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# **The Change Zone: Becoming a Mentor of Change**

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*In today’s world, change is not just constant, it’s unrelenting. As leaders, you must be flexible and quick to respond. Sheer survival requires that you help your employees be ready for and accept change. One way to accomplish this is by being a mentor of change.*

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## Mentor of Change Overview

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Are you familiar with the story of the frog and the scorpion? A frog was swimming in a pond when a scorpion saddled up to the shore and said, “Hey Mr. Frog, I really would like to get over to the other side of the pond. Will you let me jump on your back while you swim across?”

“No way,” replied the frog. “You will sting me.”

“Why would I do that?” asked the scorpion. “That would be stupid. We would both drown.”

“I guess you’re right,” the frog said. “Okay, hop on.”

So Mr. Frog started swimming across the pond, but about halfway across, he felt an incredible pain in his back. His muscles started going numb, and he couldn’t move his legs.

“What in the world was that?” asked the frog. “Are you some kind of idiot? You stung me!”

“Yes,” said the scorpion mournfully.

“But why?” asked the frog. “Now we’re both going to die!”

“I couldn’t help it,” said the scorpion. “It’s just my nature.”

Like the scorpion, it is difficult for people to change their ways. The very act of humbling ourselves to take someone else’s advice about doing something differently is a struggle. But just because you are accustomed to doing something one way, doesn’t mean it can’t be rearranged to achieve a higher level of success. In today’s world, change is not simply constant, it’s unrelenting - as leaders you must be flexible and quick to respond.

Today, you find yourself racing through the era of “e,” pausing only briefly to imagine what possibilities are next. Yet, there is really no finish line in sight—only new and different hurdles to anticipate. The familiar adage, “the only constant is change” has never been more true; however, now change is happening much faster and in shorter intervals. Are you prepared to handle it? Are your people prepared to handle it? As a leader, you must help your employees be ready for, accept, and want change. One way of making this happen is by being a ***mentor of change***.

How do you become a mentor of change? To begin, you must have a clear understanding of what a *mentor of change* is. You are probably familiar with the profession of change management. Many consulting firms provide change management services to companies implementing major change efforts. However, there is a clear-cut difference between *change management* and *change mentorship*. The next section of this article explains this difference, discusses the benefits of being a change mentor and takes you through the steps for becoming a change mentor, and ultimately, toward influencing continuous change. Understanding these points is key for leaders and managers to help employees to accept and want change.

# Change Management vs. Change Mentorship

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Change management benefits your company by helping your employees understand, appreciate and embrace the new system, process, or tool you are implementing. The positive results of an effective change management program for any business or system change have been shown time and again. *IndustryWeek* featured results of a Gallup Organization poll conducted for the Carlson Marketing Group. The poll discovered that seven in 10 workers had been through major business reorganizations within the past five years.

“Three of the four senior-management respondents say such a [change management] strategy using key best practices had a positive effect on employee morale; 59 percent say it increased productivity; 50 percent say it increased profitability; and 72 percent believe it increased their firm's ability to provide quality customer service.” (“Best Practices for Change Management,” *IndustryWeek* 1999.)

Change management is a formal process that includes a formal plan, approach and strategy to reduce employees' reluctance to making change now and in the future. Because it is a formal process, it must be managed as such—just as the technical or functional component of a project is managed.

You can realize significant success in a change endeavor by employing the expertise of consultants for implementing the formal aspects of change management. However, there is also an informal aspect of change management that is the responsibility of every leader in your organization: informally mentoring your workforce through change.

Being a change mentor does not have to be part of a formal process. Change mentors can influence and support change in an informal setting—and many people in your organization may already possess the skills to be a change mentor. In the most rudimentary form, a mentor is someone who possesses experience in a particular area and is passing along that experience to another person who has the desire to learn. However, a *mentor* is much more than simply an avenue for by which knowledge is exchanged. A mentor also must instill confidence in and motivate people to achieve success.

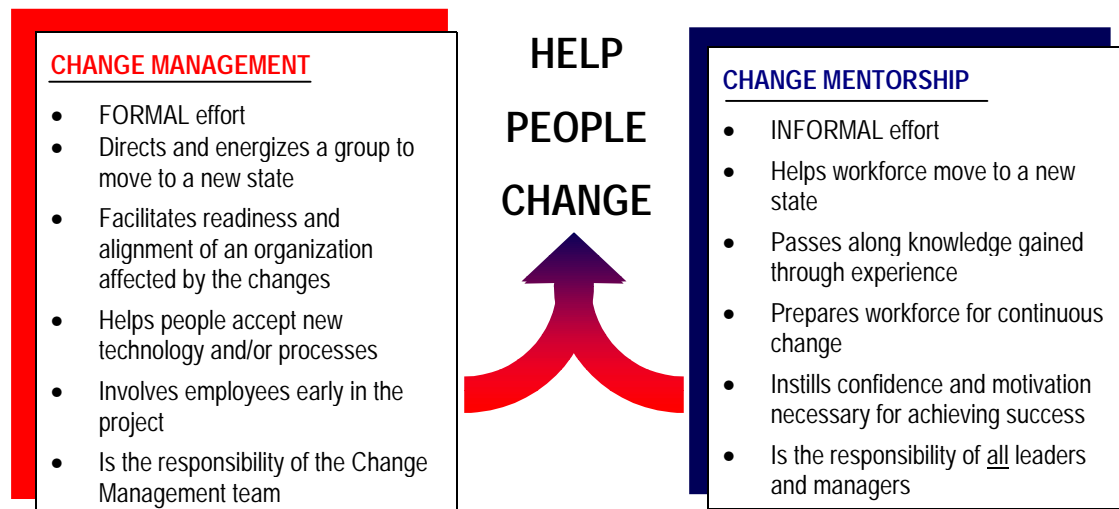


Figure 1: Similarities and Differences between change management and change mentorship.

Sound familiar? Perhaps you already demonstrate traits of being a change mentor in your day-to-day work activities without really thinking about it. Table 1, found below, summarizes the similarities and differences between change management and change mentorship. Mentoring change is the responsibility of all leaders in companies undergoing a major change effort—not just the change management experts. Because of its many benefits, change mentoring should be viewed as an intricate part of the overall change process rather than yet another task to add to an activity list. By combining the efforts of a strong change management team with change mentorship, you can successfully lead your team in making a change.

# Benefits of Change Mentorship

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The first step toward becoming a change mentor is to simply start thinking of yourself as a change mentor. This comes easily once you understand the importance behind it.

***Build Trust.*** Trust is essential in any change endeavor. A colleague of mine recently shared a story in which she heard a senior vice president of a \$3 billion corporation in the middle of a world-wide ERP (enterprise resource planning) implementation tell a distressed employee that you can't expect to trust anyone when so much change is going on. That statement epitomized the culture of that company's corporate headquarters. Middle management was fat, and trust was non-existent. Not long after receiving that "advice" the distressed employee left the company – after 15 years of service – and the stock price tumbled to well under its IPO. I suspect employees there are still struggling with "trust." Never underestimate the power that mutual respect and trust can help in change efforts. Trust promotes open communication, which can open doors that might have otherwise been barriers or obstacles. New views and ideas emerge more readily. Likewise, problems can be more readily addressed and resolved. Trust encourages good communication, which, in turn, promotes understanding, prevents resistance, and generates support for the change throughout the organization.

***Encourage Listening.*** A mentoring approach encourages *listening* by both managers and employees. Listening to employees' thoughts and ideas enables leaders to establish vision and set realistic goals that are meaningful beyond the executive suite. Seeing a plan that reflects their inputs empowers employees to take action and achieve corporate goals by improving their understanding of the corporate strategy. This ultimately saves time and money.

***Increase Commitment and Loyalty.*** Mentoring promotes comfort with the change being implemented. Change mentors provide informal sounding boards for employees to voice frustration and to ask questions without the scrutiny of the entire group. If employees are satisfied with their situations, are comfortable, and feel productive, then they will be increasingly loyal to your company. A substantial benefit during a time when unemployment is at an all-time low and retention costs are skyrocketing.



# Mentoring Change at all Levels

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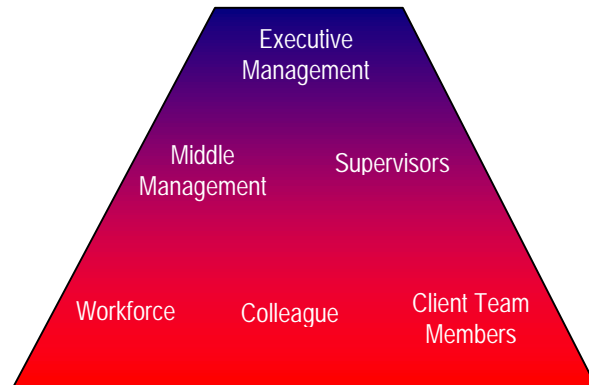


Figure 2: Mentoring Levels

Where do you start? Change mentors can come from all stages and all levels of a project. The role you play will determine whom you mentor and who mentors you. Figure 2 calls out the multiple roles that should be mentored through change.



Figure 3: Mentor of Change Cycle

## **Mentor of Change Style**

Now that you understand the difference between change management and change mentorship, the benefits of being a change mentor, and the roles to be mentored, you are ready to progress toward being a change mentor. Figure 3 shows the stages. Let's look at this cycle in more detail.

### **Stage One: "Why Me?"**

Why do you need to be a mentor of change? What's in it for you? What commitments do you have to make? Perhaps you think you already have enough to do without adding change management tasks into the equation?

Face it, change is going to be the livelihood of your company. Remember those five-year and 10-year plans you were creating only a few years ago? Gone. Today's business plan should not exceed two years. Amir Hartman, John Sifonis and John Kador in their book, *Net Ready*, recommend 12- to 18 months for implementing an e-business initiative. How easy is it to change employees' habits in only 12 months that have likely been instilled and reinforced for many years? Not very. Yet it will be increasingly imperative that you do so. If you fail at helping your workforce accept and *want* change, you will compromise the vitality of your company.

The first stage should be obvious. The next stage may be somewhat more challenging. It simply involves reformulating your thinking and existing skills, so you may become a change mentor.

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### **Stage Two: "Building Change Skills"**

To be a successful, effective manager you must possess strong interpersonal skills. This may be news to those whose management education focused on analytical thinking, planning, budgeting and so on. In the past, "soft" skills were not given the attention they deserved. However, three such soft skills can be used for building change skills: facilitation, coaching, and relationship skills. If you are already competent in these areas, then it is just a matter of gaining a new focus and applying those interpersonal skills toward mentoring change.

**Facilitation:** Use these skills for facilitating change in formal and informal settings. Opportunities for facilitating change can arise in many forms, environments, and situations. Whether your audience is large, small, or one-on-one, you can send a clear, consistent vision for the objective to be accomplished. You can mentor from behind or in the forefront. Many times "mentoring from behind" is the most

effective approach because it gives employees a sense of control in an unfamiliar situation. It also empowers them, which encourages more decision-making. When employees feel they contribute in valuable ways, their confidence will improve enabling them to assume ownership.

**Coaching:** If you employ consultants on a project, remember that they deal with change everyday—be it new technology, new projects, new places, new people. Take advantage of their experience and expertise for teaching you and your employees about dealing with change. If a “mentoring” tone is set, team spirit will flourish, and then everyone will be more open to change and more open to feedback. When you provide feedback to the employees, build them up on their strengths as well as addressing opportunities for improvement.

**Relationship:** The relationships you build will be critical to the success of any change project. You work with people both one-on-one and in group settings. If you are perceptive to individual and group personalities, you can gauge how to handle different people in different situations. Being prepared for any situation will improve your comfort level as well as the level of those around you.

When you understand how to apply your relationship skills for being a change mentor, then you should be able to use those skills for identifying opportunities for mentoring change.

### **Stage Three: “Identifying Opportunities for Change”**

**Know the Signs.** Starting day one, look for potential problem areas and people. Identify individuals who are reluctant to change. Watch for silo mentality. Listen for statements of reluctance, such as, “How will this change affect me?” or “This is the way it has always been done.” Be able to recognize unclear or miscommunicated vision. Is your organization’s “vision” defined? If so, is it being effectively communicated? Is the “vision” constantly changing?

Next, look for a sense of urgency to change. Why are you changing? Are you losing customers? Will you lose customers? Establishing a sense of urgency throughout the organization ultimately serves to motivate people toward making a change. If the leader does not feel a sense of urgency to change, then critical sponsorship and effective leadership will falter. If that sense of urgency is not communicated throughout the organization, then the workforce will be reluctant to change.

**Appreciate AS-IS and TO-BE.** Most ERP implementations change 80 percent of the current business processes. These changes can have major (and minor) impacts on the organization and its people. If the *as-is* and *to-be* processes are well understood, then you will be in a better position to mentor (and empathize with) those employees most greatly affected by the change. Managers can make better decisions when they understand the impacts to the organization and its people.

#### **Stage Four: “Analyze”**

You have identified your opportunities for influencing change, now you must assess them. What must you do to make change happen? How can you point your employees in the right direction, help them build their skills and prepare them for continuous change? Will change come with difficulty or ease?

**Consider the timeline and cost benefits.** Look at the practical aspects of the change project to further help you determine how much time you will have to devote to mentoring change. Think about the timeline of the project, the overall effort and complexity associated with the change, and the dollar figures invested in the project. Obviously, if the project timeline is extremely tight, this can affect how you use a mentoring approach. If the timeline allows for mentoring, but a great level of effort would be needed to influence change, then you must ask yourself if mentoring would consume too much of your time or would place you beyond your skill base. If the change involves a great amount of effort, then it arguably deserves additional support – a good sign that the expertise of change management consultants should be tapped.

#### **Stage Five: “Build An Action Plan”**

You can develop only two action plans to either cope with or mentor change. Let's look at each.

**Building a plan to cope:** This is the easier of the two plans to create, but sometimes the hardest to carry out because it involves accepting what you cannot change. You must understand four key components:

1. **Accept vs. agree.** You may not always agree with other managers or employees. You may not always be able to change an employee's mindset. You may have to contend with managers less devoted to the project than you are. However, you must be able to cope with these difficulties by accepting the fact that you cannot change everything. You must strive to find ways these people can contribute to the project. In the end, it will only make things easier on you.
2. **Take small wins.** Build small wins into the plan. Recognizing successes will serve to help you and your team members feel a sense of accomplishment during an intense project, such as an e-business implementation. However, take care not to generate too many feelings of comfort while celebrating successes. The overall sense of urgency for accomplishing the vision must be maintained.
3. **Keep the overall objective in mind.** Remember the objective is to cope with the behavior—not to change it. So when change doesn't happen, don't be disappointed. You know when the time is right to mentor change. When that time comes you will be ready.
4. **Use the situation to your company's advantage.** If you cannot change the situation, then determine how you can reformulate it toward accomplishing the vision. For example, say an employee is very people-oriented, but not very task-

driven. You could use that employee's people skills to communicate change throughout the organization. The resulting rewards are twofold: change can be communicated effectively throughout the organization, and the employee can feel a sense of accomplishment having contributed something valuable to the company.

**Building a plan to *mentor change*:** There are five essential steps you must take to build your action plan for mentoring change:

1. Determine the best approach for the opportunity to mentor. Should you take a direct or indirect approach? Identify political complications that require diplomacy and tact.
2. Analyze the impacts and opportunities for influencing change that you gathered earlier in the process. Determine what effect or outcome they may have.
3. Identify the Critical Success Factors (CSF).
4. Identify deliverables to attain the Critical Success Factors.
5. Identify activities and/or tasks to support your deliverables.

#### **Stage Six: “Execute the Plan”**

Once you have established a plan, then of course, you must execute it. Keep in mind, whatever the plan, the ultimate goal is to build confidence within the employee. This goal is best accomplished by leading from behind—helping an employee feel adept at handling change. Adults must first understand why change is necessary before they accept it. Only then will they be willing to execute it. As a mentor of change, you want to execute a plan that will support the vision.

#### **Stage Seven: “Follow-Up”**

Once you have executed part of your plan for mentoring change, take time to review the results you've attained up to that point. How successful has the plan been thus far? Should others get involved? Do you need to learn new skills? Consider the differences between you and the employee. Do you have the right skills? Perhaps the employee is not ready to take the next step you feel is necessary. Perhaps the path or plan needs to be changed.

#### **Stage Eight: “Influence Change”**

When you reach this stage, you have already influenced change. What are the signs? There will be less handholding and dependence on you for guidance—the employee will take ownership. Both managers and employees will display confidence, not only in current and new activities, but also when confronting the unknown. Further, they will display traits of continual growth; they will understand acceptance versus agreement, and, most important, they will become mentors of change themselves.

#### **Ultimate Goal: “Continuous Change”**

In the story about the frog and the scorpion, the scorpion could not break a “lethal” habit. Leaders in business today must break old habits of highly structured, process-driven and disciplinarian management styles. Now these leaders must teach

employees to accept change as a means for achieving higher level of success. The ultimate goal is a work culture for continuous change.

If continuous change is to be instilled in an organization, it must remain in a fluid-like state, so it can flow readily throughout the organization. In practical terms, an organization must always be in a state of continuous improvement. If you reach this state, then you have prepared your organization for the unrelenting change you can expect to see in the business world for years to come. For in this world of unrelenting change, any organization wishing to remain competitive must strive to *continuously improve*. Executive management must stay on top of external influences and react to them before it is too late.

*In the words of Mohatma Ghandi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."*

## About Clarkston

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Clarkston is a management and technology consulting firm that has been delivering value to life sciences, consumer products, high tech and manufacturing companies for over ten years. We help our clients create successful business strategies, while leveraging people, processes and technology to improve their core business and significantly increase shareholder value. To learn more about Clarkston and its Coherent Speed methodology, visit the company website at [www.clarkstongroup.com](http://www.clarkstongroup.com).