

A Short Book Report on  
***LEADING CHANGE***  
By John Kotter

(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

The business climate has been changing. More and more organizations will be pushed to reduce costs, improve the quality of products and services, locate new opportunities for growth and increase productivity while still making a profit. Successful transformation is 70 to 90 percent leadership and only 10 to 30 percent management. Yet for historical reasons many organizations don't have much leadership. And most people think about transformations as one of *managing change*.

Managing change is important. Without competent management, the transformation process can get out of control. But for most organizations, the much bigger challenge is leading change. Only leadership can blast through the many sources of corporate inertia. Only leadership can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in any significant way. Only leadership can get change to stick by anchoring it in the very culture of an organization.

The change problem inside organizations would become less worrisome if the business environment would soon stabilize or at least slow down. But most credible evidence suggests the opposite. The only rational solution is to learn more about what creates successful change and to pass that knowledge on to increasingly larger groups of people.

As the rate of change increases, the willingness and ability to keep developing become central to career success for individuals and to economic success for organizations.

Listed below are the eight most common errors to avoid when transforming your organization:

**Error #1:** By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency in fellow managers and employees. Without a sense of urgency, people won't give that extra effort that is often essential. They won't make needed sacrifices. Instead they cling to the status quo and resist initiatives from above. Do not confuse urgency with anxiety.

**Error #2:** Failing to Create a Sufficiently Powerful Guiding Coalition. Major change is often said to be impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter. In successful transformations, the president, division general manager, or department head plus another five, fifteen, or fifty people with a commitment to improved performance pull together as a team. Individuals alone, no matter how competent or charismatic, never have all the assets needed to overcome tradition and inertia except in very small organizations.

**Error #3:** Underestimating the Power of Vision. Urgency and a strong guiding team are necessary but insufficient conditions for major change. Vision is a must for creating change. Vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people.

**Error #4:** Under-communicating the Vision. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, employees' hearts and minds are never captured. Communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form. Nothing undermined change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with the verbal communication.

**Error #5:** Permitting Obstacles to Block the New Vision. One well-placed blocker can stop an entire change effort.

**Error #6:** Failing to Create Short-Term Wins

**Error #7:** Declaring Victory Too Soon. Until changes sink down deeply into the culture, which for an entire company can take three to ten years, new approaches are fragile and subject to regression. The time frame in many corporations is too short to finish this kind of work and make it stick.

**Error #8:** Neglecting to Anchor Changes Firmly in the Corporate Culture. In final analysis, change sticks only when it becomes "the way we do things around here," when it seeps into the very bloodstream of the work unit or corporate body.

### Message from Gary Tomlinson:

I hope you enjoyed this book report. This book report should not take the place of you reading *Leading Change*. This is a must read for leaders, at every level, of an organization.

*You can engage Gary at [gary@garyetomlinson.com](mailto:gary@garyetomlinson.com). To read his other book reports or book reviews visit his website at [www.garyetomlinson.com](http://www.garyetomlinson.com).*

