



FIVE THINGS REALLY SMART LEADERS DO TO LOWER THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE

By: Karl Schoemer, President & Founder of VisionQuest

Smart leaders understand that they don't drive change. Rather, they need to identify the behaviors that make the change work, and teach, coach and reward those behaviors.

They understand that their role is to make the change work for the customer. They also understand that they need to create an environment where people are equipped and held accountable to move themselves through the change process. Their job is not to make the change easy (they couldn't if they wanted to), it's to make it successful.

Let's look at five things **really** smart leaders do to lower the barriers to change.

1. They Tell More Than They Sell:

Smart Leaders understand that people are in different spots in the change process. Very often the leaders have moved through their phases of resistance and are excited about the possibilities that the change can bring. However, they understand that many employees are just beginning to hear about and process the impact of the change. Giving these people a dose of "this is going to be great" inspiration turns them off, diminishes a leader's credibility both short and long term, and creates the impression that the leader is out of touch and uncaring.

Instead, really smart leaders start with informative communication. They state the business case, the "why we are doing this" (always making the connection to the customer and marketplace). They talk straight and give honest answers. They don't focus on benefits, they focus on facts, on process, and on answering as many of the "me" questions as they can that employees inevitably will have.

Really smart leaders don't "sell" anything. They don't make promises that this will be better, they only communicate clearly that this will be different.

Really smart leaders create a sense of urgency. They understand that the marketplace doesn't grant ample time for everybody to adjust, accept, or buy-in.

2. They Hold People Accountable:

Really smart leaders know that their company is in business to serve the customer. They also understand and communicate that when the customer is satisfied, the company grows and all those in it benefit.

Really smart leaders today understand that there is no longer any such thing as "job security." They make it clear to people that the true benefit of moving through this, the next, or **any** change is that it makes the individual more employable. They shift the mentality of their workforce from an entitlement "what's in it for me" way of thinking to a "what can I do for myself that will increase my employment security" way of thinking.

Really smart leaders hold their people accountable to move themselves through change. They treat their employees like adults and not children. They hold everyone accountable for execution, outcomes, results and customer satisfaction.

3. They Reward Positive Influence:

Every organization has centers of influence. These are the people — regardless of their position — that others listen to and follow. Instead of catering to, coddling, or trying to cajole disgruntled or negative centers of influence, really smart leaders create their own positive centers of influence. This is done by using the oldest human behavior modification technique in the world. Rewards and consequences.

Those who are "on board," "bought in," and going along get rewarded. Those who are negative, resistant and spreading discontent are consequenced. Students of the business vs. students of the job, those who see the big picture and the importance of change to the customer are identified and publicly rewarded. Those who always resist, always complain, and always negatively affect others are consequenced...eventually right out the door.

Really smart leaders use their influence to create positive, change adaptive, centers of influence throughout the organization.

FIVE THINGS REALLY SMART LEADERS DO TO LOWER THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE, *Continued*

4. They Take Change as it Comes:

Really smart leaders understand that change is driven from the outside in. It comes from the marketplace and not the boardroom. They realize then, that the pace, size and complexity of the change is determined by the customer, it's their call. They have no say in which "piece" of the change they would like to implement. These leaders realize that they have to do it, they have to do it all, and they have to do it as fast as the customer demands.

Really smart leaders first communicate all this to their people. They help everyone understand that they can't slow down, or take it in "bite-sized" pieces. They then equip their people with the qualities, skills and behaviors necessary to deal with all this change at the pace of the marketplace. Lastly, they hold their people accountable to deliver.

Really smart leaders help their people speed up in today's fast moving environment. They help them get better at change so that they can take on even more change, more quickly and more effectively.

5. They Create Positive Momentum:

By taking change as it comes from the marketplace and not trying to slow it down or piece it out, really smart leaders create wins for their customers. They understand that the ultimate measure of success is not the successful implementation of one step of a complex, multi-layered change, rather it is a satisfied customer. The more wins, the more satisfied customers, the greater the momentum.

Really smart leaders are honest with their people. They don't make false promises. They communicate that the change process may be difficult and it most certainly won't be trouble free. They make mistakes, false starts and setbacks learning opportunities. They make failures the foundation of future success.

Karl Schoemer is the founder and president of VisionQuest, a multi-dimensional training and consulting firm. Over the last thirteen years, Karl has worked with thousands of companies undergoing change, in hundreds of industries, on five continents. VisionQuest helps companies and individuals "Seize Change" and make it part of their competitive advantage.

Karl's latest book is entitled: *It Is What It Is — What Are You Going To Do About It?* Learn more about Karl, VisionQuest, and change, by visiting his website at <http://www.VQSolutions.com>