

A Systematic Approach to Change

The decision to do a Baldrige assessment is a decision to change the organization. Questions will be asked that prompt leaders to reconsider the way they do things. Gaps in the day-to-day conduct of business will be exposed. Unacceptable results will shine light on ineffective processes. Cursed with new knowledge, senior leaders can either ignore it and accept that the current management system is unable to achieve the results they desire or embrace change.

The opportunities for improvement revealed by a Baldrige assessment contain the logic for acting upon them: Your results are flat or negative because this or that process is broken. Fix the process and improve your results. Measure your progress. Validate it with your customers. Repeat.

Unfortunately, the logic of the change is usually lost to everyone but the leaders who enact it, which can render it ineffective. In a [recent article](#) on Forbes, author Carol Kinsey Goman explains why human beings resist change. According to brain analysis technology, our work habits are controlled by a part of the brain called the basal ganglia. When we do things the way we've always done them, we feel good. Change stimulates the prefrontal cortex, which is linked to the amygdala, which controls our "fight or flight" response. When change overwhelms the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala triggers physical and psychological disorientation and pain. Even if we know logically that a change is necessary and positive, our brains can react negatively.

Goman offers six suggestions for helping your workforce handle change:

1. **Trust people to see the need for change.** Communicate information that shows why change is needed. Provide opportunities for people to ask questions and discuss the implications of the change. Help employees reach the conclusions that prompted you to act.
2. **Make new ideas become familiar.** You cannot over-communicate the reasons for change or how the changes will occur. Develop a communication strategy that uses all available mechanisms—town hall meetings, focus groups, staff meetings, shift meetings, intranet, newsletters, etc.—to talk about the change. As Goman notes, "It takes a lot of repetition to move a new or complex concept from the prefrontal cortex to the basal ganglia."
3. **KISS your communication.** Keep it simple. Condense the change into two or three critical goals.
4. **Never underestimate the power of a vision.** Goman writes, "I'm talking about a clearly articulated, emotionally charged, and broad picture of what the organization is trying to achieve."
5. **Don't "sugar-coat" the truth.** Be honest and realistic about expectations the how the change will unfold. Any deception, whether intentional or not, will be exposed and will heighten anxiety and distrust.
6. **Watch your body language.** "When discussing organizational change initiatives, there are two conversations taking place, and the second, nonverbal one, can reinforce or sabotage your verbal message," says Goman. People believe what they see more than what you say, which means you must totally believe in the change before you can convince others of its value.

Every organization must change to survive and thrive. A systematic approach to change that addresses these six suggestions and considers the way our brains are wired can help make change just another work habit.