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The Little Black Book of Billionaire Secrets

You Can't Outsource Change Management



Ron Ashkenas, CONTRIBUTOR

I write about simplifying organizations in a complex world. FULL BIO

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As a recognized discipline, change management has been in existence for over half a century. Yet despite the huge investment that companies have made in tools, training, and thousands of books (over 83,000 on Amazon), most studies still show a 60-70% failure rate for organizational change projects — a statistic that has stayed constant from the 1970's to the present.

Given this evidence, is it possible that everything we know about change management is wrong and that we need to go back to the drawing board? Should we abandon Kotter's eight success factors, Blanchard's, and everything else we know about engagement, communication, small wins, building the business case, and all of the other elements of the change management framework?

While it might be plausible to conclude that we should rethink the basics, let me suggest an alternative explanation: **The content of change management is reasonably correct, but the managerial capacity to implement it has been woefully underdeveloped.**

In fact, instead of strengthening managers' ability to manage change, we've instead allowed managers to outsource change management to HR specialists and consultants instead of taking accountability themselves — an approach that often doesn't work.

Here's an example of this pattern: Over the course of several years, a major healthcare company introduced thousands of managers to a particular change management approach, while providing more intensive training in specific tools and techniques to six sigma and HR experts. As a result, managers became familiar with the concepts, but depended on the "experts" to actually put together the plans. Eventually, change management just became one more work-stream for every project, instead of a new way of thinking about how to get something accomplished.

Obviously, not every company lets its managers off the hook in this way. But if your organization (or your piece of it) struggles with effectively implementing change, you might want to ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Do you have a common framework, language, and set of tools for managing significant change? There are plenty to choose from, and many of them have the same set of

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ingredients, just explained and parsed differently. The key is to have a common set of definitions, approaches, and simple checklists that everyone is familiar with.

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2. To what extent are your plans for change integrated into your overall project plans, and not put together separately or in parallel? The challenge is to make change management part and parcel of the business plan, and not an add-on that is managed independently.
3. Finally, who is accountable for effective change management in your organization: Managers or "experts" (whether from staff groups or outside the company)? Unless your managers are accountable for making sure that change happens systematically and rigorously — and certain behaviors are rewarded or punished accordingly — they won't develop their skills.

Everyone agrees that change management is important. Making it happen effectively, however, needs to be a core competence of managers and not something that they can pass off to others.

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Megan Bruneau, WOMEN@FORBES

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you're not powerless, despite it often feeling that way

Don't beat yourself up for having a normal human experience that anyone else in your shoes would likely be having.

Whether it's in response to an upcoming presentation, interview, round of layoffs, new position, or networking meeting, anxiety is an emotion we encounter repeatedly throughout our careers (and...lives). It's not a comfortable experience, and it's not meant to be. Anxiety is an evolutionarily adaptive emotion that keeps us safe—for example, when you're walking alone at night through a sketchy area (quit doing that)—and prepares us for coping with anticipated stressors—for example, when you're approaching a deadline and still have a crap-load to do.

So you see, anxiety is helpful. It's motivating. It's informative. It's protective. It's preparatory—to a point. Too much of it can paralyze us, counterintuitively (helpful if you're playing dead around a Grizzly, but not when you need to finish a presentation before noon), or put us into panic mode—which inconveniently sends blood to our extremities in preparation for “fight or flight,” rather than to our brain for THINKING. Again, this would be helpful if our stressor were a tiger, but not so much if it's an intimidating interviewer. Finally, for those of us for whom anxiety is a frequent visitor, it just isn't fun to hang out with all the time.

Fortunately, you're not powerless, despite it often feeling that way. Here are four tools for quieting anxiety's taunts and performing like a boss:

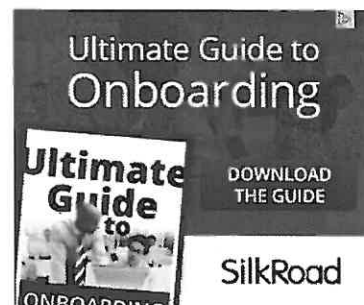
1. Make space for the anxiety and hear what it has to say

What we resist persists, and trying to suppress or overcome our anxiety tends to make it worse. We create a sense of urgency around ridding ourselves of anxiety, which compounds the experience. With the exception of drugs and alcohol, which I don't recommend prior to an important meeting or presentation, it's very difficult to ignore anxiety (again, it's *meant* to be difficult to ignore!). So, though it might seem strange if you're used to the “just think positive!” advice out there, invite anxiety in and make space for it. I actually find it helpful to envision myself expanding to make room for the anxiety. Sometimes I even say “Hello” to it out loud. Keep reading—I promise I'm credible.



(Photo Courtesy of Pexels)

Another way to make space for anxiety (or any feeling) is using mindfulness. That's nonjudgmental, compassionate acceptance of the present moment, even when the present moment is uncomfortable. It helps to remind yourself that whatever you're experiencing is impermanent—meaning it will come and go—and to imagine you're watching the thought or feeling on a movie screen. Mindfulness takes



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practice, but I promise you it will be one of the most valuable skills you'll learn. Yoga, meditation, and working with a therapist can help you develop it.

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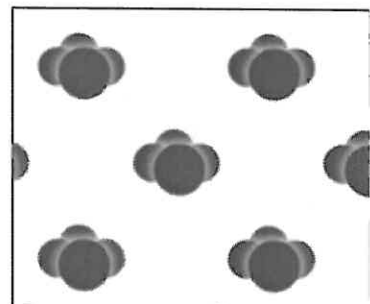
Once you've made space for the anxiety, you're going to want to hear what it has to say. This doesn't necessarily mean acting on what it's telling you to do (anxiety tends to tell us to bail, cancel, call in sick, sabotage, etc.). But, as I mentioned, there's generally some utility in anxiety. It's there to help us prepare, to warn, inform, and protect us, and to motivate us. Don't jump to the conclusion that you're broken, or there's something wrong with you, or you're malfunctioning because you feel anxious. It's likely a sign you have integrity and care about meeting expectations, which is a *good thing*. So, be curious about the anxiety and listen to what it has to say. And remember, hearing what it has to say doesn't mean you have to do what it tells you.

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2. Say something supportive (!!!) to yourself

If a friend told you they were feeling anxious, what would you say to them? *Suck it up? You have nothing to be anxious about? Quit being a baby?* Probably not. You'd probably say something like, "It's okay to feel anxious! I get anxious before presentations, too. Just aim for good enough, and it'll be over before you know it!"

Unfortunately, we tend to be far more critical and unsupportive to ourselves than we would ever be to someone else, and this causes shame, frustration, and anxiety in addition to the anxiety we're already feeling! Don't beat yourself up for having a normal human

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experience that anyone else in your shoes would likely be having.

At all points in this process (and life, really) say to yourself what you would say to a friend. Empathize with what you're feeling (e.g. "It's understandable you're feeling anxious because you heard there were going to be layoffs and you're concerned about losing your job"), and offer words of encouragement ("No matter what happens, I'm here for you"). Practicing self-kindness halts our threat response and moves us into a calming, cognitive response that's far more conducive to killin' it at whatever you're doing.

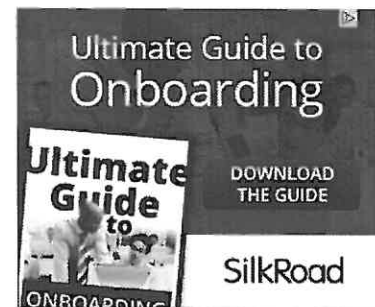
3. Gain certainty where you can

On the scale of anxiety to confidence the mitigating factors are: certainty, familiarity, and perceived pressure. Confused? Allow me to elaborate: Where anxiety is high, certainty and familiarity are generally low, while perceived pressure is high (imagine whether or not you secured a position was dependent on a surprise test in a subject area you know little about). Alternatively, where confidence is high, certainty and familiarity are generally high, and perceived pressure is low. So with this knowledge in mind, you can now hack the anxiety system. All you have to do is a) gain as much certainty and familiarity as possible; and b) lower perceived pressure by setting realistic expectations.

The easiest way to gain confidence, certainty, and familiarity is through preparation, practice, and information gathering. So do all of that where you can. Imagine various outcomes and how you'd respond to them, including the worst case scenario. Oftentimes, we think of the worst case scenario but don't play out how we'd cope with it. So when you're feeling anxious, remember to ask yourself "What's the worst thing that's gonna happen?" and "Would I survive that?" Chances are, you won't end up dead, homeless, or ostracized from the community, though our minds like to catastrophize and tell us we will. Playing out different scenarios so you feel prepared and equipped is another way of gaining certainty, thus lowering anxiety.

Now, in some cases, you just don't have the available information, resources, skills, or experience to feel confident. For example, no matter how much you read about public speaking, anxiety's going to be a regular attendee to your presentations until you've done it enough times to have a good idea what to expect (which moves you closer to "confidence" on the scale). And in those cases where anxiety is an inevitable part of the growth process, we forgo certainty and implement the other three strategies.

As for b), the easiest way to set realistic expectations is to again ask yourself "What would I expect from a friend in this position?" Aim for good enough, or 75%, and expect some fumbles or errors (unless it's literally a life-or-death situation. Then forget everything I've just said). This technique also works well for dating, FYI.



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4. Look at what's in your control, and let go of the desire to have control and certainty where it's impossible

Anxiety often centers around what's out of your control, and that's where its utility falls short. Anxiety pressures us to gain control, certainty, or comfort when we don't have the information or agency to do so. So a necessary tactic for lowering anxiety in any situation is to first look at what's in your control and what's out of your control.

For what you deem in your control, employ the skills we've already discussed. For what you deem out of your control, give yourself permission to rest in uncertainty and trust in the process. It's easier said than done, but with practice we begin to learn that not having control is actually less frightening than we imagine it to be.

Truthfully, we've got a heck of a lot less control than we think. Remember I said how you aren't powerless, despite it feeling that way? Well, sometimes you are powerless, despite it feeling as though you're not. Once we get over the momentary spike in anxiety this thought evokes (apologies), we can accept reality, relinquish control, implement the aforementioned techniques, and become comfortable with the discomfort of uncertainty—and that's wildly liberating.

Megan Bruneau, M.A. RCC is a mental health therapist, wellness coach, writer, and host of Forbes' The Failure Factor. Read more from her on her blog, One Shrink's Perspective, and follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

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Amy Morin, CONTRIBUTOR

I write about the psychological aspects of business. FULL BIO

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Your words and your behavior must be in line with your beliefs before you can be truly authentic.



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People pleasers come in many forms. I've met with business leaders who lost sleep because they were terrified of confrontation. And I've seen entrepreneurs fail because they couldn't stand to make a decision that wasn't popular.

Their reasons for trying to make people happy vary. For some, it's a learned behavior that originates in childhood. For others, the attempt to make everyone happy stems from the desire to be polite.



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If you tend to say yes to things that you don't want to do, or you avoid speaking up because you don't want to upset anyone, here are five things you should remember:

1. You aren't responsible for other people's emotions.

Whether you tend to do everything your partner wants, or you strive to make your co-workers like you, your people-pleasing efforts bear too much responsibility. Everyone is in charge of their emotions. You can't *make* anyone feel happy.

It's up to other people to cope with uncomfortable feelings like disappointment or anger. It's not your job to protect them from those things.

2. People pleasers are easily manipulated.



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Quite often, you can spot a people pleaser a mile away. And the more an individual says yes to requests, the more things are asked of her.

People pleasers become easy targets. Someone may ask favors of them by saying things like, "I hate to ask you this, but..." or "I wouldn't ask anyone else, but you're such a good friend." Whether you feel guilted into doing something, or you feel honored that you've been entrusted with a favor, you may be easily manipulated when your goal is to please people.

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3. Your choices will always be unfavorable to some people.

There isn't a single service or product that will please everyone. Just look at product reviews. One person says it's the best thing since sliced bread. The next person says the same product was a complete rip-off.

Even minor business decisions are the same. Whether you're talking about moving the holiday party to a new venue or you're thinking about updating your software, some people will cheer while others grumble. It's impossible to make decisions that please everyone.

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4. Trying to please people drains your resources.

Trying to please everyone will rob you of mental strength. The more you think about whether someone is going to be upset or how to phrase your decision in a way that isn't offensive, the fewer resources you'll have to devote to the decisions that matter most.

Worrying, ruminating, and rehashing conversations won't help you get anywhere. If you spent that same time and energy being productive, you'd accomplish much more.

5. Attempting to please others is actually a bit selfish.

One of the most common reasons I hear people say they can't say no is because they don't want to appear selfish. But in reality, the need to always be liked is actually a bit selfish.

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Saying yes to things you don't want to do will cause you to feel resentful. And that will damage your relationship. Setting healthy boundaries and preserving the relationship—even at the risk that someone may get angry—is far less selfish.

Staying True to Your Values

People pleasing can become a bad habit that causes you to lose sight of your values—either your personal values or your organization's mission. Learning to tolerate people being upset with you can be hard, but it's essential to reaching your goals.

Your words and your behavior must be in line with your beliefs before you can be truly authentic. And authenticity is the key to becoming your best self.

Amy Morin is a psychotherapist, speaker, and the author of the bestselling book 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do.

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