

## Major changes require masterful communication

Written by Julie Desmond  
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Used to be, the leaders of a company (or a rock band or a family) could simply lead: decide what's best for the organization, implement the change and accept hearty pats on the back from everyone who went on to benefit from the new way of working (or giving a concert or mowing the lawn). Now that Change is the norm across every facet of life, business leaders are beginning to realize that quality transformation can't happen from the top down. Change today happens best when everyone's on board... everyone.

One communications company in Minneapolis knows firsthand how critical employee buy-in can be during periods of change. Frank (areyouFrank.com) partners with businesses involved in ERP implementations: Cargill, PepsiCo, GE... big companies making big changes. These projects are often whole business transformations involving new technology, new processes and new rules for conducting business-as-usual. Surviving drastic change is a real concern for companies, but the people at Frank insist that simple, straightforward honesty can go a long way toward success.

Transparency is a professional value and it is Frank's m.o. Working closely with people across an organization, Frank's communications professionals developed and activate the ERP Frank 5SM, their proprietary, five-step plan that can flex to apply to any project or any sized organization. From introducing a project through instilling commitment to the changes once they're in place, Frank's messages are consistent, smart and maybe most importantly, fun.

Frank co-founders Elissa Gjertson and John Nielson laugh out loud when revealing some of their most successful change-communications strategies. Highlights from a few of their campaigns? A funny, long-running, corporate talk show hosted by a company bigwig. Literally ... "targeted" posters that help release stress (in this case, employees are encouraged to throw tomatoes at frustrating business problems that are represented visually). Imagine, metaphorical sculptures employees created to express the good, bad & ugly of the change they were going through and gritty, sports-themed Go-Lives complete with engraved travelling trophies.

Elissa and John acknowledge that change can be stressful, but insist it doesn't have to be painful. Communicating with intelligence, humor and surprise keeps employees engaged, involved and coming back for more information which in turn improves their attitudes toward a project.

The official Frank mantra is, "Software doesn't deliver business improvements, people do." And those people, like all of us, want to know, "What's in it for me?" When the answer to that question is clear, memorable and relevant at professional and personal levels, leaders can get the cooperation they need from employees to keep projects moving ahead.

Josh Bersin, a leading provider of corporate talent research, explains why buy-in matters. He says, "An empowered, engaged workforce can realize 26% higher revenue per person." 26%? Seems like as good a reason as any to invite everyone to the party.

*Julie Desmond is IT Recruiting Manager with George Konik Associates, Inc. Send your comments and career planning questions to [jdesmond@georgekonik.com](mailto:jdesmond@georgekonik.com).*