

## Article

---

# The Ten Critical Actions for Leading Successful Transformation (Task I.D.4)

---

*Based on thirty years of action research, here are the ten most critical actions you can take to ensure the success of your transformational change efforts.*

**By Linda Ackerman Anderson  
and Dean Anderson**



1242 Oak Drive, DWII  
Durango, CO 81301  
(970) 385-5100  
[www.BeingFirst.com](http://www.BeingFirst.com)

## Introduction

Over thirty years of experience in consulting to and developing transformational change leaders has led us to identify the ten most important actions leaders can take to ensure the success of their transformational change efforts. These ten actions cover a lot of ground, each representing an extensive body of work and required leadership competencies. We offer these to you as an overview of world-class change leadership.

You can use this list in a number of ways:

- To assess where your leaders are in their understanding and mastery of transformational leadership
- To create a focused and pragmatic change leadership development strategy
- To evaluate the work you have accomplished or missed on your current change efforts
- To use as the foundation for a customized change methodology for dissemination throughout your organization

As you scan the list, think about the types of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and mindsets required to accomplish each action. Keep your current change effort in mind as you read. Make mental notes about how well your change leaders are accomplishing these critical actions.

## The Ten Critical Actions

### 1. **Develop clear business results that the change effort must produce.**

Design your transformation to produce the specific results that your business strategy requires. Your organization's business outcomes are the driving forces catalyzing—and defining—the changes your organization must make to succeed. Make your business outcomes clear and tangible as you initiate your change effort, and ensure that everyone

in the organization understands that they are the reasons why the changes are required. Your business outcomes are the foundation of your case for change, and give your change effort relevance and meaning.

### 2. **Create a comprehensive change strategy that integrates all of your change efforts.**

Your transformation *must have* a change strategy guiding it, *and* your strategy must be designed to deliver your desired business results. Remember that change strategy outlines the three components of your change: the **content** of what needs to change, the **people** issues that must be addressed for the transformation to succeed, and the **process** of how all of this will take place. Your change strategy should integrate both your content and people initiatives through one unified process, and address the unique challenges of this transformation.

Your change strategy should orchestrate all of the changes happening in your organization as a unified transformation. All of the change efforts underway should fit into the larger picture, and be planned, designed and implemented accordingly. Attempting transformation without a clear change strategy ensures failure, just as creating multiple, unintegrated change initiatives will doom your overall effort.

### 3. **Lead the effort “co-creatively,” and minimize command and control.**

Transformational change has two distinct dynamics that make it unpredictable and much more complex than other types of change: (1) You must begin the process of changing before your destination is fully understood and defined, and (2) The scope of the change is so significant that it requires your leaders and employees alike to change their mindsets and behavior in order to succeed in the future state.

Command and control as a change leadership style does not work well with these core dynamics of transformation. You cannot force people to willfully march into the unknown, nor can you command them to change their mindsets and behavior. Only when people participate in creating their new future, and internalize the importance of doing things differently, will they willingly support the transformation. Consequently, transformation requires a new leadership style, one that maximizes participation, communication, shared decision-making, and attention to what is best for the overall enterprise. Developing this “co-creative” change leadership capacity throughout the leadership ranks is critical.

**4. Use a common change process methodology as your navigational roadmap.**

Given the complexities and volatility of transformation, you will need the right kind of tools for the job. Choose and master a change process methodology—like the nine-phase Change Leader’s Roadmap—to use as your navigation system for planning, designing, and implementing your change. Do not depend solely on project management methodologies or static change frameworks to guide your effort. Alone, they are inadequate tools for the job of transformation.

You cannot manage transformational change as a controllable “project” with a predetermined outcome or timetable. You can intentionally plan some important change activities, yet many show up as unpredicted and emotionally challenging dynamics that emerge as you proceed. Remember that you are discovering what your ideal future state needs to be as you go. Therefore, change leaders must constantly gather new information and learn from what is actually happening in the organization, then course correct their change process and timetable accordingly. They must observe and respond to the

emotional roller-coaster happening as the change unfolds. Project management tools are too linear, prescriptive, and task-oriented for this need, and change frameworks do not provide enough process guidance regarding what to do when. Prepare yourself with the right resources!

**5. Accurately scope the breadth and depth of the transformation required.**

You can only formulate your change plans and timetable to the degree that you have an accurate scope of what the transformation entails and what aspects of your organization and workforce it will impact. Ensure that your leaders consciously attend to both the marketplace and organizational factors (the external reality) and the human factors (people’s internal reality) that are direct factors in the success of your transformation. Internal dynamics like leadership mindset, culture, and employee attitude and commitment are as critical to your success as the more tangible marketplace and organizational factors such as technology, organization structure, or government regulations. Be sure to assess the entire organization and its human dynamics to determine your scope.

**6. Transform mindset and behavior while your organization transforms.**

Transformational change requires that both your leaders and your entire workforce undergo a shift of mindset from old world-views and ways of thinking to new perspectives and attitudes required for your business success. A critical mass of people must operate from the new mindset and culture for your future state to be realized and sustained. The most important building block to achieve this critical mass is for your leaders to begin the change effort by addressing their own mindsets.

Drive the mindset change effort with your business needs, and design it as a long-term,

ongoing development process, not just a discussion or a training event. You can address mindset most powerfully in the context of working groups focused on how to make the transformation successful. These groups can be comprised of either people from across hierarchical and functional boundaries, or individual leadership or work teams. Your transformation's success must be the reason these groups are engaged in mindset work. Individually oriented, personal growth workshops not tied to the business needs will not succeed.

**7. Ensure that your change process and change leadership behavior model your desired future.**

Employees get their primary clues about whether the organization's espoused changes are real from two key factors: (1) the change leaders' behavior, and (2) the change strategies used to achieve the transformation.

Your leaders' "walk must match their talk." In order to build employee commitment, the change process and the behavior of the leaders in charge *must* reflect the desired mindset, behavior, culture, and norms of the *future state*, not the old organization. Furthermore, since the leaders' mindsets directly shape the change strategy and process used, you must address their mindsets early in the effort in order to achieve this modeling. It is far tougher for leaders to maintain the level of influence required to compel the workforce to change if they have lost credibility.

**8. Create critical mass through whole system participation.**

The magnitude of transformational change requires a critical mass of your organization to act and work differently. Maximum participation can help you create this critical mass of positive contributors, and engage people in owning their future!

Change leaders maximize people's understanding, buy-in, and contribution to transformation—and minimize their resistance—by engaging people early in the change process. This means during initial planning, design, and impact analysis, not just during implementation. Be sure to share and request information freely, use multi-directional communication strategies, and allow for local control of local decisions to mobilize buy-in and create the critical mass of commitment you need.

**9. Establish conditions for success early.**

Successful transformation requires certain conditions, such as: (1) clear direction and understanding of why the change is necessary, (2) adequate resources, (3) adequate time and attention for change activities, (4) executive alignment, etc. Identify and create these conditions up front to increase the probability and accelerate the speed of your success. If the needed conditions are not in place, then make building them an early priority of your change strategy. It may even be better for you to delay your kickoff until you have the proper conditions in place, rather than proceeding without them and getting off on a weak footing. Establishing and maintaining the proper conditions for success requires action and oversight, not just lip service. You can demonstrate enormous leadership commitment to the change through the early and public establishment of your conditions for success.

**10. Continue until all aspects of the organization are aligned to produce your desired business outcomes.**

Align all aspects of your organization with the requirements of your desired future state, including the tangible (external) elements of strategy, structure, systems, business processes, measurements, and rewards; and the internal human dynamics of mindset, readiness, and culture. Make sure this alignment

also includes all of your stakeholders, customers, and vendors. Everyone and everything about the organization must pull in the same direction to optimize your required outcomes.

In other words, the current transformation is not over until all elements of your organization that impact the intended business outcomes are realigned to produce and sustain those outcomes. For example, if the main focus of the transformation is new technology, simply installing that technology is not adequate. You must also realign the related systems, structures, cultural norms, skills, etc. to ensure that your people use the technology properly to produce your desired business outcomes.

## Summary

So, how did you do on fulfilling these ten critical actions? Are your change leaders “on top of their game”?

If you could get your change leaders to improve their performance in one or two of these actions, which would you select? Use these actions to strengthen your change leadership capacity, and increase your likelihood of success.

If you need further information or guidance on how to address any of these actions, or what information, skills and tools are needed for each, please visit our website, or call us directly. It is our intention to support your organization to succeed in its transformation!

## About the Authors

Dean Anderson and Linda Ackerman Anderson are the co-founders of Being First, Inc., a results-oriented change leadership development and transformational change consulting firm working with visionary leaders of the Fortune 1000, government, and large non-profit organizations. For twenty-five years, Being First has been assisting executives to maximize their ROI from change, transform their cultures to high performance, and build their organization's change capability. Being First provides a complete change solution, including change strategy development, change methodology and tools, training, coaching, consulting, and hands-on change project support. A Deloitte and Touche research study once named the Being First Change Methodology the most comprehensive in the world.

Mr. Anderson and Ms. Ackerman Anderson are co-authors of two cutting-edge books on change, *Beyond Change Management: Advanced Strategies for Today's Transformational Leaders* and *The Change Leader's Roadmap: How to Navigate Your Organization's Transformation*. They co-author *The Change Management* column for *Workforce Performance Solutions* magazine, as well as the e-newsletter, *Results from Change*, which is distributed to change leaders and consultants worldwide.

Mr. Anderson and Ms. Ackerman Anderson speak internationally about the people and process dynamics that are key to succeeding at transformational change. They can be reached at [info@beingfirst.com](mailto:info@beingfirst.com) or 970-385-5100.

## About Being First, Inc.

**BEING FIRST, INC.** is a highly specialized change leadership development and transformational change consulting firm, serving Fortune 1000 companies, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and change consultants worldwide.

We partner with our clients to achieve breakthrough results. We provide a fully integrated solution of consulting, training, coaching, change methodology, and tools; everything our clients need to radically improve outcomes. We are experts in unleashing extraordinary human performance, transforming culture to enable that performance, and developing leaders to lead those transformations.

## Outcomes

- **Maximize ROI** by achieving the tangible business results you are after from change; faster and with less cost to your business and people
- Build your organization's **change capability and skill** so you can consistently reap the benefits of successful change, now and in the future
- **Transform your people and culture** to truly unleash breakthrough performance
- Develop your managers and leaders into **competent change leaders** who know how to lead all aspects of change, including the people and cultural dynamics
- Develop your internal consultants into **expert change consultants**

## Services and Products

- **Web-based Change Methodology, Products, and Tools** for every task in your change effort. Test drive **The Change Leader's Roadmap™** at [www.changeleadersroadmap.com](http://www.changeleadersroadmap.com)
- **Change Strategy Development and Process Planning** for complex transformation
- **Change Leadership Development and Coaching** for senior executives, change sponsors, change process leaders, change project teams, change consultants, mid-managers, and frontline targets of change
- **Change Consulting** that ensures you get the best change solution implemented by an engaged group of stakeholders
- Change Consultant Development to build your in-house skills
- Executive Team Development that builds cohesion, alignment, and commitment
- **Assessments:** Change Project Audit, Change History Audit, Change Readiness and Capacity, Change Sponsorship, Change Leadership, and Change Team Performance
- Results from Change e-Newsletter at [www.resultsfromchange.com](http://www.resultsfromchange.com)