READY, SET, CHANGE!

Five-Step Framework

In my two decades of experience with change projects I've often needed a fast and simple way to help prepare stakeholders and end users for change. That's why I developed the READY-Set-Change! Model.

The advantage of the READY-Set-Change! Model is that it can be deployed at any point in a project. Although the earlier you use the READY-Set-Change! Model in your project, the greater the likelihood of successful adoption of change.

To use the READY-Set-Change Model, you must have a deep understanding of why the change is happening. You'll use this understanding to develop the rest of the tools for implementation:

R **Relevant and relatable** messaging about the change

E **Engage leaders** as sponsors and actively promote the change

A **Advance** communication to ensure messaging is received, and **Advocating** for stakeholders

D **Develop support** for and training on process and technology

Y Reinforce **WHY** and reduce resistance to adoption

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R is for **Relevant and Relatable**

To help people get ready for change, we need to make sure they understand what is changing and why. A relevant and relatable message highlights the benefit of the change for those impacted, such as employees, stakeholders, and leaders. This messaging is critical to the success of any change initiative. With technology change, it's even more important, because the technical team and project teams are used to using technology jargon as a part of their language. To everyone else affected by the change, these acronyms and technical terms are meaningless, or even intimidating.

The goal of relevant and relatable messaging is to help individuals see the change as worth the trade of time and comfort. Even when there's no choice about moving to a new technology or program, most of us still make this trade in our minds. Will the discomfort of the new be offset by the benefit I receive?

Develop examples, stories, and analogies to use with stakeholders. Many people are familiar with Aesop's Fables which are credited to an ancient Greek slave and storyteller. Fables were stories used to provide lessons such as:

> *The Boy Cried Wolf is about a shepherd boy who repeatedly tricks nearby villagers into thinking a wolf is attacking his town's flock by crying "Wolf, Wolf" and enjoying the excitement of the villager's response. After several iterations, when a wolf actually does appear and the boy again calls for help, the villagers believe that it is another false alarm and the sheep are eaten by the wolf.*

If we used this type of story to explain why we need to implement a more secure, reliable security platform to end incorrect alerts and false alarms about our system it would help those who aren't technical to understand why this change is needed.

The bigger the organization, the more important it is to create relevant and relatable story connections, which lead to understanding.

E is to **Engage Leaders**

Leadership engagement is critical to success, leaders are responsible for setting direction about priorities and guiding their teams through change. Strong support from at least one executive-level sponsor has significant impact on project success. Sponsors are the leaders who are accountable and responsible for implementing a change.

Sponsors sometimes have difficulty fulfilling their roles due to demands on their time and attention. They may be overstretched in their capacity to lead change. Providing an

engagement plan, or brief, which identifies activities, messaging, timelines, ways to engage and show support for the change increases the sponsors ability to lead change successfully.

Sponsors must:

- ◊ *Explain why this change is needed and why now*
- ◊ *Reassure stakeholders that this is the right direction for the organization*
- ◊ *Be positive about the change*
- ◊ *Ensure they are visible with frequent communication*
- ◊ *Encourage the team, and provide understanding and kudos when the going gets tough*

By steadily promoting the change and 'telling it like it is', sponsors and leaders have tremendous impact. Prepare sponsors with messages, "This may be hard, but we will persevere," or "We're making progress". Sponsors are invaluable for leading the charge, communicating the need to change direction, or responding quickly to changing circumstances when needed.

A is for **Advance communication and Advocacy**

Communication is essential for change initiatives, and people need time to recognize how they will be affected by the change. Leaders, project teams, and even sponsors often overestimate how effectively they are communicating. Users often report they feel surprised by change. Communication must start early, far in advance of the change. In the most recent *State of the Workplace* study, Gallup reported that people need to see and hear a message nine to sixteen times before they understand how the message applies to them. The process of transferring an idea is complex and creates opportunities for misunderstanding in both context and tone.

Keep in mind that it's hard to over communicate with stakeholders and end users about something that will have a major impact on them. The goal is to break through the day-to-day noise to ensure that everyone is aware of and preparing for change.

Advocacy is two-sided when it comes to leading change. On one side is an understanding and expectation that those who are of involved with the change, support the change. Advocates speak positively about change and look for ways to help others become engaged in and enthusiastic about the change. This requires a positive mindset and the ability to put aside the day-to-day struggles of the project work to focus on the benefits realization to come.

The second side of advocacy is more specifically involved with the change itself. This type of advocacy involves looking for issues and problems that might affect end users and stakeholders, and then escalating those concerns to project leadership for investigation.

This kind of advocacy is necessary for our stakeholders and users to have a chance at full adoption. Many times, the project and technical team can't see the impact of unintended consequences on the end users and stakeholders. It's up to those who understand how the end user may be negatively affected to share this essential information with the rest of the team.

Develop support for and training on process and technology

Implementation of technology creates a critical need for training and development to ensure people to know how to use the system and how to adapt their workflows and processes.

Developing support plans to guide end users and stakeholders through the launch of the project and beyond is where you can get the most bang for your buck. Support encompasses the help desk, job aids, updates, labs, one-on-one mentoring and coaching, meals, sympathy, and troubleshooting. There are many ways to provide support and developing support structures is an essential pre-launch planning assignment. When developing support plans take into consideration:

- **User Acceptance Testing**
- **Superuser Program**
- **Training Curriculum**
- **Training Logistics**
- **Pre-Go-live Engagement Discussion**
- **Help Desk Plan**
- **Go-live Support Plan**
- **Post Go-live Support Plan**
- **Post Support Labs & Help Desk**

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Reinforce **WHY** and reduce resistance to adoption

"Why are we doing this?" is not a question you answer just once. "Why" must be answered in multiple ways and multiple times. You must be able to articulate the "why" in every communication. There is a deep human need to understand and if we don't respect the need to understand, people may not make the change and fail to adopt.

Change resistance is often seen as stubbornness or a refusal to move forward with the change yet what is perceived as resistance may be natural skepticism or caution.

There are generally four types of responses that show up as resistance. While not all individuals fit neatly into a single type, much of the resistance you will encounter will show up in one of these behavior types:

	Commander / Fighter	**Socializer / Saboteur**
Strength:	Leader promotes and supports change	Social Connector promotes and gains social acceptance of the change
Resistance Mode:	Actively speaks against the change	Subtly sabotages change through sarcasm and/or negative comments
Make sure to..	Keep Commanders updated with information about the change and stories about progress.	Keep socializers engaged by inviting them to meetings, events and activities. Ask for their help in with communication.

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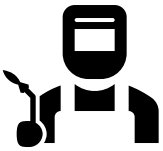
	Detailer / Derailer	 **Understander / Underminer**
Strength:	Detailer uses detailed information to deeply understand the importance of the change and how it will impact stakeholder and users	Understander provides stability and understanding for those who are struggling and unsure of change
Resistance Mode:	Will stall or delay if they don't have enough information. May create additional requirements or have so much data they've developed analysis paralysis, and nothing moves forward	Undermine the change by not engaging with the change or telling others that they don't plan on adopting change
Make sure to..	Schedule time to meet and provide agenda. Provide information as soon as possible, ask for recommendations.	Provide opportunities to try the change, provide input about the system, and request their help in planning activities such as team gatherings or events around training, testing or go-live.

The READY-Set-Change Model is a faster, more efficient, and less intimidating approach to change than what is used in many organizations. What's more, the READY-Set-Change Model and tools are flexible and adaptable to fit the timeline and resources of most projects. Start by putting yourself in the shoes of those who will be experiencing change. Dive deeply into the stakeholder assessment and determine how to help them prepare physically, mentally and with clear support. You'll see higher rates of adoption, greater work satisfaction, and easier, faster implementations which lead to successful change.

For more information visit www.AprilCallisBirchmeier.com

Purchase READY, Set, Change! On Amazon

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