



How Today's Leaders Take the Fear out of Change

By Alan Zimmerman

Even though all progress is the result of change, very few people like change. It rocks the boat. It upsets the apple cart. And it feels uncomfortable.

So most people spend most of their lives chasing after "security." They're chasing after emotional, relational, financial, or occupational security but they never seem to get enough.

Of course, they never will. General Douglas MacArthur said it quite well. He said, "There is no security on this earth, only opportunity."

If you're a leader of any sort ... leading a major organization or leading a small group ... you need to grasp the full meaning of MacArthur's comment. He's saying you may never find a way to get everyone to like the changes you are proposing. After all, most people don't want it. Remember, they want security.

However, you can make people feel less threatened by the change. I suggest the following.

1. Turn to your people. Most of your employees or team members want you to succeed. They want to be a part of a successful, winning group. So when change is about to come or you're in trouble, turn to your people.

Now that might sound a bit scary for you, to be that open and vulnerable with your people, but it works. As one successful change leader told me, whenever he got in trouble or knew that a particular change would be threatening, "I simply go to my people, explain my problem, and ask them for help. It never fails."

In reality, you've only got two choices. You can either turn to your people or you can turn away from them. Successful change leaders turn to their people.

2. Make sure people experience a lot of success. When people are going through change, they're bound to make some mistakes. That can be disheartening and demotivating.

Effective change leaders make sure their people also experience a lot of success. It makes the change so much more palatable. Good leaders look for ways to make winners out of their people. They look for ways to make them succeed rather than let them fail.

IBM knew that a long time ago. They set challenging quotas for their salespeople, but those quotas could be achieved by 70 to 80% of their salespeople. Compare that to one of IBM's competitors. They set quotas that only 40% of their people could make, which meant that 60% of their people were "losers." That's not the environment you want to create if you want to motivate peak performance in your employees or bring about change.

By contrast, a little success makes people want to do more and do better. In one research experiment, a group of adults were given ten puzzles to solve. They worked on their puzzles for a designated amount of time, turned them in, and got their scores.

Half of the people were told they did very well--that they got seven of the ten answers correct. The other half were told they didn't do very well at all--that they got seven of the ten wrong.

In actuality, both groups got the same scores. They had the same success rate. But in later trials, the half that was told they had done very well improved their performance. They got better. The half that was told they had done poorly got worse.

Now I'm not suggesting that you ever deceive your people. Don't tell them they're doing better than they really are. However, if you emphasize the positive, if you point out the things that your people do well, they'll probably get better and change more easily.

3. Make the change as simple as possible. Don't complicate things with unnecessary procedures, complex hierarchical relationships, or confusing policies. Remember KISS ... **Keep It Simple Stupid.**

In one organization where I was speaking, they had nine levels of management, and each level had 10 to 15 objectives to achieve. Everyone was frustrated, superiors and subordinates alike. They couldn't even remember their objectives let alone concentrate on them. Needless to say, change was not going very well for them.

Excellent companies and effective leaders know simple is better. TI (Texas Instruments) says having "more than two objectives" means having "no objective" at all.

And a change leader in another one of my client organizations told me, "We have only two to three key policies and stress only two to three objectives at any one time. We get better results that way."

When Toyota learned this and wanted to make a change for the better, they streamlined their chain of command. They moved from 17 layers of people to a mere five.

4. Allow them some control. Change will be less threatening for your people if you allow them some control over their destinies. In other words, the change isn't something being done "to" them. It's something they can shape.

In one experiment, people were given proofreading chores. While they worked on their tasks, loud disruptive noises were played in the background.

However, the people were divided into two groups. One group was given a button which they could push to turn off the noise. The other group was not given such a button.

The group with the off switch solved five times as many problems as the other group. And they only made a fraction of the errors.

Perhaps strangest of all, neither group ever used the off-switch. But the mere fact that the one group could control the noise was enough to stimulate their significantly better performance.

Letting people have a bit of control over their destinies takes away a great deal of the fear. It makes the change easier to deal with.

Mary Ann Milko saw that happen when she was assisting a friend whose daughter was getting married. The days before the wedding were hectic and even though the future bride and groom deeply loved each other, the huge amount of work and change was starting to scare the groom.

One night, Mary Ann said, after she had helped prepare a large dinner for several out-of-town guests, after the dishes had been cleared away, the happy but exhausted mother of the bride sat down. She softly said, "When this is all over, I plan to stay in bed for a week!"

A big smile came over the face of her future son-in-law. "So do I, Mrs. B. So do I!" he boomed.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-todays-leaders-take-fear-out-change-dr-alan-zimmerman-csp-cpae-jm5pe>