

Overcome Resistance

Give change a chance to succeed.



by Howard M. Guttman

WHAT PROMPTS PEOPLE to do what they do? Why do they behave in a certain way? What causes them to overcome fear and inertia to follow some new, untraveled path?

These are complex questions. We don't have scientifically valid answers for how organizations can change the behavior of those who show up each day in varying states of readiness, willingness, and ability to shift paradigms and routines.

What we can offer are practical tips—a kind of results verification—that come from great leaders who have overcome resistance to change to take their teams to a very different place.

- **Be reassuring.** Not surprisingly, change, especially in lean times, breeds fear. It is difficult for people to embrace your vision of some new tomorrow, no matter how brightly you paint it, when they remain frozen in fear.

Managing the fear of change is a top priority for high-performing leaders, who know that “greatness” requires making deep organizational and personal change. When Grant Reid, now global president, Mars Drinks, was faced with the challenge of turning around sales at Mars' Snack unit, he first went directly to associates—especially those whose leader had been replaced by Reid, to reassure them.

Reid set up one-on-one meetings with his VPs and their direct reports to explain his vision for the future and ask for their help in achieving it. He encouraged them to express their feelings about the changes by asking questions: “How are you feeling? What are you thinking about your future here? What are your major concerns?”

Listening to the answers, Reid realized that people wanted reassurance that their future was secure. He carefully explained what was going to change and what their role would be going forward. He let people know the end game; let them know they would have a hand in bringing it about. Before long, they were fully committed to Reid's plan.

- **Pace change.** People can only deal with so many changes before they go into “Future Shock.” One way to keep Future Shock from undermining your efforts to implement change is to make sure that people have sufficient time to understand and absorb the upcoming move to the high-performance model—and to give them plenty of opportunity to ask questions. As Axcan Pharma's CEO, Frank Verwiel, reminds us, “It's a challenge to strike the right balance between getting people to change enough to make a difference and not making so many changes that they become paralyzed.”

There is no formula for finding that balance. High-performing leaders know how to weigh the business case for the change and its urgency with how far the organization must travel to get



there. They also know how to convey to everyone that moving horizontally is the “real deal” rather than just another this-too-shall pass initiative.

Bottom-line lesson for leaders: Keep in mind that change doesn't just happen—it happens to people.

- **Tie-in self-interest.** People are more apt to change when there are incentives to do so—and disincentives for clinging to old habits. What will the high-performing model mean in terms of how players in an organization earn their living and live their professional life? What's the cash value to them? What are the rewards in terms of their career, their ability to operate freely, to tap their creative energy, and to express themselves freely without all the task interference of a siloed, hierarchical environment?

Brian Camastral, regional president, Latin America for Mars, Inc., is a super consequence thinker—a skill that he

uses adeptly in managing high-performance change. Imagine, he asked his change-shy team members, if we could create a situation in which each of the decentralized geographical units could work together as an area-wide team, continue to operate independently, and yet improve individual unit results?

Camastral got his team's attention. He then made the business case for aligning each unit's strategy with Mars' global strategy. Camastral took his top team through an alignment session, which barreled home the point that with each unit working off the same strategic plan, parts would be more interchangeable, allowing for cross-border mutual assistance. Executives on his team realized that they would remain accountable and be rewarded for their unit's results, not the region's, but their unit's results would improve, given a freer flow of talent. “The attitude began to shift,” says Camastral, “until everyone wanted to be on the winning team, and they were all determined to make it work, individually and collectively.”

When Paul Parker was vice president of HR for Colgate-Palmolive's Africa-Middle East Division, he was charged with reining in the South African team of “mavericks” who enjoyed the rough-and-tumble of the local marketplace. The only problem: The region wanted to play a more robust corporate role and become a global supplier for CP, which it couldn't do if it remained at its current level.

Enter the universal motivator: self-interest. When it was pointed out to the South Africans that they would never be viewed by corporate as a source of talent for the global organization, they realized that their behavior wasn't in their own best interests. They asked: “How do we accelerate our careers within CP?” The answer: “By demonstrating high-performance behaviors.” They began to do so.

Then there is that effective, stand-by carrot: pay for team performance. Many companies now reward both results *and* how they are achieved. In one company, 40 percent of compensation depends on “soft” behaviors: authenticity, following protocols, depersonalizing, holding others' accountable, being receptive to feedback. And it really helps people take that leap of faith onto a new path. **LE**

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ACTION: Reward results and how they're achieved.