

*A commentary on implementing a change proposal by Tony McKone,  
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I was recently talking with one of my clients, and as does happen in such situations, they asked me for my views on a situation that they had come across. This particular situation, which was not within their organisation, related to a business that had gone about developing a change to its structure the wrong way. This led my client, who was thinking about the change programme that they were likely to be heading into, to ask me what they need to do to ensure that they take the right approach with their change programme.

This was a good question to ask. And it was good that they were thinking ahead of time, so that they did not find themselves in the wrong place when they commence their change programme.

As an employer or business owner, you have the right to determine how your business is structured to deliver its goods and/or services. You are entitled to review this structure from time to time. During what I call the "thinking" stage, when you are merely tossing ideas around in your mind about what you could do, you do not have to consult with your staff. Until you have landed on an actual proposal, all you are doing is speculating and to share your speculation would only lead to unnecessary unrest amongst your staff.

However, once you have made a decision on what you want to do, at this point you must consult with those employees your decision will affect. This is one of your good faith obligations; to consult on any proposal that will or is likely to have an adverse effect on the continuation of your employees, before you make a final decision on that proposal.

In consulting you must give your staff access to all the relevant information about your proposal and provide them the opportunity to comment on that information and proposal before you make your final decision.

So what this means is that once you have decided that you want to implement a change, you need to document your proposal sufficiently so your staff, particularly those affected or likely to be affected, understand what you are proposing, why you are making the proposal, what benefits you believe that will bring, and how the proposal will affect them and their employment. This should also ideally include your intended timeline for implementing the proposal and the process you will follow during its implementation.

This consultation must be genuine. You need to keep an open mind to what your staff may provide by way of feedback and consider, where appropriate, changing your proposal based on that feedback. If as a result of this consultation process you make significant changes to your proposal, I would recommend you consult again on the changed proposal.

Once you have completed your consultation, you can then make your final decision, informed by what your staff have told you. Once you have made that decision and communicated it to your staff, you should then proceed with its implementation.

Now reading this you might go - "wow that sounds like a long drawn out process." You might even be saying "do I need to do all that?" The answer to these reactions are; 1) the consultation process does not have to be long. One or two weeks is sufficient depending on the nature and impact of your proposal; and 2) yes you do need to consult and you do need to provide sufficient information to enable your staff to comment on the proposal.

Don't be afraid of involving your staff. Remember they are the ones who do the work for you, day in and day out. They will be best placed to provide sound practicable input that could well result in an improved proposal for you to implement. Where you need to invest your time is in the documentation of the proposal. The better you describe your proposal, complete with sound rationale and analysis of the benefits, the easier it will be for your staff to see and understand what you are trying to achieve. This will then enable them to give much richer feedback and input to your proposal.

As always, if you are considering implementing change and want some assistance in getting your proposal documented and out to your staff for consultation, do not hesitate to [contact Tony](#).