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Change Leadership

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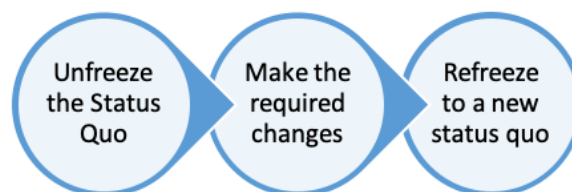
Change Leadership, by Nadine Baladi

In these current dynamic times in our industry, changes are no strangers to us! From the adoption of new technology, to reorgs, to mergers, to acquisitions, to new programs, and the list goes on, a relevant session from the EnglishUSA Stakeholders conference was “It wasn’t my decision: Leading through the Complexity of Change”. The panelists, Mackenzie Kerby (ELS), Emma Tudor (EF Education First) and Nadine Baladi (TheParliamentGroup), focused on three points:

- Understanding change and circumstances of change and how they relate to emotions
- Charting a clear course through change
- Being heard through change

Depending on the model and theory, there can be 6 types of change: Strategic, Product, Technological, Structural/Organizational, Personnel, and Behavioral. Some of these changes such as adding a new program or adopting a user-friendly technological tool can be easier to digest as they might lead to more hours for the teaching staff, or less manual data entry, for example. While structural, organizational or personnel changes might lead to anxiety, fear, and even apprehension.

Regardless of the type of change, most employees will go through three phases in dealing with the event: A sense of loss (no more status quo), an identity crisis (where do I fit in now? How do I perform this new task?), leading into a final phase of acceptance & openness. Because all these phases consume much energy, it’s important have a period of stability before bringing on the next major change. One way to think about this is:



Some of the decisions that results in the most impactful changes may not necessarily be our decisions, and the initiative might have been launched clumsily or too rapidly, or lacking details but we cannot alter what we receive, we must implement the changes that are called for, and we must focus on all the elements we are able to control. To implement a major change successfully, the experts suggest the following 12 steps:

Communicate:

1. Paint the big picture
2. Know the what, why & how
3. Keep your people front of mind
4. Communicate with transparency
5. Emphasize the Benefits

Collaborate:

1. Set out outcomes and goals for the team
2. Identify and collaborate with Change agents
3. Provide plenty of training
4. Check-in with your team regularly

Commit:

1. Make it Happen
2. Keep up the momentum
3. Lead by example: be the change!

Sometimes, in the midst of a change, we might feel isolated or even resentful, especially if it is up to us to implement an initiative that was poorly planned or that we fear. Our teams will feel the same thing when we deliver the message to them. It's important for us and for our teams to find our voice through the change. Adopting some of these tips might help:

- Pick your battles (set priorities)
- Think of yourself as a front-line consultant to your organization and provide solutions to challenges
- Take ownership of a specific task within the change-project
- Manage your manager's expectations
- Attend meetings and ask questions (request if not offered)

- While many elements of the change may lie outside of your control, ask yourself: “what *is* in my control?” Take full ownership of what you can manage and apply the change management tips and tricks we’ve discussed here.

Another helpful way to ease the implementation of big decisions is to create a culture of change in your organization and continuously nurture this attitude. Here are some recommendations to this end:

Hire right:

- Ask scenario based interview questions and throw in a curve ball, set expectations to welcome change and innovation, ask them about an innovative project they’ve worked on, do group interviews to see how adaptable and open minded individuals are to group ideas

Make conversations about change common place:

- In meetings/planning/conversations, ask how something can be done differently. Challenge the status quo. Can this be done better?

Make changes easy to implement:

- Flat organizations with little red tape or bureaucracy can push change through faster and easier

Be OK with imperfection

- Don’t come down hard on people if a change didn’t work. Learn from it. Encourage people to innovate and feel ok taking risks.

Have a grassroots network

- Bring in diverse voices who have a real pulse on the realities of their department/process/team etc.

Resources on the topic and models referred to in the discussion:

- *Bridges, William, and Susan Bridges. Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change. , 2017. Print.*
- “Bridges’ Transition Model: Guiding People Through Change.” *Change Management Tools From MindTools.com, Mind Tools,*
- www.mindtools.com/pages/article/bridges-transition-model.htm.

- <https://www.ccl.org/leadership-solutions/organizational-leadership/change-leadership/>

Nadine Baladi is Founding Partner at The ParliamentGroup, an impact-driven consultancy for international education initiatives. Prior to this, she was VP of Academics and Student Operations at ILSC Education Group, working in collaboration with the TESOL teams, Pathway Programs, Junior Programs , Teacher Training and Testing. She is a board member of EnglishUSA, a commissioner for ACCET and has presented at EnglishUSA events, TESOL, NAFSA, and AIRC. Nadine is working hard at becoming a full-time skier.