

## **Practical Lessons in Managing Change and Problem Solving**

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The objective of this paper is to explain some of the difficulties in managing change in the workplace and some of the benefits which can be obtained if the change is managed carefully.

As a manager or supervisor, managing your relationships with other people, and developing your ability to influence other people, is the most vital business skill you need. Your success in life, in both business and private aspects, ultimately depends on how you deal with the people in it.

It doesn't matter how good you are at your profession or trade, or whatever you were originally employed to do, if your relationships with the other people in your working environment are not functioning properly. Interpersonal skills are the lubricant of any business.

Just as a motor car needs frequent fuelling in order to perform at all, and regular maintenance to perform to the level of its potential so do interpersonal relationships need the fuel of respect and the maintenance of caring to enable the business to be carried out successfully. We are trained to manage things such as machinery, money and stock. However, we

cannot manage people using the same skills.

Dealing successfully with people is the hardest thing any of us ever has to do. It is in the nature of people to be unpredictable. You don't ever have the full information you need to know how best to handle them. You have to cope with your own internal influences such as personal views, and if you are a manager or a supervisor you generally find yourself trying to cope with all the difficult problems associated with people issues.

You are in a position to influence other people all the time, every day of your life, and you in turn are influenced by other people. Happily, it is possible to learn to exert your influence positively in relation to your objectives, ie. to achieve the desired results, and to respond constructively to the attempts of others to influence you.

At work, people gain a lot of security from the fact that they know what they know **what** they are going to be doing next week, next month or even next year. Some people even know **how** they are going to be doing their work next month. Attempts to introduce change in the work place can produce

resistance. This is because the security of the future is threatened.

The change reduces, or even removes, our knowledge of the future. This knowledge is replaced with a gap which is quickly filled with doubt and the doubt creates uncertainty.

It is little wonder that an announcement of change is met with resistance and every effort will be made to discourage implementation. This is reinforced with previous experience of changes which have been designed far from the workplace by people who could never know the effect of the change. Sometimes we call this management.

Most changes are resisted with the utmost vigour because the employees do not trust the organisation's management. The rôle of supervision and management in the modern organisation is changing dramatically. No longer can the blame be laid on the employees alone for poor service, low quality and falling profits. Management has to look in the mirror and lay the blame where it belongs. For too long we have had low expectations of our employees. We have believed them to be untrustworthy, grasping low performers. Being human they have wanted to meet our expectations. They were not like that when they first started work. They were full of enthusiasm and wanted to be helpful. We made them change. We showed them that we were not to be trusted.

Our words and actions did not match. We were not consistent. The single most powerful factor which drives the resistant to change is a lack of trust by the people affected by the change maker. If you are a maker of changes the answer is to be more trustworthy. Managers must throw off old attitudes in which they see themselves responsible for results and not people. Today's more effective supervisors, managers and executives are those who strive to increase their coaching skills. They share their expectations with their people, they allow solutions to develop from shared problem solving sessions and most of all, they reinforce positive behaviour.

#### **People Resist Change for a Variety of Reasons**

- The purpose of the change has not been explained clearly or convincingly.
- People are afraid they will be saddled with more work.
- They are worried they may fail under the new system.
- They can not see how they will benefit from the change.
- They are worried that their authority and status will diminish.
- For political reasons they go along blindly with someone else who is resisting change.
- They are resentful because they were not consulted prior to the change
- They are afraid the new system will generate added restraints

*Monty Jones*

### **What Steps Can You Take to Counter These Reasons For Resisting Change?**

- Be trustworthy
- Communicate fully.
- Get your people involved.
- Use the spoon-feeding philosophy.
- Get influentials behind it.
- Dispel the myths early.

Before you can adapt naturally and skilfully to the demands and pressures of change, firstly, you must create an environment and an attitude which are receptive to change. Secondly, take steps to reduce the shock and impact of change when it comes.

Coping fearlessly and successfully with change is more a matter of attitude than anything else. Our past experience which, ideally, should sharpen our judgement and wisdom, often serves as a road-block to progress. People tend to become snug in the comfortable and convenient ruts they dig for themselves. What many of us urgently need is the resolve and the follow up action to prise us out of these ruts.

#### **Problem Solving.**

The movement toward Total Quality is increasing at a considerable rate. Organisations are beginning to understand that it is not a quick fix solution. Some organisations are not having the promised success of their quality improvement efforts because they do not have a sound foundation

for the introduction of change. This is because the primary elements of Total Quality, leadership and people have been forgotten. There has been a lot of activity and focus on statistical process control and on quality. The whole process can only be successful when based on a firm foundation of leadership and people.

For example, solving problems is an activity which is best carried out by the people who are doing the job. They can be trusted to discover the most effective way of resolving the problem because they have a vested interest. They will apply their common sense if they have the authority to implement the change. Too often the problem is "solved" by someone remote from the task. This can be a recipe for failure because the people doing the job who had no input will have no "ownership" of the change.

#### **Making it Work**

In two diverse organisations we have put the principles of leadership and TQM to work. One organisation is involved in underground mining and the other is a sawmill. The similarity between the two organisations was that they had high lost time injuries in the course of their work. By involving the people in the decision making process and following principles of leadership, changes in workplace behaviour occurred. These changes led to a reduction in the incidence of lost time injuries and a reduction in the severity of injuries.

The changes have been created by a differences in the way the workers have been treated. They are regarded as a vital asset to the businesses of winning coal and processing timber. No longer are they regarded as people with strong backs and weak minds. The people doing the job are the source for changes. Managers do not unilaterally decide on procedures and methods. Instead, there are discussions with input from the people who operate the fixed and mobile plant.

Underground mining in New Zealand is carried out in a very hostile environment. Historically, if you were a miner you expected to have accidents. They were part of the job.

During the last seventeen months there have been three lost time injury accidents at this mine. In addition there has been a productivity increase of 48%.

This indicates considerable changes in behaviour at all levels of the organisation from manager to miner. These changes took place over a three year period.

Fiscal Year April March	Number of Accidents	Accident Rate per 100,000 hours	Days lost
1989/90	59	27	1,077
1990/91	36	16	250
1991/92	12	6	90
1992/93	3	2	15

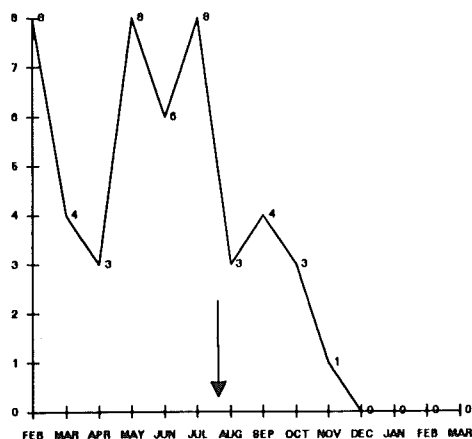
This represents a reduction of 95% in the number of accidents, a reduction of 93% in the rate of accidents and a 99% in the time lost from accidents.

At the Carter Holt Harvey Timber Mill at Taupo, a similar programme was started in July 1992. Because of the commitment of the manager and his team, some impressive results have been recorded. Statistics had been kept since July 1990 and show that, until July 1992, accidents had occurred at an average of more that four per month.

During the last six months there has been one lost time accident. This represents a reduction in accidents of over 90%

This is the result of a change in behaviour and attitudes at the saw mill.

LOST TIME INJURY ACCIDENTS CHH TAUPO  
SAWMILL  
FEBRUARY 1992 TO MARCH 1993



The work at the Taupo sawmill is not finished. The process has to continue before the changes are an integral part of the culture.

Accident Prevention is an ideal medium for the introduction of the Total Quality philosophy. All people recognise that by preventing accidents, all members of the organisation benefit. It sends a powerful signal to everyone that their well being is important. What better way to introduce the concept of a common objective and the need to work together? Most of all it is people centred.

Many companies have introduced a Total Quality programme based on such things as zero defects, quality circles, merit systems, work standards, statistical processes or making people accountable.

Often this has been done without regard for the two ingredients fundamental to the quality process. Leadership and people.

### The Future

Western countries are committing increased resources to the development of their people. They realise that they have not placed sufficient emphasis on their employees. They understand it is their people who can affect quality, their people who can be innovative, their people who have accidents, their people who can affect productivity and their people who make profits. Companies will develop a very keen competitive edge when they create an environment where their employees are working to a common objective using their hearts and minds as well as their hands.

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