

Title:

They Decided on You. Now What?

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Summary:

Upper management decided that you've got what it takes to implement change. They combed your credentials with a fine-tooth comb, watched you in action during company activities, and appreciate your leadership qualities and people skills.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

"Many are called but few are chosen."

Upper management decided that you've got what it takes to implement change. They combed your credentials with a fine-tooth comb, watched you in action during business, and appreciate your leadership qualities and people skills.

As a change agent, you could be venturing into uncharted territory. Even if you've spent many years in the company and think that you know it like the back of your hand, taking on critical responsibilities puts you back on learning mode.

When you've served in a specific position for years, you're familiar with the rules of the game. But when you're appointed as a change agent, you'll need to transition into new functions, deal with people you've probably never dealt with before, and get acquainted with processes that you don't recognize.

So you've earned the vote. What's next?

### Essentials for a Change Agent

The role of change agent is scary. It could make or break your career.

In their book, *The Change Agent's Guide to Radical Improvement* (American Society for Quality, 2002), Miller and Lawton say: "Ideally, as change agents, projects would come to us crystal clear. We would know what the issue is and who needs

to be involved...Unfortunately, things seldom work that way. Change agents are often recruited by someone...who has only the vaguest idea of how the project should unfold."

We'll discuss five indispensable traits that a change agent must have:

- Know thy culture - knowing the hot buttons of your organization will help make your task easier. How much you know of culture determines the amount of influence you can wield over people. Some issues to consider: is the company known as an early adopter of new ideas and technologies? Is there an atmosphere of distrust or collaboration among staff? Do employees nurture career aspirations? Do employees use the suggestion box frequently or do they ignore it?
- Collect the right data - knowledge is power, they say. The data you collect will depend on the type of change being implemented. If the change is to improve the rate of repeat orders from a certain geographical area that your company serves, you need to ask: who services this area, what products or services are sold, which of these products and services bring in the least and greatest amounts of business, how are complaints handled, and what's the competition doing? When you gather the right data, you ask the right questions and then decide on the right processes. Good data can reveal a gap between what company staff perceive to be the problems of the product versus what the customers think are the problems.
- Be specific - the problem with large companies is that they acquire what is called "organization-speak." This means that the entire communications network is camouflaged in terms that mean nothing at the grassroots level. To say "our company needs to be profitable in the next quarter" is vague. To announce that "changes are underway to make the company more efficient" is vague.

As a change agent, you need to say it "like it is." Take the first example above. Wouldn't it be more meaningful to say, "our company recorded profits of \$800,000 last quarter. For the next quarter, we need to increase that by 10% so we should all aim for \$880,000 by the end of the next quarter. If we make this profit, 50% will be devoted to upgrading our training rooms and materials so we can train 25 more people every month." By stating figures and targets and the reasons for them, team members will have something to work with.

- Master the tools, experiment with new ones - it isn't enough to know the principles of Six Sigma. You have to master its statistical tools: pie charts, T

curves, value stream mapping, and variance tables. If Six Sigma tools don't apply to the specific change, there are other change management tools that you can use. An example would be the Prosci Change Management Maturity Model which utilizes benchmarking and assessments of interactions with companies undergoing change.

- Delegate -refusing to delegate is a sure sign that the team spirit may not be all there. When a change agent delegates, he or she spreads the fun by letting others discover their own talents. Team members need to feel that you value their core competencies and that you're giving them free rein to use their talents to bring about change.