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# Innovation & Trends Expert Jim Carroll

## “How to implement change”



*Reflections on successful  
methods of bringing  
about change within  
an organization*



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## “How to implement change”

*Futurist, trends & innovation expert Jim Carroll regularly speaks on trends, the future, innovation and change. This article, written for several online association newsletters, provides his insight as used in several recent keynote presentations.*

It seemed like a simple enough initiative at the time – an elementary school that wanted to move to what has become known as a “balanced day.”

Rather than the standard “two-recess, one lunch hour” format, a balanced day involves a re-jigging of the classroom/recess structure in such a way that a number of problems are solved. For example, without going into the details, it helps to deal with a shortage of qualified lunch room supervisors as well as ensuring that teachers get the break time that is required by contract. It also ensures that children can get just as much outside time as they had before, yet avoids the challenges and problems that can come about from an inordinately long lunch hour in the middle of the day. It also allows for more instruction time with fewer interruptions.

*Implementing change is probably one of the most significant challenges that is faced by an executive*

Suffice it to say, it is a great initiative, and yet, when introduced to the parents their reaction could almost have been predicted -- wide ranging concern, opposition and in some cases, misinterpretation of the reasons for the proposed change.

Which, if you think about it, is a microcosm of the type of reaction that occurs when any association seeks to effect change within its membership, whether it be related to some type of minor issue or with something that involves far more significant, long lasting change.

Implementing change is probably one of the most significant challenges that is faced by an association executive. Many of you will have had a long track record in managing the process, yet given that the rate of change around us is

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swirling ever faster, we're having to constantly remind ourselves of the essence of a successful change strategy.

Bringing change to bear involves understanding the challenges and barriers that will hinder your progress, as well as the methods and initiatives that you can undertake as part of the change process in order to try to smooth any feathers that are ruffled during the process.

Consider these steps, and you might find the process of change management to be far more straightforward.

**Communicate, communicate, communicate – and then communicate some more.**

Time and again, change initiatives have failed as a result of a simple lack of communication.

*An ineffectual change process involves suspicion, fear, confusion, distrust and rumor*

All too often, those trying to effect the change have simply rammed the change through, without effectively explaining the reasons underlying the need for change, the implications of the change, and the benefits that will come from the change.

Poor communication leads to all the classic signs of an ineffectual change process, ranging from suspicion, fear, confusion to distrust and rumor.

You will do much better if you spend as much time in creating a “change communication plan” as you do in structuring the details of the change itself, as that will help to ensure that your message doesn't go off the rails.

**Anticipate objections.**

Many people seem to be driven by a rather simple outlook on life: whenever confronted with something new, they quickly respond that we can't change things because “we've always done it that way.”

*They've been born with a change anti-virus...*

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And if you get right down to it, such a statement masks the reality of the fact that they just don't like change, don't want to have to deal with change, and certainly won't accept change!

They've been born with a change anti-virus that immediately rejects any invasion of their comfort zone by any type of new initiative, with the result that you will be guaranteed a great deal of grief as you attempt to move forward.

Given this reality, it is best if your change strategy takes account of the fact that you will have strong objections to your plans, regardless of how small or large the nature of the change might be. Take the time to understand the potential objections, and then document and communicate how those concerns are likely ill-founded.

You might find that by doing this that things become a little bit easier for you.

**Make the presumption that you must sell to the uninformed**

The reason that you must work so hard to communicate the reasons for change is because many people will not be in possession of the most basic facts related to the change.

Their daily life is based upon routine – they come into work each day, and do the same thing that they've done the day before – day in and day out. They live such a life of routine that they don't ever spend time thinking about trends, the future, and how their world will evolve around them.

Because of their complete lack of any sort of change-radar, they expect that everything will always stay the same. And as soon as you interrupt their routine, all hell breaks loose.

Call them change-blind – meaning, that as you push forward any type of necessary change, you must spend a lot of time not only communicating with them, but educating them. Education implies information – and you can't have too little information.

▮ *As soon as you interrupt their routine, all hell breaks loose.*

This means that you can't simply issue a newsletter explaining the forthcoming change. You must have detailed, comprehensive information available to them that puts into perspective the many issues and areas of concern that will drive them. You must have information sessions at which you can provide them information as to what is going on.

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And you must be prepared to answer all of their questions, regardless of how picayune or minor they might seem.

### **Presume that you are dealing with indecision**

Most people would prefer if they lived in a world in which there was never any change. When confronted with the need to change, they fall prey to that other common human instinct, in that they are unable to make a decision!

Effecting successful change always requires a degree of support, and yet that support will not be forthcoming if people are driven by the aggressive indecision that seems to be so characteristic of our times.

Hence, design your change initiative and communication plan in such a way that you are forcing people into making a decision.

You can do this by putting in place a deadline by which they must act, or by providing very clear choices that must be made.

### **Plan for the fact that people will misinterpret what you say**

Many change initiatives will run up the ingrained distrust that exists within the culture of many organizations.

It's not surprising that many people will inherently distrust you – after all, there is no doubt that people have been battered by an extremely negative corporate environment through the last few years, particularly as corporate cost cutting has come to be the key change initiative of many an organization.

In such an environment, any type of change you propose might simply be viewed as a part of that cost-cutting agenda. You can counter this by being clear, succinct and concise.

You also need to have your ears firmly plugged into the rumor mill, and must be prepared to act immediately on any misinformation that you might hear is being spread about.

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### **Harness the passion of the supporters**

Successful organizational change initiatives always involve the participation of those who are eager to see the change come about, or who have a stakeholding in the successful implementation of the change.

You'd do well to get them involved as early as possible, since they will be very powerful allies.

### **Seek the involvement of the detractors**

At the same time that you get the involvement of those who want to see change, you will find that you also need the support of those who are only marginally against the change.

You'll make things easier for yourself if you spend a bit of time to try to turn them into supporters. They might simply need some of the extra care and concern with the issues outlined above – as it might simply be a lack of information that has them sitting on the fence.

Spend the time to segment your audience, and address their concerns appropriately, and you might find that you are expanding your support base significantly.

### **Be positive but address the negative**

Hopefully, you are trying to effect some positive change, and you can clearly outline a number of the benefits that will come once the change is in place.

■ *Don't try to sugarcoat...*

Even so, there is always a downside to any type of change, and you shouldn't hesitate in outlining that downside. Make sure all of your communications address any negative issues without hesitation.

Don't try to sugarcoat them – people will see through that, which can only help to fuel the negativity that can come about from a poorly managed change process.

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## **Be honest, forthright and ethical.**

Last but not least, ensure that your change initiative is based upon simple human decency and values.

*As the leader of an organization, you set the tone and climate for change.*

We've seen far too many examples from the airline industry – including some very recent events involving executive pay – in which significant initiatives for change have been literally destroyed in their tracks because of the greed show by those at the top.

As the leader of an organization, you set the tone and climate for change. If you are not seen to be full a participant in the change; don't share in any pain that it might cause; or are seen to be aloof and isolated from the change, you'll destroy any support quicker than you can say "off the rails."

You've got to be a full participant in the change, and ensure that fact is seen and noticed.

## **Jim Carroll, FCA**

As a trends and innovation expert, Jim Carroll spends a great deal of time in helping organizations cope with the change that swirls around him.

This article is based upon insight he recently provided as the keynote speaker for the US Department of Defense Maintenance Symposium & Exhibition, held in King of Prussia, PA, hosted by the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Logistics and Material Readiness.) Jim was asked to provide his thoughts on the challenge of change and the need for an innovative mindset, in the wake of the ongoing efforts for overall transformation of the US Military to meet the demands and complexities of the 21st century.

As a leading international futurist, innovation and trends expert, Jim dedicates his time and expertise to making organizations and their people ready and able to adopt tomorrow, today. Since 1992, Jim Carroll has spoken to tens of thousands of people as a conference opening and/or closing keynote speaker, or a workshop/seminar leader in over 1,000 presentations.



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His clients include many of the world's leading organizations, such as the American Federation of Teachers, Microsoft, American Express, the American Payroll Association, Taiwan Semiconductor Mfg. Co., VISA, Electronic Transaction Assn, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, KPMG, the office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, and more.

Jim has written 34 books that have sold in excess of 750,000 copies worldwide, as well as over 600 articles for a wide variety of national and international publications.

An extensive Web site containing information about Jim, including video, client references, and other information, can be found at [www.jimcarroll.com](http://www.jimcarroll.com).