7 ways to motivate your team during times of change

When your team is trying to use new tools, systems, or processes, there may be days when things feel like they're getting harder instead of easier. Your team may wonder if this new way is worth it. Your leadership can not only keep your direct reports from giving in to frustration but also engage them in making things better. Here are some proven tactics to try.

1. Track and recognize progress.

Figuring out the new way requires trial and error. Often, those errors outnumber the successes. That's why tracking and acknowledging your team's progress is crucial.

To keep progress top of mind:

- **Add a change-related progress update to your team meeting agenda.** Dedicate a few minutes each week to accomplishments, no matter how small (e.g., *"We presented the new product to six clients last week"*). Discuss lessons the team has learned and what comes next as a result (e.g., *"We learned from our client meetings that one of the new features is confusing, so Romy is working on streamlining it"*).
- **Create a physical or virtual progress dashboard.** Especially if your goals are easy to measure, a dashboard can be a quick visual way for the team to see that they're already a quarter of the way there or have just 20 percent to go.
- **In your 1-on-1s, remind each direct report of their progress.** If things are going well, this is easy. If someone is struggling, consider how to frame what they're learning as progress (see No. 4).

2. Involve your team in change-related planning and problem-solving.

> **FranklinCovey change expert Curt Garbett on celebrating progress:** "We need to pause and talk about, 'Look at how much we've learned …'" ([transcript](#))
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Leaders should provide clarity and be a source of stability in uncertain times, right? Yes! But that doesn't mean that you need to single-handedly plan for or answer every problem and then tell your team, "Here's exactly how to do it now!"

For people to feel invested in making a change work, they need to feel that it isn't happening *to* them, but that they're making it happen — and shaping the path forward.

Invite their participation at the outset of the change. For example:

> *"The company is moving to a new software system. Let's figure out a rollout plan. I have some ideas, but I want to hear yours: What kind of training do we need? What risks do we need to watch out for during the transition?"*

Then, as the change progresses and they identify obstacles, you might share advice — but resist providing all the answers. Instead, encourage them to seek help from one another and keep them engaged in imagining solutions by asking questions like:

- *"What ideas have you tried so far?"*
- *"What's not working? What have you learned that you can apply going forward?"*
- *"What ideas do you have for what to try next? How could you test those ideas?"*

3. Help clear obstacles that they can't clear themselves.

As a leader with more context about the change and connections to get things done, you're uniquely positioned to sustain your team's momentum and motivation when they run into challenges they can't overcome on their own.

To help solve your team's issues, you need to know what the problems are. To do that, make a habit of inviting them to share their challenges in 1-on-1s and team meetings by asking questions like *"What's hard about the change right now?"* or *"What do you wish was working better?"*

Managers can often help by:

- **Getting or allocating resources**. If additional training would help your team get up to speed on the new software, can you find money in your budget to pay for it? Or if they're falling behind on their day-to-day work because they're engaged in a longer-term project related to the change, can you hire or get approval to hire temporary help?
- **Tapping into relationships**. If your team can't move forward with a change because another team has fallen behind, can you discuss possible solutions with the other team's manager?
- **Identifying patterns.** Maybe your team has run into the same problem that another manager talked about at your weekly managers' meeting, so you could ask your direct reports to check with the other team for possible solutions or work with the other team to identify an underlying problem.
- **Escalating major issues.** As they implement the change, your team might run into a problem that you can't solve on your own. Maybe they learn that a competitor is rolling out a new subscription product that undercuts the one you're launching. Or they discover that the new software is not compatible with other important company systems. It's your job to alert higher-ups when your team runs into big and important obstacles.

Your team might not be able to articulate the kind of support they need as they work through a change. FranklinCovey consultant Marché Barney translates some common complaints and offers advice on what you can do to help.

4. Give them the freedom to experiment — and fail.

Change tends to make people uncomfortable. A direct report who has carefully honed their sales presentation for years now has to take a different approach based on new company strategy — is it any wonder they're anxious about it?

Your own attitude and expectations can go a long way to helping them feel safe — even excited — to embrace the new way.

Here are some things you might say:

- **In response to an idea:** *"That's an interesting approach. I honestly don't know whether it will work. What are some ways we could test out your idea?"*
- **Before an attempt:** *"I know this will be your first time doing it this way. Think of it as a test for the new approach. Things won't go perfectly, but give it your best shot. Let's see what works and what we can learn for next time."*

- **After a failure:** *"You've learned what doesn't work — that's valuable! Based on what you've learned, what do you think could work better?"*
- **After an attempt with so-so results:** *"Interesting results. What steps could you take to build on this for next time?"*

Also, look for opportunities to share stories of your own failures and mistakes. You'll model for your team that nobody's perfect and that the important thing is to learn and try to improve. For more, see [This week, share with your team a relevant failure of yours and what you learned from it](#).

5. Reinforce behaviors that support the change.

"The old way" can have a massive mental pull for your direct reports — almost like gravity. They may fall back on what they're used to because it's easier and they're good at it or because they don't know what to do instead.

Your encouragement can be a powerful force to propel them in the right direction.

To help them embrace the change:

- **Be a role model.** Show that you believe in the change and are prioritizing it in your actions. For example, if your company rolls out new branding, start using it in your communications right away. Or if your group adopts new software, don't schedule meetings that conflict with training sessions, and attend the trainings yourself, if appropriate.
- **Recognize team members who embrace the change — no matter what the outcome.** Your direct reports can also be role models for their teammates (just check ahead to make sure they are comfortable being called out publicly). For example, you might say in a team meeting, *"Thank you, Janelle, for being the first person to use the new sales presentation. She presented the updated materials clearly, and whether or not we close the sale, the feedback that she got is going to help us make some useful tweaks."*
- **Give private redirecting feedback when someone reverts to the old way.** For example, *"I noticed that you're using our old pitch. I know it can feel awkward to change messaging, but it's important to help our clients see the value in our new subscription model. I'm curious what you're thinking about the new messaging — could we talk through some ideas to help you get more comfortable with it before your next call?"*

6. Consistently remind them of the vision for the change.

When you introduced the change to your team, you probably made a case for how it could make their lives better. That was enough to start them down the path of change. But when they're in the midst of trying new things and getting frustrated, it's easy for them to lose sight of what they're working toward. "Managers tend to talk about the nuts-and-bolts of change," says FranklinCovey change expert Curt Garbett. "They forget to highlight the results the change can bring. That's the compelling part that gets people excited." (You may want to revisit the [Case for Change](#) tool.)

For example, if your vision is to improve your store's shopping experience via a redesigned layout and a new inventory tracking system that frees associates to spend more time with customers, you might mention it:

- **In a team meeting:** *"Thank you to everyone for sharing how the new tracking system is working for you. I know it's not perfect, but one of the goals of this project is to free up our time to spend with customers. What adjustments could we make so we spend less time organizing stock?"*
- **In a feedback conversation:** *"This initiative is about improving our customers' experience, so I like that your idea will shorten wait times for them."*
- **After a direct report encounters a setback:** *"I know customers had trouble finding what they were looking for in your department. It's understandable that not everything we try is going to work. The good news is that our surveys show that our customers feel positive overall about the layout changes. Any ideas about how we might make your department setup easier to navigate?"*

Pick the right circumstances to talk about the vision. When a customer service representative is struggling to figure out which button to press on the new phone system, reminding them of the CEO's grand corporate efficiency strategy will only make you seem out of touch.

7. Look for ways to ease the burden of the change if your team is demoralized.

Big, hard changes can grind you down. If your team is spending all day, every day trying new things, failing often, and struggling to make progress, it can shake their confidence in the change and in themselves. If you hear a direct report say something like, "I used to think I was good at my job, but now I'm not so sure," it might be time to look at their workload.

Could you break down a big project into smaller, doable tasks to let them see they're making progress? Or, if they're spending 100 percent of their time on the hard work of change, could you shift 15 percent of their time to less taxing work? Working on something they're comfortable with and good at could boost their confidence and give them more energy to tackle the harder stuff.