

# Change for the Better

By David Scurlock

Managing the process  
of change to improve  
your business

Consider the following changes that are impacting businesses today:

- Changing economic conditions;
- Changing government requirements;
- Social media and technology;
- Multigenerational workforce;
- Customers' expectations; and
- Different forms of competition.

You may agree or disagree with the specifics of how these changes impact your business, but the important thing is how you deal with them and how your employees react to and adjust to them. Some changes may directly impact you; others may not apply to you at all.

Other important factors are your personal reactions to change and your ability to recognize how changes impact those around you. This article focuses on change from a business perspective, but the concepts apply to adaptation to any change—professional or personal.

Everyone handles change differently, and the way individuals handle it can affect the entire organization. Understanding the phases one goes through during a change can help you manage it and assist others in managing it as well. In a business setting, individuals supporting and communicating with each other in groups or teams can make moving through change easier and more productive, resulting in positive business results.

The following are the stages individuals go through in the process of change.

**Stage 1: The Plateau.** Before a change occurs, you follow established patterns. You are either masterful or comfortable. In any case, you are on a performance plateau and in a comfort zone.

**Stage 2: The Cliff.** This is when you start to do things the new way. Performance may drop off. You choose your role in the change process.

**Stage 3: The Valley.** Performance bottoms out. You are working harder than before, but are less productive.

**Stage 4: The Ascent.** You find new ways of doing things. The learning curve increases, along with

your performance and morale. You start feeling more positive about your performance.

**Stage 5: The Mountaintop.** Performance exceeds the pre-change level. Your performance improves and errors decrease.

This model looks at change as a process that impacts performance and business results. The change itself is physical, the process psychological. It starts with the status quo and goes through stages until the performance associated with the change exceeds the old way of doing things.

All individuals go through the stages over time, but the amount of time each person spends per stage varies. Some individuals can get “stuck” in a stage, while others readily adapt and move rapidly to the new norm.

The following are actions that can ease the transition associated with change:

- Once you understand each stage, it becomes easier to move through it and help others do the same. As a manager or team leader, share the stages of the process with everyone.
- Include the entire team in defining the change or planning the process of the change.
- Create a vision for the change, focusing on the end results.
- Communicate frequently about the change, verbally and through e-mail and written documentation.
- Celebrate success and accomplishment throughout the process.

Change is inevitable—how the process is managed makes the difference in the outcome.

## A Case Study in Change

An organization needed to increase market share and revenue from existing customers. It also wanted to generate references from existing customers.

The company determined that the best way to accomplish this was to have the service group implement consultative sales and recommendation skills when on service calls. This represented a major change for the

technicians. A plan that included a change in management strategy was implemented to support the new initiative. The following outlines the steps to put the new strategy in place:

1. The management team put a comprehensive strategy in place for technicians to recognize opportunities during service calls and follow up on them.
2. The company determined the products and services the technicians would offer. Marketing and support tools also were created.
3. A meeting was held to announce the change and generate support. Topics covered included why the initiative was important, why the technicians were selected to execute the strategy and what was in it for them.
4. The technicians' managers were included in all meetings and communication. In addition, the managers had meetings that covered how to coach the technicians, manage the transition and identify which technicians they felt would manage the transition easily and which might need additional training and coaching.
5. Ongoing follow-up meetings, communications and publication of technicians' performance were implemented.

The process resulted in success, with technicians generating an additional 25% in revenue annually.

When implementing a new strategy, all of the steps in this example can make change smoother. The faster individuals can move from the “plateau” to the “mountaintop,” the faster results will occur and the ability to sustain results over time will increase. *wqp*

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