

# Strategic Importance of Change Leaders Modeling the Change

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

## Introduction

One of the toughest change efforts we supported was made more difficult because the CEO was not willing to change himself in the very ways he was demanding that his organization change. The company was transforming its strategy, operations, business processes, and culture.

The cultural goals included behaviors of greater teamwork, more overt sharing of information and power, increased risk-taking, and the essential need to drive decision-making further down in the organization. The new business strategy and operations needed these new behaviors to succeed.

When it became apparent that the CEO continued to make side deals, usurp key decisions, and exclude some of his key players from important change discussions, we knew that the leadership of the change was seriously impaired. How do you get senior leaders to really understand that they must model the changes they are sponsoring, or they will lose credibility, cause resistance and cynicism to mushroom, and be a major factor in their effort's failure? How do you get leaders to walk their own talk?

This article explores the key change leadership issue of "modeling," and provides insights for how you can get your leaders to model the changes they are asking of your organization. one that has already begun.

## How do you know if your change effort requires leadership modeling of new behaviors and cultural norms?

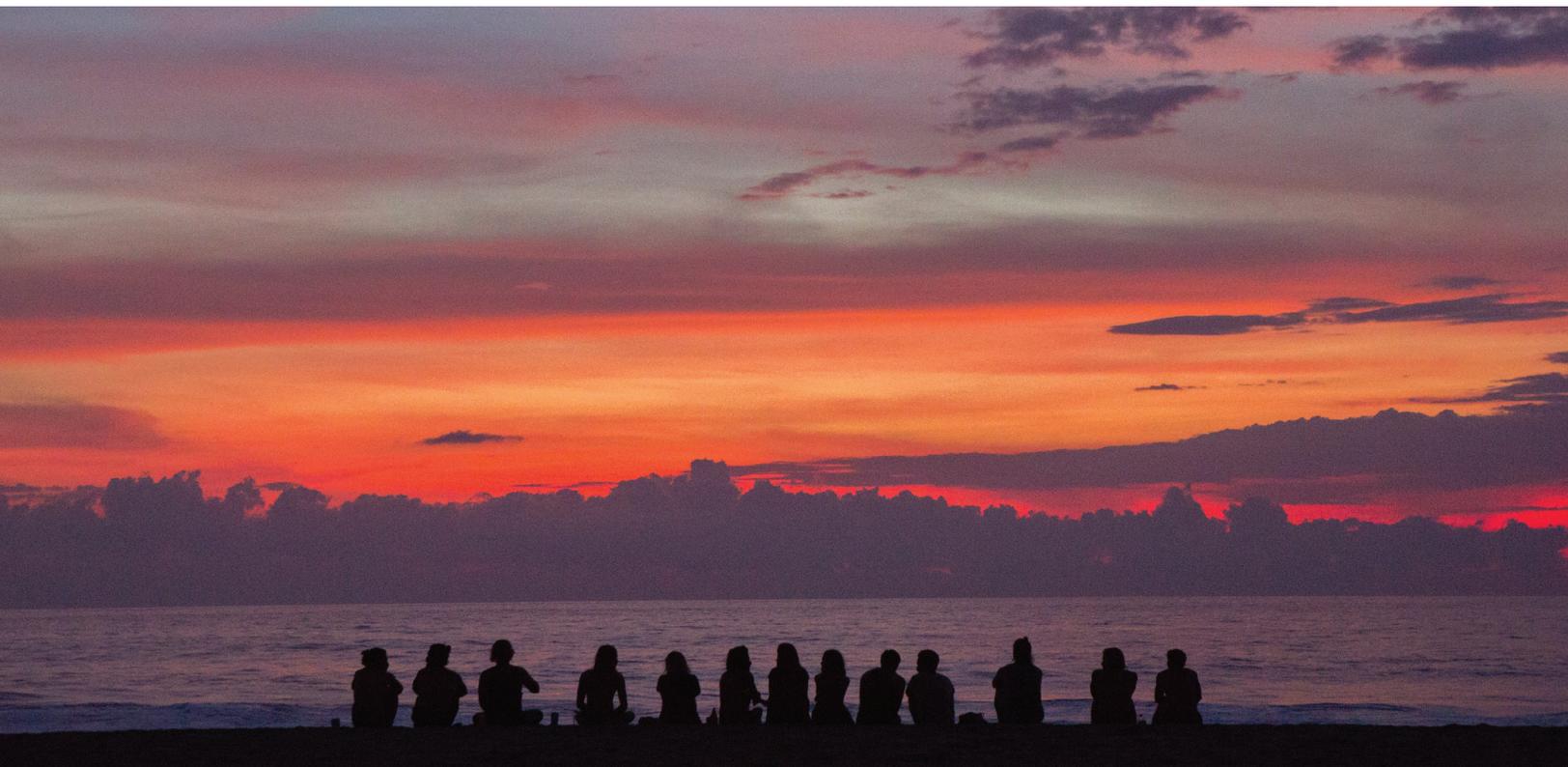
Your change effort requires leaders to model new behaviors and norms if the new state you are trying to implement clearly requires new behaviors and norms to succeed. If the current mindsets, behavior patterns, and cultural norms are adequate to drive the new state, then you do not need leaders to model anything other than their current behaviors.

Typically, leaders see their major change efforts in terms of strategy, structure, business processes, technology, skills, products, and services—the “work” of the organization. Sometimes, such changes do not require much human or cultural change. Developing and using new technical or professional skills does not necessarily require personal change. Selling a new product or service does not typically require personal change. In these cases, modeling new behavior is not a requirement because there is no new behavior to model.

Most of today’s change efforts, however, do require significant changes in behavior

to succeed. Many also require fundamental shifts in people’s mindsets and how they view the marketplace, people, or customers. If your changes are significant enough to demand changes in behavior, mindset, culture, relationships, language, or any other aspect of how people work with each other, then the challenge of leadership modeling is paramount to your success. Your leaders will have to model the new mindset and behavior first, or your employees will not believe that the change is real.

All personal change comes from within the individual, from the inside out. Some change efforts attempt to mandate changes in people from the outside in, through strategies like threat of job loss, new performance standards, or replacing old systems with new ones. Ultimately, however, change efforts only succeed if the people choose to change. Otherwise, they may change for a short while, and then revert to their old patterns. We have even seen people revert to using paper reports after their organizations implemented multi-million dollar IT projects. Personal change only sticks to the degree the people choose and commit to the change—for themselves.





When leaders overtly model the new behaviors first, they create a safe environment for managers and employees to change. They raise people's willingness to choose the new direction. Without the modeling, however, employees are more reluctant to risk or invest in the new behaviors. Employees look to their leaders for the support—and the precedent—to change personally. Leadership modeling delivers both.

In the case mentioned above, we, the consultants, were clear about the leadership modeling that would be required, but the leaders were not, especially the CEO. This brings us to our second question:

### **How do you engage leaders in recognizing their personal responsibility to change themselves to mobilize the changes they are asking of their organization?**

Getting the leaders to see that they have personal work to do in the change is a challenging task, especially if the leaders think they can delegate responsibility for the effort to others and just get interim progress reports.

We recommend several strategies to raise executive awareness.

1. Early in your change effort, engage your leaders in answering the question, "Will we need new mindsets or behaviors in our organization to succeed in our new state?" If the answer is, "yes," then ask them to specifically identify those behaviors. Challenge them to evaluate themselves to see if they currently model the new behaviors or not. Then present the question, "What do we risk as leaders if we continue to act in the old ways in our change effort?" Approached rationally, most leaders see the wisdom in leadership modeling.
2. You must help leaders see this requirement for modeling before they inadvertently communicate one thing and then do another. Once they repetitively model the old way while espousing the new, they will lose credibility. Do your homework, and develop scenarios, questions, and data that demonstrate their need to model the change clearly. Consider using stories and data from past changes that suffered from the leaders not walking the talk. You may also have stories of some successes to demonstrate the effectiveness of modeling.

3. Begin the change with an Executive Briefing about how to lead change to introduce the full breadth of requirements for transformational change. Emphasize the depth of personal and cultural change that drives transformation. Build big picture understanding of what the leaders are undertaking—organizationally and personally—when they give the green light to change.
4. Use the Drivers of Change Model to flesh out the full scope of the change, showing how shifts in your marketplace requirements for success or your business drive needed changes in your culture, leadership behavior, and mindset.
5. Ask the leaders how they see the change affecting them personally—their role, priorities, ways of working, their motivations, fears and hopes. Ask them how they want their staff and workforce to see them as sponsors or leaders of the change. Have them evaluate how this influences their need to change personally.

## How do you support the leaders to undergo these personal changes, and sustain the changes throughout the effort and beyond?

Your strategy to accomplish this aspect of the change depends on the degree of personal change required of the leaders. If you need skills and behaviors that are only moderately different, you can plan for special training or use your existing executive development vehicles to accomplish this work during implementation. However, if the changes affect the leaders' mindsets, behavior, and relationships, you need a more extensive and tailored approach. Consider these strategies:

1. Depending on the magnitude of the changes, or the perceived "threat level" of your leaders to change, make sure you have the quality of professional support needed to take on this work. When it comes to supporting people to change from the inside out, find experienced consultants to help you.





2. Host a special session for the leaders to discuss the changes required in their mindsets, behavior, culture, values, etc. Explore with them how to behave according to the new requirements, and how to assist each other to sustain these changes. Make sure you plan for adequate time to fully explore these topics. This cannot be accomplished in a brief staff meeting or in the middle of an operating crisis!
3. Sponsor a Breakthrough Change Leadership Program to experientially reveal the changes in mindset, behavior, and relationships that the transformation requires. Follow this session with discussions about how to reinforce the personal changes, how to self-monitor, how to give each other feedback on behavior, and how to support the entire leadership community to make the changes stick.
4. Alter your executive incentive and rewards system to directly reinforce the new behaviors, and then use it!
5. Create a cascading strategy for the rest of the leadership and management ranks to undergo this same type of personal change. Design an ongoing

and sustained process to reinforce, celebrate, and reward visible changes in behavior. Keep this work linked directly to the business outcomes of the transformation.

6. Provide executive coaching to those leaders who need the personal support to make and sustain the personal changes.

## In Summary — Walking the Talk

A transformational change that is devoid of the leaders modeling the behaviors and norms they are asking of the organization is doomed to fail. It is essential to make the requirements for personal change relevant—and essential—to the success of the change. This type of work is not a “nice-to-do” type of thing. It is a key ingredient in your change strategy. If you are currently undergoing a transformational change in which the leaders are NOT modeling the new mindset and behaviors, find a way to “stop the action” for a risk assessment of this dynamic. Gather data to make the point. When your organizational and technical changes require shifts in leadership thinking and behavior in order to succeed, your leaders need to step up to their responsibility to walk the talk they are asking of the organization. Good luck!

## 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.