

So You Think Employees Hate Change

By Ann Latham

We've all heard it. Employees Hate Change. Do you believe it? I don't. I think employees are getting a bum rap. I think they are being used as an excuse for poor change, poor results, poor communication, poor planning.

First of all, have you asked them? No, I don't mean have you asked them if they hate change, I mean, have you asked them what they would like to change? Have you asked them specifically what is driving them crazy about their jobs that they would love to change? Have you asked them what your company needs to improve? Where it is wasting time, talent and money? Where it is disappointing your customers? Try it. You might be shocked at how eagerly they would encourage change.

Oh, and while you are at it, ask them what has changed recently. The frequency with which one must change is generally inversely proportional to the power of the individual. The higher up in the ranks, the steadier the cruise. The top brass even have assistants whose job in part is to protect them from disruptions, variations, and generally, anything that interferes with their preferred routine. Front line employees, on the other hand, must change all of the time. Every new program, every new idea, the whims of superiors who come and go, the short-comings of their peers, the failure of processes, the complaints of customers, the trials and errors of developing supervisors – all forces that yank employees first one way, then the other. And employees have exactly three choices:

1. Quit
2. Ignore the forces and hope they go away
3. Change

The reality: Employees Change Constantly.

So what DO employees hate? They hate:

- Being asked to change without a clear, sensible purpose and destination
- The ambiguity of the path to a new destination
- Seeing decisions made through power, rather than informed process
- Unrealistic plans and expectations
- Destruction of the systems they have evolved to make their jobs easier

- Disruption, time and time again, without results

It is time to quit using this myth that employees hate change as an excuse for poor results.

Results are the responsibility of management. The buck stops there. Management can get the results they want if they:

- Know what they want to achieve
- Can communicate it clearly, including the value to all
- Can work with their people to develop reasonable plans and expectations at each level of the organization
- Follow up, hold people accountable, and adjust as things unfold

It is time to refuse the victim mentality and promote a more positive, self-fulfilling prophecy:

- Constant change is necessary if we want to make people productive, processes reliable, and customers happy.

Ann Latham is a master facilitator, management consultant, and president of Uncommon Clarity, Inc. She is also the author of Clear Thoughts – Pragmatic Gems of Better Business Thinking. For more information or to subscribe to her free newsletter, please visit www.uncommonclarity.com.

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