Everything changes

Tammy Ball will be speaking at the Turf Managers' Conference next month – and here's a sneak preview aimed at managers and deputies as she examines how change in the workplace should be communicated

Change in the workplace presents itself in a variety of ways. It can be a complete transformation of how an organisation conducts business, it can be a minor change in a particular department's business process, or it can simply involve moving one employee's desk to the other side of a room.

In most organisations, the decision to change something comes after complex research and heated debate among leaders and management, or simply because someone noticed a desk was located in an inconvenient place in the reception room.

Leaders, managers and supervisors in a workplace environment are usually quite adept at recognising what changes need to be made in order to create opportunities to increase productivity or satisfy customers. However there is a big difference in deciding, doing and executing a sustainable change. Recent research indicates 50% to 70% of organisational change efforts fail, and the reasons for failure range from lack of leadership support to budget overspend. There is one overriding theme which stands out in all of the research in this field; the people affected by the change ultimately determine whether the change is executed in a sustainable and successful manner. In other words, Change is Personal. Why would the people in your organisation resist something new? Here are but a few things employees might say or think when asked to change how they work:

• Were we doing something wrong? I thought everything was going just fine.

• I don't like outsiders telling me how to do my job.

• Is my job in jeopardy? Are they preparing for a reorganisation?

• This is stupid and I'm not doing it.

Here's an example. In early 2012, Jerry had just started his new job as training manager for a service organisation with 500 employees and about £7m in turnover. His first assignment was to train 450 of the employees how to use a new software program which allowed them to scan paperwork and file it electronically. This project had begun in 2011 and it was now all set for implementation. The staff would no longer need to keep or file physical papers in those disorganised manila folders which would not only free up physical space in the offices, but also allow them to access files from any computer. This new process would lend itself to a more mobile way of performing their job duties. What a great idea, right?

Jerry had been in a few meetings with the leaders and executives who had made the decision a year ago to set the project in motion. He was told the technology was in place, testing had been successful and everyone was excited to launch the training.

When Jerry arranged the training for the first 50 people, he quickly discovered a few obvious problems. He walked into the training room and immediately sensed palpable feelings of distrust and resistance. He thought the staff would actually be excited (as he was told) and full of anticipation to learn something new and innovative. Instead, the majority were either overtly rude and sarcastic or withdrawn. As he continued to present the training content and introduce the new step-by-step processes, he uncovered some of the ugly truths that would ultimately halt the entire project and place the implementation of a multi-million pound investment in jeopardy. Jerry knew some things about change in the workplace and was beginning to understand this particular change was fraught with problems and he knew if he continued with the training part, the project would fail. He realised that although the concept of this new technology was very sound and the many benefits were undeniable, the people responsible for using it and making it work had been left out of the planning process and decision-making. In fact, they had not even been informed of who, what, when, where, how or even why this change was taking place. They were simply told it was mandatory to show up to a training class.

Jerry scheduled a meeting with the leaders responsible for the new technology project and went to work creating a new plan to show them. Having spent a day with that group of employees who were expected to implement and use the new process, he suspected the level of resistance would pervade throughout the company and ultimately cause the project to fail. Jerry had some ideas about how to salvage the implementation and turn things around. He knew that ANY change in the workplace has a greater chance of success if every employee affected by the change understands the following basic

fundamental aspects about the change:

• The reason for the change - the WHY

• Who will be affected by the change? This includes internal staff, customers, business partners, and all other stakeholders

• How will each person be affected by the change? More importantly, how will I doing my job differently every day?

• What will change about my daily job duties?

• When will these changes take place?

These few things sound very fundamental and fairly easy to communicate. So why don't companies follow these steps? In reality it is because to do them right can be labour intensive and they take time and energy. There must be heavy doses of relating and connecting with those individuals who are affected the most. After the interactions, leaders and other change advocates must use the information and feedback for creat-

ing key messages to communicate consistently and often throughout the entire process and beyond. The results are well worth the efforts and the effect is multiplied throughout the organisation. Engaged employees are not only more accepting of future changes, but are more likely to become change advocates. Employees who feel seen and heard are more loyal, productive and seek to create a positive work atmosphere.

In every profession, every business, every organisation and every company, change is either happening or about to happen. Even the smallest, least intrusive change can meet with drama and great resistance if not handled with the people in mind. The leaders and managers who are responsible for seeing changes through to their successful implementation must involve affected team members from the beginning. The reason the change is being considered must be made clear and communicated consistently. Once all team members can

understand the idea and determine how he or she is personally affected, the mystery begins to fade and is replaced by clarity. During times of change in the workplace, clarity diminishes resistance and creates space for healthy anticipation and cooperation.

How are you, as leaders and managers, affected during change efforts, and what can you do to prepare yourself and your team?

• Acquaint yourself with the change and get the details

• Acknowledge the change and assess your own level of resistance

• Communicate and interact with every team member

• Recognise the stages of change and help your team navigate through

Taking time to interact, relate and connect with the people will make the biggest difference during times of change in the workplace. Accurate and consistent messages and honest expectations must be a part of every conversation and communication.

about the author

American-born Tammy Ball has 15 years experience as a change leadership specialist and, together with her husband Rob, founded Coaching by the Balls – geared to ensuring individuals get the results they need professionally and personally. Tammy also conducts training workshops and lectures in customer service.