

# **Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time**

**Excerpt of Chapter 5:  
Remarkable Leaders Champion Change**

people feel about change. You can be dissatisfied and even see a vision of a much better situation, but if you don't know how to proceed or what to do first, you are often immobilized by the change.

As the leader, you are often in the best place to give people a clear pathway. When people know what they need to do or what they can do to get started, they are more likely to get moving. When possible, involve others in creating these steps, but sometimes it is best to create these first steps for those you lead.

If the change is large, people don't need to see every step from the beginning to the end of the change, but they need enough steps to get started just like you needed on your big project. Trust plays a part in this lever as well. The greater the trust is between you and your team, the fewer initial steps people need to know. In organizations where trust is low, people may require or even demand a more complete plan from the start.

Steve, our CEO, had a series of high-level steps in mind to create the new culture he envisioned. Now he is creating the more detailed next steps with the help of his culture team. As their process moves forward, people are asking, "What's next?" "What can we do?" "How can we keep this moving forward?" These kinds of questions are proof that people are onboard mentally and emotionally and need some way to take action. As the leader, you must continue to provide these steps or help the group create those next steps themselves.

### *The Risks or Costs of Change*

The first three factors of change (dissatisfaction, a vision, and a plan) must all be present. If just one of them is not, nothing will happen. But even when all of those are present, before making a change, people are going to compare the relative risk, or costs, of any change to the potential outcome. And these are the perceived risks to the person doing the changing, not the perceptions of the person (likely you) implementing the change.

Look back at the exercise for the word *change* at the start of this chapter. The more minus signs are associated with the list of words, the more likely it is that the person will be more cautious about change and therefore perceive greater risks or costs. Often leaders are confused as to why people are resisting a change, and this factor is important to remember. The leader is undoubtedly fired up for the change, and so the risks for them have already been reduced, or they see risks they are willing to live with. But each of us independently computes those costs and risks, and our perceptions of these costs are the reality for us. The higher the

perceived risks, the less likely it is that an individual is going to welcome change, no matter how great the potential benefits seem.

In his conversations across the organization and with the help of his culture team, Steve has identified some of the risks and costs perceived by the larger organization. Once they are identified, leaders and members of the culture team can address them in conversation and begin to reduce those perceived risks in a variety of ways.

### *Your Now Steps*

Understanding these change levers is the first and best step you can take to lead, manage, and champion change more successfully. These steps are designed to help you understand and begin to apply these levers:

1. Identify any change you've recently experienced. It can be individual or organizational in nature.
2. Determine how successful the change was.
3. Think about the change from the perspective of each of the levers. If it was a highly effective and successful change, consider how each of these levers played a part in that success. If it was (or is) a less successful change, use your knowledge of these levers to understand what was missing and what steps you could have taken to improve the success of the change.
4. Capture your insights and lessons learned in your journal.
5. Using these insights, make any adjustments to current changes you are involved in as a leader or a participant.



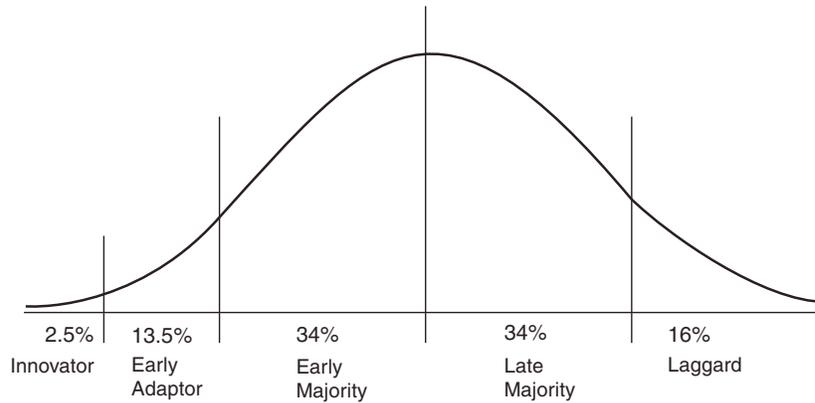
**Remarkable leaders create faster and more successful change by using the change levers.**

### **Planning Change Efforts**

Now that you understand the four powerful levers that can create or block change, you have a template for making change implementation work. Any successful change plan will include the development and implications of these four levers. The Now Steps you just worked through provide a clue to building your change plan, but the timing must be reversed. Ask yourself the questions about each lever *before* you implement the change to help create the information, communication, and insight required for your plan to be successful.

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Figure 5.1. The Diffusion of Innovation



### *The Diffusion of Innovation*

In 1962, Everett Rogers wrote the first edition of *Diffusion of Innovations*, which formalized the diffusion of innovations theory and became a classic in sociological literature. It used statistics to look at populations of people and categorize their reactions to technological change. Through this work, Rogers stated that a population could be classified into one of five categories based on their adoption of an innovation or idea (Figure 5.1):

- *Innovators*. These are the people most willing to take risk. They are adventurous, eager, and well informed on the particular innovation. The research found innovators to be just 2.5 percent of the population.
- *Early adopters*. These are those on the leading edge of change. While the innovators come to the change first, the early adopters are watching them closely and come on board next. They represent 13.5 percent of the population.
- *Early majority*. Representing 34 percent of the population, the early majority is deliberate regarding a particular change.
- *Late majority*. Representing another 34 percent of the population, these people are even more deliberate, and perhaps even skeptical, regarding a change. They are more swayed by the experiences of people they know in regard to adopting the change.

- *Laggards*. The final 16 percent of a population to accept a change. These people are sometimes seen by others as hostile to change or unwilling to change. In reality, they are the most deliberate and typically rely on the direct experiences of those they trust.

While much can be learned about change implementation from this well-documented research, there are a couple of specifics to remember:

- Not everyone will see the risks and costs of a change in the same way. Even if two people both have high levels of dissatisfaction, have a clear vision, and know the early change steps required, they won't necessarily be ready to change at the same time because of the differences in their perceived risks (and perhaps their propensity to change in general).
- Although an individual might fall into a different category for different changes (for example, a typical early adopter might not like to be accessible 24/7 and chooses not to have a cell phone, making this person a laggard in that area), most people fall into one category most of the time, especially when you reduce the scope to work-related changes. Even if you can't categorize each individual, recognize that within your target population, you will have people across this full spectrum of innovation categories.



To learn more about the diffusion of innovation and how it can affect your change plans, download this Bonus Byte at [www.RLBonus.com](http://www.RLBonus.com) using the keyword "diffusion."

### *Targets and Timing*

The diffusion of innovation model is especially helpful when you add in a time component. Rogers' research took the bell-shaped curve and plotted it against the time line of adoption. The resulting S curve looks like Figure 5.2. This graphic illustrates a couple of points critical to your change planning and implementation process:

- If you can get your change to point A on the slope in Figure 5.2, you will gain the advantage of momentum as the early and late majority begin to adopt or accept the change. This is important because leaders often get discouraged as the change seems to be moving slowly. The S curve gives you hope that once you get to point A, the change will move much more quickly.