

A person is working at a desk in a bright, modern office. The desk is cluttered with a laptop, a white coffee cup on a saucer, and a pen. The person's hands are visible, typing on the laptop and holding the pen. The background shows a large window with a view of a city skyline. The text 'HOW TO COMMIT' is overlaid on the image.

# HOW TO COMMIT

Knowing how to overcome resistance is probably the most valuable skill for changing the world.

## THE SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

There are a lot of studies and literature which cover the subject of resistance to change. You can find tons of information available to understand its reasons and how to deal with it.

This is not an exhaustive collection on the topic, nor is it an in-depth analysis of human nature.

This whitepaper aims to cover the frequently observed root causes for resistance to change in personal life and business entrepreneurship and provide few tips on simple actions to turn this resistance into commitment.

## WHO RESISTS CHANGE AND WHY ...

When you try to make an important change in your life or your business you will be faced with two main sources of resistance: from your stakeholders and from yourself. The root causes radicate in three basic instincts: the comfort zone, being in control and fear of the unknown. A stakeholder is any person who has a direct interest or is affected in some way by your project.

It could be a boss, partner, family, friends, neighbours, even somebody you might not know yet but you will probably meet as a result of your project activity. The changes you will make in your life will somehow affect them, their interests, their goals. Most probably, you will be threatening their comfort zone by changing the status quo, challenging their control span by bringing in new, fresh ways of doing things and trigger their fears by making them face something unknown. As a result it is normal that their reactions include: doubtful acceptance, open rejection, concealed boycott, silent denial, or avoidance.

## ... WHO RESISTS CHANGE AND WHY?

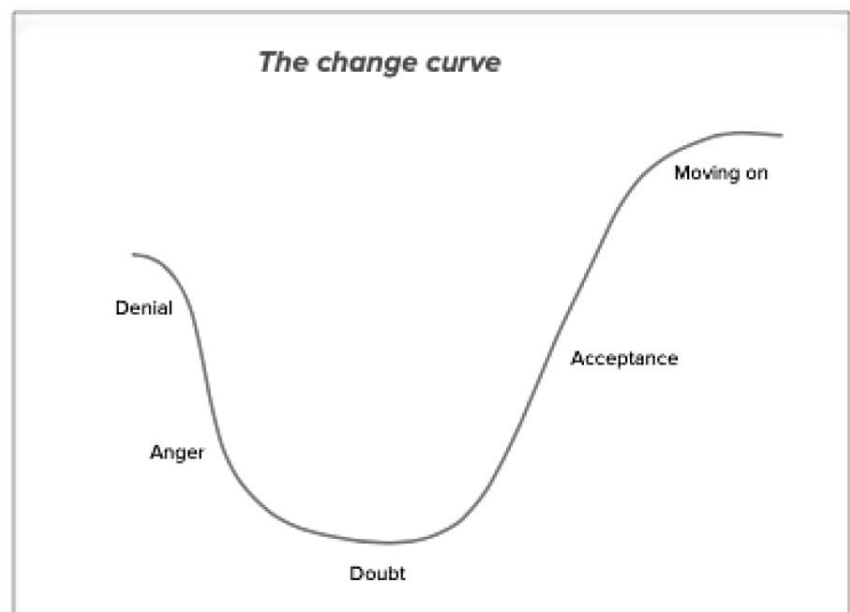
So you have to preempt these measures and actions, then have a plan to mitigate to ensure that they back you up, sponsor, approve, support or help you with the changes you are making. Otherwise, your stakeholder's might sabotage your projects. The same issues you might face with your own comfort zone fears or need to be in control. However, it can be exponentially worse.

When you don't address your own resistance to change and turn a blind eye to it, you become your worst enemy: you get stuck, procrastinate and abandon dreams. It will bring you to the point of frustration, self-denial and blaming the world for your failures.

Dealing with resistance to change is important. You have to plan for this variable in your transformation journey, just like you do with budgeting, timeframes, and activities.

## THE CHANGE CURVE

The Change Curve is based on a model originally developed in the 1960s by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross to explain the 5 Stages of the grieving process: denial, anger, doubt, acceptance, moving on. Since then, it has been widely utilised as a method of helping people understand their reactions to significant change or disruption.



## IDENTIFY THE STAGE

When you kick off your project and identify your stakeholders, invite them to a meeting and inform them about your plans.

Collect their reactions and try to place them on this curve. If you have doubts, go back and ask more questions, get more feedback. They can be anywhere between 'denial' and 'acceptance', depending on their openness to your goal and their own goals. It is highly improbable that they are at the stage of 'moving on' as they have to see some results from your work.

Depending on their stage in the curve, you should adopt different strategies to overcome their resistance and help them move towards acceptance. Do the same exercise with yourself. How do you decide where a person stands on the change curve?

## DENIAL

In the denial stage, also called the stage of shock and denial, the first reaction is usually shocking. This initial shock, while frequently short-lived, can result in the stakeholder wanting to slow you down or make you change your mind and drop the idea. The shock is often due to a lack of information and fear of the unknown. Your own reaction might be the same. You might even feel fear of looking stupid or doing something wrong as you will be undertaking different things to the rest of the people around you do.

After the initial shock has passed, it is common to experience denial. At this point, everyone tends to maintain focus on the past, including you. There's likely to be a feeling that as everything was 'OK' as it was, why change? This is a typical reaction of people who are comfortable with the status quo and fear failure.

## DEPRESSION

In the stages of anger and doubt (also called depression), resistance is even stronger. After the feelings of shock and denial, anger is often the next reaction. It is common to blame your own fears about what the upcoming change might cause on someone or something. Stakeholders might frame you as a failure if you don't show results or progress, and if you do and don't like the results, they might withdraw support.

The lowest point of this stage comes when the anger begins to wear off, and the realisation hits that the change is unavoidable. It is common for anxiety levels to peak. People tend to fixate on small issues or problems, losing perspective of the bigger picture, often to the detriment of progress. If you act cleverly whilst your stakeholders are in the first stage of the curve (the denial), you might avoid this second stage and go directly to the next one, which tends to be much more cheerful.



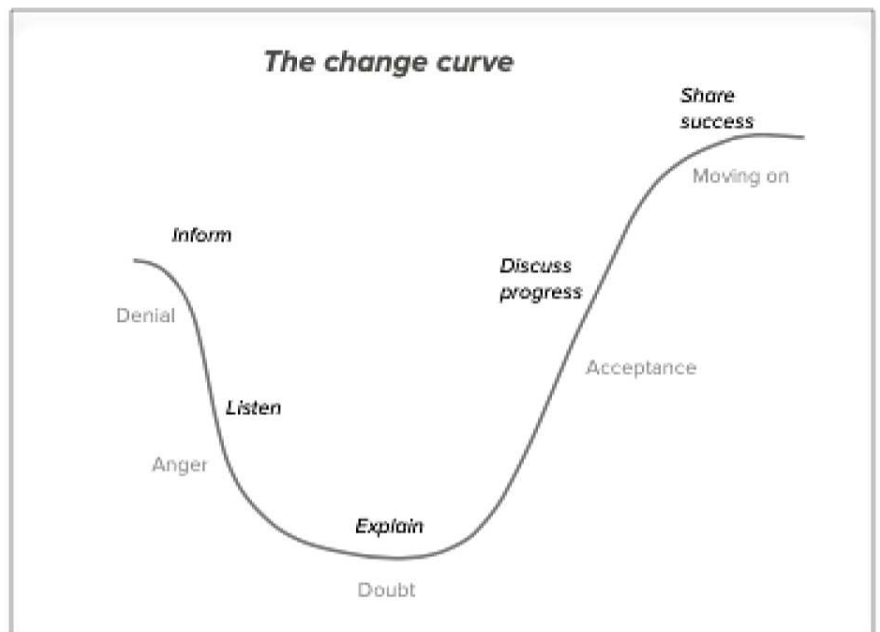
## INTEGRATION

The last stages are about acceptance and moving on (also called integration). This is a more optimistic state than the previous one as people accept change and even embrace it. Usually, there is no friction and resistance as everyone sees the results and benefits of the change.

The final steps involve integration, moving on to a better future. By the time everyone reaches this stage, the changed situation has firmly replaced the original and becomes the new reality. Humour is often used when referring to behaviour earlier in the process. Each person reacts differently to change, and not all will experience every phase. Some people may spend much time in the anger and doubt stage, whilst others who are more accustomed to change may move fairly fast to acceptance. Keep that in mind when you define your action plan to mitigate resistance.

## DEAL WITH STAKEHOLDERS

So, you have identified where your stakeholders stand on the curve. Now how do you deal with it? There is no established set of rules or technical know-how for this. In fact, even best practices vary depending on circumstances. Dealing with resistance is not about tools; it is about soft skills. Still, two standard approaches work every time and bring results: **communicate** and **share success** all the time.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

At the stage of **DENIAL**, communication is key. **Informing** what the actual change is, the action plan, the results it may bring and providing as much **reassurance** as possible will convince your stakeholders to support your change project.

**Reiterate** continuously about how you will work on your goal, the **future benefits** that matter to all and the plan you have to mitigate the risks.

It is crucial to move through anger as it is the strongest point of resistance in change management.

So don't give up. Convince them that your plan will work if they help you, and all of you will benefit from the results.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

During the state of **ANGER**, **listen**. People need to express themselves. So listen, mirror their concerns and reassure them that you are moving forward with your plan.

**Show results**. Quick wins are good leverage to use at this stage. When you notice that the anger diminishes and is replaced by doubt, **double your efforts** to deliver results, keep informing and explaining your work. Ask for feedback and discuss your progress openly.

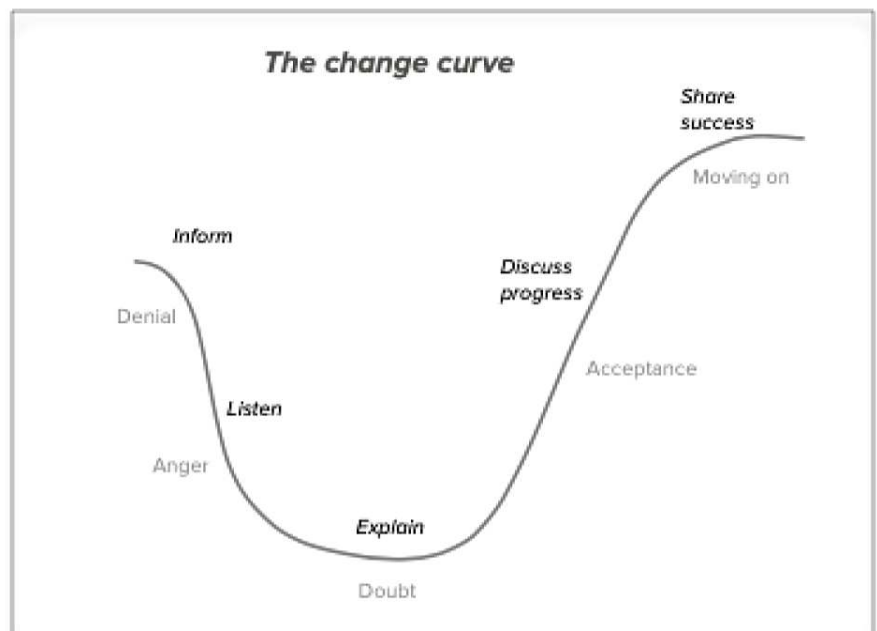
Another good strategy is to **leverage** with any stakeholder at the acceptance stage, to convince the rest about the benefits of the change and the need to move forward.

You will know that one of your stakeholders has moved to the ACCEPTANCE stage when questions about what is next start popping up. Resistance **diminishes** to a minimum, and everyone starts talking about results.

This is a **positive** stage, so keep it positive and **share** success with everyone. Show your results. Incorporate the changes you have made in life as usual or business as usual and celebrate success with everyone.

## DEAL WITH YOURSELF

Just like your stakeholders, you will feel resistance to change. And similar to them, your level of resistance depends on the acceptance of the change you are making. Ideally, you are making a change because you want it. In such cases, you are in the acceptance stage from the very beginning, and your resistance is limited to some of the actions you have to carry out and find unpleasant. But overall, you see the big picture, and the benefits of your change surpass all doubts or any discomfort you might have along the journey.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

If, however, you are in a situation where the change has been **imposed** on you, or you feel you have to do it, but you are not convinced or afraid of the effort or failure, you might be at the beginning of the change curve facing your own denial and anger.

In such situations, don't look to address possible stakeholders; look for a **mentor** to help you move forward. A mentor can be a boss, a friend, a colleague, a psychologist... someone who can help you with objective **guidance** to overcome your resistance.

When it comes down to convincing yourself about moving forward with making a change, do the following exercise. Take a pen and paper and answer the following questions:

- What exactly am I afraid of?
- What do I earn by changing?
- What do I have to lose?
- What will I lose if I do nothing?

## INSIDER TIP:

Be specific and objective. This is an exercise just for you. You don't have to share it with anyone if you don't feel comfortable doing so. The answers to these questions will allow you to gain perspective with regards to the change you want. They will help you decide if you really want the change. If you do, you will commit and overcome all obstacles. If you don't, you need to consider working on a different goal that is more important to you and one you can achieve.

“ Success nurtures experience, and experience is what makes us embrace change. So, start with the change or goal you are convinced about and most matters to you. Once you've succeeded, move to the next goal... ”

# HOW TO COMMIT

AND FINALLY

You are probably guessing by now that if you address resistance correctly and in time, you don't have to worry about the commitment. It will come as a result. Case in point!

There are two important self-discipline tricks you can use to keep focused.

1

Always focus on the goal.

During your change journey, you will face lots of distractions, you will feel tempted to fall into comfortable old habits and routines, you will be scared to undertake certain actions, and at times you will doubt if all this effort is worth it. Think about your goal and remind yourself of the bigger picture - of the dream you are chasing.

2

Always remember the trade-off.

When giving up seems like a big relief during the difficult moments of the change journey, ask yourself what are you losing by giving up.

- What would you lose if you stopped doing the change and went back to your previous life?
- What will you win if you don't give up?
- Is it a quid pro quo?

Be honest, and you will see that you have got more to win if you continue forward, even if there is an aspect of uncertainty.