



Change: Why It Can Be So Hard For So Many *By Joy S. Ruhmann*

You've heard it before, bring up a new way of doing things and the response you often get is, "What's wrong with the way we've been doing it?" or "This is the way we've always done it". Or even worse, you conduct a meeting where a new initiative is rolled out. During the meeting everyone seems to be on board with the changes then, around the water cooler, you hear, "Well, that'll never work" or "We've tried that before and it didn't work then, what's different now". Each of these self-defeating phrases is counter-intuitive to increased productivity, profitability and teamwork. However, as sad as it seems, they are heard all too often in organizations.

So what is it about change that's so challenging and causes so much resistance? The resistance to change can come from many sources:

- As unique and resourceful individuals, our personality or behavioral style impacts how we respond to change. High energy, outgoing individuals will often appear to thrive on change, while lower energy, more introspective individuals may appear resistant to change.
- Our level of self-esteem can have a significant impact on our ability to adapt to change. Individuals with lower self-esteem may be resistant to change for fear of loss of status or role identity. Individuals with higher self-esteem may thrive on change as they see it as creating new opportunities or indicative of better things to come.
- Finally, our level of stress can impact our ability to deal with change. No matter where we turn, organizations, teams, individuals, even families are doing more with less at a faster pace than ever. Cell phones, wireless internet access and PDAs keep us connected 24/7 so that we often don't slow down to rejuvenate, refresh, renew. And too much stress can lead to lower creativity, lower energy and a tendency to want to limit change in order to avoid more stress.

The problem is, as W. Edwards Deming, the father of the quality movement in America, is quoted as saying, "It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory". So for organizations focused on superior customer service, growth, and profitability, change is inevitable and must be accepted and sometimes embraced in order to achieve their mission and vision.

How do you create an environment where people will embrace change? The key is to understand that the only one any of us can really change is ourselves. Have you ever hired someone who wasn't quite right for the job, however, the position needed to be filled and you were just sure that you could change that individual to be effective in the job? If so, you likely ended up with a mis-hire. People change only if they want to change.

As John Miller, author of the landmark book, **QBQ! The Question Behind the Question** promotes, “change is a personal thing and I can only change me”. When it comes to dealing with change, I’m the only one who can impact my decision to:

- ▶ Embrace the change
- ▶ Fight the change or
- ▶ Simply ignore it, hoping it will go away.

Miller goes on to say that it’s through personal accountability that we become more effective at dealing with change and avoid the pitfalls of “*We’ve never done it that way before*” or “*That’ll never work*”.

While it is true that the only person you can change is yourself, it’s also true that business leaders are tasked with guiding other people through change. By instilling a sense of personal accountability into each of your managers and employees, you can positively impact their ability and willingness to deal with change, their attitudes and their commitment to your organization’s success. Because, in reality, Deming was right, ***change really is necessary for survival***

For more information about creating a culture of accountability in your organization, contact Joy Ruhmann at 919-510-0055 or joy@ruhmannassociates.com.

