proven leader and mentor. Jeff Urbaniak is a retired Air Force Chief and current Leadership Consultant with over 30 years of leadership and management experience. For an opportunity to have your issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.