Leading Change
John Kotter’s Eight Steps


See—Feel—Change

People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings.

The flow of see-feel-change is more powerful than that of analysis-think-change.

Help people SEE: Compelling, eye catching, dramatic situations are created to help others visualize problems, solutions, or progress...

As a result ...

Seeing something new hits the EMOTIONS: Evoking an emotional response that reduces emotions that block change and enhances those that support it.

Emotionally charged ideas CHANGE BEHAVIOR or REINFORCE CHANGED BEHAVIOR.

Introduction to the Eight Steps

“Producing change is about 80% leadership—establishing direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people—and about 20% management—planning, budgeting, organizing, and problem-solving.”

“The first four steps in the transformation process help defrost a hardened status quo. If change were easy, you wouldn’t need all that effort. Phases five to seven then introduce many new practices. The last stage grounds the change in the organizational culture and helps make them stick.”

“Successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight stages, usually in the following sequence. Although one normally operates in the multiple phases at once, skipping even a single step and getting too far ahead without a solid base almost always creates problems.”

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Creating a Guiding Coalition
3. Developing a Vision and Strategy
4. Communicating the Vision
5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision
6. Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins
7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing New Change
8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture
1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation. If complacency is high, transformations usually go nowhere because few people are even interested in working on the change problem. If urgency is low, it’s difficult to put together a group with enough power and credibility to guide the effort and to create and communicate a change vision. Never underestimate the magnitude of the forces that reinforce complacency and that help maintain the status quo.

Four behaviors usually stop needed change:

1. complacency: driven by false pride or arrogance
2. immobilization: self protection, fear or panic
3. anger: you can’t make me move
4. pessimism: leading to constant hesitation

Strategies for Establishing a Sense of Urgency

1. Examine current realities: strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to faith formation. What are we doing well? What are the areas we need to improve? Who are we reaching and involving? Who are we not reaching and involving?
2. Listen to feedback from parishioners, families, and participants in faith formation programming. What’s working for them? What’s not? What can be improved?
3. Identify recurring problems in faith formation that never seem to get solved. What are the problems that seem to come back each year? What are the problems that no matter how hard we try, it seems we can’t ever solve?
4. Identify the major challenges facing the parish and faith formation efforts from within and from outside. What are the forces affecting the life of our parish—within the congregation and from the outside community and world? What potential crises do we see looming on the horizon?
5. Identify the major opportunities for faith formation that the parish has not acted on yet? What are the positive forces that the parish needs to build on? What are positive trends that could dramatically affect the quality of faith formation?

2. Creating the Guiding Coalition/Team

A strong guiding coalition or team is always needed—one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective. Building such a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any change effort.

The two major tasks involve:

- Assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort.
- Encouraging the group to work as a team.

Because you are likely to meet resistance from unexpected quarters, building a strong guiding coalition or team is essential. There are three keys to creating such alliances.

- Engaging the right talent. The most effective team members usually have strong position power, broad experience, high credibility, and real leadership skill.
- Growing the coalition/team strategically. An effective guiding coalition needs a diversity of views and voices. Once a core group coalesces, the challenge is how to expand the scope and
complexity of the coalition. It often means working with people from across the whole parish community.

Working as a team, not just a collection of individuals. Leaders often say they have a team when in fact they have a committee or a small hierarchy. The more you do to support team performance, the healthier will be the guiding coalition and the more able it will be to achieve its goals. Especially during the stress of change, leaders throughout the enterprise need to draw on reserves of energy, expertise, and, most of all, trust. Real teams are built by doing real work together, sharing a vision, and commitment to a goal.

Establishing a Guiding Coalition/Team:

1. The Core Team of parish staff and parish leaders guide the curriculum design process—fashioning a curriculum, implementing a curriculum, and evaluating the curriculum.
2. The Design Team creates the preparation programs, home activities, and reflection activities for each event.
3. The Implementation Team are all of the leaders who conduct preparation programs.
4. Ministry Partners from other parish ministries and programs collaborate with the core team on specific projects that involve their particular ministry. Ministry Partners serve as resource people in the design and implementation of a learning plan.

3. Developing a Vision and Strategy

Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future. A good vision serves three important purposes. First, by clarifying the general direction for change, it simplifies hundreds of more detailed decisions. Second, it motivates people to take action in the right direction, even if the steps are personally painful or not in people’s short term self-interests. Third, it helps coordinate the actions of different people in a remarkably fast and efficient way. Vision helps align individuals for action.

How do you actually build a vision? Because it relates to the future, people assume that vision building should resemble the long-term planning process: design, organize, implement. I have never seen it work that way. Defining a vision of the future does not happen according to a timetable or flowchart. It is more emotional than rational. It demands a tolerance for messiness, ambiguity, and setbacks, an acceptance of the half-step back that usually accompanies every step forward.

The two major tasks involve:

- Create a vision to help direct the change effort.
- Develop strategies for achieving that vision.

Characteristics of an Effective Vision

1. Imaginable: Conveys a picture of what the future will look like.
2. Desirable: Appeals to the long-term interests of staff, leaders, parishioners, and others who have stake in the parish.
3. Feasible: Comprises realistic, attainable goals.
4. Focused: Is clear enough to provide guidance in decision-making.
5. Flexible: Is general enough to allow individual initiative and alternative responses in light of changing conditions.
6. Communicable: Is easy to communicate; can be successfully explained within five minutes.
4. Communicating the Vision

A great vision can serve a useful purpose even if it is understood by just a few key people. But the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of the people involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction. That shared sense of desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations.

The two major tasks involve:

- Use every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies.
- Teach new behaviors by the example of the guiding coalition.

Key Elements in the Effective Communication of Vision

1. Simplicity: All jargon must be eliminated.
2. Metaphor, analogy, and example: A verbal picture is worth a thousand words.
3. Multiple forums: Big meetings and small, memos and newspapers, formal and informal interaction—all are effective for spreading the word.
4. Repetition: Ideas sink in deeply only after they have been heard many times.
5. Leadership by example: Behavior from important people that is inconsistent with the vision overpowers other forms of communication.
6. Explanation of seeming inconsistencies: Unaddressed inconsistencies undermine the credibility of all communication.
7. Give-and-take: Two-way communication is always more powerful than one-way communication.

5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision

Effectively completing stages 1 through 4 of the transformation process already does a great deal to empower people. But even when urgency is high, a guiding coalition has created an appropriate vision, and the vision has been well communicated, numerous obstacles can still stop leaders from creating needed change. The purpose of stage 5 is to empower a broad base of people to take action by removing as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible at this point in the process.

The three major tasks involve:

- Get rid of obstacles to change.
- Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision.
- Encourage risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions.

Empowering People to Effect Change

1. Communicate a sensible vision to leaders: If leaders have a shared sense of purpose, it will be easier to initiate actions to achieve that purpose.
2. Make structures compatible with the vision: Unaligned structures block needed action.
3. Provide the training leaders need: With the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes, people feel empowered.
4. Align information and personnel systems to the vision: Unaligned systems also block needed action.
6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins

Major change takes time, sometimes lots of time. Zealous believers will often stay the course no matter what happens. Most of the rest expect to see convincing evidence that all the effort is paying off. They want to see clear data indicating that the changes are working and that the change process isn’t absorbing so many resources in the short term as to endanger the organization.

The three major tasks involve:

- Plan for visible performance improvements.
- Create those improvements.
- Recognize leaders involved in the improvements.

A good short-term win has at least these three characteristics:

1. It’s visible; large numbers of people can see for themselves whether the result is real or just hype.
2. It’s unambiguous; there can be little argument over the call.
3. It’s clearly related to the change effort.

The Role of Short Term Wins

1. **Provide evidence that sacrifices are worth it:** Wins greatly help justify the short-term costs involved.
2. **Reward change agents with a pat on the back:** After a lot of hard word, positive feedback builds morale and motivation.
3. **Help fine-tune vision and strategies:** Short-term wins give the guiding coalition concrete data on the viability of their ideas.
4. **Undermine cynics and self-serving resisters:** Clear improvements in performance make it difficult for people to block needed change.
5. **Keep key leaders and councils on board:** Provides those in leadership positions in the organization with evidence that the transformation is on track.
6. **Build momentum:** Turns neutrals into supporters, reluctant supporters into active helpers, etc.

7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing More Change

When a project is completed or an initial goal met, it is tempting to congratulate all involved and proclaim the advent of a new era. While it is important to celebrate results along the way, kidding yourself or others about the difficulty and duration of organizational transformation can be catastrophic. People look forward to completion of any task. The problem is, the results of a change vision are not directly proportional to the effort invested. That is, one-third of your way into a change process, you are unlikely to see one-third of the possible results; you may see only 1/10th of the possible results. If you settle for too little too soon, you will probably lose it all. Celebrating incremental improvements is a great way to mark progress and sustain commitment—but don’t forget how much work is still to come.

There is one cardinal rule: *Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow.*

The three major tasks involve:

- Use increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit the vision.
- Develop leaders who can implement the vision.
- Reinvigorate the process with new projects, themes, and change agents.
What Stage 7 Looks Like in a Successful, Major Change Effort

1. **More change, not less**: The guiding coalition uses the credibility afforded by short-term wins to tackle additional and bigger change projects.
2. **More help**: Additional people are recruited and developed (trained) to help with all the changes.
3. **Leadership from senior management (parish staff/core team)**: Leaders focus on maintaining clarity of shared purpose for the overall effort and keeping urgency levels up.
4. **Project management and leadership from other leaders and teams (Implementation Teams and Ministry Partners)**: Those involved in development and implementation of change efforts (e.g., programs) provide leadership for specific projects and manage those projects. [Empowerment]

8. **Anchoring (Institutionalizing) New Approaches in the Culture**

*Culture* refers to norms or behavior and shared values among a group of people. *Norms of behavior* are common or pervasive ways of acting that are found in a group and that persist because group members tend to behave in ways that teach these practices to new members, rewarding those who fit it and sanctioning those who do not. *Shared values* are importance concerns and goals shared by most of the people in a group that tend to shape group behavior and that often persist over time even when group membership changes.

Culture is not something that you can manipulate easily. Attempts to grab it and twist it into a new shape never work because you can’t grab it. Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people’s actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement. Thus most cultural change happens in stage 8, not stage 1.

The two major tasks involve:
- Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success.
- Develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession.

**Anchoring Change in a Culture**

1. **Comes last, not first**: Most alterations in norms and shared values come at the end of the transformation process.
2. **Depends on results**: New approaches usually sink into a culture only after its very clear that they work and are superior to old methods.
3. **Requires a lot of talk**: Without verbal instruction and support, people are often reluctant to admit the validity of new practices.
4. **May involve turnover**: Sometimes the only way to change a culture is to change key people.
5. **Makes decisions on leadership development and succession crucial**: If the development of new staff and new leaders are not changed to be compatible with the new practices, the old culture will reassert itself.
Planning for the Eight Steps of Change

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
   - How can you begin or continue to help people feel a sense of urgency about the change?

2. Creating a Guiding Coalition
   - Who is or will be on your team? Do you have the key leaders who can guide the change initiative?

3. Developing a Vision and Strategy
   - What is your parish’s vision and plan for lifelong faith formation?
   - How will you develop this vision and plan? OR How can you keep the vision fresh?

4. Communicating the Vision
   - How, when, to whom, how often, and in what forms will you begin or continue to communicate the vision to the parish?

5. Enabling Others to Act on the Vision
   - How will you empower and equip leaders, in a variety of roles, to implement the vision (e.g., design team, logistics teams, implementation teams)?

6. Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins
   - How will you use what you are learning from implementing lifelong faith formation to continuously improve what you are doing? How have you or will you celebrate short term wins and how will you use short term wins to promote greater ownership in the change and greater participation of the parish community?

7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing New Change
   - How will you ensure that there is no “letting up” as you implement the vision and plan? How will you produce new change? What areas are in need of improvement?

8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture
   - What are you doing to anchor the change in your parish’s culture?
Sustaining the Change and Momentum


Approach

1. **Leverage** the momentum and credibility gained from short-term wins to consolidate gains, to learn what’s working, to further refine and coordinate different aspects of the effort, and then move on to bigger parts of the change. What lessons did we learn from the short-term wins? How can these lessons influence the future direction of change?
2. **Align** and monitor key organizational areas. Change all systems that don’t fit the new vision. Focus on the issues that are more difficult, lengthy, and risky, but that will produce more fundamental changes to the organization, such as: How should processes, work practices, procedures, and policies be changed to fit the vision? What accountabilities need to be realigned with the new processes?
3. Get the **people part** of the equation right in order to maintain the momentum of the change.
4. Ensure the change is reaching all levels in the organization and seek feedback on its effectiveness.
5. Sustain the involvement and support of leaders.
6. Coordinate the changes to make them “fit together.”

Sustaining

1. **Maintain the sense of urgency:** Explore new ways to reinforce the case for change can help strengthen the desire to achieve the stated goals. Use short-term wins to demonstrate the potential benefits of the overall change.
2. **Promote visibility of the change effort and its successes:** Remember, your actual progress may not matter unless people know about it. Communicate broadly the progress and results of the change.
3. **Show commitment and support for the change through actions:** You must remain ever mindful of the need to walk the talk, ensuring that your actions are consistent with the vision.
4. **Ensure that those implementing the change remain in touch with the true purpose of the change:** It’s important to occasionally hit the reset button and remind people of the rationale for change. Conduct focus sessions and informal conversations to learn the perceptions of stakeholders and provide feedback to the team.
5. **Build commitment by connecting to critical stakeholders:** They are the people who can make or break the process. Keep everyone informed of successes and challenges. Look for informal opportunities to get opinions.
6. **Listen closely to people through the organization:** Collecting data provides crucial input regarding the issues and barriers to change. Conduct short surveys and focus groups.

Don’t Let Up

1. Monitor and measure the progress of the change.
2. Launch new projects and initiatives to continue the change.
3. Develop new leaders.
4. Talk about the progress and the successes of the change.
5. Remain active in clarifying priorities to achieve the desired change.
6. Remain emphatic, even passionate, in your determination to see the vision become a reality.
7. Support leaders during the transition.