PROBABLY EVERY VALUE ENGINEER WHO HAS COME UP WITH ONE GOOD VE recommendation has also faced "Resistance To Change."

One of the best articles we have seen to deal with this problem was printed in Landmark, the official publication of the Indo-American Society, headquartered in Bombay. It was written by Dr. Richard D. Miller, President, R. D. Management Associates, of Virginia, and is entitled "Coping With Change."

We reproduce it practically in its entirety and encourage our readers to re-produce it, as desired, without regard to our copyright restrictions on the masthead of the Value Digest. Dr. Miller begins:

One of the most difficult but important tasks managers face is getting people to accept change. Workers often resist new production quotas, new work processes, new regulations, new safety procedures, new bosses, or other changes. What can managers do to help bring about such changes more easily?

First, managers need to examine what is known about change. Change is taking place at the fastest rate in the history of the world. Change is happening all of the time. It may be either constructive or destructive change. It may also be either welcomed or unwelcomed. While even welcomed change may cause stress in those affected, this article will be primarily concerned with change perceived as unwelcomed.

Change affects our personal lives, our work lives, and our social lives. Perhaps our work lives are affected the most as our jobs change or disappear with rapidly changing technology. Still, people do not resist technical changes as much as they resist social change. Workers do not mind procedures being changed for a new piece of equipment nearly as much as they mind the changing relationships with other workers that might result. In many cases, workers resist changes to personal schedules, do not like new team members, or resent what they fear may be a loss of status.

From this, we know that managers must accomplish technical change without causing great disruption to the relationships existing in the unit. What actually happens is that managers are often so concerned with the technical details of making changes that they forget to look at the effects of the change. They fail to look at the ways the change rearranges team or unit relationships or disrupts individual procedures for doing things.

Managers can make the accomplishment of changes easier for everybody when they understand:

> How people react to change.
> Why people resist change.
> How people resist change.
> What they can do to reduce the resistance to change.
> How changes can be made even when there is resistance.

Let us briefly look at each of these issues.

How do people react to change? Individuals may react differently, depending on the nature of a change. But as a group, people react predictably. The initial reaction to an unwelcome change will be shock. People may actually hate the change. They will then look for reasons why the change won't work or for someone to blame for the change. This is called scapegoating.

After this initial period of resistance, people begin to tolerate the change. They even begin to look for reasons why the change might work.

Finally, people begin to accept the change and make it part of their work patterns. They may even make the change such a normal pattern that it is then used to resist other changes. The effective manager is able to reduce the time spent on the early phases and quickly get employees into the toleration phase.

The point should be emphasized that these are not theoretical phases. They are real. During the shock period, people may actually get sick. Absenteeism and the use of sick leave will increase. During the scapegoating period, morale may get very low as workers look for someone to blame for the change. Fights may even occur between workers. Only when they begin to believe that the change will not be detrimental to them will they begin to accept it.

Change may take place in many ways. It may be a natural or evolutionary development such as approaching old age. It may be a revolutionary occurrence such as the death of a company owner or a technological breakthrough in equipment or procedures. It may be planned change such as a calculated attempt to change some attitude or behaviour of employees or to introduce a new work procedure into the organization.

Why do people resist change? The following are some of the reasons:

Fear of failure.
Fear that workload will be increased.
Familiar work habits are interrupted.
Change does not seem practical or workable.
The cost of the change seems too high.
Work group was not asked about the change.
Change rearranges long-time relationships with members of the work group; splits up long-time working groups.
The nature of change may result in loss of job satisfaction.

If these are reasons why people resist change . . . how do they resist it? Resistance to change may range from individual slowdowns to violent resistance supported by sabotage and strikes. In between are all kinds of resistance techniques, such as:

Increases grumbling.
Continuous procedural questions.
Increased absenteeism or tardiness.
Increased accidents.
More grievances.

Work slowdown.
Increased equipment breakdowns.
Strike action.

Having identified the reasons why change is resisted and the ways in which change is resisted, what can managers do about these reasons?

Sometimes resistance is so strong, it appears a change will never be made. But changes will occur when the incentives are strong enough. The key to making successful changes is early and continuous planning. For example, managerial decisions which will cause a significant change in procedure, process, or social relationship require a plan for making the change. Remember, even very small changes can be significant.

To successfully implement a change, managers need to consider the following:

1- The problem -- How can such and such a change be put into effect?

2- What facts are known about the change? The people? The unit?

3- What assumptions should be made about the organization, groups or individuals affected by the change?

4- In what different ways can the change be accomplished?

5- What is likely to happen as each alternative in step four is implemented?

6- Which choice is best considering the situation, the resources needed, the time required and the likely outcome?

Let us examine step four (finding ways to get the change accomplished) in more detail. Remember, the key to making a change is getting employees to accept the idea. Change, itself, is neither good nor bad. However, many employees think change created from within the work group is "good" change, and that change imposed from above or outside the work group is "bad."

That means they should take part in the planning process when possible. Let them know early about a possible change. Get their ideas about how to make the change. With such actions, the shock effect can be reduced. Springing a major change on an individual or a work group will only make the shock worse.

Do not take it for granted that the work group will see that the change is good for it. Explain who benefits. If only the organization benefits in the short run, tell the group. It will not always make the change easier, but the employees will respect you for being honest with them.

Sometimes change may be mandatory. Government regulations are a good example. The organization may have no choice. At other times, changing technology requires that employees learn new ways in spite of their resistance. What does one do in such cases? How does a manager make required changes in spite of employee resistance?

Sometimes circumstances will preclude managers knowing about changes before it is time to implement them. Sometimes the manager will have to make sudden changes -- the reasons for which are not totally understood. The way the manager acts in such cases is important.

The effective manager may try to find out more about the reason for a change. If that is not possible, a good example must still be set. If the manager acts like the change has his or her support, the employees are much more likely to respond in a positive way. If the manager sulks or complains, the unit will be quick to pick up that tone and resist making the change.

Other ways to make changes that employees are more likely to accept are:

Reorganize. Put those already favourable toward the change on it and give the others another assignment.

Bring in new equipment if possible. People usually try to fit themselves to the new equipment.

Begin training people early to do what the change requires.

Develop a reward for those who take on the new system.

State specific disciplinary action which will be taken if they do not comply with the required change. Enforce the action firmly but fairly.

"Making change work is one of the biggest challenges managers face. The successful manager is one who can effectively deal with change; one who can work in a changing organization; one who sees change as a challenge -- not as a problem," concludes Dr. Miller.