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hierarchy—Boss A tells Worker B what to do and B does it—there's now a flat landscape where everyone is expected to take the reins as needed. That means if B has an idea—a way to make a process more efficient or a new way to get client feedback—he or she is allowed, even expected, to make it happen.

Sandra Wiley • Nov. 06, 2012

From the Boomer Bridging the Gap blog.

The new collaborative workforce has turned the rules of leadership upside down and shaken them vigorously for good measure. Where there was once a fairly defined hierarchy—Boss A tells Worker B what to do and B does it—there's now a flat landscape where everyone is expected to take the reins as needed. That means if B has an idea—a way to make a process more efficient or a new way to get client feedback—he or she is allowed, even expected, to make it happen.

In other words, everyone is now a leader. This is great news for entrepreneurially minded staff—but it does pose a challenge for an employee who wants to create change but doesn't "officially" run the show.

It can be more challenging for employee-led grassroots ideas to spark change, but it can be done. While you may not have the long term resource commitment your leaders do, you can still be proactive—and successful—if you have a clear vision and a firm commitment.

Being an advocate for change, regardless of where you fall in the organizational chart, can put you in the position of being a team leader—and someone who has great career potential. If you'd like to start sparking positive change within your organization read on for ten ways to be proactive:

1. **Align individual priorities with firm goals.** Chances are your firm has overarching change goals it is working to meet. Don't just wait to be told what to

do—look at those goals and figure out what you can do as an individual employee

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can begin to recommend better ways of doing what you already do.

2. **Learn to live with ambiguity.** There is usually uncertainty during change. For instance, perhaps leadership hasn't answered all your questions because not all of the details have been worked out yet. Partners may also have legal reasons for not releasing information. The point is, sometimes it's in your best interest to roll with the ambiguity. Of course you should raise your concerns and ideas, but then keep focused on the task at hand. However, if you feel that ambiguity is disturbing the workplace or if you see leaders ignoring real concerns, let your manager know the downstream impact in a polite yet firm manner.
3. **Understand your leadership style first.** Even if your business card doesn't have a powerful title, you are still a leader. And every leader has a particular style and specific strengths. It's well worth your time to figure out what your style is, how it is seen by others, and how you can apply it to maximize your strengths. Most leadership assessments come down to four types of leaders: loud and proud; cheerful and optimistic; the strong, silent type; and data driven. You may also be a combination of them. In any case, knowing your own leadership style can help you effectively manage up the organizational chain of command, coach employees and present, and lead future change projects. Your knowledge will also help you to recognize different leadership styles and thus frame your own communication to meet the needs of others.
4. **Change what you can change: yourself.** There is an old saying that too many cooks spoil the soup. Similarly, too many leaders during change can make everything confusing and fragmented. If you are not in a position to formally influence the change, instead of trying to create a leadership role, take the opportunity to change your own attitude, behaviors, and beliefs. You can do this by setting realistic goals for yourself and then eliciting feedback on them from peers, managers, and perhaps even clients. "Remember that firm change and

personal change have strong similarities: You must clearly identify what you want

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will help you influence change, because knowing others' motivations and interests will help you to explain how the change project will meet their needs. And don't forget, another great way to influence change is to model the behavior you want to see in others.

6. **Become an early adopter and ally for change.** Adapting early to change and being an ally for it is one simple and visible way of leading change when you are not running the show. This entails wanting change to happen and working toward that goal as soon as you have a logical explanation for a particular alteration or modification. The nice thing about being an ally and early adopter is that you aren't seen as someone who is just giving face time to the change; you are actually doing it and helping to spread enthusiasm among your team members.
7. **Create a community of peers.** Many change projects have task forces or committee's that serve as the eyes and ears of change. This group relays information, ideas, and concerns back to the leadership team so that the change plan can be adjusted as needed. If your firm has a change council, ask to be part of it. If it doesn't, offer to help organize one. For change leaders, there is no replacement for direct feedback as to how communications, plans, and new projects are being perceived in the field.
8. **Help other employees cope with change.** Even if you're excited about change, not everyone will be. Some team members might feel confused, angry, frustrated, or exploited. To make the transition easier for them, first, be on the lookout for signals that someone needs help coping: absenteeism, depressed or despondent behavior, or attacks on team members. You might intervene one-on-one, or help steer a bickering session into a change session. You can also help others cope through active listening. Try to act as a sounding board, and help the other person reduce emotionality and increase rational discussion.

9. Encourage communication among your peers. Remember, the sum of the parts is

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When change is not yet happening, take advantage of your accomplishments to capture the emotions, excitement, and energy your team needs to forge ahead. Whether you are a junior staff member or the Managing Partner, show your enthusiasm for the project. Change comes from the heart, not from corporate messaging. A sense of possibility for the future of the firm is contagious! If you see that a change is needed but you aren't the leader, don't just sit back and be told what to do—be proactive! When you show your commitment in creative ways, you'll be asked to run the show sooner than you think.

Human Resources

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