

## Implementing Change? Appeal to the Head and the Heart

Jeff Hannah

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A hallmark of the modern work world is the fervent, unrelenting force of change. At one time, organizational change was episodic and manageable, but now It. Just. Keeps. Coming.

It doesn't take long to discover that the most difficult aspect of change is the human element. That is, helping individuals and teams understand, support and integrate new processes, systems and approaches.

We've become adept at introducing change via memo and in PowerPoint presentations at staff meetings. And granted, these channels are important. But leaders too often overlook a critical facet of change: the emotional, or visceral, impact.

In fact, we would suggest that symbolism, rites and ceremony are very powerful ways to emphasize – and make indelible – the possibilities presented by change.

Wait, wait. We're not talking about sacrificing virgins in the conference room, or bringing in shaman or practitioners of the Dark Arts. Instead, ceremonies and events that feature a visual and symbolic component can be legitimate vehicles to facilitate the stages of change.

To illustrate: the story is told of a small, struggling business that hired a new CEO a number of years ago. After two weeks on the job, the CEO gathered the 100 or so employees in the company parking lot, where a large area had been cleared. The staff formed a circle around a large oil drum, in which a fire was burning. After a short period of time, a wheelbarrow appeared, loaded with numerous copies of the company's human resource manuals. The CEO ceremoniously threw every copy into the fire, creating a very visual spectacle of flame and spark. The message? Things were no longer going to be done the way they had been in the past; it was time for a fresh start.

Without a doubt, the CEO's welcoming memo and formal introduction to employees were necessary. But rest assured that no one who stood in that circle in that parking lot forgot the image of the manuals going up in smoke.

We facilitated a ceremony several years ago for a hospital system instituting a new model of patient care. A great deal of work had been conducted researching the new approach, and roles and processes were redesigned.

An evening kick-off event was planned, and key staff and managers were invited. After several brief formal presentations, small slips of paper were distributed, and attendees were asked to write down remembrances of the "old" practices: things they wanted to remember, things they wanted to forget, things they wanted to honor or cherish.

Attendees were given the opportunity to read their remembrances to the group, and several did. At that point, a facilitator walked through the room, collecting the slips of paper in a large

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basket. The entire group was then led to an open space outside the building and adjacent to the meeting room. A senior nursing leader spoke briefly about the excitement and anticipation of the hospital's new commitment to patient care, and the basket containing the written remembrances was set afire. A respectful hush fell over the group, and no one left until the basket was nothing but smoldering ashes.

The significance was clear: while we always hold memories of the past, they must be released to embrace what lies ahead.

For change to be effective, the human ingredient cannot be underestimated or minimized. When implementing change, leaders must appeal to both the *head* and the *heart*.

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