



The Four Levels of Change

How I learned to guide a traditional volunteer-based organization to bring about massive change and growth

I was speaking with a bank president last year about the difficulty he was having with his board of directors. He was attempting to implement new programs, but his board, who were untrained in the ways of running a bank, were resisting him at every turn. Five minutes later, I spoke on the phone to an association leader who had to let two employees go to appease his administration committee who were calling for cutbacks. He bemoaned the loss of the employees, but said he had no choice, because the committee didn't understand how necessary these two staff members were to the success of the organization. Two months ago I consulted with an organization that was hesitant to implement the transition to a coaching culture because their board of investors didn't understand anything that hadn't been budgeted far in advance or practiced in the past.

In each case, there is a basic lack of understanding about how to lead people (particularly negative people) through the transition process. There are four levels of change that every leader needs to master if he/she wants to successfully transition the organization. They must be followed in order. I will explain why later. Learn these, and you will become a change agent.

Level One: Knowledge

You've heard it said: "No one wants change except a wet baby." Well that is not completely true. Most people welcome change in one form or another. Are you wearing the same fashion you were wearing ten years ago? Are you satisfied with your weight and/or appearance? Are you tired of watching the same television program or channel? Most people like change and will embrace it if they understand why the change is necessary. To transition your organization, you need to begin by educating everyone in the need for change. You need to win over the nay-sayers and the ones who resist change the most.

I used this principle when I was Education Minister in a church I worked in for over six years. If you think your organization is difficult to accept transition, you should work in a church. When I transitioned our church from teaching the same old way to a new way of developing leaders, I started by asking key leaders (the ones least likely to support me without a good reason) what they liked and didn't like about the way we taught

leadership. I listened to them and wrote down what they said. Later this would be the foundation for selling the new concepts to the entire congregation. Begin by educating everyone as to what the change is about and what the results/benefits will be. Ask questions like: Do you like the way we have been doing business? What are you hearing from our customers (particularly our most important customers)? What would you change if you could?

Level Two: Attitude

Encourage a culture of change and anticipation. Get your motivators working for you. Attitudes won't change until people know why the change is occurring. Generate a sense of excitement in the organization by casting the vision of the way things could and will be. Donald Phillips writes in his book, *The Clinton Charisma: A Legacy of Leadership* about how President Bill Clinton used attitudes to initiate change during the early years of his administration. He suffered the lowest presidential approval rating ever just after taking office in 1993. After losing both houses of congress to the Republicans in 1994, he came back and won re-election by a majority two years later. President Clinton was a master of floating an idea to get reaction before announcing a change. He would introduce a new program by mentioning what he was thinking of doing in a press conference or casually in an interview. Then he would read the reaction of the public and act on their response. An example is the bill ending the deficit in 1993, which passed with 51-50 vote in the Republican controlled senate.

I used the Attitude Level in transitioning the church education program by getting the people who had encouraged the change the most to talk about it. I appointed several key leaders among this crowd to a work team that met regularly to discuss the transition. They then went to each class and held town hall meetings to discuss what we were planning from a positive view point. We floated ideas to see how people felt about them. We invited contrary opinions and dealt with them up-front. As a result, the congregation as a whole felt supportive of the new program. It wasn't introduced in the dark but in front of everyone with their approval and enthusiasm.

Level Three: Behavior

People begin to act on the change once they are in favor of it. Positive attitudes about the transition bring about behavioral change. Behavior is most often based on habits. Habits that are created through time as people practice what they feel comfortable doing. Behaviors will change as positive attitudes influence the organization's culture.

The best place to observe this process is in organizations that transition from a Management Culture to a Coaching Culture. As I bring a coaching culture to organizations, I have noticed that once the initial fear of the new coaching method is overcome, people begin to get excited about learning coaching techniques. The process of coaching, when learned by teams, creates high-trust relationships and attitudes that rise above traditional Management/Employee dynamics, and moves people toward a collaborative Coach/Partner relationship. Author Tom Crane says, "In high performance cultures, people feel part of the larger whole. Teams focus on creating connection and high trust. Trust directly supports people being able to work together more effectively

and more efficiently which leads to higher performance.” In short, their new attitudes about coaching lead to behavioral changes that transform the organization successfully.

In the church, key teachers signed on to help write the material that they would teach. We had several seminary trained leaders (yes, I was one, but I relied on seminary trained lay leaders who already had the respect of the congregation) assist with editing the material and consulting with the teachers authoring the material. Once people knew WHY we were transitioning and were MOTIVATED to go through it, they became comfortable with the change. Their behavior followed their hearts. Behavior always follows attitude.

Level Four: Organization

Finally you will see organizational change take place as behaviors become habits and the team is marching along to a new beat. Behavioral change means that everyone is acting on the attitudes and knowledge they have gained and are behaving in a new fashion. This insures organizational change as everyone begins to pick up the new habits.

The church leaders implemented the new methods of teaching and leadership. They attended the new members class we created that taught these new principles. Interestingly, one of the deacons who had fought the changes remarked after attending a public training session, “If this is what you are doing, I am behind it 100%.” He had opposed it only because he heard it was new. Once exposed to the actual program, he was on board and encouraged others to participate and get involved. The organization changed as everyone participated and came up with new and creative twists on the program. The team that helped put this together inspired other transition teams in the church to form. It was the greatest success I witnessed in my years of church service because the lay people led the way following the Four Levels of Transition.

Unfortunately, although many leaders know these levels, they lead their people through them out of order – most often backwards. You have probably seen an inept manager attempt to implement change in the organization, then force behavioral change; tell everyone they have to be happy about it; then tell them why and answer questions when it is too late. Generally this is practiced by leaders who think they have enough power that everyone will do whatever they say without question. Disaster always follows.

When change comes, it doesn’t have to be a disaster, or a “train wreck.” It can be the most invigorating process your organization goes through if you cast a bold vision, carefully plan your steps, execute with determination and take it one step at a time.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information

**on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group,
please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.**