

# Communicating Change

## Month 6 Leadership Challenge

### Purpose

This challenge tests your ability to communicate change in a way that builds understanding and commitment. The goal is not just to announce what's changing, but to explain why—and to do it in a way that inspires, informs, empowers, and engages.

### Why This Matters

Research shows that almost one-third of employees don't understand why organizational changes are happening. When people don't understand the reasoning behind change, it creates resistance—and employee resistance is a leading factor in why change initiatives fail. Companies highly effective at change management are 3.5 times more likely to outperform their peers.

Galbraith, M. (2018). Don't just tell employees organizational changes are coming-Explain why. *Harvard Business Review*, 5, 6-11.

### Your Challenge

Within the next 7 days, communicate an upcoming or ongoing change using all four elements:

1. **Inspire with a compelling vision.** Start with the big picture—why is this change important and how will it positively affect the organization long-term? Connect the change to your core mission. Answer: How are the changes we're making today helping us achieve our vision for tomorrow?
2. **Inform with regular, honest communication.** Share what you know—what's changing, when, and how. Be candid about what you don't know. And don't forget to answer "What's in it for me?"—if people understand what's in it for them personally, they're more likely to commit.
3. **Empower leaders and managers.** Equip the people who will be leading through this change. When senior leaders model the behavior changes, transformations are five times more likely to succeed. How your leadership reacts will trickle down to managers and then to employees.
4. **Engage employees in the process.** Find ways to solicit feedback and involve people. This builds ownership and makes employees more likely to support—and even champion—the change.

### Guidelines

- Choose a real change—current or upcoming—that affects your team.
- Prepare a brief narrative that covers the "why" before the "what."
- Communicate it in a team meeting, one-on-one, or written format—then observe the response.

## CU Thrive Leadership Circles

### Key Concepts from the Research

**Start with Story:** For most change initiatives, start with a narrative that articulates the big picture—why change is important and how it will positively affect the organization. This becomes the foundation for all communication going forward.

**Be Candid About Uncertainty:** You won't have all the answers. That breeds anxiety—but pretending you know when you don't is worse. Focus on what you know, be honest about what you don't, and commit to following up.

**“What's In It For Me?”:** One of the most important questions in change communication. If employees understand what's in it for them personally, they're more likely to commit. Failing to answer this question will hinder your efforts.

**Communication Is Never One-and-Done:** Keeping employees informed is something you have to do throughout every step of the change process. Continual communication is a leading factor in a transformation's success.

### Reflection Questions

After completing the challenge, reflect on the following:

1. Did you lead with the “why” or the “what”? How did that affect the response?
2. How clearly could you articulate “what's in it for them”? Was that harder than expected?
3. What questions did people ask? What does that tell you about what they need to understand?
4. Where were you candid about uncertainty? How did people respond to that honesty?
5. How did you involve people in the change? Did that build ownership?
6. What would you do differently next time you communicate a change?