

When automobile construction and repairs became computerized, there was widespread feeling that many mechanics would not be able to make the switch. Despite this, the vast majority learned how to use computers. The reason they accepted the change? The benefit of doing so was crystal clear and instead of being the disaster scenario predicted, the automobile industry provided one of the greatest change success stories of all time.

Contrary to popular belief (and what is often communicated by leaders) recent research demonstrates that people do not naturally resist change. What people resist is the pain of the change. And although finding the benefit may often appear to be a challenge in itself, once it has become clear, the change is no longer painful. Every high performer, in fact, lives this every day – seeking change and taking risks for the resulting benefits.

Beneficial though the change may ultimately be, the pain needs to happen. In any life situation where loss and letting go are the order of the day, grieving inevitably has to take place for new bonding to be possible. By reaching out into new areas, being curious, and learning new things, change actually helps fulfill this innate need.

In a world where change has become a way of life, successful change is dependent on one key condition - feeling secure. In order to take any change on board willingly, people need a secure base from which to operate in order to feel trust and safety. Change in business is no different.

Making a difference through secure bases

One of the principal issues in today's ever-changing world is current low levels of employee engagement. This can be disastrous for business. Says Gallup: "The level of emotional attachment to the job has a direct correlation to productivity, customer satisfaction, lost work days and turnover - all of which are key economic factors". A major part of the solution is to ensure that managers are aware of the difference they can make in providing a secure base for employees and colleagues.

Employees with a manager who fulfills his or her role as a secure base, tend to feel safe enough to stop looking for danger and start seeking the benefits beyond the pain of the change sooner than those with no secure base. A secure base is not necessarily a manager, however. It might be a colleague, a team, a coach, or even a teacher, or some completely different relationship.

The main way to differentiate the secure base relationship from other relationships one may have is trust. It is those people or things or places that provide a feeling of safety inside. Once that is established, any degree of anxiety or uncertainty can be managed successfully.

The way to employee hearts and minds

One of the principal attributes of any leader is to be able to provide a sense of protection, as well as help communicate why the change is necessary. In change processes where there are leaders who cannot communicate what the benefit is, the brain will indeed seek out every negative aspect it can find. Statistics show that more than 80% of change initiatives succeed when a secure base is present. In fact, the secure base can actually facilitate "re-wiring" the brain so that change becomes something we seek, rather than avoid.

Leading change is about bringing people with you. By the same token, leading change is a mindset. It is not about telling people to transform. It is about making people part of the dialogue, and CEOs and senior leaders, by definition, need to represent a secure base for even large numbers of people. A positive line manager who acts as a secure base, shows caring, and builds bonds, will be likely to enjoy the benefits of contented employees. Some of the most spectacular CEO failures have been simply because so much time was spent over-focusing on cost cutting, on goals, and on facts and figures, that they forgot the people and in the process; forgot to understand the pain people were going through. This is a guaranteed formula for creating resistance to change and failure.

Taking the lead

Bonding with employees may appear easy, but an astonishing 20% of people in organizations actually have no idea how to form positive emotional bonds. Be they managers unable to create bonds with employees or vice versa, the end result can only be destructive disconnection.

When those bonds are in place and secure, however, people have the space, the freedom and the courage to move forward - helping them gain the self-esteem that they need to perform their job correctly. The brain lives its natural way of being - seeking new neuron expansion through constant on going learning, challenge and change.

Be it boss or employee, somebody has to lead the process. And if it works - bingo! What an opportunity! Change ceases to be something to be feared and becomes a novelty - something to pursue. Only then, will people go the extra mile to make it all happen. Positive risk taking becomes a way of life.

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