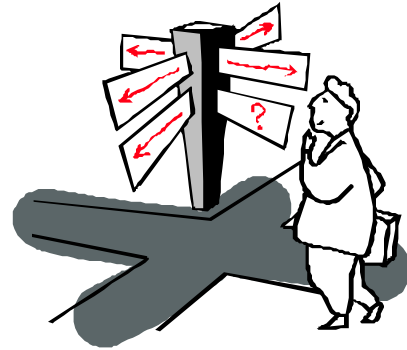


Everybody Loves Progress Nobody Likes Change

These days, producers everywhere recognize that their individual farms and farm organizations are undergoing change at a pace and scale never before experienced. In order to maintain forward progress, organizations must keep reshaping themselves—shifting, and flexing to fit a rapidly changing world.

This is the only way that today's farms and the organizations that serve them can hope to survive in a fiercely competitive environment. As Spencer Johnson notes in his classic book *Who Moved My Cheese*, "If you do not change, you can become extinct!"



As important as change is, however, most people just plain don't like it. As a result, those who create change are frustrated with family members, coworkers and employees who often display amazing resistance to the changes being implemented all around them.

The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, I will examine the "process of change," i.e. the normal and natural stages that people go through when change is implemented. Second, I'd like to suggest a simple strategy you can use as you lead people through the process and help them to "cope with change."

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE:

The people who "create change" are normally the owners, managers, and board of directors of farms and agribusinesses. The nature of their job requires that they look down the road, anticipate changing conditions, and then adjust and adapt their business as necessary. In effect, they are paid to live in the future.

As a result, managers spend a lot of time by themselves and with their close associates and advisors— thinking through how they will restructure, form different alliances, expand or downsize, and adopt new technologies. By the time they decide to move ahead and announce a change to their employees, they will be to the point *in their own minds* where the change is complete and fully operational.

Unfortunately, implementing change cannot be viewed as a date on the calendar. Just as those who create change have had time to get comfortable with the it, employees, supervisors, and those who will have responsibility to implement the changes need to have time to go through the same process.

The reason so many people appear to resist change is because they are on a different time frame than those who create the changes. The following outlines the three primary stages that all people go through when any kind of change is implemented:

1. Endings— During the change process, people are in the position of either voluntarily or involuntarily having to "end" an attachment to an old way of doing

things. Endings are typically viewed in terms of loss. Endings are often associated with losses related to job issues, different relationships with other people, or the giving up of familiar methods and procedures. People don't like endings. They tend to hold on to the past.

2. Transitions— This stage involves the process of letting go and moving on. The key question at this stage is *transition to what?* It is difficult enough to let go of the past; but it is doubly difficult if there is not something there to reach for. Letting go is easier when you have a clear picture of what to expect in the future.
3. Beginnings— In order to let go of the past and start a new beginning, there must be a certain level of ownership of the change. This ownership comes only after people are well along and mostly through their transition. Beginnings, especially in their early stages, require practical ways that people can align with a common vision, commitment, central purpose and direction.

When change occurs, it's common for people to experience some degree of pain or disorientation (an ending.) Over a period of time, the pain gradually diminishes (transition). Eventually, people and organizations move back to a sense of normalcy, and are able to start (a new beginning).

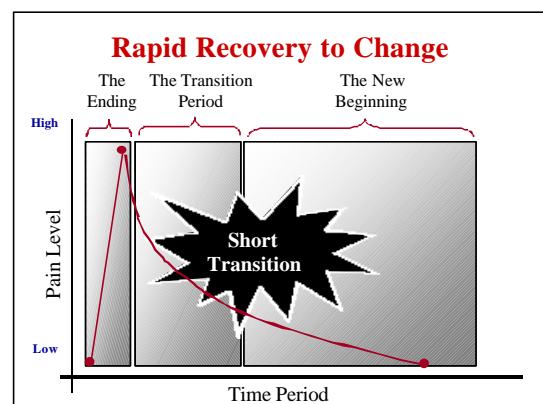
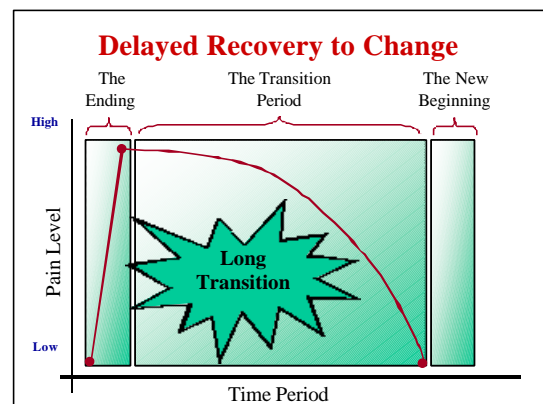
COPING WITH CHANGE:

There is a tendency for managers to jump to beginnings. No sooner is the new strategy announced— people are mobilized to implement the change and take action. Employees are told to get on board, and fast! Those who express concern, worry, or even confusion about the new system are often made to believe they have a “bad attitude.”

What complicates the change process is the fact that not everybody is at the same place at the same time. Some people are still holding onto the past and remain stuck in the ending stage. Others are just moving into transition. And, a few may have already entered into the new beginning.

The *rate* of recovery through transition, however, is *not* a given. It will vary, depending on the way the change initiative is handled— both personally and organizationally. It is not possible to skip the period of recovery and suddenly drop from high to low pain. But it is possible to shorten the transition period.

The most important aspect of leading change is “movement” through the transition period. Managers need to intervene in a change situation



and help people move toward ownership, and new beginnings. The following lists some steps that can be taken to help people move through the transition and into a new beginning:

1. **CLARIFY** (People need to be heard): Actively listen to employees' questions, concerns, gripes, opinions, and feelings. When change occurs, people are tossed up in the air and they all land somewhere along a line. A cardinal rule in dealing with change is that where people come down is where they come down. Their reactions, whatever they are, will be normal and natural for them given their experiences and individual circumstances. For this reason, do not judge, evaluate, advise, agree or disagree. Just hear them out.
2. **SHARE** (People need empathy): Empathy is different from sympathy. Empathy shows that you "understand" how they feel. Sympathy says you "feel the same way," yourself. During periods of change, people need to know that you care.

At this point in your discussion, let the other person know that you will now be shifting from listening to talking – and that you would like to share your own understanding of the particular change. The "feel, felt, found" technique works well here. You might say something like, *"I know how your feel about this change. At first, I felt much the same way myself. However, after thinking about it more, I have found that there are several aspects about the change that will benefit us all."* Link your response to their concerns. Use the information you have about the change to address each of their issues, problems and needs. Show the bottom line – spell out how their concerns will be met or will not be met.

3. **ENGAGE** (People need direction): Ask for agreement. Make sure that you both understand each other and agree on the information exchanged so far. Ask for ideas. Solicit help from the other person. Do not judge or evaluate. Suggest some ideas of your own. Identify the ideas that you both agree on and establish a plan of action that will help the individual "move" through the transition and on to a new beginning.

Yes – change is inevitable and a certain degree of stress is predictable. The good news, however, is that misery is optional. When individuals and organizations understand that change is a people process— and not an event on the calendar, things will go better.

by Jim Henion
Cooperative Resources International