

Change Leadership: Why One Aisle Is Never Enough
Building a More Complete Approach to Leading People Through Change
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TRANSCRIPT

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Welcome to Victory Leadership, where good leadership leads to victory.

Here we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth.

Let's get started.

Earle Airey

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Welcome to the leadership pit stop, where we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth.

My name is Earl Every with Victory Leadership.

And today we're going to begin a new conversation on change.

Now, change is certainly not a new leadership topic.

It's been around since leadership's been around.

And while that in of itself, it is worth revisiting because organizations change technology, changes markets, change expectations, people, and also leaders, because leaders are people, too.

And sometimes that change may look completely different when we approach it with a new experience.

So today I want to talk about change leadership from a different perspective.

So imagine that you go into the grocery store and it's because you're looking to create a healthy meal plan.

You enter one aisle and there are useful choices all up and down.

Some of them are great, some of them may be not so great.

But you start to build your basket.

Now, as you are placing items in your cart and you're building your plan, would you do so without visiting another aisle?

Probably not.

You need vegetables and protein grains.

Maybe some things require refrigeration and other things require freezing.

Something may be completely different because maybe you're also shopping for your friends and family and they all have specific needs that you may want to consider.

Organizations work very much the same way.

Sometimes leaders become so committed to change that one method that they might be utilizing is as if they only went down specific aisles or just that one aisle.

Instead of going through the entire store, they follow the steps.

They check off the boxes that might look like communication or training, conducting measurements, reinforcing.

And those things matter.

I'm not going to say that they don't.

But change involves more than just steps.

It involves people, relationships, systems, and leadership behavior.

We're all learning.

We're all expressing our emotions.

We are trying to determine who and what we trust, what is the meaning, and how do we adapt these things into meaningful methodology.

So today's episode is change leadership.

And while one item down one aisle is never enough.

So let's pull in today's leadership pit stop.

So let's take a look at a green flag moment.

A change plan should create direction without creating blindness.

Structure.

Change models can provide extremely useful architecture, but the plan should help us just more than that.

It should not prevent us from seeing what the system is teaching while we move.

Now, that is a difference between implementing the change and then leading through the change.

So let's establish something early.

Change management and change leadership.

They are not enemies.

They work together to accomplish the desired changes that are necessary.

So let's consider or look at it.

Earle Airey

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Earle Airey

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A little bit more of a little deeper perspective.

Change modeling does not include the needed leadership to pull it off.

A change model may tell leaders to communicate a vision, however, the guarantee that the leader has the emotional intelligence to recognize it or recognize the fear that might be in the room as a result of the change.

The methodology may call for building a coalition get those people together that will support the change.

But that instruction alone does not create the trust between the correlation members or with the leadership.

A plan may require employee engagement, but it does not automatically explain why employees should find the change meaningful.

And a roadmap may include training.

While that is helpful, training does not necessarily remove the workload, conflicting incentives, inadequate staffing challenges, broken processes, or the challenging those norms that make the desired behavior difficult.

A model may call for reinforcement, but keep in mind that that reinforcement is much harder when employees perceive very little organizational support.

So when the chain architecture describes important work that needs to happen, the change leadership capability influences how that work happens through people, and that distinction matters.

Think of change.

Think of it as at least two important layers, and this is by no means exhaustive, but they're pretty big.

So we'll stick with these because this is a good foundation for building your framework.

And the first one is the functional architecture, and it asks what needs to happen now, these may include things such as strategy, objectives, governance, communication plans, training, and so on.

This list is by no means exhaustive and they are important.

However, underneath those activities lie another layer, and that is to behold behavioral support structure.

And it asks what conditions need to exist for people to move through this change effectively.

And it may include elements like emotional intelligence or psychological safety, participation, clear answers to the what's in it for me Question, perceived organizational support, meaningful communications, leader credibility, and so on.

The architecture helps us to address what needs to happen, but the behavioral support helps people to make it happen, and neither should be ignored.

The what's in it for me is more than a communication technique.

That phrase may sound transactional.

However, during change it represents something deeper.

People are often trying to determine is this worth it?

Is this resource relevant?

How emotionally entangled am I, or are those around me?

What's my level of professionalism or relationality or practicality?

These things and more contribute to those elements that helps to develop the trust that leaders may unintentionally send signals that are not yet clear.

So people may Naturally assess it as the value proposition.

And they may ask, well, what becomes better if I do this?

Or what does this help?

How does this help?

Or what does this help the people that we serve?

How does this improve my work?

Does this make my job less frustrating?

Eventually.

So there are other elements on this list, and they are by no means exhaustive, because these questions are not necessarily resistance.

These can be the individual's sense making in action.

People don't support change simply because leadership believes it's worthwhile.

They're more likely to engage when they see, feel, and experience enough value in the change to justify what is asked of them.

The change effort eventually becomes behavioral, especially when someone must do something different than what they may have been used to or have done in the past.

It may require using a different process or making a different decision, adapting to new technology, or changing a habit that's a challenging one.

And that's why the individual's internal change also matters.

However, individuals rarely work in isolation and even in remote teams.

So suppose that leaders say, we need employees to collaborate more.

However, departments are rewarded when they compete internally, or we need our managers to coach.

In reality, managers just don't have time to do that, or we want our employees to speak up.

However, employees remember, were the last person who challenged assumptions and was punished, or they were in some way, shape or form met with undesired consequences.

And of course, we need innovation.

But are the mistakes that we make today treated as failures, or are they learning opportunities?

In each of these cases, the desired individual behavior is colliding with the system.

Change leaders therefore need to ask, what in our environment is making the desired change easier or harder?

Now that question can change the conversation.

Instead of asking, why won't people change generically?

We begin asking, what are we doing rewarding?

Assuming protecting, communicating, or tolerating, that might be making this change harder than it needs to be.

When the change slows down, leaders often they often add force to get things moving again.

Starting to slow down, kind of push harder, more urgency.

We need to have more meetings, more messages.

Then you get the memo.

We'll create another dashboard so people can generate the reports so they can get more information.

There can be more accountability.

We need to hold people accountable for what it is that we need them to do.

And sometimes just additional energy is necessary.

But sometimes, when we think about it, the better question is, what can we remove?

A confusing approval process, maybe conflicting priorities, an outdated policy?

Or is it a workload problem?

Are we asking a lot?

Are we asking too much?

Maybe there's a technology barrier.

Ever try to use the tools and it's just as confusing to try to get the tool to work, let alone what you're trying to work the tool against.

There are several elements here to consider.

Before asking people to just push harder, leaders should examine what might be holding them back.

Removing one meaningful barrier can Sometimes movement can create more movement than, let's say, another motivational speech or another town hall meeting.

And this is where the grocery store metaphor can become a little more useful because different change situations require different ingredients.

You're not going to purchase the items to bake a cake if you are looking to cook a steak dinner.

Because the one aisle may emphasize purpose and direction, like what is it that we're changing and why now?

And as a result of our efforts, what becomes better?

We go down another aisle and it might emphasize people and behavior, things like what most people understand, learn, believe, or do differently to make this change work.

Then we go down the next aisle and we discover things around relationships and participation.

Who needs a voice in this change?

Who carries informal influence and who should help change the change?

Who should help shape it?

Then the next aisle.

We may find that there are elements around systems and constraints.

We look at the, you know, what structures or processes or what are our norms or incentives, or even the workloads that reinforce the present state.

Then maybe we head down the aisle where we look at learning and adaptation.

What do we need to test and are we making any discoveries?

And where and would and should we adjust?

And then finally we may go down another aisle.

That is the leadership capability.

What do leaders need to become so that they can be better at the elements that contributes towards a successful change?

Perhaps active listening, coaching, emotional intelligence.

Maybe we need to look at it from a systems thinking perspective.

If there's conflict, how do we manage it?

And what are the elements that helps people get past their risk and vulnerability to start building trust?

Maybe there's an opportunity to delegate so that people can get more done and not rely completely by overloading themselves.

There's another.

Another aisle that I would say to consider and that could look at reinforcement and sustainability.

And I love the one definition of sustainability that I heard a couple of years ago.

And that's the capability of this generation to be able to achieve the results that they wish to achieve without sacrificing the future generation to be able to do the same.

So in an organization, how does that apply to us?

Now?

The point is not to visit every single aisle for the meal that you're planning.

Certain aisles you'll go down, and certain ones you won't.

But depending on what the focus is, what the culinary delight that you're about to create is going to take you down.

Some, but likely not all.

One of the biggest risks in change leadership occurs when the plan becomes successful.

Something that leaders feel obligated to defend.

The plan was approved and the resources have been committed and the executives even have signed off on it.

And you have assembled your coalition and they believe in it.

But now contradictory information starts to appear that's a part of change.

But instead of becoming curious, perhaps people start to become defensive.

Questions become the resistance.

Disagreement is seen as being negative.

Slow adoption becomes that there are employees that are trying to sabotage or they have an attitude problem.

The warning signs become something to just kind of explain away.

And this is how change group think can develop effective change leaders remain committed to the purpose without becoming so blindly attached to the original plan.

Because the original plan is not to prove that the plan was right.

The objective is to help the organization reach the best possible and best reasonable outcomes.

That exercise requires reflective practice.

Leaders need.

They need moments to step outside the activity just long enough to ask some important, some meta questions, if you will.

Thinking about thinking.

What are we seeing?

What are we assuming it means?

And where is the evidence that supports that assumption?

What evidence challenges it?

And whose voice are we hearing?

And whose voice is missing?

So this and others, these elements of reflection, it does not mean that everything comes to a stop.

It means creating enough space for thinking to be remain a part of the doing.

Reflection should start before implementation.

One useful practice is reasonable pre mortem.

So imagine the change is six months in and it hasn't produced the outcome that you expect.

The following could look like this.

Why may that have happened?

Not every imaginable catastrophe, but you know, just what is the most plausible danger zones.

So we think about if this could have happened or that could happen, and then just enough to kind of start thinking about what some of those considerations should be and then move forward.

Some of those elements could have been maybe that the managers were not adequately prepared or anybody adequately prepared for that matter.

Perhaps the workload in of itself prevented adoption.

Fighting so much for the change that you overworked the people to the point they couldn't even make the change happen.

Maybe that the employees just did not understand what the purpose of the change.

They understood how to do it and they understood what they were doing.

They didn't understand why.

Perhaps there was a technology boundary or challenge that didn't align.

And perhaps there are departments that are conflicting incentives, priorities or resources that are necessary to make the change happen.

So then consider asking, which of these conditions can we influence now?

What strengths already exist that could help?

And what early signals would tell us that the danger is emerging?

Should we persevere or should we pivot a strength based approach Approach.

It doesn't ignore risk, but it refuses to let the risk become the only story.

A pre mortem is not permission to predict failure, but it is permission to notice what success might require before the organization learns too late.

Once implementation begins, new information is likely to appear.

And that's why many plans need humility.

So we ask what are the people actually experiencing?

What is working better than we expected or what is harder?

Where is the energy growing and where is support weakening?

What unintended consequences have appeared?

And this is not a moment of indecision.

It's learning.

A change plan should contain a plan for learning from the change plan.

Reflection also matters after meaningful milestones, do not wait until the entire initiative succeeds or fail fails.

Pause and ask what has created?

Or what is creating value?

What is consuming energy without producing enough benefit?

How should we persevere?

Why should we stop?

Or what needs to change?

All of these elements help to keep the learning alive throughout the change.

Organizations often train employees for new processes, but what about the leaders?

If the change requires management to coach differently, are they prepared?

If the change requires spirited collaboration, can leaders navigate potential conflicts?

If the change creates uncertainty, and it most likely will, can leaders communicate calmly and honestly?

Do people need psychological safety to experiment?

And do leaders know how to create it?

If previous initiatives have damaged trust, can the leaders repair it?

And if the organization wants innovation, can the leaders respond constructively with an experiment that may fail?

Because change management and change leadership requires development.

So do not only ask, what must employees learn for this change, Also ask what must leaders become better at?

Because this is what the change needs to succeed?

That question may uncover one of the most important ingredients missing from the plan.

Change management creates order while change leadership creates movement.

Management helps to coordinate.

Leadership helps to mobilize.

Management helps to monitor.

Leadership helps people make meaning.

Management helps to protect execution.

Leadership helps the organization to adapt.

When that reality challenges the plan, neither deserves to be diminished.

The healthiest chain efforts know when each is needed.

If you are leading or supporting change, consider these seven questions.

Number one Purpose and direction.

Why this change?

Why now?

And what becomes meaningful and better?

Number two People in behavior.

What will people actually need to feel, think, learn, or do differently?

Number three Relationships in participation.

Who needs a voice and who carries the influence that the formal organization chart may not show?

Number four Systems and constraints.

What structures, policies, incentives, workload or norms make the desired behavior difficult?

Number five Learning and adaptation.

How will we discover whether our assumptions are right?

Number six Leadership capability.

What must learners or leaders learn or practice to support this change effectively?

7.

Reinforcement in sustainability.

What will help the desired behavior remain after the launch?

Energy fades now.

You do not need the same answer for every change.

And that's the point.

Think about a change that you're currently leading, supporting or experiencing.

Then ask which aisles have I spent the most of our time in?

Back to the grocery store Analogy or metaphor?

And which aisles have we barely visited?

Maybe your architecture is excellent, but people don't see the value.

Perhaps the communication is strong, but managers are not prepared to coach.

The technology functions as expected, but the workload makes adoption unrealistic.

The employees support the purpose visibly, but they do not trust the practice that's in processing.

What if leadership is so committed to the plan that it labels useful dissent as resistance?

Then ask one more question.

What might become possible if we stop asking one framework to do the work of the entire store?

So we try to get everything that we can possibly get for a healthy meal plan in a grocery store down one aisle.

We probably wind up in the frozen food section in front of the frozen meals.

And how healthy will somebody's lifestyle be after a couple of months of eating nothing but pre packaged frozen meals?

Change is complicated because organizations are human systems.

Plans, people, relationships, systems, learning, reflection and leadership all matter greatly.

No single aisle is going to give you everything.

So plan thoughtfully, lead humanely, reflect continuously.

Test assumptions, listen for the meaning, remove unnecessary barriers, measure what people are actually experiencing as much as possible.

Persevere when the evidence says to continue.

Pivot might be necessary when when the system teaches you something new.

And remember, a change plan should create direction without blinding us to our assumptions or emotional attachments to a favored process.

Thank you for being with me today and remember that good leadership leads to victory and I will see you in the winner's circle.

Earle Airey

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As always, good leadership leads to victory.

I'll see you in the winner circle.