

# Leading relationships through change

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## Abstract

The goal of many consulting veterinarians in dairy and beef practice is to work toward continual improvement of their clients' health, management and overall business success. Such improvements will require changes to current management practices and strategy to adapt to changing market demands, herd dynamics or other external factors. This may feel like a constant state of change. However, our farm has had success in managing and implementing change through being cognizant of the Kübler-Ross Change Curve. This is a process to consider when implementing a successful change, regardless of the magnitude of change. Additionally, there are common pitfalls to avoid when fully executing a change. Following a disciplined change process will often yield a faster cycle of change and more desirable results.

**Key words:** change, management, leadership

## Leading relationships through change

When a dairy or beef operation is working toward continual improvement, change is inevitable, and one might consider essential. This change is often derived from anticipating or responding to changes in market dynamics, herd production goals or management and other drivers of dairy and beef production decisions. It should be made clear that the author is not a trained psychologist or mental health professional. These recommendations are developed from personal experience and insights from his own process of self-improvement.

## Personal development

In order to lead effective change, one must know their individual strengths and weaknesses in order to effectively lead teams. This often requires intentional effort to understand their innate motivators and how these change under stress, while working as a team versus individually.

There are many developmental tools to consider for personal development. A short list of these would include DiSC personality profiles, Myers & Briggs assessments, strengths finder tests, or Enneagram assessments. These assessments draw on many of the foundational concepts that are related, but focus on different aspects of oneself. The author prefers the DiSC assessment for the simplicity and ease of understanding the concepts.

## Knowing your team

The foundation of success for any team is rooted in trust, as Patrick Lencioni discusses in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. With the absence of trust, there is no ability to work together to attain positive change or the desired results.

## The change process

Change has a logical and predictable process as described by the Kübler-Ross Change Curve. The initial phase is shock and denial, followed by frustration, then depression in the Valley of Despair. After this low point in the cycle, make a positive turn toward the new way with experiment, then acceptance and finally, integration. Furthermore, there is a tendency among consultants to be heavily involved in the process of change initially. Along the continuum of change, their presence fades and frustration develops among farm managers and staff tasked with implementing these changes. We call this the 90/10 principle. We desire change with a successful outcome, call this 100% completion. However, we're only involved in the initial 10% of the process and fail to engage in the tough, real work of the remaining 90%.

## Disciplined change

To combat this predictable cycle of change and tendency to be involved in the initial portion of change, the author recommends following a consistent change process guideline. Through developing a set of questions and process to prepare for changes, one is able to properly plan and more importantly, lead successful and desirable changes. When considering a change, first describe the change, know who this will affect and what is to be expected during this change. Consider current routines, common practices, time constraints and other potential system changes. Develop a list of expected results and a relevant timeline for completion and checkpoints for monitoring success or failure of the impending change. Describe the opportunity for change and why this is the right time to implement this change. Lastly, be sure to have one key individual fully responsible for implementing these changes and analyzing all relevant outcomes of the change.

## Conclusion

Knowing one's personal motivators and knowing how to adapt and complement a team while following a consistent process of change will lead to successful changes. Through this process, consulting veterinarians and farm owners, managers and staff can remain nimble in the constantly changing markets we operate within.

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