



Implementing Change:

**Banana Carts and
Smart Phones**

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IMPLEMENTING CHANGE: BANANA CARTS & SMART PHONES

Written by Larry Johnson – 2/20/19

Implementing change usually means overcoming the resistance of others to changing. Ken Olsen, who was CEO of Digital Equipment Corporation back in 1977 once famously said “There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.” How short sighted was that?

I would laugh at him now except that back in 2008, I bought my last flip phone. The salesman tried to sell me one with a camera, and I said, “Why would anybody want a camera in their phone?” How short sighted was that? This is all to say that people have a hard time seeing the possibilities in the future when they haven’t even thought about future. So, if you want them to change, it’s probably a good idea to help them see the possible outcome of the change before it happens.

Seeing the future helps implementing change.

And I’m reminded of a story told by Arie de Geus in his book *The Living Company*. Back in the early 1900’s, a group of British scientists was exploring a remote mountain region on the Malaysian Peninsula. They came across a tribe of people who were completely untouched by civilization. The tribe had no modern conveniences and had not even invented the wheel for themselves.

The group got to know the tribe and its chief, whom they found to be an intelligent fellow. They brought him down to Singapore for a day so he could see what the modern world was like. At the time, Singapore was a bustling port city with all the modern conveniences of the time: steam cars, rail road trains, cargo ships, multi-story buildings, and electricity. After 24 hours of immersion in this environment, they brought him back into the hills to his tribe.

Imagine the scientists' surprise.

During the debrief, they asked him, "What are your impressions of Singapore?"

To their surprise, it wasn't the buildings or the trains or the ships or the electric lights. It was that he saw a man who could carry more bananas by himself than any of his tribe's people could carry. Why? Because the man had a cart and the chief had never seen one. All the other stuff was so far out of the chief's realm of experience that they made no impression on him. The best that he could do was see something to which he could relate.

So what does that have to do with you implementing change on your team?

If, when implementing change, you want people to behave differently. Or you want them to try a new system. Or you want them to utilize new software, and they are resisting, it may behoove you to help them see what the change will look like once it's in place.

What works in Malaysia will work here too.

A few years ago Rusty, a client of mine, did just that to change the entire culture of his company. He had recently taken charge of a large car dealership that his father had started in the 1950s. The existing culture was

a focus that said, "Promise the customer anything to get the sale and then charge as much as possible for repairs later." In other words, profit and turn-over came first and customer loyalty came last.

Rusty wanted to change the emphasis to make the sales process as pleasant as possible. Then delight the customer with awesome service so you could gain her loyalty. To make this happen, Rusty made arrangements with the local Ritz Carlton Hotel, whose motto is, "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen,." He paid to have employees of the dealership go through new employee orientation at the Ritz.

Rusty said the results were amazing. People came back with a whole new perspective on how to provide great customer service. He went on to say, "Implementing change became so much easier when people could see the future."

When implementing change, consider this.

So you might keep that in mind when you try to bring about change with your team. Is there a way you can help the team members see where you are heading? At least see a model of it, get a picture of it, or experience it in some way or another. Can they visit a location where a similar change has occurred?

I think of the chief and the banana cart. Perhaps bringing his tribe to a small village where the carts are already in use would have helped him in implementing change to a banana cart culture.

If you'd like to read more about implementing change, check out my blog article [Change Requires Some "Tough" With the "Tender"](#)

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