



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

From the Golden Zone

If you're introducing new initiatives in your DC, beware the change monster

By Susan Rider

Whether you're installing a new WMS, initiating a stricter safety program, or otherwise shaking up your DC, beware the change monster — it lives in every company.

In many organizations, people are resistant and reluctant to change processes because what they do today feels comfortable and the fear of change is prevalent. Change resistance is an issue on projects, new implementations of material handling equipment, and the installation of new software systems.

Unfortunately most managers ignore the need for change management and later wonder why the project was not an overwhelming success. Change management should be included in every project because "Change" is a word that generates fear for most in your distribution center.

More commonly you'll hear people say when asked, "Why do you do this that way?" "Well, we just have always done it that way and no one seems to question the why of it!"

How do you begin? Select a change team, champions who enjoy change. These individuals are rare but easily recognized: They're the ones going up to their supervisors or managers with ideas for better processes and procedures.

They thrive on change and mediocrity is something that totally upsets them. The change agents will assist in bringing the other associates along.

Some other ideas for change management include:

- **Celebrate the change.** Start with a party, a special time to have refreshments and talk about the exciting events coming up and why the company is undertaking such a change. This will help to immediately eliminate fear and will help associates feel more comfortable. A good example of this was a company in North Carolina. The DC had an aging workforce and the tenure at the company was long.

The organization wanted to install a new computer system and move away from paper processes. The company had two choices: change the workforce or help them embrace the change. It partnered with a local community college and had the school offer a night class at the company's facility to teach computers 101.

The company also offered a program to help employees buy laptops. The company chipped in \$100 and offered free training.

The employees were so excited because they wanted to learn to use computers, but the fear of learning something so new and different had been

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preventing them from doing so. But there was strength in numbers, and most employees took the class on their own time and bought new computers for their homes. The vice president of this company just smiled when at break time he heard them all discussing what they learned the night before.

- **Communicate.** Explain why you are doing something, what the steps are, and how it will affect associates. Post this communication in your normal employee newsletter, on bulletin boards, and in work areas.

If the change requires bringing in outsiders, put up posters that show the company logos and photos of the interlopers. This can squelch rumors. Outsiders coming into your facility always start talk from workers who wonder what they're there for, what they are doing, and if they are eliminating jobs.

- **Keep it simple.** Don't over complicate instructions or messages. The change management program is all about taking out the fear. But if your communications or messages are complicated and hard to understand, it will just reinforce the fear.

- **Reinforce the change with affirmation.**

Ask employees how they like the new process, equipment, or software. Truly listen and take their ideas to heart. Some gripes may seem very trivial, but to the associates they mean a lot.

- **Remember, change is tough for some, so post cheat sheets around the area.** Cheat sheets should be clear and simple messages on how to do the task at hand. Don't forget to do this in multiple languages if you need to. This little crutch will also help alleviate the fear and assist with future training of new associates.

- **Train, train, and train some more.** This is so very important because with redundancy the "change" will become the new "we've always done it that way!"

Human beings are creatures of habit, so if you don't manage change you will notice after a few weeks that associates will go back to the way they "always did it."

Susan Rider is president of Rider & Associates. A veteran of the logistics industry, she is a past president of the Warehousing Education and Research Council. She can be reached at 270-324-4762. **DCM**

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712 Main Street — Suite 187B, Boonton, NJ 07005-1450

Telephone: (973) 265-2300 • Fax: (973) 402-6056 • Email: info@DistributionGroup.com • Website: www.DistributionGroup.com

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