



# Communicating Change

“Change” can be a time of uncertainty for many employees, and it presents a great chance to build trust. Try these ideas for credible communication.

- 1. Your initial change message should be:**
  - a. Relatively brief – headline and just a few details.
  - b. Voluminous detail so nothing’s left to the imagination.
  - c. Treated as “routine” so nobody gets upset.
- 2. You should position the change as:**
  - a. Something that will be painless.
  - b. Something people shouldn’t gripe about.
  - c. A smart way to do business.
- 3. Your communication should be from the perspective of:**
  - a. The management team making the decisions.
  - b. The people most affected by the change.
  - c. The company lawyers.
- 4. In managing resistance, you should:**
  - a. Try to bring resistance to the surface.
  - b. Keep people focused only on the positive.
  - c. Fire people who don’t “get on board” quickly.
- 5. Make sure your communication plan is:**
  - a. Geared to your least-educated employee.
  - b. Flexible enough to go with the flow.
  - c. Carved in stone so nothing will go wrong.
- 6. Send messages designed primarily to:**
  - a. Build trust and positive feelings.
  - b. Build trust and compliance.
  - c. Build trust and commitment.
- 7. Be sure to tell your employees:**
  - a. What you know.
  - b. What you don’t know.
  - c. Anything truthful that will keep them happy.
- 8. Generally, the best communication takes place:**
  - a. In small groups.
  - b. In a video tape of the company president.
  - c. In a company-wide email message.
- 9. The best communication “style” is one that:**
  - a. Reminds listeners of their favorite uncle.
  - b. Feels like a letter from home.
  - c. Fits the situation.
- 10. In a conflict between culture and change:**
  - a. Change always wins.
  - b. Culture always wins.
  - c. Successful implementation really depends on management’s determination.



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## Each correct answer is worth 10 points

**1. a.** A common tendency in this age of email and other technology is to give employees information in gigabytes instead of simple sentences. Resist it. The best communication is simple, straightforward and relatively brief. Tell them what the change is. Tell them why the change makes sense. Tell them they will be kept informed. Then follow four important rules: No secrets. No hype. No surprises. No empty promises.

**2. c.** Change is rarely painless, even positive change, so don't bother to suggest that your change will be easy. A common barrier to change is the lack of a clear business case for the change. Define the change carefully. Explain how it makes sense for the business, how it improves customer service, how it makes the operation more competitive. Generate a sense of urgency. And tell employees that you have a plan for implementing the change in ways that appropriately involve them – then be sure to follow through.

**3. b.** Effective communicators pay careful attention to the perspectives of the people they want to influence. Be sure to speak the language of the people most affected by the change. Don't just use their buzz words, and certainly don't be condescending in any way. Do your best to see the world through their lenses. As for the company lawyers? The happier they are the less anyone will know. Let them advise you on important points of law, but keep them out of the communication business.

**4. a.** It really doesn't matter if change is perceived as positive or negative, *resistance* to major change is inevitable. You can't deal with resistance if it goes underground. Create an atmosphere where people feel safe in expressing doubt, anger, fear or any

other feelings they may have. Keep the discussion open and honest. After all parties understand each other's frames of reference and the "whys" are clearly established, focus on "what" we can do to move forward.

**5. b.** By its very definition, change is subject to change. Although you should agree on general principles from the beginning, keep your communication plan flexible enough so the tactics and even the strategies can be adjusted in real time. You may think you have the world's neatest webcast already "in the can," but if the flow of events makes it irrelevant or even only slightly off target, you'd be foolish to use it.

**6. c.** As you work to guide people through the transition from the status quo to the "desired state," you may be tempted to use the old hammer approach and pound the troops into quick submission. As any good missionary can tell you, lasting change is based on commitment, not on mere compliance. Building commitment is more time consuming, but its long-term cost is lower and it's well worth the effort.

**7. both a and b.** In addition to telling what you know about the change, make it clear what you *don't* know. If pertinent facts are missing, promise to obtain and share them, then deliver on the promise. One of the most credible things a leader can say is "I don't know the answer to that question, but I'll do my best to find out and then I'll get back with you."

**8. a.** Email and newsletters are certainly the quickest and cheapest way to get a message out fast, but they are often low on credibility and overall effectiveness. Use them only to

broadcast quick "headlines," then follow up quickly with more effective vehicles. Small group discussions tend to be very effective if someone is there with "the facts" and is both able and ready to engage in open give and take. Many video messages tend to come across as impersonal and contrived.

**9. c.** Engineers and computer people tend to appreciate analytical and logical approaches. Sales reps and retailers often prefer more empathic and spontaneous presentations. Operations people like data highly focused on bottom line results. These are generalizations, but you get the idea. Employ a style – or a combination – that best fits your audience.

**10. b.** Culture is king of the hill, and every organization is perfectly aligned to get the results (good or bad) it's getting. No matter how compelling your communication, the change you want can never happen if your reinforcement systems and other culture elements don't support it. Get aligned.

## Quiz Scoring

### Your score:

**80-100** You scored high and that's good. But don't get complacent. Effective communication can be tricky and you must stay alert.

**60-70** Next time you face an opportunity to communicate (which is no doubt every day) try these ideas.

**Below 60** Communication troubles in your organization? Maybe you're part of the problem. Try to become part of the solution.

