Article

The Strategic Importance of Change Leaders Modeling the Change

(Task I.F.2)

This article addresses the critical importance of leaders walking the talk of the changes they are asking of their organizations—in mindset, behavior, and relationships. It poses three questions to raise this flag, identify the personal changes leaders need to make, and explore strategies to accomplish this development in support of the change.

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Introduction

One of the toughest change efforts we supported was made more difficult because the CEO was not willing to change himself in the very ways he was demanding that his organization change. The company was transforming its strategy, operations, business processes, and culture. The cultural goals included behaviors of greater teamwork, more overt sharing of information and power, increased risk-taking, and the essential need to drive decision-making further down in the organization. The new business strategy and operations needed these new behaviors to succeed.

When it became apparent that the CEO continued to make side deals, usurp key decisions, and exclude some of his key players from important change discussions, we knew that the leadership of the change was seriously impaired. How do you get senior leaders to really understand that they **must** model the changes they are sponsoring, or they will lose credibility, cause resistance and cynicism to mushroom, and be a major factor in their effort's failure? How do you get leaders to walk their own talk?

This article explores the key change leadership issue of "modeling," and provides insights for how you can get your leaders to model the changes they are asking of your organization.

How do you know if your change effort requires leadership modeling of new behaviors and cultural norms?

Your change effort requires leaders to model new behaviors and norms if the new state you are trying to implement clearly requires new behaviors and norms to succeed. If the current mindsets, behavior patterns, and cultural norms are adequate to drive the new state, then you do not need leaders to model anything other than their current behaviors.

Typically, leaders see their major change efforts in terms of strategy, structure, business processes, technology, skills, products, and services—the "work" of the organization. Sometimes, such changes do not require much human or cultural change. Developing and using new technical or professional skills does not necessarily require personal change. Selling a new product or service does not typically require personal change. In these cases, modeling new behavior is not a requirement because there is no new behavior to model.

Most of today's change efforts, however, do require significant changes in behavior to succeed. Many also require fundamental shifts in people's mindsets and how they view the marketplace, people, or customers. If your changes are significant enough to demand changes in behavior, mindset, culture, relationships, language, or any other aspect of how people work with each other, then the challenge of leadership modeling is paramount to your success. Your leaders will have to model the new mindset and behavior first, or your employees will not believe that the change is real.

All personal change comes from within the individual, from the inside out. Some change efforts attempt to mandate changes in people from the outside in, through strategies like threat of job loss, new performance standards, or replacing old systems with new ones. Ultimately, however, change efforts only succeed if the people *choose* to change. Otherwise, they may change for a short while, and then revert to their old patterns. We have even seen people revert to using paper reports after their organizations implemented multi-million dollar IT projects. Personal change only sticks to the degree the people *choose and commit* to the change—for themselves.

When leaders overtly model the new behaviors first, they create a safe environment for managers and employees to change. They raise people's willingness to *choose* the new direction. Without the modeling, however, employees are more reluctant to risk or invest in the new behaviors. Employees look to their leaders for the support—and the precedent—to change personally. Leadership modeling delivers both.

In the case mentioned above, we, the consultants, were clear about the leadership modeling that would be required, but the leaders were not, especially the CEO. This brings us to our second question:

How do you engage leaders in recognizing their personal responsibility to change themselves to mobilize the changes they are asking of their organization?

Getting the leaders to see that they have personal work to do in the change is a challenging task, especially if the leaders think they can delegate responsibility for the effort to others and just get interim progress reports. We recommend several strategies to raise executive awareness.

1. Early in your change effort, engage your leaders in answering the question, "Will we need new mindsets or behaviors in our organization to succeed in our new state?" If the answer is, "yes," then ask them to specifically identify those behaviors. Challenge them to evaluate themselves to see if they currently model the new behaviors or not. Then present the question, "What do we risk as leaders if we continue to act in the old ways in our change effort?" Approached rationally, most leaders see the wisdom in leadership modeling.

2. You must help leaders see this requirement for modeling *before* they inadvertently communicate one thing and then do another. Once they repetitively model the old way while espousing the new, they will lose credibility. Do your homework, and develop scenarios, questions, and data that demonstrate their need to model the change clearly. Consider using stories and data from past changes that suffered from the leaders not walking the talk. You may also have stories of some successes to demonstrate the effectiveness of modeling.

3. Begin the change with an Executive Briefing about how to lead change to introduce the full breadth of requirements for transformational change. Emphasize the depth of personal and cultural change that drives transformation. Build big picture understanding of what the leaders are undertaking—organizationally and personally—when they give the green light to change.

4. Use the Drivers of Change Model to flesh out the full scope of the change, showing how shifts in your marketplace requirements for success or your business drive needed changes in your culture, leadership behavior, and mindset.

5. Ask the leaders how they see the change affecting them personally—their role, priorities, ways of working, their motivations, fears and hopes. Ask them how they want their staff and workforce to see them as sponsors or leaders of the change. Have them evaluate how this influences their need to change personally.

How do you support the leaders to undergo these personal changes, and sustain the changes throughout the effort and beyond?

Your strategy to accomplish this aspect of the change depends on the degree of personal change required of the leaders. If you need skills and behaviors that are only moderately different, you can plan for special training or use your existing executive development vehicles to accomplish this work during implementation. However, if the changes affect the leaders' mindsets, behavior, and relationships, you need a more extensive and tailored approach. Consider these strategies:

1. Depending on the magnitude of the changes, or the perceived "threat level" of your leaders to change, make sure you have the quality of professional support needed to take on this work. When it comes to supporting people to change from the inside out, find experienced consultants to help you.

2. Host a special session for the leaders to discuss the changes required in their mindsets, behavior, culture, values, etc. Explore with them how to behave according to the new requirements, and how to assist each other to sustain these changes. Make sure you plan for adequate time to fully explore these topics. This cannot be accomplished in a brief staff meeting or in the middle of an operating crisis!

3. Sponsor a Breakthrough Change Leadership Program to *experientially* reveal the changes in mindset, behavior, and relationships that the transformation requires. Follow this session with discussions about how to reinforce the personal changes, how to self-monitor, how to give each other feedback on behavior, and how to support the entire leadership community to make the changes stick.

4. Alter your executive incentive and rewards system to directly reinforce the new behaviors, and then use it!

5. Create a cascading strategy for the rest of the leadership and management ranks to undergo this same type of personal change. Design an ongoing and sustained process to reinforce, celebrate, and reward visible changes in behavior. Keep this work linked directly to the business outcomes of the transformation.

6. Provide executive coaching to those leaders who need the personal support to make and sustain the personal changes.

In Summary—Walking the Talk

A transformational change that is devoid of the leaders modeling the behaviors and norms they are asking of the organization is doomed to fail. It is essential to make the requirements for personal change relevant—and essential—to the success of the change. This type of work is not a "nice-to-do" type of thing. It is a key ingredient in your change strategy. If you are currently undergoing a transformational change in which the leaders are NOT modeling the new mindset and behaviors, find a way to "stop the action" for a risk assessment of this dynamic. Gather data to make the point. When your organizational and technical changes require shifts in leadership thinking and behavior in order to succeed, your leaders need to step up to their responsibility to walk the talk they are asking of the organization. Good luck!

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 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

• **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