

Managing reactions to change

By Tara Puckey

Winston Churchill once said, “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.” Perfection is a bit of a stretch, but encouraging frequent change – not just change for change’s sake, but real, meaningful change – is truly one of the things that can position your practice by leaps and bounds ahead of the rest.

Everything about the world today is moving rapidly. Think about this: It took airline companies roughly 68 years to reach their first 50 million customers. The automobile industry? Right around 62 years to hit their first 50 million drivers. Pokémon Go reached 50 million users in just 19 days.

It’s simply not possible to continue to operate with a “that’s the way we’ve always done it” mentality. Innovation is moving quickly, and frankly a significant portion of people entering the workforce is looking for a culture of change, not a place where good ideas go to die without breathing a little life into them first.

Adapting to change doesn’t always come easy. Generally, there are four broad reactions to change, though these are just generic – *don’t forget, everyone is different*. Some of these might hit home with your own reactions to change, and more likely than not, you can see these “personalities” in the people with whom you work.

The Critic: Absolutely opposes change and will go kicking and screaming into the process (usually figuratively, *but ...*). The “why” behind the change doesn’t matter or resonate – they truly don’t get it in a meaningful way. Critics often behave this way because any change might eliminate them or something about which they care deeply, or they have not been conditioned to change or aren’t being approached in the right way about the benefits of change.

The Victim: Full-on panics at the prospect of change, and it’s met with all the reasons change will negatively impact the individual’s work, the team’s work and the overall organization. Victims may try to reason their way out of changing because of all the possible downfalls and challenges. They behave this way because they don’t understand the need for change and the reasons behind it, or they fear they don’t have the skills/knowledge to complete the new tasks being asked of them.

The Bystander: Completely ignores change by either continuing to work in the same way as before or creating a new path that implements just enough change to get by “under the radar.” Bystanders can be vocal, behind-the-scenes critics of change, encouraging other employees to ignore or half-adapt, too. Often, they have a fundamental disagreement with any change or don’t understand it enough to “buy in”

The Jump Up and Down: Consistently looks forward to change in all areas of work/life. Caution the auto urge of this type of person to change for change’s sake while not completely understanding all aspects of the change. They often behave this way because they may not be challenged enough in their work, or their deep understanding of a process or procedure leads them to believe it could be done better.

The underlying secret to success for each type of “change reaction” above is **communication**. Obviously, other aspects of change management are important – buy-in about the idea, involvement in the decision, understanding and explaining the *why* – but each of those things is rooted in good communication. Overall, if you’re transparent about the process, explain why there’s a need for change, and encourage others to get involved in the decision-making, your team will be better

for it. *Recipe for disaster?* An information vacuum, which only causes people to fill it – often with incorrect information that gets everyone fired up.

In the end, a successful law practice will have to change. If you want to succeed, you’ll have to stay current, not only on the legal aspects of your practice but also the changing face of business operations and essential skills. Andy Warhol was right: “They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.” ☺

From AI and technology, to leveling up job skills, to building working relationships and creating environments that focus on employees’ mental wellness, an upcoming Law Practice Management series from ISBA will educate participants on what shifts in the business landscape mean for their firms, their workforce and the future of the legal profession. The “Drivers of Change” series is a four-part mix of live and on-demand courses designed to explore the internal and external factors that are transforming the legal workplace.



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