# CHAMPION OF CHANGE

## Dedicated to help you and your organization manage change and be ready for the future of work

**Preparing for change can be complicated, especially in the context of a large organization. The markets are always in flux, and when a new technology or system rolls around…BOOM… industries are thrown on their head and companies scramble to figure everything out. Sometimes, these companies scramble themselves into devastation. Why? Because their change preparedness systems were either lacking or nonexistent.**

Today, professionals within the change industry are revamping their systems to better prepare their organizations. Mara is an example of this professional, but she did not start out in this field.

In college, she had studied education, and it just wasn't working out. After college, she began her career in a call center at a financial company. However, taking her educational background into account, her employer quickly noticed that she was fit for something else. Mara soon moved into a training role for new hires.

The company was completely changing their record-keeping platform at the time. The platform was spread out across the entire company, and no department was left unaffected by the change. Mara was placed as one of the employees to help lead this effort.

**In that moment, her journey with change management began.**

She worked with departments across the company and learned how employees adapted to new tasks in a tech-dependent environment. After this task, she began a new project: outsourcing the call center to India over a period of 4 years. She was exposed to new cultures and new methods of communication.

Eventually, Mara moved on to work for another financial firm where she managed a team of hiring professionals and created training materials.

From her past work, Mara picked up two critical skills for anyone looking to understand change.

First, was the ability to adapt: how do we alter our current methods to fit new systems? Second, was the ability to foresee change. Now, of course, she didn't develop psychic powers to peer into the future. Rather, she learned how to anticipate: where are things going? Is it realistic to expect that they will continue to go in this direction? Will the organization's current system be under threat soon?

Mara's current job is at a large, multinational company. Her initial foray into the company started with a 3-month on-boarding process. During this time, she embarked on an all-expenses-paid traveling and networking trip. Sounds pretty nice, right? But the organization's line of business was complicated, and this journey was necessary to learn everything.

The trip helped Mara understand her own role in the company. Not only that, but she also discovered what the company needed: performance improvement initiatives. She noticed that training revolved around products instead of performance. Deeper questions weren't being addressed, such as, Why are we training the products?, What kind of information is necessary to effectively train these products?, and Who needs that information?

This particular organization functioned in an incredibly dynamic industry. New products were a constant reality. Change was always happening. Understandably, it was overwhelming for Mara. So she started to think: when we introduce new products and new initiatives, people talk about change, but there isn't an actual change strategy in place. And, in that line of thinking, the light bulb went off.

She decided to utilize the Creating a Mindset for Change program. She had heard about the program some time ago at a networking event. The program was centered around driving change at a psychological level for management and employees alike. It was perfectly designed for her situation, so she decided to give it a shot.

After her on-boarding trip, she pitched the Creating a Mindset for Change Program to senior leadership. Instead of being ecstatic, like she hoped, the higher-ups felt cautious. She received responses like, "We have a lot going on right now," "This isn't the time," and "Why now? Why this?'"

Of course, Mara acknowledged the fact that the company was entrenched in their own operations, but she made the case that the program was essential. The company needed some sort of push to enable and help their employees change their mindset. With a new mindset, employees could then be prepared for change that was occurring now and change that was set to occur in the next 5-10 years.

To sweeten the pitch, she made an offer: "Let's just try it out on our customer support group," she said.

"It's low risk, low cost, and there's lots of room for feedback to gauge how it's working out."

Leadership finally agreed and gave her permission to test the program as a pilot with the customer service department.

Mara got to work immediately.

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Mara grew excited after several months of the Creating a Mindset for Change pilot went by: "The feedback is fantastic," she said. "People are really embracing it." Perhaps it was the change solution she needed all along.
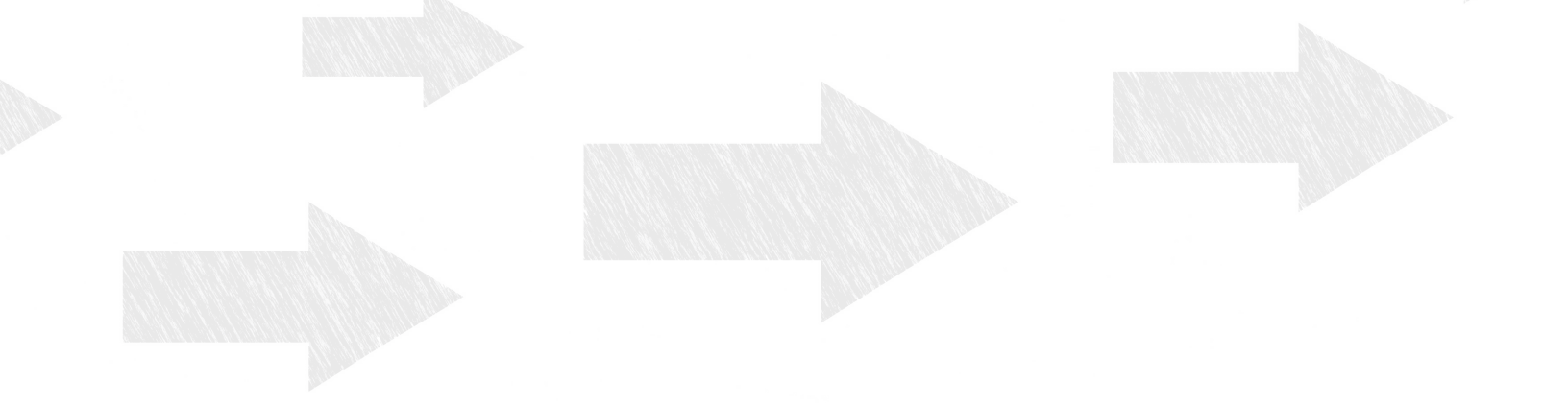
She started to notice conversations between employees about the program. Concepts from Creating a Mindset for Change were actually being discussed and unpacked in the break room. From the managers, Mara heard consistent praise about the content and how it was delivered: spread out over time on a weekly basis, building on itself.

Managerial staff even mentioned how the program positively affected both their professional and personal life. According to Mara, one manager applied the "concepts to help her daughter cope with the absence of a prom date. She talked to her, asked her some questions, and eventually helped her change her mindset."

According to Mara, some employees went through the program several times. Others raved about the content itself, which was praised as "fantastic."

Communication increased drastically between members of the sales department and their managerial staff. The program found a way to bring them together, amidst their busy schedules, and focus on collaborative efforts.

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So what good was coming from this? Yes, the feedback may have been great, but what were the outcomes? Simply put, people were finally thinking. Well, thinking differently, that is.

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Features of the of program were specifically designed to bring employees and leadership out of the ideological ruts. Think of it this way: the staff were essentially going through the motions; autopilot, if you will. But the program, in a sense, woke them up and allowed for them to think about their positional duties in an entirely new way. This is crucial because it is here where innovation begins. Communication in the department vastly improved as well and team meetings became regular, which were often canceled in the past, due to everyone lost in a cloud of their own self-imposed busyness. Today, teams are becoming more cohesive, questions are being asked more often, and new ideas are taking hold at a much greater pace than before.

Utilizing a program focused on an individual's mindset changed everything for Mara. She realized that the very concept of change wasn't approached correctly in the past. There was always a great deal of talk regarding change, but it was exactly that: talk. Nothing ever took off or took hold like she wanted it to.

Change management is complex and tough to implement. This complexity leads to a number of reasons as to why it's so difficult to push for change management in the workplace. For some organizations, getting change projects off the ground is a challenge in itself. For others, their focus is simply off the mark.

You see, change management tends to address systems, processes and procedures. And while these are very important, it's missing the most critical element: people. Consider this: how do we expect our organizations and teams to change if the leaders and people in them don't? Mara identified this line of thinking and made it a priority in her change management strategy with people, whether that was the customer support reps, managers, or senior leadership.

And she was right to focus on people along with process. Let's look at two important data points here:

- 87% of employees believe there is not enough focus on how to effectively change (McKinsey 2015).
- 90% of CEOs believe their leadership and organizations do not have the agility to change (Bersin Deloitte 2016).

It's clear that people are at the root of change work being effective or not. If employees feel that there is a lack of focus, and CEOs themselves fail to have faith in their organization's agility, then how can change management be implemented or even understood?

If there is a program in place, change management can focus on people, systems and processes. Mara saw this herself when her program was being piloted.

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Mara's change management strategy is far from over. In fact, she has plans to implement Creating a Mindset for Change in other departments after the customer service pilot is finished.

She foresees strong, cross-departmental functionality with Creating a Mindset for Change. The program, encourages conversation and collaboration, and Mara sees this as the perfect opportunity for departments to come together and improve communication.

But Mara is well aware that preparation precedes change. Equipping people with the right skills, laying out the right incentives, and creating the right action plan are all paramount to driving effective and lasting change. To implement a solid change management strategy, an elective program and platform is crucial. But if you don't start with the people themselves, then change will never stick. Mara saw it, and you will too.

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