



How to Guide Your Team Through Change

Brought to you by Assemble You.

It's time to work on you. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Nothing is certain except death, taxes, and change [1]. Change is inevitable, it comes for us in all aspects of our lives, and when you're managing a team, you are watching it affect not only yourself but also those who work around you. Today, we're going to learn: how to help you manage change effectively, how to motivate your team, and how to guide them through the change.

When change is required, your initial focus should be creating and outlining a detailed transition plan. Do you know where this change is leading you? If so, you have a goal and can set milestones to reach on the way to that goal. Recognise where you are now and where you need to be. Then start to define your team's short- and long-term goals clearly. Consider all of the elements relevant to what your team is going through - for example: is there a specific timeline to which you need to adhere? Are there predefined steps your team must take? Once you have an outline of your plan, bring it to your team, and ask for their input. Your team can give you feedback that helps update and streamline your plan of action based on their skills and knowledge. In addition, asking for this kind of feedback will motivate your team to feel ownership over the plan and be accountable for their own change. Your team can help fill gaps in your plan of action that you may have overlooked.

Resist the urge to share only the broad picture vision and end goal with your team. According to Gartner [2], in order for big changes to take hold, people at every level of

the organisation need to understand why these changes are taking place. With a top-down approach, the gap in understanding between the C-suite and entry-level employees is a whopping 31%. Compare this to an open-source change strategy, where that gap shrinks to a mere 3%. So keep in mind that whatever change is happening for you, if you are leading a team, it's also happening for them. Change is a period of flux which means you need to learn to adapt not only to the big picture but to the nitty-gritty as well.

Communication is key in times of change [3]. Your team will process it better if they have a clear idea of what is going on. Being honest and transparent with them will smooth the change process for everyone. You aren't the only one suddenly thrust into confusing waters. After creating a detailed plan and refining it with your team, keep them updated with what is or isn't working or what new obstacles have been thrown in from higher up. Once again, keeping these lines of communication open will help your team get on board because it feels like they have a stake in the game. And if you don't know the answer? Say so! That level of transparency will endear your team and remind them that this change is happening to all of you simultaneously - you are all navigating the same boat.

You must make time for questions from your team as you both navigate the choppy waters of change [4]. Whatever communication you receive from higher up is likely not trickling down to your team without your help. So there will be more questions coming your way than what you may feel is normal. Remind your team that you are there to help them out, not just delegate expectations.

That being said - don't forget to delegate to team leadership! It is okay to lean on your team when it is needed. As Steve Jobs once said

It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.

You want your team to be successful at the end of a period of flux. Now is a perfect time to lean on your team leaders and delegate aspects of your transition plan [5]. That provides an opportunity to nurture talent on your team, giving opportunities to those who want to move up. It also eases the transition to new organisational

structures, roles, and expectations in a way that feels organic. For example, you may offer a leadership opportunity to someone you know will end up with a more demanding role. In doing so, you are engaging that team member and introducing them to a higher level of expectation during a period where you both will be extra communicative with each other.

Consider creating a transition “team” in which you delegate specific tasks or goals in your transition plan to specific people on your team. At regular intervals, you could have a meeting where everyone updates the team on the task they are responsible for. In one swoop, you will have delegated tasks in your transition, outlined and refined your transition plan, opened the channels of communication as well as an opportunity for constructive feedback, engaged your team members in the change, and mitigated the risk of miscommunication between team members.

Change in a workplace is hard, especially when managing a team. Reports may call on you to manage conflicts more often during a time when everyone is experiencing more stress. Once again - communication here is key! You need to be listening to your team, and clearly communicating what needs to be done and by whom. And you need to be doing so with an overextended sense of empathy. It’s impossible to predict just how everyone will react to change in the workplace and how those changes will bleed into their personal sphere. Conflict resolution may not go as smoothly as it had in the past, and that is normal! In these situations, an empathetic leader is more effective than a stoic one. Listening to your delegates can also illuminate future problem areas - which you can nip in the bud before they expand.

Here’s an example for you. Perhaps because of a new organisational structure, two members of your team find they’re doing the same work, and there’s a misunderstanding about how they should do it. If you navigate change and conflict with a little extra compassion, the members of your team may feel more encouraged to engage you in conflict resolution. They may come to you for clarity on who is doing the task “right”. By listening with empathy, you can more effectively answer their question - *who will be doing this task in the future, and how can the other person support them through the transition?*

With delegation and empathy, you can ease the stress of transition for you and your team. You won't feel you're doing all this on your own (after all, change cannot happen in a vacuum), and both yourself and your team members will feel open to communicating effectively and openly.

With all this planning and tasking, it can be easy to forget to thank your team. Times of change are times when people need support more than ever, and that goes for the workplace as well. Make sure you balance any constructive feedback with positive reinforcement and recognise the moments when your team goes above and beyond. Show gratitude to your team and make sure to check in with their needs as you navigate the transition together. Offer extra resources to manage stress or anxiety and find a time for morale-building activities. What you want to do is remind your team members that you appreciate them, and that it wouldn't be possible to go through this change without them. That will also help build loyalty within your team, ensuring they won't abandon ship when you finally reach your destination.

Feedback is crucial - and it goes both ways. Ask for specific feedback on your transition plan and pivot accordingly - your decisions affect your team, after all. That can also help frame the transition as an opportunity rather than a nuisance for your team. There are some things you likely won't be able to change - directives have to come from somewhere, after all - but there is a lot you can frame in a positive light. Take feedback sessions as opportunities to educate on what is working, what needs to be done, and how you can stay on track to achieve your goals. And remember - this education flows both ways. Make sure to schedule these feedback sessions regularly so there are no surprises in the end.

Change is inevitable, and it is never comfortable. But by implementing a transition plan, maintaining an open and empathetic line of communication, and providing and listening to the feedback you can ease the shock of change for yourself and your team. At the core, you want to approach change with a positive mindset so you can get back to working effectively, as a team.

Next time you are confronted with a change project be honest, open, and remember to communicate with your team. That's all for now, have a great day.

[1] *5 Ways to Lead in an Era of Constant Change*, Jim Hemerling, TEDTalk, (2016)
https://www.ted.com/talks/jim_hemerling_5_ways_to_lead_in_an_era_of_constant_change?language=en

[2] *Organizational Change Management*, Gartner
<https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/insights/organizational-change-management>

[3] *Fortune.com - A Good Boss Never Leaves Their Employees in the Dark*, Sandi Peterson, (2015)
<https://fortune.com/2015/06/24/sandi-peterson-leading-during-transition/>

[4] *Forbes: 6 Dos and Dont's of Leading Through Change*, David Stuart and Todd Nordstrom, (2016)
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidsturt/2016/05/13/6-dos-and-donts-of-leading-through-change/?sh=56bb495961d3>

[5] *Indeed.com - How to Lead a Team Through Change*, Jennifer Herrity, (2022)
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leading-through-change>