

IGAMING CAPITAL

18 THE NEXT LEVEL OF GROWTH

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Marion Gamel is a C-level executive with over 20 years of experience. Having started her career as an entrepreneur, she then worked for Google and Eventbrite, and was Chief Marketing Officer of Betsson Group. Marion has been coaching entrepreneurs, founders and

ASK THE COACH

C-executives around the world since 2015. In this regular column, she provides advice to business leaders to empower them on issues ranging from improving efficiency to driving transformation and international growth within the company.



Dear Marion,

There are major changes currently taking place within my company, and due to inevitable circumstances, not all of them are entirely positive. I want my workforce to be more adaptable, but at the same time, I don't want a mutiny on my hands! I find managing change within my organisation to be a tricky subject. It often feels like I have to choose between one and the other, which is not very conducive to business growth. How can I create a culture of agility within my workforce, whilst appropriately managing change in my organisation?

Sincerely,

Confused CEO



Dear CEO,

CHANGE IS BUSINESS, BUSINESS IS CHANGE.

The ancient saying, 'The only thing that never changes, is change', has never been truer than today. Globalisation and digitalisation are amplifying humans' and companies' need to deal with ambiguity, to adapt and to grab opportunities in order to survive, let alone thrive.

Whether change comes from our environment and imposes a shift in the way we think, or whether it comes about as the result of our thinking, which impacts our environment, change is a 'brain thing'. It is therefore essential for business leaders to understand the mechanisms of change and how to harness it, in order to turn their team into an agile, change-friendly workforce.

HOW TO 'DO' CHANGE

Change is hard.

Despite the fact that our brain is an organ built to adapt, it is not fond of change. Carrying out habitual tasks on autopilot is easiest. You see, habits take the shape of neuro-wirings in the brain, which are used so often that they're like rail tracks. Replacing habits (rail tracks) with new ways (walking through uncharted wild terrain) is a considerable effort and requires three key ingredients: time, attention and repetition.

Time: Change cannot be rushed. To embrace changes, people need to go through various stages, without skipping any, until they reach acceptance.

Attention: A limited resource. While we pay attention to something new, we're not paying attention to everything else. Asking your entire workforce to focus on change is an investment as it takes their attention away from other goals.

Repetition: Changing our way of acting or thinking requires practice, in order to achieve fluency. One cannot 'un-wire' their brain to erase an old rail track. Instead, change requires you to intentionally do something new repeatedly, in order to create a new rail track. 🚂



• HUMAN BRAINS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY SOCIAL

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, who created the 'hierarchy of needs' theory, a sense of belonging is the third most important basic human need. In time of change, leaders need to gain trust, activate loyalty, and create a strong sense of belonging, getting people into a positive mindset. Such goals can be achieved by acknowledging emotions, sharing information, activating the reward system, making the most of 'in groups' and using story-telling.

EMOTIONS

Change is the birth of new, but it is also the death of old. When major changes happen in a company, the range and sequence of emotions that people experience can be compared to the emotions they feel when they lose a loved one - denial, anger, a desire to go back to the past, followed by acceptance and the ability to plan for the future. However, if the sequence is not followed, change can alter individuals' behaviour in a negative way, leading to anxiety, territoriality, selfishness, inability to make decisions, lack of focus, disengagement, and worse.

Furthermore, emotions are contagious: they'll spread like wildfire throughout your workforce. Ignoring them leads to a decrease in employees' performance and a rise in attrition. Here are two simple things a leader can do to create a strong bond and maintain trust while driving change:

Acknowledge the various emotions being expressed and experienced by your team. Share some personal truth - such as your own experiences and emotions in relation to a change you went through - and show authentic empathy. 'I care about how you feel', 'I understand your concerns' and 'I felt the same way' are powerful messages coming from a leader. Give your team a safe place where to 'vent': small workshops, one-to-one discussions with a manager, or Q&A sessions during the company all-hands gathering. Not only is this cathartic, this will also undercut the need for gossip.

After you've explored and acknowledged their emotions, **offer your team a break** from them. Unite troops around a new project or goal. You can choose to give more importance to the imminent launch of a new product, in order to offer your team something positive to focus on while a deep change is happening in another area of the company. Alternatively, you can refresh your company goals and organise your workforce into project-teams to tackle each goal.

INFORMATION

Fact: Even the most negative piece of news is less stressful than not knowing! Levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, have been found to be higher in people waiting for a test result than among people who know that the outcome of the test was negative. One of the most important requirements to efficiently manage change is to share as much information, as early and as often as possible during the process, giving your workforce the reassurance that nothing bad is going on 'behind their back' and that their leader is acting in a transparent and respectful manner.

If you are working on a re-organisation, announce you've started the process and commit to a date for the final reveal. If it is likely to result in job cuts, pre-announce it, explain the rationale and commit to keeping your workforce up to date in a timely fashion. The feeling of being kept 'in the know' will gain trust and loyalty, as well as keeping stress levels down and performance high.

REWARDS

In times of change, it is paramount to celebrate good work and successes even more than usual. Communicate in a timely way about achieved goals, acknowledge great work on a weekly basis, and create a company 'awards' ceremony. Give kudos and small bonuses. While your team's reality is changing, it is reassuring to feel proud about achievements. •

IN-GROUPS

A recent and surprising finding of neuroscience is that although we think of social pain - such as being rejected or criticised - as different from physical pain, the brain processes both similarly. They feel identical and they impact us equally. Social rejection reduces IQ because it is painful, and pain impacts our ability to think.

Throughout our lives, we all build an in-group - people we feel close to - and out-group - people we feel different from. In time of change, encourage managers to gain awareness about their own in-group as well as the way they treat people in it and how it differs from the way they treat outsiders. This awareness empowers them to intentionally widen the group of people who benefit from special treatment.

THINGS TO TRY TO WIDEN IN-GROUPS

Change the location of meetings to different parts of the company building to encourage networking.

Invite to your team meetings people from different functions in order to encourage cross-functional collaboration.

The stronger the sense of belonging and the wider each employee's in-group within a company, the more likely your workforce will be to think as one and care about the company as a whole.

MARION'S CHEAT SHEET FOR BRIDGES'S TRANSITION MODEL:

ENDINGS

- Listen and acknowledge emotions. Demonstrate authentic empathy, don't censure or dismiss.
- Give people as much information as possible, as often as possible.
- Symbolically mark the Ending, treat the past with respect.
- Define what's over, and what is not.
- Encourage the growth of in-groups to strengthen the sense of belonging.

IN BETWEEN

- Acknowledge that you are temporarily in limbo zone.
- Use storytelling to demystify this phase of transition.
- Recognise and reward great work.
- Create new focuses and goals to rally and re-energise your team.

NEW BEGINNINGS

- Encourage testing new ways while minimising the fear of failure.
- Describe the future and share your vision.
- Empower people and give them some sense of control, by involving them in planning the future.
- Celebrate early successes as proof that the new is valid.

STORYTELLING

From an early age, we love stories and use them to assimilate complex moral concepts such as courage, ethics and hope. We use the same skills to understand real people and situations as we do to relate to fictional characters. A powerful thing a leader can do is to talk to their team about their emotions, their past experiences with profound life changes, and what they learned from these experiences, which then allows them to share their vision about the future. By doing this, a leader turns a stressful reality into a story that encompasses the present whilst looking into the future. Storytelling is persuasive as it presents an idea in a non-threatening way. One of the most powerful models available to tell a compelling story about organisational change is the **Intentional Change Model**, developed by Boyatzis and Goleman:

1. **The ideal self:** Who we need and want to be. Our vision for the future.
2. **The real self:** Who we are right now. Our people, our skills, our ways, our business context.
3. **Our learning agenda:** To go from who we are to who we need to be.
4. **The experimentation:** We must embrace learning and the transitional period, including minimising the fear to fail.
5. **Supportive relationships and resources:** They make change possible as we support each other. Making a list of the great people we work with reminds us of this resource we can tap into.

PLANNING CHANGE

One of my favourite models to manage change is **Bridges's Transition Model**: from **Endings** to **In Between** to **New Beginnings**.

It offers leaders a powerful tool to identify where people are in the change process and what they need to move on to the next stage. This model can be effectively used in workshops, where the three phases are described and explained so employees understand what it is they are going through, why it feels like it does and what's coming next. Once assimilated, this model can be used to deal with future changes and with other teams, creating an agile, change-friendly culture where the 'Ending' is no longer sad, the 'In Between' is acceptable and the 'New Beginning' is exciting.

Good luck
Marion IOC

Got a question for Marion? Email her at marion.gamel@gmail.com