



Start with the 'why' – even if you don't know the 'what'.

As humans, we need to understand why in order for us to take action, especially if we are expected to do something new. As a leader this is a critical point, because when you set out to make a change you don't know the detail of what it will mean for each individual. You could wait until you know the detail but the trouble is that rumour fills a void! Bad news stories tend to grow and spread in the absence of any steady voice. Stand up, be clear about why things need to change and don't be afraid of not knowing all the answers. Just make sure that you do provide answers once the detail emerges.

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FOR WHEN CHANGE MATTERS



“Action starts with why”



Leaders are often frustrated during major changes and use phrases like “I’ve told them” and “they’re ignoring me”. But, just because you have engaged with (or told) your people what’s happening and why that doesn’t mean that they have remembered. Also, it doesn’t mean that their interpretation of what’s happening matches yours. This is the communications dilemma - and there is no simple answer to resolving it. You have to put a great deal of time and effort into communications in order to increase memorability to a point where it can drive action and increase engagement to a point where you can be confident that ‘everyone is on the same page’. As a rule of thumb—once it feels like all you ever talk about are the changes then you are probably communicating adequately.

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“You can’t over-communicate a major change”

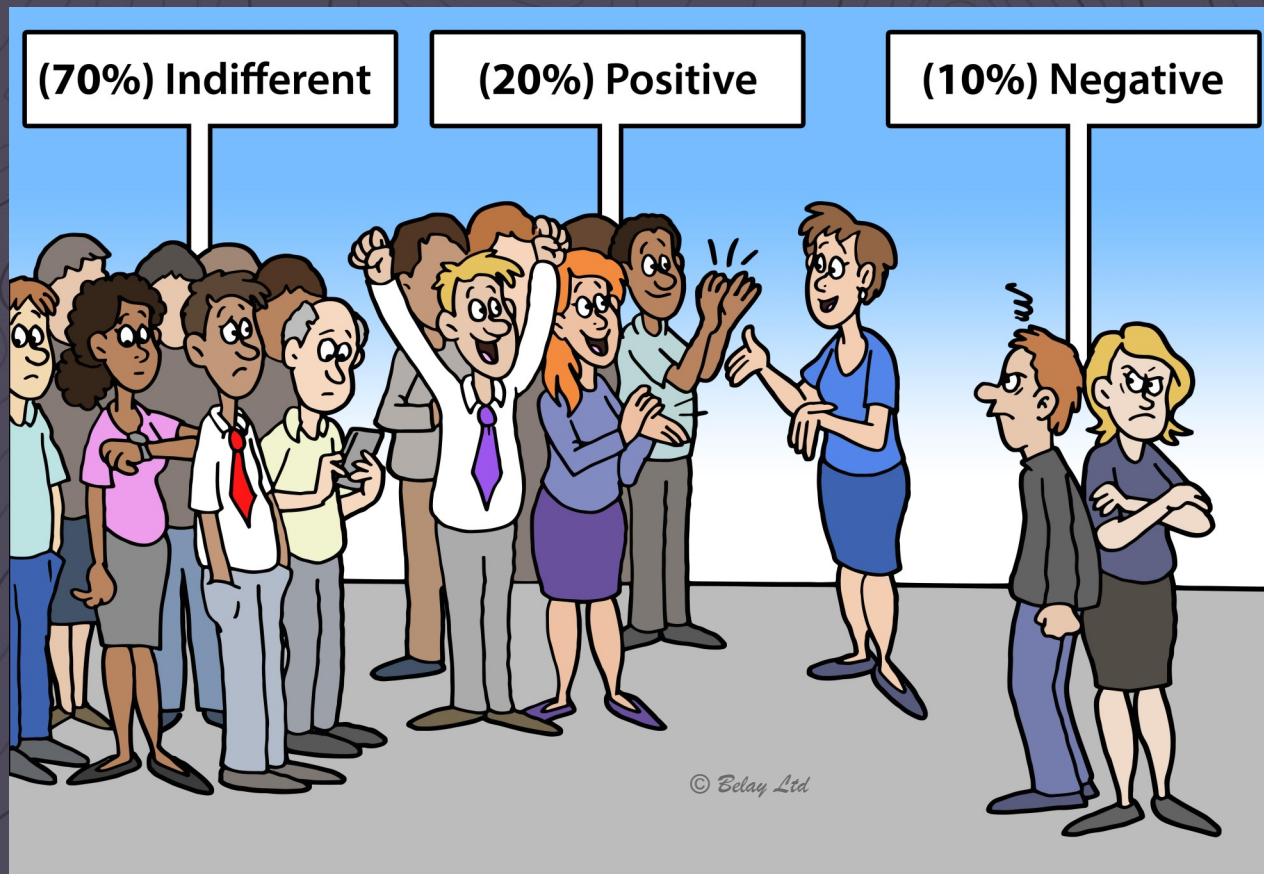


Don't kid yourself that all your plans are confidential and that people don't know that something is going on. If it's bad news then tell people as early as possible. This stops the rumours – which are often more doom laden than the reality of the situation. Remember, it is the rumours that will drive some of your best people to decide to leave. Engage early and often to make sure that your business keeps running and that your top performers can be confident in choosing to stick with you.

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“Rumours are corrosive — don't let the rot set in”



You may well find that there is a resistance to changing things. Often there can be a persistent, but vocal, minority that will challenge any efforts to change things even when most other people have mentally moved on. Don't let these noisy few take too much of your attention. Make sure that you spend your effort on engaging people that are undecided. This is usually the biggest group. If you can turn them into supporters then you will have the critical mass needed to make the change happen and make it 'stick'.

If required, isolate the persistent opponents and don't give them the credibility they seek. Whatever happens, make sure they don't take too much of your time and attention.

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“Concentrate on engaging the many — not the few”



If you are making a big change to how people work then it takes time to embed that change. Switching on a new IT system is just the start of getting people to do things differently. Think about using communications stories as a way of reinforcing the new things that you want to see. Make sure that people are publicly acknowledged for doing things in the new way. And, above all else, make sure that everything you do is in keeping with the new ways of working. Actions speak louder than words and, as a leader, any attempt to circumvent, slip back or otherwise avoid working in the new way – WILL BE NOTICED.

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“The end of the project is only the start of the change”