

The Anatomy of a Change Champion

By Ann N. Gatty



We know that change is a constant in our organizations, but it can be downright scary to experience. Therefore, I encourage organizations which are experiencing change to identify a leader within the organization to be your change champion. This individual can be a cheerleader, a role model, an encourager, and a teacher—all rolled into one.

A change champion can make a powerful impact on the outcome of a change initiative, but they will be more successful if they embrace the following leadership competencies. With change comes uncertainty, so being able to understand staff members' fears, anxiety or resistance is crucial. Applying these

5 competencies with the organization's change initiatives will make the change more comfortable and productive for everyone involved.

Be the explore new ideas.

Change champions are curious—looking for new and better ways to do things, create things, or explore new ideas. To be effective, these leaders are open minded and inquisitive. Since change is constant, it makes sense to learn how to adapt to new situations. But where do new ideas arise? To begin this search, start with front-line employees.

Front-line employees know what's really happening in an organization. After all, they're the ones who meet and interact with your customers each day, so they know how the customers feel about your organization and your competitors. Ask them about their experiences, and you'll find that they have ideas about how to better serve these important individuals.

Also, talk with other employees who serve different functions in the organization. Since they are focused on specific work processes, you can bet they know how they would recommend improving the way things get done.

People like to work with change champions. Such leaders model not only willingness to explore new ideas but also can establish an atmosphere of inclusiveness. Such leaders exhibit curiosity and actively learn from those around them. Exploring new ideas keeps the organization from becoming stale and mundane.

Be a problem solver

Leaders who are effective problem solvers keep the organization moving forward to meet goals without getting side-tracked along the way. We've all been witnesses to things going haywire, but it's the problem solver who can identify where the glitch is, and make modifications to get back on track. Successful problem solving, entails recruiting the right people, resources and expertise. With this collaborative effort, a well-informed solution can be crafted.

Especially in times of fast-paced change, problems that arise often seem monumental. Rather than watching the staff throw in the towel, develop a solution that breaks down the process into smaller sequential steps. Step by step your team can continue moving in a forward trajectory until the project goal is completed. This practice can produce an optimistic outlook, which is important for maintaining the will to push through the change.

Be a risk taker

A strong change champion is committed to driving for results. The leader is an instigator of change. However, with change comes risk. How you handle risk is what sets change champions apart. In their book, [Great By Choice](#), Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen use the analogy of bullets and cannonballs to illustrate how to effectively assess the severity of risk. To mitigate risk, begin with changes that are low-cost with low-distractions and fire bullets at the risk. When you are ready to take on much larger risks, you are ready to fire cannonballs.

The wise risk taker is one who remains open-minded when assessing the amount of risk involved in any situation. This leader doesn't get too attached to solutions until the ideas have been reviewed, and the benefits for making the change are identified. In other words, taking the risk is worth the effort, and the benefits out-weight the costs.

Be a motivating communicator

One of the best competencies that a change champion employs is using a motivating message. Being a motivating communicator keeps the team moving forward toward the goals, even if times get tough—and they often do get tough during times of change. It is essential that leaders not only set the vision for the organization but explain why moving toward this vision is important. Being able to recognize the people who make things happen is part of being a motivating communicator. People want to know that they are contributing to a cause that is bigger than themselves. They want to be assured that going through the trials and tribulations of the change will be worth it in the end, and that they are recognized for their efforts.

Be the owner of the change

Change champions must keep an open mind, remain flexible and maintain a sense of humor throughout the change process. This will help their team to persevere. Being able to take ownership for mistakes and being transparent about things that have not gone as expected goes a long way with staff. Showing ability to admit an error, illustrates the ability to be candid and honest. These traits build trust. Just the opposite happens when people hide their mistakes or blame others. The trust in the organization evaporates. We all make mistakes at some point. Taking ownership of these often takes courage—but it allows others to see the change champion as a positive role model. It allows them to try new ideas, and if mistakes happen, they know that there will be understanding.

The final thoughts about being a successful change champion is that you must be the initiator of change. Get started, monitor the execution and modify along the way to keep the change efforts on course and to achieve the desired results. Being afraid to take action because something might go wrong leads to stagnation. When you start, keep moving forward. Push through the rough spots and celebrate the victory!

About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business development strategist. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. Dr. Gatty is a frequent writer and contributor www.AllBusiness.com, www.MarketInsiders.com, and www.WomenOnBusiness.com. Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.