

Keys To A Successful Software Change

How to Motivate Your Team & Get the Most Out of New Technology



CHANGE. Ready or not, here it comes. Though typically easier said than done, change is essential in any business that intends to remain in business.

Companies aren't recognized for staying ahead of the curve or trusted for their innovation by keeping to the status quo. However, nobody likes to talk about the hard parts of change and what it takes to implement it successfully.

Now, change, itself, isn't so scary. What's scary is the adaptation process, the frustration of the unfamiliar, the discomfort with something new and seemingly invasive, the risk of doing all this work for an unsatisfactory return. When it comes to managing change, particularly when it involves new technology, business leaders must be wary of what they're getting themselves into.

Luckily, leaders need not fear, for there is a formula for successfully managing change in terms of implementing new software, driving adoption among your teams, and maximizing the return on your investment. With this plan in hand, you can be sure of what to expect (Step 1), put a reliable strategy in place (Step 2), and commit to a plan that gets everyone on board (Step 3).

Don't fall into the trap of launching a new software platform, process, or technology that you know will improve your business...only to roll it back a few months later. Instead, guide your team into the future with confidence and ease.

STEP
1

Know what to expect

The same grieving process we go through in our personal lives shows up in our places of work as we experience significant changes—just as similarly, there are strategic ways of working through those stages.

STEP
2

Put a reliable strategy in place

Having a game plan complete with the right tools, training, and support will go far in mitigating fears and setting employees up for a successful transition.

STEP
3

Commit to a plan that gets everyone on board

Set your direction, and remain committed to the plan and to making the transition necessary to hit the goals you were after in the first place.

GOOD GRIEF

What to Expect at Every Stage of Change

Employees can't flip a switch and seamlessly go from one way of doing things to a totally different way of doing them. They're set in their ways, they have pride in their effectiveness, and they don't see a reason to change.

That being said, throwing them for a loop with new technology can and will bring some pain points. The first step to mitigating these is to put yourself in their shoes and understand what they'll be going through. From there, you can create a plan to help all those involved to accept the change, embrace the change, and make the most of it to drive real enterprise success.

It sounds dramatic, but the same grieving process we go through in our personal lives shows up in our places of work as we experience significant changes there as well. And just as similarly, there are strategic ways of working through those stages and mitigating them to achieve optimal adoption and success with your new technology.

You can expect to encounter denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and thankfully, at last, acceptance. Let's dive into each of these problems and their solutions, so you're able to recognize them in your staff as they come, and be able to guide them swiftly through the stages.



Denial



Anger



Bargaining



Depression



Acceptance

Denial

Problem: Employees are comfortable with what they know and what's always worked for them, so they see no need to shake things up. Once you start including them in conversations around a coming change (which you should!), you'll most likely encounter denial in the form of defending traditional processes. The fact is, even if they recognize and acknowledge that certain tools and procedures could be improved, those in denial will have a hard time believing that that can happen without sacrificing on current efficiencies.

Solution: Acknowledge and account for your employees' experiences. Value their input and ensure that it will be thoughtfully considered when making these types of decisions since, after all, they're ultimately the ones most affected by them. Give them the full picture behind why a change is being made, and remind them that new practices are being implemented for the sake of improving internal efficiency and service to customers.

Anger

Problem: Anger will show its face when employees realize that change is coming for them, whether they're ready and willing — or not. Keep in mind the anger you encounter is just the result of deeper feelings going on below the surface. For the time being, employees who were once confident in their effectiveness are now feeling much less secure and out of their element.

Solution: Transparency and reassurance at this stage is key. Red Hat's Change Management Consultant, Kate Reno, explains "The anger and grief happens less when you're extremely transparent about what's happening and why it's happening. Solicit feedback along the way." Facilitate open discussions where employees can voice their challenges, concerns, and any anxieties they're feeling. Make sure they know you don't expect instant comfortability and ease with these new changes and that it's a learning process for you as well.

Bargaining

Problem: Stemming from this insecurity and frustration, employees will naturally seek out ways to avoid and work around the new processes. They may even appear to be adapting to the change, while managing to still hang on to their old habits.

Solution: Be mindful and understanding when this happens — and more than likely, it will. Change takes time, and it's much easier for employees to adapt when it's implemented in stages. However, if the only option is for big change to happen all at once, accept that workarounds will occur, and be sure to clearly demonstrate how the processes your staff is accustomed to translate within the new structure.

Depression

Problem: By now, employees realize that change is here to stay, and they're probably feeling a bit out of sorts. Positions in which these folks once excelled suddenly have them feeling totally out of their comfort zone, and less confident in their abilities.

Solution: Be sure to recognize your employees for their effort and the wins they see along the way. Feelings of helplessness can be mitigated, and confidence can be re-instilled by providing the resources they need (more on that later) and communicating the value of their skills and strengths in a new setting.

“The anger and grief happens less when you're extremely transparent about what's happening and why it's happening.”

Kate Reno

Acceptance

This one's no problem at all! Employees have now become confident enough to recognize the true potential of the new system. They accept the changes, release their resistance, and begin to thrive in a different, but more effective, process.

And now that everyone's bought in, they'll even be able to recognize and value the personal benefit these changes could have for them the more that they commit. Take advantage of this momentum by providing ample opportunity for L&D and capitalizing on the team's energy and enthusiasm.

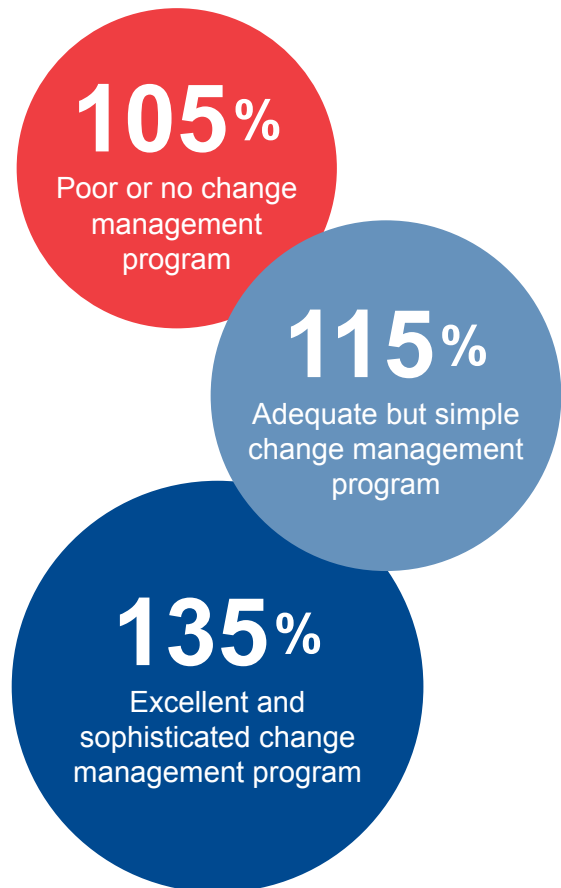
Throughout all these stages, never lose sight of your role in this transition. As a leader in your business, every person involved will rely on you for guidance every step of the way. Stay in tune with the challenges, triumphs, emotions, and feedback from your team during times of change, and you're on the right path to optimizing on your investment.

When it gets tough, and everyone wants things back to the way they used to be, it's on you to unite the team again. How to be sure you can do that? Have. A. Plan.

ROI Achieved in First Year Through Change Program*

The better the change program, the higher the ROI

ROI — Time savings / Increased innovation / Productivity / Financial return



**SOURCE: "The Value of Change Management" by Google for Work and Raconteur*



THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO WING IT Have A Game Plan

Once you know what to expect, you've got to have a plan to navigate these stages and work towards optimization of your new technology. Having a game plan complete with the right tools, training, and support will go far in mitigating fears and setting employees up for a successful transition.

Training will have a particularly profound impact on employee adoption. First of all, it facilitates bottom-up engagement. Rather than just taking top-down orders, employees feel like they are supported and counted on for their contribution to a successful implementation.

However, the benefits of effective training go well beyond employee attitudes and adoption. By taking the time to train your staff, you're able to fully realize the depth and capabilities of your new technology. Regular employee input during this time will reveal all sorts of unique applications and use cases that your leadership team may have not even realized.

In other words, thoroughly support your staff (your most important asset) in their transition, and as a natural result, you'll get the most out of your investment. Thorough support begins with thoroughly planned training, and it's important to have that in place before taking on a new implementation.

According to research by Prosci, proper change management increases the likelihood of meeting business objectives (on time and within budget) six-fold — as opposed to implementing a change without adequate management of it. As Reno says, “If you spend a little more time upfront, everything else goes faster, you end up spending less time if you do more work upfront.”

“**Proper change management increases the likelihood of meeting business objectives (on time and within budget) six-fold.**”

Identify Your Training Goals & Timeline

As far as goals go, number one is to keep time lost during transition to a minimum. In order to achieve this, there should be a strategy in place to train employees to do their jobs as efficiently as prior to the new system being implemented. From there, support your employees in leveraging the new system to their own advantage. Successful adoption relies on them recognizing the value and reaping the personal rewards outside of how the business is benefitting. Incorporate training early on that specifically demonstrates the higher efficiency possible for employees, and with that, the increase of time available for them to reach more customers, close more deals, work at higher quality, etc.

Throughout your planning, set realistic expectations with regards to your group's technical skills, the technical requirements or complexity of the new technology, and the extent of change that your staff will be experiencing in going from one

way of doing things to a whole new system.

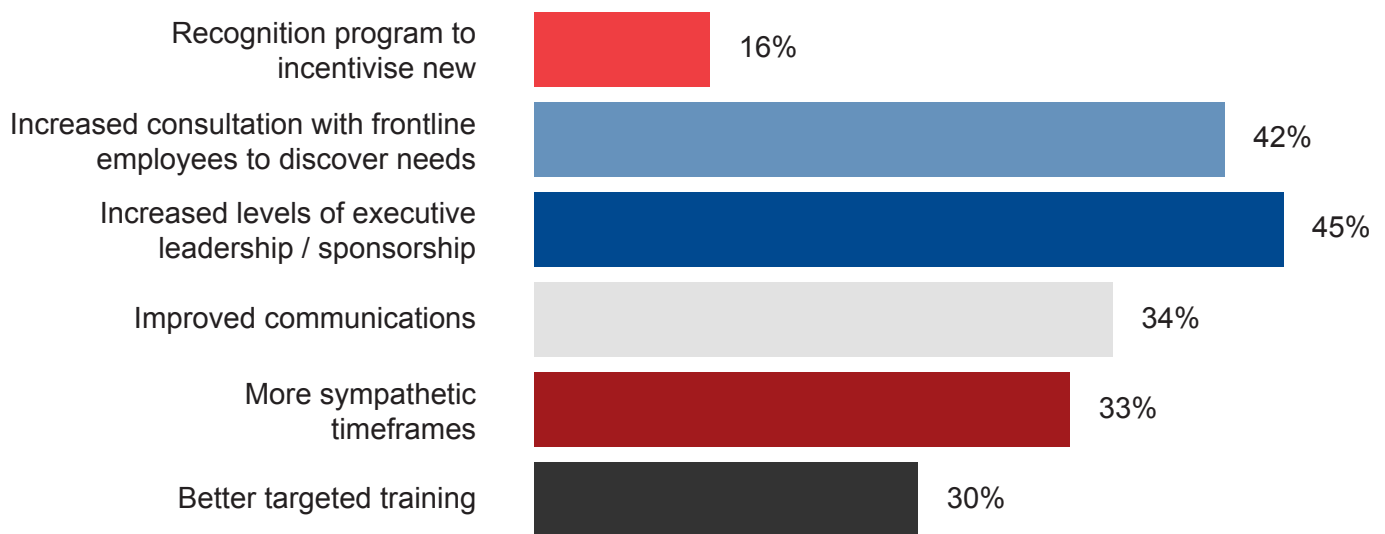
Honor Different Learning Styles

As you're evaluating employees' skills and tech savviness, consider dividing them into two groups before proceeding with training: those to whom new technology will come pretty naturally and those who will need some extra time and support. By separating the two, you'll be able to tailor each of their training programs to best suit their needs and get everyone on the same page.

The fast-paced group can move straight to training on the more technical aspects of the technology, while the others can take the time they require to focus on the basics — everyone has to start somewhere, and it's better for everyone if that's accepted on the front end. Even though the groups will be moving at different paces, the other benefit to this is that the more advanced group will soon be able to help bring others up to speed.

Activities that Most Improve Employee Engagement*

A variety of activities are needed for maximum employee buy-in



*SOURCE: "The Value of Change Management" by Google for Work and Raconteur

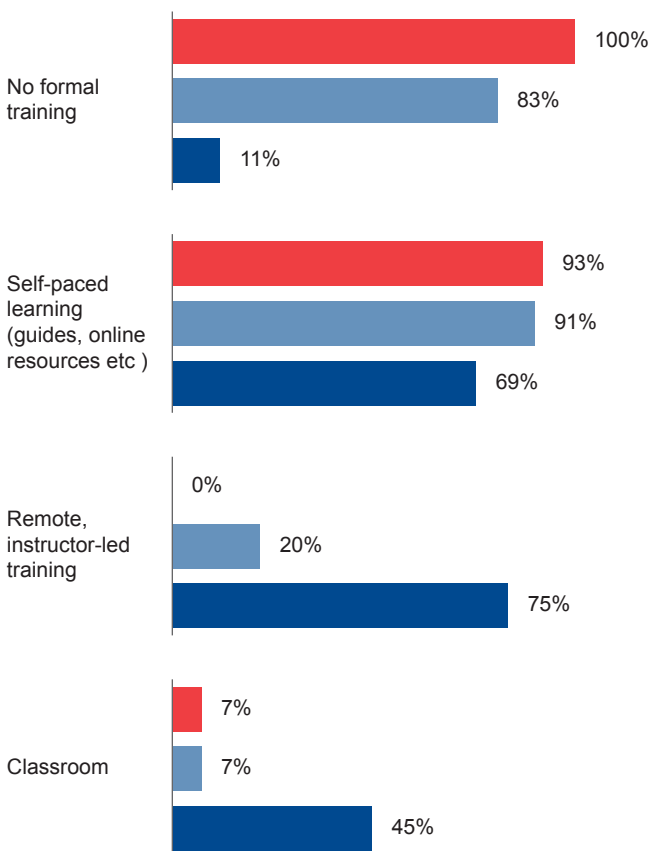
Diversify Your Training Methods

Everyone has different learning styles, but conveniently, there are a number of training methods for new software implementations available to leverage. It's best to use a strategic mix of methods in order to have the furthest reach across a diverse group of learners. It also helps to have multiple opportunities for learning in general — effective training is not just a one-and-done situation.

Most Successful Training Formats*

Projects are most successful when multiple training formats are used

- Poor or no change management program
- Adequate but simple change management program
- Excellent and sophisticated change management program



*SOURCE: "The Value of Change Management" by Google for Work and Raconteur

Some of these training methods include, but are not limited to:

- Training by the software/technology provider
- Classroom-based training
- Interactive or on-the-job training
- Training the trainer
- Access to training portal with how-to videos and other ad hoc resources

There tends to be a huge missed opportunity for companies when it comes to training resources simply because they don't know what to ask for, what they should expect, or what tools are even available to them. Knowing this ahead of time, make sure you speak openly with your provider on the front end about what sort of training they offer and even for client success stories, as these will help guide your own training strategies.

Empowering your staff to embrace change means arming them with the resources they need to make the most of it and leads to achieving optimal ROI.

Effecting change in your business doesn't have to be synonymous with chaos and unease. There will be rough patches, but preparation, planning, and empathy is what will propel your team through the process. The keys to success? Knowing what to expect, having a well-designed plan in place, and staying committed to the charge. When done correctly, the effort on all parts will have been worth it, and the team and outcomes will be better off because of it.

Commit, Don't Quit



One cannot be successful at something on which they don't take action. Action gets results, so it's just a matter of steering your actions in the right direction and staying the course. Like the rest of humanity, your employees are creatures of habit, and because of that, you can't expect change to be welcomed with open arms. No matter how in tune you are to your team's state of mind, change and the hard work that comes with it will be met with resistance. That being said, set your direction, and remain committed to the plan and to making the transition necessary to hit the goals you were after in the first place. When it's time for implementation, consider the following tactics to get the team on board and as excited as you are.

Top-Down Teamwork

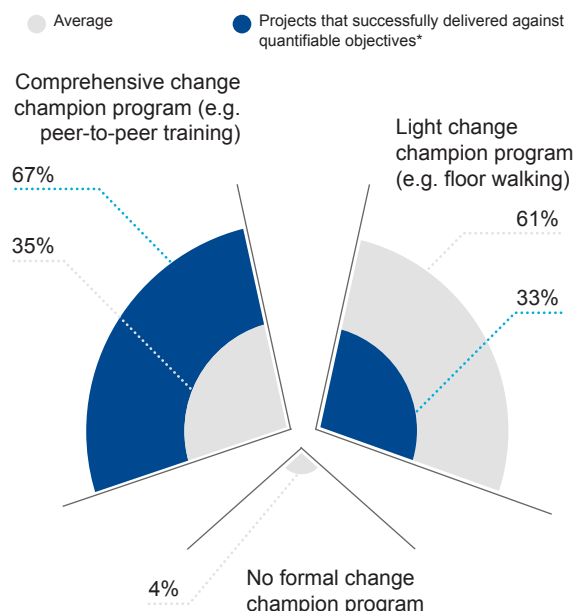
Fostering an inclusive work environment is crucial to overcoming the challenges that come with learning a new system, and it starts all the way at the top. Management and their teams should feel as if they are in this together and can rely on one another to help get all parties up to speed. To do this effectively, provide your management team with delegated training and support to build confidence in your initiatives.

Champions for the Cause

You're going to need some champions on your side. Leverage key staff members and department leads by convincing them of the benefits brought on by the new system. When they see how it benefits them, they will work hard on your behalf to convince the folks in their respective departments to get on board with it as well.

The Role of Change Champions*

Change champions play an important role in successful change programs



*SOURCE: "The Value of Change Management" by Google for Work and Raconteur

Hope For The Best, Expect the Worst

We just dedicated a whole section to having a plan, but it's important to reiterate the impact a strong strategy has on the success of a change initiative. Consider all the obstacles you might encounter, and plan ahead for how those will be handled swiftly, and ideally, how you can avoid them altogether. Too many bumps in the road during a delicate transition period will quickly wear down the confidence your team has in both the process and the finished product.

Clear Communication

In order to deal with concerns, conflicts, and misunderstandings in the most productive way, keep your eyes and ears open. Listen to your people. They will undoubtedly have something to say, and they want to feel that their words are valued. Their feedback is necessary to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the training you're putting them through. Having this transparent feedback loop will enable you and the vendor to address issues quickly and keep your implementation timeline on track.

Incentives: AKA What's In It For Me?

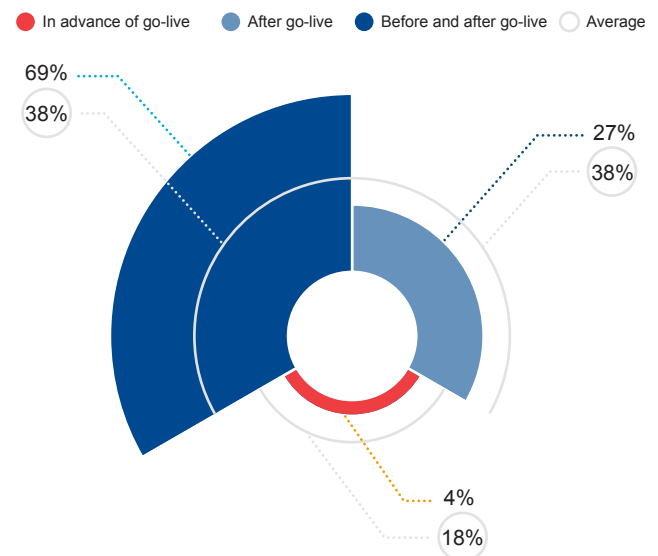
This will be the second question employees ask when they're notified of coming change, with the first being, "Why?" The "why" is easier to answer because it's the reasoning behind making the change to begin with. In reality though, that's not really your staff's primary concern. They want to know what it is about this new system that's going to benefit them. If they have to change the way they do things, what's in it for them?

For everyone to commit to making the transition, you have to make sure each employee knows how they personally stand to benefit from it. If you

can paint a picture for them that demonstrates the ways in which this will make their job easier, faster, more lucrative, etc., you'll be setting yourself up for success with adoption. And along the way, don't forget to have fun and recognize the folks who are out there embracing change and crushing it. Pizza parties and ice cream go a long way, but there's even opportunity here for promotions and new titles as well.

How the Most Effective Change Management Programs Rolled Out Their Training*

The most successful change programs offer training before and after go-live



*SOURCE: *"The Value of Change Management"* by Google for Work and Raconteur

Every business and technology is different. There's no one right, simple answer for how to manage change across the board, but it does boil down to three main objectives to keep in mind. Know what you're getting yourself, your business, and your employees into — before you get into it; plan strategically in order to handle the change that's coming; and commit to the plan you've made and the goals you've set, with the support of your team beside you.