

## **“Leading Change”**

**By: John P. Kotter**

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**Reviewer: Michael L Schwartz**

### **General Opinion of the Book**

John Kotter discusses why change in businesses will continue, at an increasing pace, due to changing socio-economic conditions.

Kotter lays out eight errors that firms make in initiating change and why these errors doom change to failure. Kotter then spins these eight errors into an eight stage change process (p20, 21, 22, 23) for successful changes.

Kotter, on pages 18 through 20, defines his overriding premises in why changes fail and why his eight stage process is necessary. He talks of how globalization has changed markets. How companies that sell in small geographic areas can feel the impact of changes in the global economy, even indirectly, with the following scenario:

“Toyota beats GM, GM lays off employees, belt-tightening employees demand cheaper services from the corner dry cleaner.”

Further, he talks of rapid changes through, and because of, globalization.

The examples given are through Kotter’s personal recollections with minimal corporate identifying characteristics given. We must, therefore, take Kotter’s comment “on face value” as there cannot be any verification of the events recounted.

### **Valuable Concepts**

- Ways to Raise Urgency Level (p 44) was of great interest to me. Particularly the first way “Create a Crisis”. I’ve been on many programs where a problem was imminent, and yet, no one seemed to notice or to care. You have to get their attention. I observed a great example of getting this done, last week. One of my team, in attempting go get across to other team members the urgency imparted in a Chief Engineers meeting stated: “We either get this work done this week, or next week we’re all out of jobs.” Got everyone’s attention. Raised urgency. We got the job done (or, at least the tasks that needed to be completed by end of last week). I’ve been following up that statement with the comment that if we don’t successfully get the entire task completed, on time, the entire program in jeopardy. It appears to be working in getting people focused.

- Putting Together the Guiding Coalition (P 51) is a great concept. I don't think it will happen very often, though. I've observed too many times that higher level people issue an edict and walk away without dedicating adequate resources.
- Vision is the central component of great leadership. (p68). Or, as I've also heard it put: "First a dream." For what is a vision, if not a dream defined? The vision, properly communicated to those doing the work, is the driving force, the destination, the goal. Citing my example from above, this young engineer gave a small, but very definite vision, keeping your job. It got people motivated.

### **Application in Practice**

- Communicate the vision. This is something that needs to be done. Defining the work to be done by a Working Groups is often done, but defining a vision is something is rarely done.
- Short Term Wins. Need is to define more intermediate goals that will give the group(s) a feeling of accomplishment as they progress to final (?) completion of projects. Members of one of working groups have been on the same task for long time periods, sometimes for years, beginning to feel "burned out". The lead must define some intermediate goals to generate short term wins. The fact that this is endemic to the entire organizations does not absolve the team lead from responsibility their part of the program.
- "Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow." (P133) I've observed, and been subject to, resistors who undermine the hard work and small victories of people. Sometimes it's because they're afraid of change, sometimes it's a "my way or the highway" mentality. Whatever the reason, they always slow progress. It's up to the leader to keep nudging the group in the right direction to a final win.