

How to deal with change

Well-stated goals and plenty of communication remain key

What is change management, and why is it important?

Martini: Change management is the process by which an organization and its members transition from one place or state to another. Given how quickly the legal landscape continues to evolve, businesses must be nimble and respond in kind. Change management provides a framework by which we can work through necessary transitions in such a way so that we are able to do what needs to be done while, at the same time, providing our colleagues with the necessary tools to understand and embrace the change and help push it forward. Without such methodologies, change can be a very difficult proposition.

Susler: Change management is a way of driving the people side of change to achieve a desired outcome. Done well, change management engages people and enables them to feel engaged in the change process, incentivizing all to work together toward a common objective.

Note that change management is not a stand-alone process for designing business solutions nor a process improvement plan. Rather, it provides the framework for instituting organizational change with the major focus being on people and bringing about a smooth transition. The importance of change management lies in careful planning and frequent, effective communication and thus becomes the key to ensuring long-term, lasting success.

What makes change management particularly challenging for lawyers?

Martini: When you look at the typical personality profile of lawyers, there is an underlying theme which emerges — skepticism and a resistance to change. Much of this is borne of being risk-averse by nature, which enables lawyers to be good at what they do — advising clients on how best to protect themselves and to mitigate risk. Lawyers are also analytical by nature, and they require a lot of facts and information before evaluating a particular proposal.

I believe there are ways for leaders to leverage these qualities among their constituencies so as to effectively garner support. However, it requires hard work, patience and transparency along the way. It also means that leaders need to check their egos at the door and understand that there is tremendous value in having their team members ask questions and challenge their thinking. This helps ensure that they will reach an optimal result with their decision-making and that there will be buy-in with whatever change they are trying to implement.



Inside Out

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Susler: Resistance to change is normal for most, especially lawyers. It is difficult and creates uncertainty. By providing lawyers with a specified framework for achieving a desired outcome, it becomes much easier to get on board and embrace the change. Lawyers are also uniquely suited to help lead that change because we are adept at asking the right

questions and challenging conventional ways of thinking.

This is enhanced if we have built up our reputations as trusted advisers and valued team members, as we have discussed in recent columns.

As leaders, what can we do to successfully drive change in our organizations?

Martini: The first step in driving change is recognizing that change is needed under the circumstances. You must develop a clear vision of the type of change that is required, and you then have to create a road map for getting from where you are to where you want to be. This can be tricky, since it involves a series of short- and long-term steps. You often need to develop a series of contingency plans to address the various ways your plan may play out. You also need to clearly com-

municate your strategy for change so that you can rally the necessary support.

As part of that, it is important to consider how the message of change will be received by your various constituencies and tailor the message accordingly depending on who is in your audience. You also need to carefully consider the impact the change will have on the culture of your organization. It most certainly will be at the forefront of everyone's minds, and you must demonstrate that you have carefully thought about the issue and have a means to effectively address it.

Susler: In-house lawyers, with relationships both within and outside the legal department, can help lead change in their companies. It is important for us to help ensure alignment of our organizational values, people and behaviors. We can help our business colleagues to make the case for change by helping develop a formal plan before it is launched, one that not only explains the purpose and goals but also that includes how to communicate the plan and explain what happens to their jobs, their careers, their roles in the company and process going forward.

We can also help prepare for the unexpected. Nothing ever goes as planned and, as lawyers, we are well-equipped to consider in advance how to handle the unexpected and help our colleagues to do the same. ■

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