

"the heart of change" by john kotter and dan cohen

Literature



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John Kotter and Dan Cohen's *The Heart of Change* outlines eight steps a leader can take to influence and empower members of an organization to create change. Using anecdotes from the business world, Kotter and Cohen discuss how concepts like instilling a sense of urgency, visualizing success, and developing goals can inspire workers to enact change at every level. This text describes some excellent ideas for how to lead successfully, but where it is most effective is the direction to appeal to individuals' emotional sides to expel complacency and instill drive through frustration. This emotionally-based model makes this text strong because it creates a shared understanding between a leader and subordinates, it enables leaders to target complacency, and sets the stage for both long term and short-term victory.

There are many self-help books out there designed to turn a reader into the best of leaders with a few simple tactics, but what makes *The Heart of Change* stand out is the willingness and encouragement from the authors to allow emotions to play a key role in the workplace. In Step One "Increase Urgency" of their eight-step plan, Kotter and Cohen use an example of employees at a manufacturing firm being shown a video of a frustrated customer explaining the problems he was encountering at the consumer-level of their business. Being shown the actual image and words of the annoyed customer instead of seeing numbers of dissatisfaction in a report enabled the workers to create an emotional connection with the customer's frustration.

This frustration instilled a sense of urgency within the employees to create changes to the manufacturing system to better serve the customer needs

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and created a shared understanding between leadership and subordinates. One sees the success of this shared understanding in all kinds of businesses, the Army included. Having workers understand the frustrations of both the user of the product and the leadership helps the workers have an emotional connection to their work. This connection can instill a desire for change if this emotion is negative. Utilizing the emotional mindset is also a sound way to use a different standard for viewing success. Now instead of measuring success solely on numbers, leaders and subordinates can measure their victories through their own and customer satisfaction. Leaders and subordinates feel more invested in their work, and since all are experiencing this emotional tie to their work, all feel the need to innovate when needed. This first step of Cohen and Kotter's plan can really empower leaders to take all aspects of the outputs of their work into consideration, and it makes this eight-step plan have validity right from the start.

This concept is a great way to combat complacency, which can be rampant in any organization. The idea of appealing to emotions rather than logical thought is not necessarily something a leader will think to do first, but that is why Heart of Change is so unique. Complacency can be associated with a general apathy in terms of the outcome of one's work. Recreating a connection between the final product of one's efforts and one's emotions combats complacency, even if that emotion initially is negative. Kotter and Cohen delve into a side of leadership with which others struggle; appealing to subordinates on a human level. Expressing frustration with the current state and encouraging others to do the same has the potential to drive innovative behaviors.

Complacency is often an issue within organizations but can be difficult to recognize. This is another point where the ideals illustrated in Heart of Change can be helpful. In each of the anecdotes told in each chapter, it is evident that workers were complacent and apathetic about the quality of their work before the leaders created emotional relationships between workers and work. In one such anecdote, factory workers were filmed manufacturing a product. Upon seeing themselves working on film, employees started to identify inefficiencies within their workstations, and they saw the extra effort that they had been expending when working with those inefficiencies. That knowledge empowered the workers to innovate their processes, making their own lives easier and the final product better. Before seeing their own work, these employees assumed what they were doing was good enough, but after seeing how inefficient it was their emotions changed, and they worked to improve their own experience. Using this technique, a leader can replace complacency with empowerment. This understanding of the relationship between emotions and empowerment is another way this text shines a new light on leadership and proves the effectiveness of understanding workers on a human level.

The last element of this text that adds to its value as a leadership aid is the idea of the emotional aspect associated with both short and long-term success. Step Six discusses the importance of creating short-term wins because they give feelings of accomplishment and optimism which maintain the drive for the long-term goal. Here one can see again the positive relationship between emotional leadership and workplace success. This may not be one of the areas in which The Heart of Change is unique, but it is one

of the most applicable ideas. Using smaller goals to build positivity helps a leader influence emotion in a positive way and continue progressing changes that have already begun. This mindset makes Kotter and Cohen's argument especially effective because now this overarching plan encompasses not only initiating change, but ensuring it continues too. The longevity of the eight-step plan adds to the validity of this text as a strong piece.

The Heart of Change is a helpful aid designed to inform leaders of the merits of inspiring subordinates to create change based on their feelings. The text is successful in this respect as it discusses the importance of using emotionally based reasoning to create feelings of urgency, dispel apathy within a workforce, and maintain a positive attitude towards changes that have already begun. The strength of Kotter and Cohen's arguments within these areas make this book a must-read for any leader looking to get some serious work done.