

## It's Hard to Change Habits

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**Business change initiatives have an extraordinarily high 70% failure rate**

**We're finding that it's really hard to change habits. We're implementing some new ways of doing things, and our people seem to be really resistant. We have good employees, it just seems like they're stuck in a rut. How do we get things moving?**

This reader is right. Change is hard. People form habits, and then they stick with them. That's both the bad news and the good news. Once you build a new set of habits, things will go much more smoothly.

Get people involved in the changes you're hoping to implement. Make sure everyone understands what's expected, and why. Training is essential until new habits are formed. Look at where things get stuck, and figure out why. Encourage people to talk about what's going on, how it impacts them, and what they'd like to have happen. Be sure to allow time for practice, discussion and follow up.

Until people understand what you're trying to accomplish, it will be hard for them to follow your lead. Take time to explain what's going to happen and discuss the benefits of doing things the new way.

Recognize that for some people, the new way may seem more complicated, more time consuming, less friendly. They may very well be right so, encourage people to talk about their concerns. Don't bury problems, get them out in the open.

Ask people to try, and be firm about your intention to implement the new way of doing things. Just because things seem difficult, don't blink and allow people to go backwards. Keep up the training, discussion, follow up, and pressure to stick with it, until you've fully implemented the changes you want.

Set realistic goals that reflect the outcomes you want to achieve. Set interim progress measures to show that things are heading in the right direction. For example, if you're trying to implement a CRM system, set an overall goal: everyone using the system 100% to log phone calls, emails, appointments and new contacts, within 90 days.

Interim progress measures might include training different departments over time, For example - train the sales department week 1, customer service people week 2, accounting staff week 3, field people week 4. Use of the system 50% of the time within

a week of training. By week 5, people voluntarily opening and using the system 90% or better. Then check back in to find out who's hitting the interim progress measures and who's stuck.

Build a plan to get through the training, practice and follow up required. Make sure that people have enough time and guidance, so that they learn how to do things the new way correctly. Expect that productivity levels may dip as people focus on practicing new skills.

Just about every business has some seasonality to it. Pick a time to practice when the business isn't running at full steam ahead. If necessary, bring in some temporary help to handle routine tasks, to free people up to go through training and practice.

Check on why some people are struggling. Chances are they aren't getting to payoff quickly enough. In other words, for this group it's simpler, easier, and more rewarding to stick with the old habits. Take people aside and find out what obstacles they're dealing with. If possible, consider developing customized solutions to deal with their challenges. Whatever you do, don't let up on insistence that change take place.

Look for people who are doing well with the new habits. Ask them what value they get from implementing changes. Ask them to share their positive experiences with others who are struggling.

Insist on change, with respect and support. Consider rewards as motivators. First department to get on board 100% gets treated to dinner. Once a department demonstrates mastery, they get a bonus. Consider what your people would find motivating, and be prepared to supply that as they work hard to achieve what you want.

### **Looking for a good book? The Change Leader's Roadmap: How to Navigate Your Organization's Transformation, by Linda Ackerman Anderson, Dean Anderson.**

*Andi Gray is president of Strategy Leaders Inc., [www.StrategyLeaders.com](http://www.StrategyLeaders.com), a business consulting firm that specializes in helping entrepreneurial firms grow. She can be reached by phone at 877-238-3535. Do you have a question for Andi? Please send it to her, via e-mail at [AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com](mailto:AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com) or by mail to Andi Gray, Strategy Leaders Inc., 5 Crossways, Chappaqua, NY 10514. Visit [www.AskAndi.com](http://www.AskAndi.com) for an entire library of Ask Andi articles*

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