

How to create meaningful and lasting change in your team



I once saw a cartoon of a leader standing at the front of a large auditorium addressing his staff. He posed one question: Who here wants change? All hands in the packed audience shot up. He then posed a second question: Who here wants to change? Not one hand was raised. This anecdote speaks to the fact that we all want change to take place without us having to be impacted at all. We want change to happen in others, in the structures, systems and processes out there. And yet, if nothing changes, nothing is going to change.

Behaviour change can take place at three levels. These can be visualised as three concentric circles. The most obvious level is the outer layer which is concerned with the 'what' needs to change - the outcomes, results, and goals you wish to achieve and the problematic or opportunistic situations which require improvement or leverage. Outcomes are about what you're aiming for and hope to get.

The second level of change is concerned with the 'how', in other words the processes, habits, rituals, routines and systems required to support any change. That is, process changes are about what you do.

The third and deepest level focuses on changing identity. This layer is concerned with the 'who' needs to change and involves deliberate reflection and action around changing your beliefs, assumptions, biases, worldviews, self-image and even judgements about yourself and others. Identity change is about what you believe.

All three levels of change are useful and can support a leader's strategic intentions. However, research conducted by James Clear, bestselling author of 'Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results', shows that what is key is the direction of change. Rather than starting from the outer levels and working your way in, begin at the core of identity and expand outwards towards outcomes.

True behaviour change is identity change. Crucial to self-motivation is when a habit becomes part of your identity. It's one thing to say I'm the type of manager who wants to be more intentional, for example, and

something quite different to say I'm the type of person who is intentional. The more pride you have in a particular aspect of your identity, the more likely you are to be motivated to maintain behaviours and habits associated with this, and the less likely you have to convince yourself to maintain these. Doing the right and necessary thing is easy because your identity and your behaviour are fully aligned.

What is meant by 'intentional leader'?

An intentional leader is someone who invests the time to get clarity upfront and decides the kind of person they want to be. This approach is applicable at multiple levels - as an individual, as a team, as a company, or even as a community.

Key questions to raise your intentionality and chances of success:

Who is the type of person/s that could get the successful outcome I/we want?

What are the beliefs this person would have? What do they stand for? What are their principles and values?

What are the habits and choices they practice daily? Weekly? Monthly? What are they not doing?

What resources, processes and systems would they have in place to be successful?

What beliefs, habits and choices of mine would need to be edited and upgraded to fully live into this identity of who I wish to become?

What is a fundamental habit I want to put in place as a building block starting from today? How does this behaviour/action help me become the person I wish and hope to be?

How can I make this habit obvious?

How can I make this habit attractive?

How can I make this habit easy?

How can I make this habit satisfying?

Your identity emerges out of your habits - scrutinise your habits to determine how effective you will be. Once you have clarity on the type of person or team you want to be, you can begin taking small steps and implementing processes to reinforce your desired identity. James Clear notes that our habits shape our identity, and our identity shapes our habits. He is well quoted for saying that "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems".

While goals are useful for setting a direction, systems are best for making progress. If you want better results, focus less on setting goals and rather be intentional about putting in place repeatable effective behaviours, systems and processes which will support not only the identity you are forging but also the outcomes you're aiming for.

The most practical way to change who you are is to change what you do and how. This way, every action you take is a vote for the type of person or team you wish to become. For example, each time you encourage your employees, make clear unambiguous requests and give them constructive feedback in the moment, you are an engaging leader. Each time you advocate for and stand by an ethical decision in a

heated debate, you are a person with integrity. Each time you do what you say you're going to do, you are a trustworthy person.

Four ways to be more intentional every day:

Make a decision to become an intentional person

While this might seem self-evident, it may not be. By deliberately choosing to embody the identity, habits and beliefs of someone who is intentional you are one step closer to becoming so. You might want to identify an intentional role model who embodies these qualities and observe their daily practices.

Be deliberate with your daily top three

To be more deliberate with your day, identify the three important activities that will help you achieve the outcome you want in line with the kind of identity you are wanting to foster. If you are wanting to increase your sales numbers and contact calls with your customers this month, ask yourself what would a top salesman or woman do today and every day? When you are intentional with your time, energy, and focus each day, you are far more likely to achieve the result you want. Being intentional with your time ensures you have direction for your day and allows you to establish daily routines. Without an intentional focus for your day, you can feel stuck and waste time on non-important activities. Without intention, you can take on too much and get easily distracted.

Clean up your communications

Being an intentional leader requires being deeply present to other people as a sign of how much you value and respect them and for this you will need to hone your ability to listen and be physically present and still in discussions. For example, by setting an intention when going into a difficult conversation of being the kind of person who is deeply attentive, calm, centred and a great listener, you're priming yourself and setting the tone for the conversation to follow.

Make clear requests of others

Learning to be intentional also requires learning to be a better communicator. A crucial communication skill is developing your ability to make clear requests. For any request to be effective, in other words, fully understood by another person so they may implement it to the standards and levels you require, four things are necessary:

Clarity on who is making the request and who is receiving the request (check they have the context, competence, confidence and means to carry out the request).

The timing of when the final output of the task is required including specific format you require and any interim check point expectations.

Shared understanding of the actions to be taken and the conditions to be fulfilled. This might take a few rounds of clarifying questions to make sure your intentions and the other person's interpretations are aligned.

Avoid assumption-based thinking. A helpful question to ask someone is: Please play back to me your

understanding of what I'm asking for.

The so what of intentionality

In summary, to be intentional means you have a clear purpose and are deliberate about taking repeated action, no matter how small, on a regular and consistent basis in line with the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings that are most important to your identity and purpose, either individually or collectively. When you have an intentional focus, you choose to lead with a clear purpose that is meaningful to you and both evident and inspiring to others. When you become intentional, you focus your time and energy on the daily habits, rituals, systems and processes which reinforce the primary outputs you seek.