

# RESPECT: The Golden Rule of Change Management

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### **Abstract / Teaser:**

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Read this title and you're sure to think, "Alright, no kidding, people aren't going to follow your lead on the journey of change if they don't respect you." But you'd be wrong; that's not what it's about. You'd also be wrong if you thought it simply meant you needed to *respect* them, though you'd be close.

The respect that we want to pull forward is the need for allowing others to go through the very same process that *you* went through when you developed the plan for change in the first place.

Think about the need for change that you've brought to the table. Maybe it was the need to upgrade a piece of technology. Perhaps it was the need to lower your prices. Or maybe you decided it was time to fire someone. In any case, chances are you didn't come to your conclusions overnight. Perhaps you dealt with a problem for some time, lamented over it, talked to people, spent a month looking for solutions.

Now go back and think about what was involved in your coming to a decision about the need for change. How many hours did you spend thinking about it alone? How many conversations did you have with other people? How many nights did you sleep on it? For big decisions, there's often months or even years of contemplation, evaluation and consternation that go into your decision-making process. Then think about what usually comes next.

Next comes the decision—and a plan. And that's often followed by an explanation to the rest of the organization. If it's a big, company-wide decision, the corporate communications team is

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pulled into draft an announcement. The CEO conducts some town-hall meetings. Maybe some PowerPoint slides and talking points are distributed down through the management ranks. All of this amounts to a translation of your *thinking process* into a process of *telling*. And often the conversation behind the scenes is about those who are resistant to change—why buy-in will be a challenge and that, one way or another, we'll have to force the change through. What's not included is time, information and a forum for people to have the same discussions and go through the same process that you went through to come to your conclusions.

The word respect, used in the context of this article, is about the need to let people go through the same trials and tribulations, deal with the same angst and fundamentally go through the process of *connecting the dots*, just like you did. If you want buy-in, that's the only way you're going to get it up front.

Of course, there's a problem with all of this. If we've taken three months to make a decision and we're convinced it's the right one, we may lack either the patience or the luxury of time to let people go through the process. In that case, all we ask is that you respect the fact that they may not buy in as you wish right away. Your team may dutifully do the job you ask them to do, but they're not going to like it and they're not going to buy-in until, of course, the change starts to take hold and deliver results.

But up until this time, people will struggle, evaluate, doubt and respect their own right to question the validity and the process of the change. Give them that time, and give yourself time to test your assumptions about reaching success against the reality of the change process you've designed. When your early successes do materialize, people will come around because the positive experiences with results will reinforce the need for the change and that it was the right change (for more on this phenomenon, see, "[The Cycle of Change](#)" <sup>[2]</sup>).

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