

Game Changers: What Makes the Difference?

Learning from the Outliers



There is something inherently motivating as the clock strikes 12 on 01/01: a fresh start; a blank slate; a chance or opportunity for change; a revolution; a minor adjustment; or a new approach all seem a bit more within reach. The start of a new calendar year provides an obvious opportunity to reflect, learn, and do things differently. There is a misperception that change ought to be revolutionary. It can be, but need not be, as slow progress is still progress. What matters most is that each move, period of growth, or decision you make as a leader is moving in the direction to which your goals and targets lay. How do you play the game in business and are you making the right moves to win?

In our work we've come across a few Game Changers. Game Changers, as we like to call them, are people who will not accept a mediocre way of doing business. They don't fear change; rather, they see it as a necessity for growth. Game Changers are aware of their impact on their people and leverage this to implement new, sometimes subtle, ways of doing things. They lead through example and their desire for more outweighs their fear of failure.

In performance psychology, it is the norm to study and learn from outliers and exceptional cases; to understand their best practice and what can be done to replicate them to elicit similar performance results. The good news is that expertise and skill can be learned. So while personality traits, the environment, and a person's innate character all influence a person's behaviours and actions, it is not to say that new behaviours that are more aligned with your business goals, cannot be learned.

Over the past couple months, we have come across a couple exceptional cases of our own.

At a recent HR conference with one of our client organisations, a senior leader was giving a talk about her professional

journey, sharing pieces of her struggles that influence where she finds herself now. When asked what it was that helps her push through those tough places- she replied, 'I'm not sure... I don't really think about it too much because I am usually not there for very long'. She doesn't accept; she wiggles herself out from being pinned against a wall and finds a way to shift, no matter how small or subtle.

Another Game Changer, Fred, is a senior leader with 30+ years of experience in a public sector organisation, recently transitioned into a new senior directorate role within a new company. Fred has spent the last 6 months reflecting on the organisation's internal and external processes, and its people. Fred humbly leads through example, works with integrity to his word and respect for his colleagues to bring about organisational change and real impact. He recognises the company's strengths and pitfalls and develops ways to bring about change that sometimes, and often, goes against the status quo. And most of all, his desire to do business better overthrows his fear of failure.



Game Changers are bold enough to shake things up and play differently, to win. They also recognise that to win, you need people on your side. Resistance to change is prevalent in all organisations and inherently within people. We are creatures of habit. When something threatens our safety and stability, we feel vulnerable. Our minds and bodies tell us that something in the environment is jeopardizing our safety, so we freeze and ward off any attack. We resist change! Only when we begin to understand and rationalize change and to recognise that it is good for us along with our teams and organisations- do we buy into it and commit to what needs to be done to change. As leaders, it is our job to be effective Change Makers by being successful Game Changers.

How to be a successful Game Changer:

1. Know your Impact. To change the rules of the game, Game Changers are clear about the reason for and impact of the change and communicate this with their people. They are clear about how the benefits outweigh the effort; and that there is a real need for change. Without this, resistance persists, and buy-in and commitment is less likely. Game Changers are clear about what footprints they will be leaving behind.

2. Address your Capability Gap. The truth is that we are not superheroes. We don't know it all, nor are we highly skilled at everything. In the same way that authentic leaders show vulnerability while still saving face, Game Changers address any capability gaps related to the change to be

successful. When we are clear about our shortcomings, we are better able to predict and foresee future outcomes, and the fear of the unknown tends to diminish. Resistance is less likely to occur when employees feel that their leaders can competently and confidently manage the change- ironically, competence and confidence breeds when we have a keen awareness of our capability gaps.

3. Don't be a Hoarder. Out with the old, in with the new. If the old isn't working for you anymore, why are you still hanging onto it? Game Changers recognise when it's time to let go of a system or procedure and do so without regret. If it's the wrong fit for who you are and what you do now, cut the strings and innovate. Game Changers challenge people out of comfort zones and are brave enough to disrupt those hardwired connections to the old ways.

4. Abide by The Golden Rule. Game Changers do not lead exclusively- they lead amongst the pack. For this reason, Game Changers treat others in the same way they wish to be treated. In dealing with change, Game Changers communicate clearly and continuously. They make efforts to inform employees and to keep them in the know, in order to have them in both body and heart through the transition.

What is it that you want to do differently this year?

What will you keep, change, or throw out the window? What do you need to

accept in order to let go of? While change doesn't happen overnight, or need to be revolutionary, change comes about by making small steps on new pathways that lead to a new or existing goal. Are you courageous enough to be a Game Changer this year, and if so, how?

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