

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 58

When you communicate an important change message you must repeat it often to make it stick...

Communicate for a change ...

"I expected...more." Durza, character in Eragon



"Resistance can take strange forms"

Do you blame those who resist change? Do they resist deliberately or do they miss your message?

Today I took the children to see the film Eragon, a tale of a young "dragon flyer". I went with some trepidation, imagining it would be similar to the Lord of the Rings trilogy. These were films I watched without comprehending the plot (ok, I figured the ring had something to do with it), baffled by the characters (so whose army is this then?) and lip reading as I strained to hear their mumbled lines.

With that in mind, Eragon was a pleasant surprise. The words were clear, they kept the plot simple and repeated the character names often enough so that even the older generation (i.e. me) could understand who was who. True, there was some dialogue to make you cringe towards the end (courtesy of the Dictionary of Clichéd Clichés) but it is a film aimed at children.

Before Christmas I co-facilitated a workshop. The participants were a group of change managers involved in a serious piece of change

management. They are experiencing strong resistance to their change efforts and so my colleague and I were asked to help them reflect on their efforts and provide guidance on good change management practice.

We had them elicit their issues and it was no surprise that communication came up as one of them. Specifically there was a lack of a clear vision from senior management (in fact a changing vision), insufficient repetition of the message and a habit of sharing bad news but not good news. No wonder they are meeting resistance. I'd like to compare the situation with Lord of the Rings but that won 11 Oscars in 2004, so it obviously communicated well with somebody.

SO

As one section in the day we took them through Kotter's principles for Leading Change effectively (to see all the principles, read the book: Leading Change ~ John P Kotter, or take a look [here](#)).

One of these principles is "communicate the change vision effectively", the principles of which are (in my words):

- Keep the message simple, eradicate jargon
- Use metaphor, analogy and example to enrich the message
- Use many different methods to communicate the message
- Use two way communication wherever possible
- Keep repeating the message

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- Lead by example, model the change
- Explain inconsistencies in the message

In other words, it is not enough to communicate once and in only one way; it is a continuous effort. This group had not done enough, had focussed too much on the negatives and one suspects when they met resistance, shouted louder rather than seeking ways to communicate differently.

One of the strengths of a group of change leaders is that they understand completely the details of a change initiative because they have lived and breathed it. Unfortunately, it can also be a weakness because they assume, due to the change announcement and the briefing workshops, that everyone else has achieved the same level of understanding. Not so, as Kotter's research shows.

ACTION

If you are meeting resistance in a change programme, consider how well you are communicating. If you have a change to communicate now, take a look at Kotter's principles and seek to emulate them.

TO CLOSE

For my daughter's birthday party, we took her and nine friends ice skating at the Tower of London. Having ice skated only once since childhood I had a bit of trepidation about that too. I was delighted that I was able to skate reasonably well and as I glided round, snatches of "School's Out" by Alice Cooper slipped in to my memory and took me back to my youth, roller skating on the rink at RAF Cosford.

The ice rink was very crowded, with many beginners. What surprised me was the almost telepathic communication of the skaters and how they so often managed to avoid each other. Just a few simple rules (skate in the same

direction, don't link hands with more than one person, no mobile phones) and the skaters flowed. True, some flowed slowly, some clung to the sides, but with encouragement from friends and ice marshals they were able to get out there and skate.

I wonder if we might repeat this with change programmes; set some simple rules, communicate them well, give lots of encouragement and move everyone in the same direction. Have we made it all too complex? I'll let you decide.

May your week be smooth skating .

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