

A Whitepaper  
from The Institute  
for unLearning

# Leading Change

*Without Resistance*

INSTITUTE FOR  
UNLEARNING

# Leading Change *Without Resistance*

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**Everything that follows is based on one basic and simple premise:**

The results we are getting today is what happens doing it the way we're doing it now.

This is certainly true in how we currently go about change/improvement. The traditional approach used for virtually all change improvement is actually what causes the resistance that makes it so hard to get anything accomplished.

The traditional approach to implement a change looks something like this:

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Step  *Identify a problem.*

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Step  *Find an expert with a good idea.*

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Step  *Bring in the expert to tell people how to do their jobs better.*

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Step  *Overcome all of the resistance caused by Steps 1, 2 and 3.*

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# “What's your *personal experience?*”

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At this point, when working with a team, the question asked is “From your own experience, how long does it take for the resistance to show up when there's a change?” The answer has always been some version of ‘immediately!’

And yet, organization after organization, boss after boss, starts with the same method that keeps proving it doesn't work.

It does work actually – if you want to have people resist, this is a very effective and proven method to cause that resistance to happen!

Yet, we've heard many of these same people repeat the definition of insanity while smiling.

There is another way to bring about the changes/improvements you desire with far less stress and effort. And, it is both simple and easy.

This approach brings common sense back to common practice.

This approach has a 20-year track record of successes on numerous major national healthcare reform initiatives for U.S. Health & Services (HHS) and Medicare (CMS). They refer to it simply as the Signature Style™.

# Actual

## *Solution Finding*

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The Signature Style™ moves us from the old ‘problem-solving’ model to actual solution-finding!

The foundation of the Signature Style™ is based on a simple common sense understanding:

People don’t resist change so much as they resist being changed.

And, the answer to this simple question:

“Whose good ideas are people most likely to buy-in to with the least resistance?”

In addition, what if the reason they aren’t already doing their work better has more to do with the quality of the leadership they’re provided than a lack of knowing ‘how to’?

Yes, this is not always the case! It certainly isn’t always because of poor leadership. Far too often it is a case of a manager simply doing things the way they’ve always been done; i.e. the traditional approach to change!

It still amazes us that common sense hasn’t surfaced in the realization that the old-fashioned approach starts by making people wrong.

How can it not be clear that when people are made wrong they are going to shut down and become defensive?

# The Dynamic *of Change*

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The old way causes the resistance to surface right from the start. That approach also begins with the presumption that the people just don't know how to do their work better.

If making people wrong about what they have done is what causes resistance, what might be a place to start to mitigate the resistance?

Start by acknowledging them for what they are doing right, for what they are doing that is working!

The part of this whole dynamic of change and improvement that seems to have been forgotten – it certainly has been overlooked – is this:

There are times when things are not working!  
And, there are also times when it is working!

The part that seems to have slipped past our conscious awareness is:

**THEY ARE BOTH CAUSED!**

When something we're doing doesn't work, it is clearly because the way we're doing it is causing it not to work.

What seems to be missed is remembering that when it is working it is also caused.

# More and Better

## *Sustainable Results*

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Think about it, do you want more things in your life working; or, do you want fewer things not working?

If your desire is to have more things working more often, what then might you want to know more about?

For some inexplicable reason our entire society seems to have been conditioned into thinking that improvement is all about figuring out why it isn't working.

The Signature Style™ is an alternative approach designed to produce more and better sustainable results while dissolving the resistance to change.

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### Step

Consider a situation you're facing that requires immediate progress. Instead of beginning with what's wrong, what isn't working, or what hasn't worked, begin the discussion with a version of one of these questions:

*“What is working now?”*

*“Where are we already getting the results we want?”*

*“Where are we already seeing the progress we need?”*

Start the discussion by building a foundation of what has been done successfully to get to the current state, the current situation.

# Discover *the Gold*

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Congratulations, you've just addressed Step 1.

What's going to be different in a meeting that starts by acknowledging people for what they have done right vs. what they did wrong?

What's going to be different in the level of openness and cooperation? The sense of team? The level of trust?

Follow this by exploring all that can be learned from understanding what is causing what's working to work.

We receive calls constantly from leaders that were amazed at the gold discovered from just this one question.

An example: a client we were working with was having difficulty with a number of locations with one of their customers across the nation. Sales were slipping. They had been trying to turn it around, to fix the problem, for months.

In the first meeting with the executive team we asked if there was any place they were getting the results they wanted. The instant response was "Yes, but that's only one of many!"

# Doing Something *Different*

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Next question, “What are they doing that’s working?”  
Again an instant response, “What do you mean, that’s only one place and we’re too busy trying to figure out why it isn’t working everywhere else?”

When the managers talked to the team that was getting the successes, they learned that they were doing something different.

They had just figured something out that no one else had.

When the executives asked the successful team why they had never said anything, I’ll bet you can guess the answer – “*You never asked!*”

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## Step

*“What is causing the results we are getting?”*

*“What is causing what is working to work?”*

*“What are you doing that’s working best?”*

Somehow we’ve become fascinated with knowing everything we can about why things don’t work. Let’s become fascinated with understanding what causes what is already working to work.

# Re-clarify the *Objective/Goal*

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## Step

“What is the goal/outcome/result we want to produce?”

It is essential in this exploration with the team that the leader not be the one telling the team what the goal/objective is.

That’s the old way, and usually followed by a question like, “Is everybody clear on the goal?” What’s the predictable answer from the team?

Though it takes longer going around the team and having each member share their understanding of the goal/objective, the benefits reported over almost three decades make an amazing case for the practice.

Key among the benefits reported is the answer to the question, “When is the best time for a leader to discover that there are different ideas about the actual goal/objective?”

How many times have you ever been told something like, “This isn’t what I asked for!”

It’s the pay now or pay later plan. Think of what a few moments of clarity at the beginning can save in frustration later. This has nothing to do with good people/bad people or even smart people vs. not so smart people.

# People Have *Unique Filters*

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Anybody been raised in a home with at least one sibling? Notice how they are all different? They heard the same words from the same parents, yet they all interpreted them differently.

It is no different in the workplace. Each of our people have their unique set of filters.

Again, when is the best time to assure that everyone is on the same page? One of the most useless questions, that is used far too often is some version of, “Does everybody understand what I mean?”

Perhaps the most significant benefit is what has been revealed between Step 1 and Step 3 - the gap.

It is what is inside the gap that is keeping us from getting to the goal. These are the only obstacles – problems – we need to find the solution to.

The list of everything wrong about what has been done so far, is in all likelihood a much longer list than the list of what we have to resolve/overcome to get to the goal.

The first three steps clarify where we really need to put our attention. Getting from where we are to where we want to be is the goal, not solving all of the problems from the past.

# Where Do You Want *To Be?*

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Problem-solving has become the biggest obstacle to progress today. We are so conditioned to immediately go to looking for what's wrong - so we can fix it.

We don't need to fix everything that is wrong with the way it is, we only need to resolve those issues between where we are and where we want to be.

What if we didn't need to fix anything? What if all we needed to do was to keep doing more of what is already working?

Asking a question like, "What do we need to know about what didn't work to help us get to our goal?" is far more strategic than asking "What didn't work?" "Why didn't it work?" or, "Who's fault is it?"

At this point in the process, a common tendency is to want to get right to the action. There is a vital step in between.

How people apply themselves to what they are doing is a direct impact of their understanding of why they're doing it – the classic WII-FM.

# Coming Into *Alignment*

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## Step 4

Directly addresses these questions:

*“What will be the benefit when we achieve the objective?”*

*“What will be the benefit for you, for us, for the customers?”*

Basically, the ‘why’ we’re doing what we’re doing.

Keep asking until there is a clear agreement and alignment on why you’re doing what you’re going to do. Again, this is NOT the place for the boss to tell their people what the benefit is (the old-fashioned way), but to **ASK THEM!**

This is the questioning that deepens people’s buy-in.

At this stage in the process it may also be a place to ask, “What will be the cost if we don’t achieve our goal?” This is especially true when there is significant impact to people for not reaching the objective.

Either way, it is vital to connect or reconnect people with the reason for doing what they do before rushing into action.

# The

## *Action Step*

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### Step 5

“What can we be doing more of, better or differently to get closer to the goal/outcome/objective?”

Again, consider the mental process this approach activates. If we have more people doing more of the right things, there will be fewer problems to solve.

Assuming that buy-in is important, notice that it starts in Step 1 of this approach.

It is easier to get people to buy-in to what they are doing right than it will ever be to admit someone else's idea of what they've done wrong.

Everything from Step 2 on is about deepening and directing the buy-in already achieved in the first step.

Step 3 is simply to clarify that everyone is on the same page. The suggestion is to have the entire team express their best understanding of the desired outcome. By hearing each individual's response, a leader can be certain that everyone involved is in agreement of what is to be done and how.

Now it's time for the action in Step 5. Notice the difference in people's energy level after building the foundation through Steps 1 – 4 vs. starting with “What's the problem?” and “Who's fault is it?”

# Engaging With *the Process*

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What is Step 6 in this 5-Step process? Circle back and repeat the process again. This time begin with questions like “What progress have you achieved since we last met?” (Since you last used the 5-Step process.)

We’d like to hear about your success stories. We want to share the best on our radio show. Send your stories to us at:

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