



GERRI KING Ph.D.  
HUMAN DYNAMICS ASSOCIATES, INC.

# Navigating your way through change

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© Gerri King, Ph.D.

**Gerri King, Ph.D.** - social psychologist and internationally recognized speaker and seminar presenter - consults to corporate, manufacturing, educational, health care, non-profit, and governmental clients throughout the US and abroad. Gerri also keynotes at national conferences throughout the year.

Dr. King presents on a wide range of topics including team building, resolving conflicts, effective communication, motivating employees, the dynamics of change, reducing stress, why people avoid success,

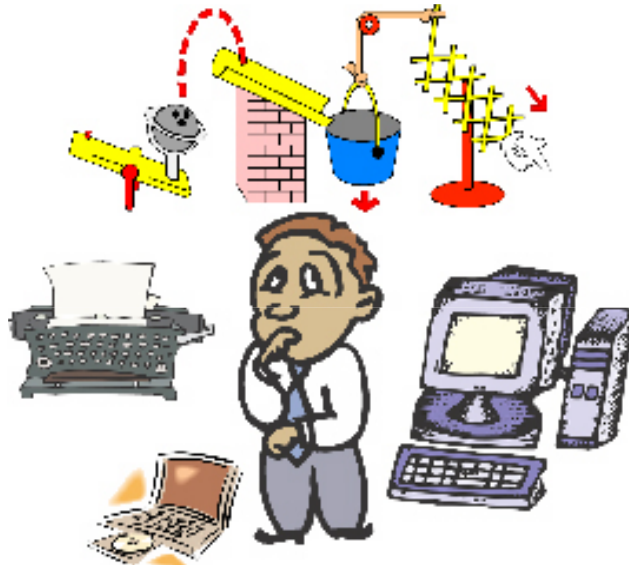
and the changing role of leadership. She facilitates strategic planning, mergers and acquisitions, staff and administrative retreats, collaborative efforts, and mission & vision development.

Gerri is the author of "**The Duh! Book of Management & Supervision: Dispelling Common Leadership Myths**" (available through her website) and the founding partner and President of the 30 year old Human Dynamics Associates in Concord NH.  
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# The Effects of Change

## Change is difficult for most of us:

- We resist it because it *is* so difficult.
- We feel guilty because it's often made to sound so necessary and inviting!
- It's almost impossible to alter any single thing in our personal or professional lives without affecting everything else.
- With every gain there is a loss. It's essential that we spend time processing the losses (even if it's merely the loss of the familiar) before we can expect people to embrace the gains.
- Difficult times inspire both emotional and logical reactions. Problems arise when trying to solve the emotional aspect logically and the logical aspect emotionally. It works best if we are all in an emotional place together and then move to a logical place. To remain connected emotionally, we don't have to understand the other's emotions, nor do we have to share them. We merely have to acknowledge that the other person is experiencing them.



- *Each person's reaction to change is unique.* It's important that everyone else works very hard to understand each other's perspectives (through "active listening" and "shared meaning") because that's what provides the frame of reference for the people's reactions.

***The impact of change on organizations is even more difficult.***

## Consider an organization:

- Making changes necessary to adapt to new government regulations;
- All people within the organization trying to reorganize their procedures;
- Redefining organizational vision or focus and adjusting to the ramifications.

*Even the smallest diversion from the norm can cause tremendous resistance. It hardly matters that we know there's going to be an effect on the rest of the system; the fact that we can't identify what it's going to be (fear of the unknown) makes us anxious and even more resistant.*

# Change Leads To:



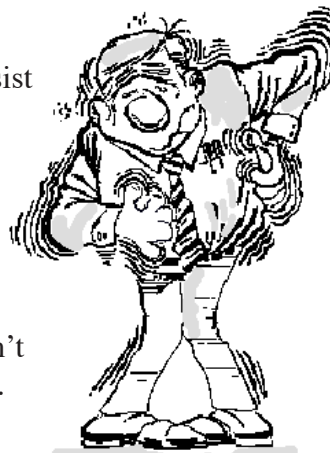
## Fear of the Unknown

Whether change is negative or positive, the result is the same. Both create a new situation which is unfamiliar, possibly scary, and both lead to a fear of the unknown, which leads to stress.

When we are in transition, we are, at least for a time, deprived of knowledge. Knowledge is the basis of power, and power gives us the ability to influence. When in transition, our power base is eroded, we feel we no longer have the ability to influence, and control becomes a real issue.

## Lack of Control

- When we are *not* in control, we have a tendency to hang onto the familiar.
- Sometimes we dig in our heels and insist on staying with the old ways = resistance.
- Sometimes we sabotage our own progress or the progress of others (a phenomenon known as “success sabotage” or “fear of success”) so we don’t have to face change and the unknown.
- When out of control, the tendency is to become more controlling, trying to exert what power we have left on the people or things over which we still have influence.
- When we’re in this frame of mind, naturally we can’t help but be resistant to new ideas and new ways of doing things.



“aaarrgghh!”

# Change Leads To: (continued)

## Loss of The Familiar

- We try reducing anxiety by listing (and re-listing) all the benefits of a new situation. But somehow it doesn't work all that well and we're still worried and upset.
- That's because **with gains there are losses**. Even giving up an unhappy or unproductive situation and substituting a "better" scenario has its disadvantages.
- In the workplace we may be giving up a feeling of expertise, old habits or comfortable working relationships. Even if the changes are needed and positive, we are losing familiarity and predictability. "We have always done it that way" means "We know how to do it that way and it is no longer a struggle."
- Any change, large or small, triggers fears that even more difficult changes loom in the future.
- *In a world of tension and inherent difficulty, sameness can be calming and soothing. The fact that a new direction is appealing does not mean we don't long for the old.*



## Anxiety About the Future

- Anxiety is not really about the present because we know what's happening at the moment. Anxiety invokes the past (we remember similar situations that didn't work out, or what we went through with past transitions), and is usually about the future.
- Anxiety is heightened because we don't know answers to questions about the future. It's not unusual to make up an answer - often one that further increases our concern. For instance, we imagine the worst in order to "be ready for anything".
- Change automatically vaults us into the future - a place fraught with unanswered questions, unknown possibilities and uncertain results. It can be very exciting to be sure, but excitement and anxiety co-exist with great regularity.

# Helpful responses to change



**1 Recognize resistance, concern, anxiety and stress as normal reactions.**

We do not need to add judgment to an already tense situation. If our self-esteem is already strained by having to learn a new protocol, it certainly will not be enhanced by berating ourselves or others for not accommodating the changes. In other words, accept how we or others feel. Feelings aren't right or wrong, they just are. If they exist, they're real and valid.

**2 While enumerating the gains and positive aspects of change, address the losses, too.**

What are you giving up? What will you miss? What comfort will be gained by keeping the old policies and processes? Identify the roles of familiarity and predictability and acknowledge them as assets.

**3 Learn what has to be accomplished to accommodate the changes and make a reasonable plan for getting it done.**

At the same time, recognize that everyone has his or her own way of getting the same things done at a pace that's comfortable for him or her. Respect personal style and pace, and to the extent it's possible, take them into account. When people believe their styles will be tolerated, the pressure reduces and they can often make transitions more quickly.

**4 Support one another.**

Those who are able to make changes more quickly can either be intolerant of those who need more time or they can help them in a non-judgmental way. Helping is rewarding and builds a team atmosphere.

**5 Try not to have a narrow view.**

Acknowledge that a single change affects the entire system. To the extent those ramifications can be anticipated, you're that much farther ahead, but it's rare that you can predict everything. There will be surprises. If surprises are seen as normal, you're less likely to be negatively affected by them.

**6 Accept the notion that most of the time, change is very difficult....**

...even though it can be exciting, progress-oriented and beneficial. Even if you take change in stride, make sure you appreciate and understand what's going on. Allow talk about, and sharing of, concerns because it normalizes reactions and lessens isolation. It humanizes the process.

**7 Increase communication and feedback during times of change.**

*The tendency is to cut down on staff meetings and become individually isolated when just the opposite should occur.*

- More communication is necessary to reduce misunderstanding, conflict and stress.
- Announcements of changes should go out regularly so people who are impacted can prepare or give feedback and suggestions.
- **To guard against rumors and anxiety, it is essential that announcements are made regularly to update people. Even if you don't know anything more, tell people! Announce the fact that you have no new information. Otherwise, there is risk of information (true or untrue) running rampant.**

## Reminders

- 1** When resistance is manifest through statements such as "I think this is stupid" or "This won't work", it may indicate the person's fear of incompetence; she or he may mean "I'm afraid I won't be able to do it".
- 2** The extent of the rumors indicates the extent to which people are lacking information.





# Looking At Your Workplace Environment

- ☐ Do you have a clear purpose: is the vision, mission, goal, or task defined and accepted by everyone?
- ☐ Is the climate informal, comfortable and relaxed? Are tensions low or high? Does there seem to be boredom at meetings?
- ☐ Is participation high? Is there a lot of discussion and does everybody participate?
- ☐ Do people listen effectively and truly understand what each other is saying and meaning?
- ☐ Are people comfortable with conflict and do they have good resolution skills?
- ☐ Do people employ good decision making, using consensus where possible?
- ☐ Is there open communication? Do people feel free to express their feelings and are there few hidden agendas? Does most communication take place face-to-face and not behind peoples' backs?
- ☐ Are there clear roles and work assignments and are people happy with the arrangement?
- ☐ Is there shared leadership? Does everyone take responsibility for the functioning of the organization?
- ☐ Do people spend time developing key outside relationships, mobilizing resources, and building credibility with important players in other parts of the organization?
- ☐ Is there diversity within the group and is it appreciated, respected and utilized?
- ☐ Do people periodically examine how well it is functioning and what might be necessary to improve its effectiveness?



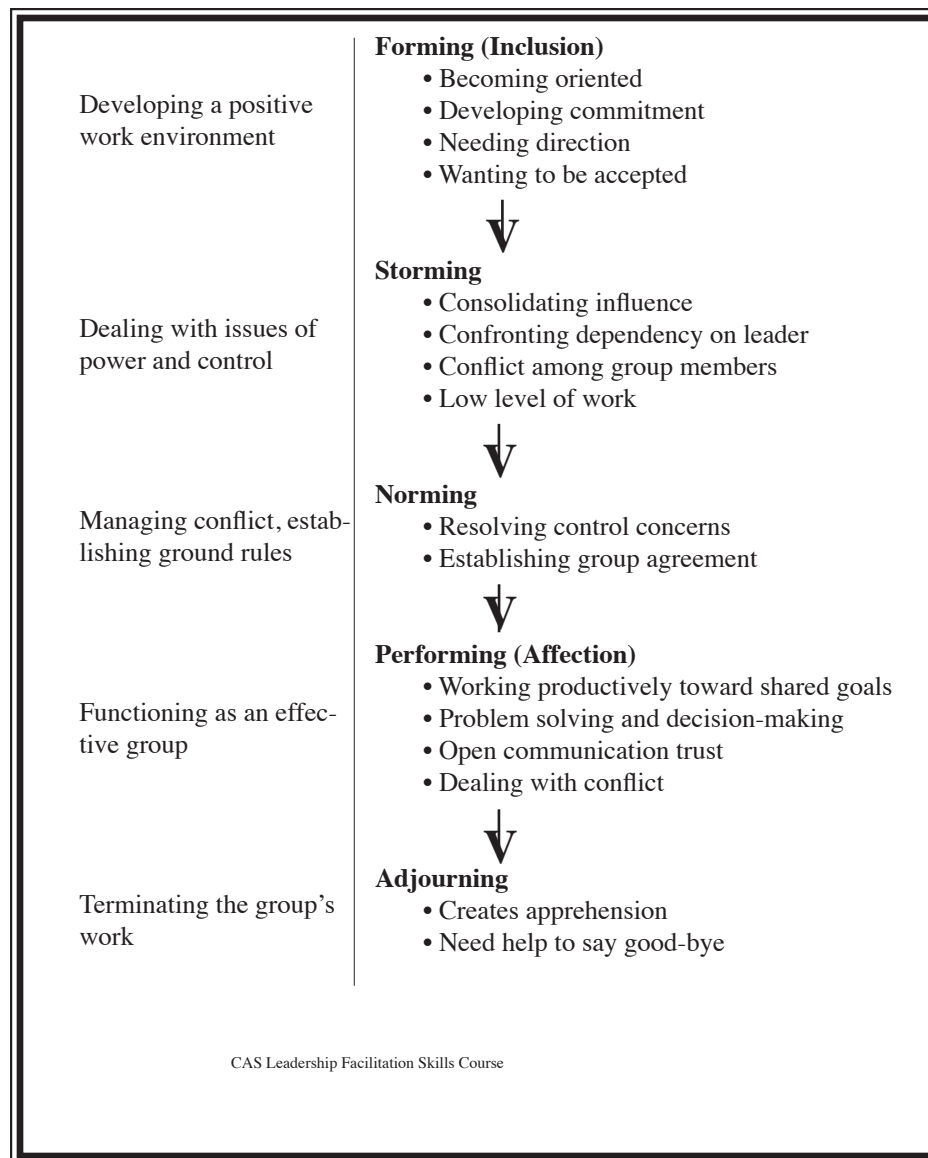
## **Characteristics of Effective Workgroups**

- Clear goals and a shared vision.
- Cooperative leadership.
- Appreciation of group development.
- Appreciation and use of diversity among the team members.
- Creative conflict management.
- An ability to accommodate change.
- Ability to problem solve.
- Incentives that pertain to the individual but enhance the group.
- Involvement and energy.
- Open, honest and respectful communication.
- Shared meaning.
- Flexibility (consistency being present in on-going support).
- An ability and invitation to work with other teams and departments.
- Individual and group competency and responsibility.
- A safe and trusting environment.
- More fun times.



*Because teams are groups, and groups behave in specific and predictable ways, it's essential to understand the stages of group development. The more we appreciate how groups progress, the less we personalize issues that emerge.*

## Stages of Group Development



# **Building Trust In A Group**

**The Effectiveness of the Group  
Is Directly Affected  
By The Degree of Trust In The Group**



The group will not immediately and automatically have trust. Each person makes the decision as to whether to trust the group in her or his own time and it is based on the perceived safety of the group.

# Ways of Establishing Trust

- A great deal of time should be spent at the outset **forming the group**. It saves a whole lot of time later.
- Introductions or re-introductions or some other form of common experience go a long way in helping people be comfortable.
- Spend time sharing individual styles in communication and especially dealing with conflict. When people understand each other's styles they are less apt to negatively personalize comments, responses and body language.
- Remember, the group has to trust the leader. But also remember, that the leader has to trust the group.
- Developing group guidelines are very important in creating a safe environment.
- Non-judgmental behavior is most important.
- Being present, here and now, and completely focused is a message that the people in the room are of the utmost importance.
- Respecting confidentiality should be a given.
- Willingness to spend time working through conflict and difficult issues models respect and trustworthiness.
- Each person's pace and fears should be respected.
- Viewing silence, awkwardness and conflict as normal encourages a healthy atmosphere.
- Truly listening to one another goes a long way. However, it takes practice and allowances should be made for skill-building in this area.