



# A Candid Message to Senior Leaders: Ten Ways to Dramatically Increase the Success of Your Change Efforts

By Dean Anderson, Ed.D. and Linda Ackerman Anderson, Ed.D.

## Dear Senior Leaders,

We possess a unique view into your world as a senior executive. For the past forty years we have worked with many of your peers in the Fortune 1000 teaching, consulting, coaching—and always, learning— what it takes to be really successful as a sponsor of large change efforts. We have seen the best and the worst of change leaders in action.

In this letter, we want to share with you what we perceive you need to be doing—or doing differently, or to stop doing altogether—to get the return on investment you need from the change efforts you sponsor or lead.

This is a candid portrayal based on our observations of our senior executive clients over the past two decades. The picture we paint here is further fortified by what we consistently hear from other seasoned consultants and project managers, both external experts and internal professionals, about the successes and challenges they face in getting their senior leaders to do what is required for change to succeed.

Not everyone will tell you these things. Too often, executives shut down the messengers of feedback, causing those around them to hesitate before saying what they really think or feel. But as authors, we have no “axe to grind” or “punches to pull.” Obviously, you cannot fire

us, but even if you could, we would be equally frank with you. Any particular point we make may or may not be accurate in your case. Only you can discern that. But we hope you will find value in the discourse. So, read on and ask yourself, am I doing the best I can for my company as a leader of change?

## **Remember these Words: My Style and Actions have Direct Impact on Our Change Efforts**

Think cause and effect! How you sponsor or lead change has an impact on your change efforts' success. Your style, decisions, and actions (or lack of them) all have an effect. Sometimes your impact is positive; other times it is not. The problem is that most leaders do not know which impact they are having. This is normal of course. All of us think we

are contributing and having a positive impact, even when we are not. Our mistakes are never deliberate; rather, they are inadvertent. In this article, we hope to give you an opportunity to pause for a moment and reflect on your mindset, behavior, and style as a change leader, as well as on the change strategies and techniques you use, so you can better discern just what impact you are having.

Do you know what constitutes great change leadership? Are you aware of which aspects of your leadership add value, and which are limited by your personality, style, or lack of understanding? Do you know what your organization needs to maximize its success at change? Are you doing these things? Ponder these questions as you read.

This article outlines the top ten things executives need to do differently to improve their change results.





## Ten Things to Do Differently to Dramatically Increase Your Results from Change

### 1. Create greater alignment, commitment, and support in your top executive team to ensure that they are individually and collectively doing all that is necessary to make your change efforts successful.

A typical quote we hear from your subordinates is, “There are so many political dynamics among the executives that this change is being torn apart. They are not willing to work together, nor admit they are actively working against their peers’ agendas. We need them to lead as a unified team, not bicker and fight with each other.”

Most senior leaders see themselves as individual contributors. They naturally think first about the success of their business unit, process, or function, and orient to the success

of the enterprise second. At a distant third, they sometimes support their peer’s needs and success.

Over the years, this individualistic orientation among those at the top often creates major internal competition for power, resources, staff, project priority, compensation, promotions, and general attention. If this internal competition goes unchecked over many years, it manifests into power struggles, alliance building, internal resistance, and withholding of support from other executive’s agendas. How true is this for you and your team?

Sometimes, the political terrain in the top echelons becomes so fraught with conflict that the senior executives themselves dare not address it, no matter how costly the finger-pointing and backbiting is to the overall performance of the organization. You might find in your own team that talking about the quality of your relationships with each other simply has become too threatening. You might even think that it is better to just leave things

alone. However, in your gut, you know that such dysfunction can destroy any chance for success in your large change efforts. Why?

Because large complex change—especially transformational change—impacts people and processes across boundaries—boundaries of role, function, process, and organization. Consequently, transformation demands cross-boundary support at the top. It is a non-negotiable requirement of success. You can succeed if you have it, but have very little change if you do not. In addition, if you do not have it with your peers, you can hardly expect the rest of your organization to have it either.

How do you get the needed support from your peers?

- First, you have to address the dysfunction in your team, including the historic power struggles and lack of alignment, communication, and support. Undoubtedly, this takes courage, but the ROI will be substantial. You will likely need outside, expert consulting support for this work, since most executives are not comfortable doing this level of interpersonal work with their internal resources.

- Next, secure the agreement of your team members that your change effort is a direct vehicle for implementing your organization's business strategy. (By the way, if it is not, you should stop your change effort!) Since your top team is responsible for business strategy success, demonstrate how your effort supports both the enterprise and the team in their role as senior leader.
- Then, collectively explore and determine how the scope of your change effort will impact their areas of responsibility. Make sure they understand the tangible ways your change will influence their operations.
- Then, use their input to help you design your effort so it meets their needs.
- Finally, tell them how you will inform and involve them throughout the change and what you will need from them over time. Get their agreement to partner with you for success.

## **2. Model the change you are asking of others.**

This is critical! Employees believe what they see (behaviors and actions) and are generally





skeptical of words, especially if your words do not match your deeds. Consequently, you must walk your talk if you want to minimize employee resistance and maximize their buy-in and commitment.

Major change, especially transformational change, demands that people change personally. This means you as well as others. The most courageous thing you can do is to go first, with your own personal change. Identify how you need to think and act differently for the change to be successful, and then proactively change your self. Get an executive coach if that will help. Modeling personal change yourself and creating safe conditions for others in the organization to follow in kind may just be the bold action that transforming your organization requires.

For example, if you are attempting to create a collaborative culture, then you must work collaboratively yourself. Provide fewer answers

and ask more questions. Get more people involved, and keep those not involved informed. Ask for others' input in situations where you would normally take control. Communicate more. As Gandhi put it, "Be the change!"

Remember that personal change is critical to your success, and it cannot be accomplished in one executive development experience. It is a process, a journey, and take courage and conviction to see it through amidst your organization's changes.

### **3. After you kick the change off, stay involved and contribute the right amount of senior level strategic influence over the change—all the way through to completion.**

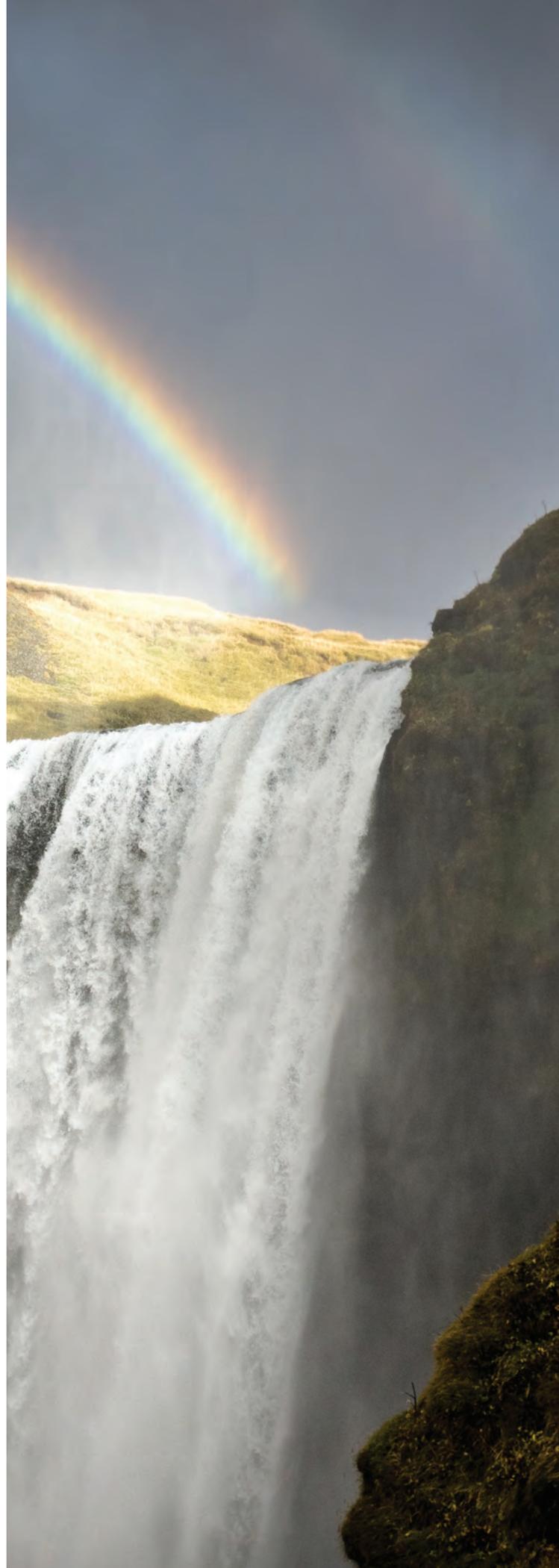
As the sponsor of major change, you have a critical role to play in your change effort—a role that cannot be delegated to anyone else. Furthermore, your role requirements last

throughout the change all the way to completion. By the way, completion does not mean when you have implemented the change; it means when your organization is running effectively in its new state and realizing the full value of the change. In short, you must stay involved far longer than you think.

Typically, we see leaders initiate their change efforts by identifying desired outcomes, naming a project manager, allocating budget, and specifying a timeline. Then, they either get too involved with the details of the change, which stifles their change team's efforts, or at the other end of the continuum, they simply disappear, popping in occasionally to assess what is happening and make key decisions. However, their absenteeism has left them uninformed and unequipped to make sound decisions about the change. Sound familiar?

Sponsorship demands that you find the middle road and stay strategically engaged with your change effort through its full lifecycle. Keep your hands out of the details, but your head fully into the strategic issues. Remember, organizational change is primarily business strategy implementation. You are the key person to link your change effort to the business strategy to ensure the change delivers what your strategy demands. Plus, your change team needs you to help them understand the larger strategic challenges the organization faces so they are not blindsided by them as they plan the change.

We frequently hear project heads, change team members, and consultants bemoan, "Once the future state has been decided, we can never get the attention of the leaders to make key strategic decisions about implementation or even offer needed input. It is so low a priority that they squeeze critical discussions about the change into one hour in the middle of their monthly meeting agendas, or become totally inaccessible."



Do not let your change teams say this about you. Stay informed so you can offer intelligent input and be able to make sound strategic decisions when necessary. Make yourself available to your project team to offer your strategic insight when they have a breakdown they cannot fix or are faced with unfamiliar forks in the road. Discover the barriers they face and use the power of your position to clear the way. Make sure your peers in the top team are providing what your project team needs to succeed, whether that be access to their line leaders, staff for special change tasks, or time on their mid-level manager's agendas to integrate the change work with their operations. Know what is working and not working so you can justly hold people accountable for progress.

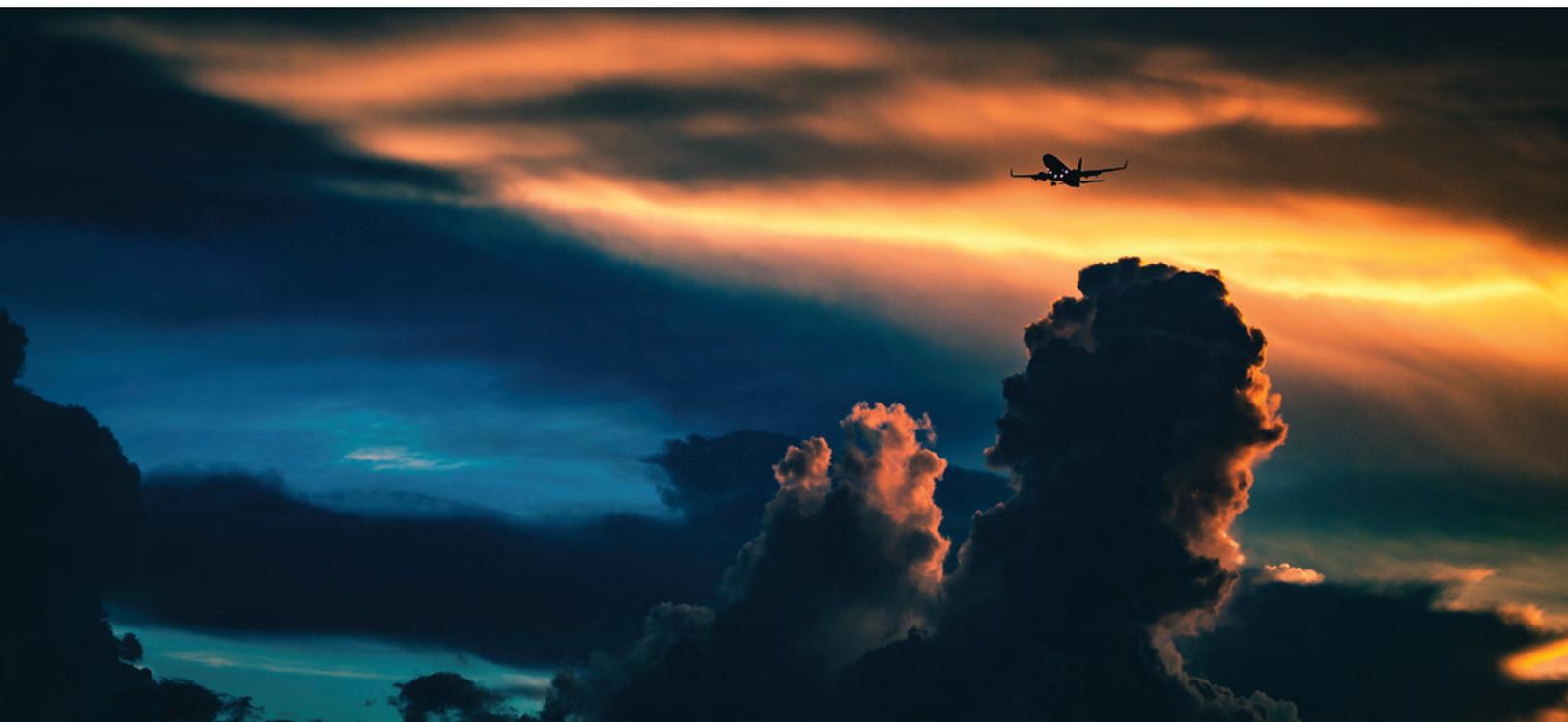
#### **4. Develop your understanding of human and cultural dynamics during change so you can make intelligent decisions about how to proactively handle them.**

In last month's letter, we suggested that you needed to stay far more involved—strategically (not tactically)—in your change efforts, all the way to completion. We suggested that you will need to break down organizational barriers

for your change team, provide input, offer guidance, and make decisions at critical junctions. Much of your needed involvement will regard human and cultural issues.

Are you equipped? Do you understand human dynamics during change—such as motivation, resistance, human needs and drives, communication and behavioral styles, and emotional reactions and the mindsets that trigger them? Do you feel capable dealing with the impacts that your change may have on your existing culture, or how to transform your culture to serve your outcomes while your organization undergoes its change?

Most senior executives are not so equipped. They are far more skilled with the strategic content of their businesses than the people issues, especially during change. They understand their markets, customers, products and services, business models, and organizational systems and processes, but do not understand how to constructively address the psychology of people, change, or culture. In fact, most change efforts fail not because the executives designed the wrong "content" solution, but because they could not get them implemented effectively by their people. Either resistance was too great, political maneuvering





derailed the effort, employees withdrew their participation, or once implemented, people simply ignored the new state and went on using the old technology or process. Sound familiar?

People issues have not always been of such great concern. Until the 1990's, most change was developmental or transitional, with far less significant human impacts. At most, people had to modify certain behaviors or learn new but similar skills to implement change. But now, most major change is transformational, which impacts people far more deeply, often emotionally and within their own belief and values systems. In transformation, fundamental ways of being, relating to others, and operating are often radically changed. This makes expert treatment of human and cultural issues a critical success factor in transformation. (See *Beyond Change Management: Advanced Strategies for Today's Transformational Leaders*, Anderson and Ackerman Anderson, 2001, for a review of the different types of change and their human impacts.)

Sponsoring transformational change requires you to understand what makes people tick, both what ignites their passion and commitment and what causes them to resist. If you learn about human emotions and the belief systems that trigger them, you will be better able to design and implement your change efforts so they cause people to commit and participate in positive ways.

If you do not attend to or understand human dynamics, then you will inadvertently make decisions that have huge negative impacts on your people without having the forethought to put in place ways to mitigate those impacts. Here are a few examples of emotionally costly decisions:

- ▶ i. Cutting twenty percent from budgets without cutting the scope of work.
- ▶ ii. Taking everyone's job away and requiring them to vie for new positions.
- ▶ iii. Not asking key people impacted by the change for input to the design of the new organization or business solution.
- ▶ iv. Not providing any business case for the change, and expecting people to follow your executive mandate without airing their questions or fears about the change.
- ▶ v. Saying "yes" to certain aspects of your change plan without really understanding what your "yes" means, then changing your decision mid-stream once you do understand the impacts, thus jerking your people around.

These common actions will disrupt your change effort, slow it down, and make it far more costly. Mitigate these potential road blocks by learning about the human and cultural dynamics of change so you will understand how to generate

alternatives that create commitment rather than resistance.

**5. Build a change integration plan. Stop unleashing numerous change efforts without attending to how to integrate, oversee, or coordinate issues between them or with the existing business.**

Typically, a new business strategy requires several major changes, and perhaps many smaller ones. Many executive sponsors will set all of these efforts loose on the organization, even promoting executive incentives for each one who succeeds the fastest. Since each is its own separate change effort, they staff these efforts, budget for them, govern them, and monitor them as independent projects. To make matters worse, the leaders of each effort may run their projects using different change models, competing consulting firms, and the same people who need to keep the business running effectively while they simultaneously attempt to change it. Unfortunately, this strategy of unleashing numerous isolated efforts creates impossible levels of chaos, confusion, and competition. It increases the cost of your overall change, radically slows its pace, and can destroy employee morale and commitment to change. Fortunately, there is a better way.

Integrate your change efforts from the beginning. Once you identify your major initiatives, establish a change infrastructure for how you will govern them, make decisions, allocate resources across them, and determine overall pacing. Create overarching agreements for how to minimize the complexity and burden on your organization and overtly share accountability for enterprise-wide success.

Make sure your infrastructure includes a multiple project integration team. Use this team to streamline and consolidate your interdependent projects, remove redundancies, and share resources.

And think seriously about using a common change process methodology—one that allows for customization for the unique needs of each initiative, cross-fertilization among them, and a shared language and approach to handling process complexities and human dynamics. See the Article, “How to Implement a Common Change Methodology to Increase Your Organization’s Change Results and Skill.”

Lastly, be sure to set your changes up to interface effectively with your ongoing operations so that neither is sub-optimized. You can change your business successfully while you run your business successfully only if you integrate the two so neither derails the other.



**6. Set realistic timelines. Stop using arbitrary timelines that do not match the real needs of your change efforts or the capacity of your organization to actually make the changes happen.**

You can blow holes in the potential success of your change efforts by setting unrealistic timelines. Just because you want the change to go fast does not mean that it can go fast. It is fine to create a real sense of urgency for change, but that does not mean that its timeline can be expedited beyond what is humanly possible.

Speed is a product of a number of variables: the complexity of your change, the change readiness and capability of your organization, the resources you have allocated, and the state of your current operations. Mixed together with a healthy dose of operational reality, these variables establish the timeline that is possible.

Your change could go faster if it was less complex, or your organization was more ready or had more change skill, or you allocated more resources, or your current operations were in better shape. But each variable is what it is right now, and the mix of them all determines the speed possible now.

When you establish timelines that do not mesh with these realities, your people will see right through them, and you will lose credibility. Furthermore, the very people you need to make the change happen will begin to resist, resent, and fight the change because they feel victimized by its timeline. Their stress increases, and they begin to think that since the timeline is unrealistic, so is the change effort and its leadership.

An unrealistic timeline does nothing to increase the speed of change. It actually slows things down because it drastically lowers the change





readiness of your organization, and can even reduce performance in the ongoing business. There are definitely ways to increase the speed of your change, but setting unrealistic timelines is not one of them!

## **7. Build a critical mass of support for your change with significant engagement and input from the functions and people directly impacted by the change, or who are required to make it happen successfully.**

This recommendation goes directly to your leadership mindset and style. When an organization feels “done to” by change—rather than inspired, involved, and led—resistance abounds. Recent management literature has focused on the dangers and obsolescence of the “command and control” leadership style, with good reason. If you assume that your people will change because you tell them to, or threaten punishment if they don’t, backlash is

inevitable. Of course, making critical change is important to the future of your business, but holding your people hostage is not the answer. Resentment and “workforce rage” will grow. Loyalty to you and the organization will go out the window. Your credibility will shrink. So, what can you do to engage and compel your people to take on the challenge?

Change does not happen from the outside in... “Do it because I said so.” It happens from the inside out. People can only change—really change—when they understand buy in to the need, and decide to do things differently. Your leadership responsibility is to create that understanding, test it, model it, and make it palatable and compelling. Engage your people to think about what needs to change and why. Involve them in generating potential solutions, out-of-the-box possibilities. Give them an opportunity to have a say—if not some real influence—on the new future you are asking them to create. With your leadership and real employee engagement, your people will see the

value of change and make it happen because they want to, not because you demanded it.

One very powerful way to generate momentum and readiness is to consciously build a critical mass of genuine support for the change. Identify the most influential “opinion leaders” from all levels of the affected functions, the most powerful executives, and the staff that show the most enthusiasm and understanding for the changes you seek. These people form your “bank account” of support. Knowing how much positive energy already exists for the changes is key to understanding how much more support you must then generate from your “fence-sitters,” and eventually, from converting your resisters. Remember that critical mass is a game of inertia, not specific numbers. You must mobilize enough support to overcome the inertia of the status quo, and give the change a life of its own, like a snowball rolling downhill picking up speed. Only then will your change happen.

The best way to spread understanding, generate creative thinking, and build critical mass is through participation. There is a full range of engagement strategies from which to pick. Do not make the mistake of thinking that

when you ask your people for their ideas, you must then do what they say. This leads to the faulty leadership assumption that it is better not to ask at all. Do ask, but set clear expectations for what will be done with the input. With your people engaged in the possibility of creating a better future for their organization, you will have added important weight to the critical mass of support that you must have to succeed.

## **8. Plan your change and future state as best you can, and then establish a mechanism and process to course correct your plans and outcomes as you discover the need to do so.**

Many organizations are run with cultures and mindsets that demand, “Get it right the first time, and do it now,” “Mistakes are not to be tolerated,” and “Project plans and predetermined budgets are sacred.” If your changes are transformational, they will be unruly, unpredictable, and messy while happening. Project management tools and structures are too rigid as the backbone for guiding your transformational process. They do not accommodate the human roller coaster, and they typically generate the misconception that the plan is the reality.





Because you will need to figure things out as you go, you will need a different navigation system. Transformation requires a vehicle for seeking out daily surprises and responding to emergent needs and new information. We strongly recommend that you create a course correction system, an ongoing mechanism for generating new information and out-of-the-box thinking. You will also have to create the cultural expectation that the breakthrough solution you seek might come from any part of your organization or any person. Since this co-creative way of working is unique in most organizations, as illustrated by the predominance of command and control leadership, you must not only create this course correction vehicle, but also embed it, use it, and model its value to the organization on behalf of producing a successful change. This suggestion is one of the most powerful ways we know to alter your culture and mindset, and to build your organization's resilience for keeping up with the perpetual demands for change.

### **9. Put the right people in charge of the change, and provide them with the authority and support to succeed.**

When a major change is announced, and the leader named to it is someone who simply has time on their hands, or comes from a distant staff function, or does not have the right experience or influence or power, the signal about the low importance of the change is unmistakable. Or just as bad, the person named as leader is known to have a political bias that will skew the outcome from the start. Your top change leaders must have organizational savvy, political clout, respect, and wisdom about the required future state needed, emotional intelligence, and people and cultural know-how to be successful on any major change. This means that an underling, a human resource staffer, or an external change consultant cannot run your change, especially if it is transformational and long term in nature. This also means that you must make a hard

choice about naming a highly respected line leader as the top orchestrator of your change. Although it is tough to take someone you rely on from your ongoing operation, think about the risk of not doing so and having your change fail. Put the right people in charge and ensure that they have the support, time, and resources they need to be successful. Choose people who can interface confidently with your ongoing operation and see the big picture of that which is best for the overall organization. Choose someone who will do the personal and cultural work as well as the technical and financial work, and someone who will engage the best resources in the organization to create the critical mass of support and behavior change you need. And by all means, take their ongoing responsibilities “off their plates” so they can focus their attention on the change. If your change is big, this means full-time attention.

**10. If you use external consultants, contract with them to support your change without over-controlling the design of your future, or the way in which you lead the change or involve your in-house resources.**

Most consulting firms have enormous technical, financial, or professional expertise to offer you, as well as armies of staff consultants to

help you succeed. When you are faced with the unknowns of transformation and are driven by the fear of failure, external consultants can appear to be a very appealing solution to your woes. We see three limiting patterns in this scenario:

- i. Too many different consultants running around wreaking havoc in the organization with nobody looking over them or coordinating their efforts.
- ii. A consulting firm with way too much control over your operation, that usually has contracted with you for huge fees, and that is not producing the promised results. In addition, the consultants are alienating or patronizing your internal resources who could be of much greater value to you if they were given more access and authority.
- iii. Consulting firms that bring essential content expertise, but lack people and change leadership expertise (even though they may have sold you these services as well as their technical skill).

When you need certain kinds of external help, hire for that. Stay in control and always negotiate check-points that enable you to review and alter your consulting relationships when you recognize the need to do so.





When you have many major change initiatives underway requiring different kinds of consulting expertise, put a savvy change leader in place to oversee the big picture, and even coordinate and align the various consulting firms you have engaged. Keep your organization's interests at the forefront, and if you lose sight of them, call "time out" with your consultants to regain your footing.

The number of disenfranchised competent internal resources (i.e., technical, business process, change management or organization development specialists) who leaders do not use on their change efforts is quite astounding. Learn about and use your internal experts, or at least team them up with your external consultants for partnering or learning purposes. Don't assume that because you have hired external support and are paying a lot of money for these people, that they automatically know more than your own people. Ask around.

## Summary

So, how have you done compared against all ten recommendations? Reflect on how your recent changes have gone. If you are pleased, know that in some way you and your executive peers set them up to be successful. If your changes have fallen short of expectations, then unfortunately, you also had a hand in their failure. To really know, consider asking for a change audit from a cross-section of your organization about how well you have collectively handled change. Can you name the conditions for success that you already know work in your organization? Have you made change leadership capacity a priority for executive and management development? If you need to, ask your executive development people to create a real-time learning process for you and your leaders to become savvy leaders of change—today's kind of change. It will be well worth your investment.

## About The Authors

### Linda Ackerman Anderson, Ed.D.

Dr. Linda Ackerman Anderson, Co-Founder of Being First, Inc., specializes in facilitating transformational change in Fortune 1000 businesses, governments, the military, and large not-for-profit organizations. Industry experts regard Linda as a founding leader of Organization Transformation and a godparent to the Organizational Development community.

As one of the pioneers of Conscious Change Leadership, Dr. Ackerman Anderson brings decades of expertise in developing conscious change consultants and equipping them with the insights and methods to become experts in their fields. She specializes in assisting leaders to sort through the chaos of transformation, develop change processes that produce extraordinary business outcomes, transform organizational mindset and culture, and personally model the changes they seek to create. Linda speaks about leading conscious transformation at international conferences, co-wrote two best-selling books, created the renowned 9-phase change model; The Change Leader's Roadmap™, and published over 50 articles.

### Dean Anderson, Ed.D.

Dr. Dean Anderson, Co-Founder and CEO of Being First, Inc., is an international speaker and bestselling author with over forty years of experience in developing executives of Fortune 1000 companies, government agencies, and large non-profit organizations to design and implement transformational change, deliver breakthrough results, increase organizational change capacity, and establish a high performing, co-creative corporate culture that unleashes human potential.

As one of the pioneers of Conscious Change Leadership, Dean is passionate about co-creation—the high-performance way of being and working that produces results for one's self, the other individuals involved, and the whole enterprise. Dr. Anderson's comprehensive understanding of human motivation and performance, vertical leadership development, and the process of transforming mindset, behavior and culture gives him a unique perspective that has established him as a thought-leader in the field of Organization Transformation. Dr. Anderson co-wrote two best-selling books, published over fifty articles, and has been featured in leading publications such as Business Week.



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## About Being First

Being First is a breakthrough company, providing advanced expertise in personal and organizational transformation.

We guide visionary leaders to transform themselves and their organizations to Achieve Breakthrough in business results, culture, leadership, and executive team performance, while building world-class change leadership capability. We are pioneers teaching Conscious Change Leadership, and provide a complete System of Transformation to our executive clients.