

## **Embracing change – a new look at old ideas**

Change is tricky for any organization but Leandro Herrero, CEO of the Chalfont Project, can help. Herrero's book, *Viral Change: The Alternative to Slow, Painful and Unsuccessful Management of Change in Organizations*, takes on the task of educating businesses about the nature of change.

There are a lot of myths around how people do or do not embrace change when it comes. The most important thing, according to Herrero, is to understand that behavior drives change, not the other way around. If you want your employees to adopt some new system or process, you must have the behaviors in place that will support that new system. Just because the new system is better, more productive, more efficient, less costly or cumbersome, that doesn't mean your employees will adopt it easily . . . if ever.

Change in organizations, Herrero says, should be more like an infection, spreading new ideas, new ways of working and new behaviors through peer to peer influence. It is much more a viral activity (*Viral Change*<sup>TM</sup>), than a rational cascading down of communications from the top.

Information already moves through the company much the same way a virus moves through a body. That means, it doesn't necessarily start at the top and move systematically downward. It moves from multiple loci outwards, spreading through connections until the system is overwhelmed (the "tipping point").

It is up to a company to understand and utilize the "organizational highways" that are already in place – by taking advantage of the networks that exist in every organization and allowing information and change to disseminate outwards, peer to peer, as well as top to bottom.

### **Only behavioral change is "real" change**

In order to get people to adopt new systems and processes, it is necessary to encourage them to make changes at the behavioral level. Like New Year's resolutions, superficial changes may only last a few days or weeks before we revert back to our old patterns. Only change at the behavioral level is effective and lasting. So what are the mechanisms that cause and support this kind of change? And why do we resist?

People resist, says Herrero, not because it is in the nature of human beings to resist all change, good or bad. If people believe that change may impact them badly – by reducing their level of control, for example – they may put up a fight. But if hold-outs see their peers being rewarded for alternative behaviors (the target behaviors), they will be infected by the viral change that's sweeping the company.

### **Myths of change**

One of the myths Herrero wants to debunk is the idea that "big changes require big actions." Just as small frustrations can derail a large project, small, positive changes can have a cumulative effect, building toward a tipping point.

Equally, Herrero says we must let go of the notion that “only change at the top can ensure change within the organization.” Of course, ideally, those at the top would be in support of change and ready and willing to model the new behaviors necessary to effect that change. But such support doesn’t always happen. Viral change doesn’t rely on top-down support. “Distributed leadership” means having small teams of leaders dispersed throughout a company. These leaders can effect change locally that then radiates outward through established networks.

The idea that “people are rational and will react to logical and rational requests for change” may also be more of a hindrance than a help. People are rational and are interested in hearing the reasons and logic behind making a change. But people also need to see how it will affect them and how they can have an effect on the change. If those logical reasons aren’t internalized, aren’t emotionally integrated, then the behavioral changes will be superficial and fleeting.

### **Viral change and pharma sales**

The same philosophy can be applied to sales force effectiveness. As Herrero says, salespeople are often “taught” a set of responses for situations that might arise. If the customer brings up objection A, reply with reassurance B. This is ineffective because it is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how people change. You may have a very slick presentation with lots of colorful slides and a lot of very reasonable arguments in support of your product, but in order to effect change at the behavioral level, you’re going to have to appeal to customers’ emotions as well as their reason. When the desired behavior emerges, reinforce and reward it and never forget that even small changes can have major impacts.

*[Viral Change: the alternative to slow, painful and unsuccessful management of change in organizations](#)* – by Leandro Herrero (ISBN 9781905776016 - \$29.95 / £19.95) is available from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk, Barnesandnoble.com, meetingminds.com and many other (online) retailers. You can contact Leandro Herrero through the website at [www.thechalfontproject.com](http://www.thechalfontproject.com).

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