



## **Five Myths About Change How to Make Change Work For You**

By Tom Northup

Today's global business environment changes constantly. Yet too often companies develop their processes and procedures as if change will never affect them. Managers and employees work in habitual patterns and will resist change unless they buy into it.

For many years the telephone never changed. It had a rotary dial on a black base. About fifty years ago, beige colors were added. Push buttons arrived. Now phone features change every few months.

For years the investment castings industry, which makes large heavy engineered products, faced no competition from imports. Yet Asian imports are now attacking their top line. We see this phenomenon repeatedly.

### **Transform Your Business**

Rapidly changing technology and information transmission speed has shortened the business cycle. Faced with these changes, leaders take on a difficult task when they try to drive their companies to realize their vision and deliver sustainable results. They may find the very existence of the organization in jeopardy.

Leaders must incorporate transformational not just directional changes. Companies get the results — good or bad — that they are designed to get. If your vision for the future differs from your current situation, if you want different results, then you must change the way you do things. If you don't, how can you expect results that are any different from those you have already achieved?

Change, though pervasive, is often misunderstood. Many myths affect our attitudes toward change and limit our ability to proactively accomplish positive change. Too often we react defensively to circumstances that appear beyond our control. Let's take a closer look at five myths about change.

### ***Myth 1 — Change must be imposed. People don't like change. We must coerce them to make changes.***

Real change is self motivated. It's not that we do not like change, what we do not like is to be changed. When we don't involve our employees in discovering the need for change and don't involve them in the change plan, they become "change plan critics."

Fred, the owner of his company, decided to centralize customer service. His managers resisted with many reasons why this was a bad decision. Fred delayed implementation and brought his managers together to discuss why and how to improve customer service. Not

too long after, the managers were pushing Fred to speed the customer service improvements!

An effective leader understands that sharing power is the most effective way to build personal motivation. Participants must take intellectual and emotional ownership of the change initiative. When they are part of the change process and solution they develop personal commitment to the outcome.

***Myth 2 — You gradually wear down resisters. Eventually everyone will embrace change.***

As we learned in Myth 1, you can work with the people who openly resist your plans. They will slowly respond to your leadership.

However, you cannot ignore those who do not openly protest. These problem employees, the “amen brother” types, appear to accept changes. In reality the more changes you incorporate, the more these silent resisters sabotage them in subtle ways.

While they may openly play your game, they are working for the status quo. They think that they can, “wait this out for a while, and soon everything will be back to normal.”

***Myth 3 — Change is a one-time thing. Once we make the changes we need, everything will be OK.***

The world changes continuously and companies must change with it. If you suspect that change will be difficult, plan for it. After all, the time to repair your roof is when the sun is shining.

Effective leaders build a culture that embraces regular change through the use of continual planning. A culture that emphasizes planning develops management agreement, personal commitment and team focus. With these conditions present, you proactively lead change with the support of your team.

Focus is key. Planning focuses the management team. Focus then drives performance and performance drives results. Management focus, therefore, becomes a competitive advantage.

***Myth 4 — Change is radical.***

Real change happens in small steps. Large changes overwhelm people, defeating them before they even start.

When we break the change initiative into small steps, people maintain enthusiasm because they see positive progress in short time periods. Prioritize these steps so the results lead to success of the overall initiative.

Leaders that track and measure the success of each step of their initiatives most often accomplish their goals — and as the leader of your company, you must hold yourself accountable. When you make the steps small, it is easier to redirect effort as necessary. People responsible for change remain positive. They can quickly see the results of their efforts.

***Myth 5 — Others have to change, not me.***

Too often the attitude of the leader is “My people need to change, not me.” In reality change begins at the top. You must lead change if you want your organization to change. The most effective change initiatives are proactively led by top management.

As an effective leader, you play a key role as a positive role model. People respond positively to shared initiatives and team effort. When top management is actively involved, you and the company are better able to respond to the inevitable twists and turns that arise.

***Be Comfortable with Change.***

In summary, these five myths impact our ability to make necessary and effective changes in the time frames that allow us to proactively impact our marketplace. Accept these myths as fact, and you are likely to fail. Debunk these myths by acting proactively, and your chances of success increase exponentially.

Globalization, rapid technological advances and speed of information have permanently altered our business cycle. When you understand that real change is slow and difficult you will find ways to help you and your organization become more comfortable with change rather than resist it.

***The Change Credo***

People are “change plan critics” unless they become part of the change process and solution.

Share power by involving managers in the planning process; develop personal commitment and team effort in order to build agreement and focus; break change initiatives into manageable pieces; be proactive; hold yourself accountable, knowing that what gets tracked and measured gets accomplished — this is the credo of the successful leader.

By staying in control, you weather the difficult periods. By being proactive, you build a “lets beat our best” change philosophy into the culture of your organization.

Positive change brings positive results. Real change should be satisfying . . . and fun!

-----

With more than 30 years in operations management, Tom Northup understands the business complexities faced by today’s busy executives. The former CEO and principal of three successful businesses, one of which he grew from a second tier player into a position of market leadership, Tom is his own success story. Through coaching, consulting, mentoring, and training, he provides real-world, practical experience and thoughtful leadership—all with a focus on sustainable success and results. Tom strives to make a difference personally and professionally. He may be reached at [TomN@lmgsuccess.com](mailto:TomN@lmgsuccess.com) or [www.lmgsuccess.com](http://www.lmgsuccess.com)

Copyright © 2007 Tom Northup