





# Breaking Through

Overcoming fear and resistance to create positive change

BY MARGARET GRAZIANO

Change is inevitable, and people often reflexively fear change, even when the outcome will be positive.

With fear comes resistance, and when both are at play, your organization becomes stuck in place and unable to overcome new challenges. To help your organization become agile enough to adapt to change, we must understand the necessary steps to overcoming the inevitable constraints caused by resistance and fear.

## WHAT'S CAUSING FEAR?

If your employees are experiencing unresolved fear, it's often difficult to determine the source. In fact, most of the time, you won't even realize you or the people around you are in a state of fear—and you can't fix a problem you don't even know about. Change management for the organization can only be effective when you navigate your own fears about change.

Things we commonly fear in the workplace include failure, not being able to manage change, exposing our

vulnerabilities, and the unknown. And these just scratch the surface. Every person and every organization are unique and have different fears that may cause challenges in the workplace.

To overcome fear, we first must understand what is bringing that fear to the surface. Be conscious of your own fears and acknowledge them. Be curious and ask others in the organization what concerns them about impending changes and what makes them uneasy about moving forward. Ask why people are afraid. Getting past fear is much easier when you know what you're up against.

## OPEN YOUR MIND

Resistance to change is how your organization falls behind. When people fear the uncertainties associated with change, they tend to resist even beneficial transformations, keeping the organization stuck in a frustrated state.

One of the most common causes of resistance is closed-mindedness, which is often born out of fear. Once we understand what is causing that fear, we need to work on opening our minds to the new possibilities and ideas we are resisting.

Just because we've gotten this far by doing things a particular way doesn't mean there isn't a better alternative. Being open to diverse perspectives and ideas leads to innovation and excellence. It's much easier to gain buy-in and engagement from people when you get curious and include their opinions and perspectives.

Hiring people from a variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise can support this. Anyone you hire and engage with about moving the organization forward needs to be committed to the government's vision. People who don't care often resist change because they don't see how it benefits their personal agendas.

## MANAGE YOUR EGO

Allowing your ego to take charge of your behaviors only leads to a struggle to innovate and grow as an organization—and that goes for everyone in the organization. It's important for every employee, you included, to take a good look in the mirror and see where we resist doing things differently or moving into unknown territory.

If you always have to be right, struggle with feedback, blame others for your failures, and/or don't hire people smarter than you, these may be signs that your ego has too much control over you and is inhibiting your ability to change and keep your organization in a position that makes a positive impact. You may not even realize it. A few ways to remedy this personal and professional challenge include:

- **Encouraging feedback from within the group.** This allows for you to better understand what's working within the organization and what can still be improved upon.
- **Practicing self-awareness.** You may not realize your ego is controlling your actions. Looking inward to understand why your ego is causing you to act in ways that thwart your personal effectiveness will make you better at self-managing.
- **Being grounded in who you are.** Living your life in a way that's true to yourself and understanding your values and goals is crucial. The ego often overreacts to failure and self-limiting thoughts. Grounding yourself in authenticity fosters consistency and clarity of direction. When our actions align with our true selves, we project clarity and certainty because we're being genuine and transparent.
- **Moving out of frustration and into courage.** It takes courage to be wrong and to admit it. Cultivating our ability to admit missteps and embrace vulnerability is key to effectively managing the extent to which our ego controls our behavior. Being transparent also models vulnerability and authenticity for others to follow.



## HAVE A DIRECTION

Being stuck in place often indicates a lack of specific direction. As the old chestnut goes, if you don't know where you're going, you'll never know when you're there. Your organization, the people within it, and you yourself all need direction. People need to see the vision, and they need to understand why they must feel compelled to act on that vision.


Ask questions of yourself and those around you. What is our purpose? What is the vision of our organization? Why is that important? How will it benefit the organization, the people in it, and each of us, individually? What is the contribution we most want to give? When do we know we've accomplished that goal?

Establishing a purpose and defining the contribution your organization aims to make are fundamental aspects of overcoming fear and resistance. Clearly articulated goals and a shared vision provide the guidance we need to navigate challenges and drive positive change. When people see and feel the vision, we understand why and how we can contribute. This gives us the positive energy to create and move

forward, rather than react and remain complacent.

If you don't have a direction, it's easy to just stick with whatever you and your organization are doing right now and not change anything. While this approach may keep you afloat for a little while, it won't create long-term stability and success.

## WAKE UP AND MEET YOUR HIGHER SELF

When we embody the contributions we aspire to and adjust our behaviors to make them congruent with those aspirations, we stand a little stronger, feel more confident, and produce more profound insights. When we take time to establish measures for success and effectiveness, actively seek feedback from others, create a clearly defined direction and focus, and feel strong and secure about ourselves and our abilities, that's when fear and resistance no longer have a hold on us, and that's when our organizations are free to create the positive changes we aspire to see. 

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