

LEADING INNOVATION

**A non-boring, step-by-step guide to get your
team, department, and organization to:**

**Stop Whining about Change
& Start Embracing Innovation**

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About the Author

Avish Parashar is quite possibly the world's only Motivational Improviser. He uses his 20+ years of experience performing, teaching, and studying improv comedy to show organizations and individuals how to improvise, adapt, and innovate in an ever-changing world.

Avish's expertise is in instilling a flexible and innovative mindset in individuals and organizations who want and need to think quickly, adapt to change, and increase creativity and innovation.

He is also the author of two books on applying improv comedy skills to business and life.

You can learn more about Avish at www.DingHappens.com

Chapter 1: People Hate Change – and That's Dangerous

“I just want my people to stop whining about change!”

As a professional speaker, this is one of the more common comments I hear in my pre-presentation calls.

The organization, department, industry, technology, etc. is changing, and people are having a hard time accepting and dealing with it.

If you are reading this book, then chances are that you are:

1. The person in charge of the team or organization that is changing
2. The person tasked by the person in charge to lead the change
3. Someone in the middle of the change who is just tired of everyone else’s complaining.

You may also not be currently going through change but you are smart enough to realize that your team needs it. Without change and innovation, you may fall behind the competition (and the world).

Whether you are a business owner, C-Level executive, manager, HR professional, sales and marketing director, learning and development trainer, or just someone who cares about change and innovation, this e-book can help!

The Importance of Accepting Change and Embracing Innovation

You may be tempted to throw your hands up in the air and say, “Forget it! My people are so resistant to change that it’s not worth trying anymore!”

Please don’t do this!

Avoiding change and not embracing innovation can lead to a few challenges:

Reduced Productivity

- Too much time spent whining, complaining, and resisting change
- High stress about change leads to lower efficiency and creativity
- Unwillingness to accept short-term discomfort prevents adopting systems, processes, and technology that increase long-term efficiency

Reduced Profitability

- Lack of innovation leads to a lack of relevancy and top of mind awareness in the market
- Slow response to change creates openings for competitors to take market share
- Doing “business as usual” misses opportunities to expand and sell more to both current and new customers

Life is Too Short!

Motivation and morale are not hard, measurable, quantifiable traits. But they are relevant factors that significantly impact results.

Your ability to get your team to stop whining about change and start embracing innovation directly impacts the productivity and quality of life of everyone involved.

For those going through the change who do embrace it, their productivity and morale drops being around the negativity of those who are fighting it. (Some people love to complain at work. For many others, having to listen to others complain does nothing but drain them.)

For the resisters, they may seem negative, but it is often the uncertainty they are afraid of. They would be very happy if nothing changed, which is why they resist. They won't be happy again until they achieve a "new normal." Ironically, this won't happen until they embrace the change, but the uncertain period will be a difficult and non-fun one.

Finally, if you are the one trying to get others to accept change and embrace meaningful and necessary innovation, your life can become miserable. And life is too short to be miserable.

“Your ability to get your team to stop whining about change and start embracing innovation directly impacts the productivity and quality of life of everyone involved.”

Chapter 2: Moving Up the “Innovation Mindset Ladder”

Moving Up the Ladder of Accepting Change and Embracing Innovation

Fortunately, you can accelerate the process if you offer people the proper guidance.

Your people (and yourself) are probably at one of five levels when it comes to dealing with change and embracing innovation:

Innovation Mindset Ladder

| Level | Effectiveness | Characterized by | Focus |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Embrace | 6x | Initiative | Leadership and evangelism |
| Support | 3x | Yes And | Present mindedness |
| Accept | 1x | Happily Implement | Yes And |
| Begrudgingly Accept | -2x | Implement but Complain | Personal self interest |
| Resist | -4x | Whine and Fight | Organizational self interest |

The first step is understanding what level you are starting from.

Resist

At this level, people actively resist your attempts to lead change and innovation. In meetings they argue against what they are being asked to do (even if arguing is moot as it has already been decided that they must implement).

They will also ignore your instructions. When asked to take action, provide input, or offer support, they will simply not do what you ask. When you try to call them out on this they will deflect (“oh, sorry, I haven’t gotten around to it”) or start arguing again (“Why do I have to do this again? This is a waste of time!”).

These problems are compounded when you have no direct authority. If the people in question do not directly report to you, you have few options when they choose to resist. Things may reach a breaking point where superiors need to get involved. This may work in the short-term but it can lead to long-term internal discord.

Effectiveness: -4x. Not only are you not making progress, but you are also falling behind because of the time, energy, and morale drain of constantly fighting with people.

“Not only are you not making progress, but you are also falling behind because of the time, energy, and morale drain of constantly fighting with people.”

Begrudgingly Accept

At this level, your people accept that the change is going to happen no matter what, but they are not happy about it.

They will implement, but they will give it the bare minimum effort. It won't be their best work, and they certainly won't bring anything new to the table.

They will also still complain, making everyone's life (especially yours) miserable.

Effectiveness: -2x. This is the level that many people settle for, but it's not enough. Your people may be able to implement your changes, but they are not helping you out.

“You’ll achieve results, but by the time you do other teams, departments, and organizations will have moved farther ahead.”

Accept

At this level your team understands the need for change. They may not like it, but they get it. They may not jump all in with their own ideas and initiatives, but they will happily do what they are instructed to do.

At this level they will implement with minimal complaint. Even happily.

Effectiveness: 1x. At this level you will get results. You will make progress and good things will happen. The only challenge is that since the world is constantly changing, this level is only enough to help you maintain your status quo - to keep up with internal and external changes.

“This level is only enough to help you maintain your status quo”

Support

At this level, your team not only happily implements, but they actively build off of your ideas.

This is characterized by a “yes, and” approach. Rather than meeting your ideas with “yes, but I don’t want to do that!” they respond with, “yes, and here’s what else we/I can do!”

The nice thing about this level is that you stop being the sole driver, as others push ideas forward as well.

Effectiveness: 3x. This is the first level where you start tapping into the power of collaboration. Productivity should improve as morale in a “yes, and” environment is higher, people are more invested because they contributed to the idea, and focus is on moving things forward, not maintaining the status quo.

“This is the first level where you start tapping into the power of collaboration.”

Embrace

At this level your team has embraced the importance of innovation. Members not only build off of each others' ideas, they initiate their own ideas. Their minds become attuned for problems to solve, systems to improve, and opportunities to seize.

It is critical at this level to have a strong and clear strategy to make sure the high level of innovation doesn't scatter your focus. Beyond that, you should reap some tremendous benefits by having a team or organization of people who embrace innovation.

Effectiveness: 6x. Never underestimate the power of a team of focused, guided, creative people who are supported and who embrace the power of innovation.

“Never underestimate the power of a team of focused, guided, creative people who are supported and who embrace the power of innovation.”

Chapter 3: Leading People Through Innovation

Leading People Through innovation

First, figure out where you are. One reason you may have struggled in the past with getting people to stop whining about change and start embracing innovation is that you tried to jump too many levels.

For example, if your group is at “Resist” and you try to take them right to “Embrace,” you are bound to fail.

Once you have figured out where you are, you need to start moving your group through the levels.

Each level requires a different area of focus.



As a reminder, here is the core concept to focus on at each level of the Innovation Mindset Ladder

| Level | Concept |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Resist | Organizational Self Interest |
| Begrudgingly Accept | Personal Self Interest |
| Accept | Yes, And |
| Support | Awareness |
| Embrace | Leadership and Evangelism |

To Move From “Resist” to “Begrudgingly Accept”: Appeal to Organizational Self Interest

Resisters are tough. If you try to appeal to their self-interest they will argue and get annoyed, as they will not want you telling them what’s best for them.

Your goal here is not full buy-in, just “begrudging acceptance,” so appeal to organizational self-interest. Tell them why this initiative will be good for the company, even if it may make things harder at first.

They may continue to disagree. At this point you have 2 options:

1. Pull rank. Not the best, but sometimes you have to lay down the law, just to get things going.
2. Use “time-bounding” (More on this later)

To Move From “Begrudgingly Accept” to “Accept”: Appeal to Personal Self-Interest

Once people are moving, you can start to appeal to their self-interest. People will only accept and “happily work” if they are happy and see how things are getting better for them.

Point out how this is going to help them in their individual role or in their personal lives. Will it increase their productivity, reduce their headaches, help them advance their career, or give them more free time or time to explore projects they are excited about?

If you can't find a way to make the change appeal to their self-interest then you have three options:

- 1. Get creative.** Look beyond the obvious to find some way that people will benefit.
- 2. Create benefits.** Maybe the change itself has no benefit. What incentive or benefit can you create to make people more invested (i.e. the old, “if everyone passes the final we get a pizza party!” from school).
- 3. Change or drop the initiative.** You may not always have the authority to do this, but if you do, and if your current plan doesn't make your individual employees' lives better, you may want to rethink it. Too many innovation initiatives struggle because they are good for the company but horrible for the employees.

To Move From “Accept” to “Support”: Instill a “Yes, And” Mentality

It’s easy to get complacent when people are in the “accept” stage. Everyone seems happy, and things are moving along. However, if you stop here you are missing out on the real power of innovation.

The goal here is to get people to move from simply doing what you say to building on and advancing on ideas (yours and others’).

To do that, instill a “Yes, And” mentality. In every moment, you have the choice of saying, “Yes, And” or “yes, but.” Innovators find ways of saying, “yes, and.”

“Yes, but” blocks progress and limits creativity. “Yes, and” builds rapport, expands ideas, and explores creativity.

The “yes,” accepts the current idea and the “and” supports and builds off of it.

By instilling a “yes, and” mindset your team will move to “creative collaboration” where no one person has to be brilliant and you are creating new ideas that you never would have otherwise.

To create a culture

of Innovation

start with



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To Move From “Support to Embrace”: Promote Awareness

“Support” is a great place to be, but for most of your team, it is still reactive. To move to the highest level, “Embrace,” you want your people to move from reacting to initiating. Have them be the ones who come up with the initial ideas that the rest of the team can support and build off of.

The key here is “present-minded awareness.” So many innovations, big and small, come not from a group of executives in a boardroom thinking of ideas, but rather from employees of all levels, top to bottom, paying attention to what’s going on around them, what systems and processes could be improved, and what opportunities are staring them right in the face.

The problem is that everyone is so overworked and overstressed that they don’t have time of mental capacity to simply be in the moment and notice.

Once the people on your team and in your organization learn how to notice and are given permission to do so, they will start coming to you with innovative ideas.

To Leverage and Build From “Embrace”: Create Leaders and Evangelists

Though “Embrace” is the highest level, you don’t have to stop there.

Once you have people embracing innovation and seeking ways to improve and advance both themselves and the organization, the next step is to turn those people into leaders and evangelists.

The people on your team who Embrace Innovation can become exemplars who the rest of the organization looks to and learns from. They can move into leadership roles (official promotions, committee chairs, or simply lead by action). They can spread the word and take people through the process of moving others up the ladder from “Resist” to “Embrace” as well.

Chapter 4:

Tactics to Smooth the Road

Tactics to Smooth the Road

Moving through the five steps may seem simple, but it won't always be easy. Here are 7 tactics you can use to make your path easier as you work on getting your organization to embrace innovation:



1) Create a “Time Box”

If you are facing resistance, instead of trying to get people to change forever, ask them to change, “for a while.”

How long is “a while”? It depends on just how resistant your group is. It could be for one three-hour meeting, for a week, or for a quarter.

Whatever time frame you choose, if you let your team know that this is a temporary thing, you’ll have an easier time getting buy-in from them to at least attempt what you are proposing.

“If you let your team know that this is a temporary thing, you’ll have an easier time.”

2) Ask with an open mind for input

Nothing struggles as much as an initiative that is thrust upon people. You will have a much easier road if you solicit input, feedback, and opinions before you start making changes.

This should not be just a “going through the motions” survey either. You will get much greater buy-in if people feel their opinions were taken, listened to, and incorporated.

This will require you to have an open and flexible mind. Don't go into this process with a rigid agenda and then only accept input that fits your agenda and ignore the rest. Think collaborative.

“Don't go into this process with a rigid agenda and then only accept input that fits your agenda and ignore the rest.”

3) Put them in charge

You can put a twist on things by putting the Resisters in charge of something. People who hate being told what to do can come alive when they are put in charge of coming up with the plan.

Important: If you put them in charge, you need to work with them and incorporate their ideas and suggestions. You will lose trust if you give them some authority and then ignore what they say.

“You can put a twist on things by putting the Resisters in charge of something.”

4) Separate generation from evaluation

To improve innovation, create “safe zones.” ([“innovation playgrounds”](#)). The key is to separate idea generation from evaluation.

Create an environment – even if for only 15 minutes – where no, “yes, buts” are allowed. People must support and build off of each other. You’ll be amazed at how much synergy and positive momentum can come from that.



5) Reward behavior

We live in a results-driven world. As such, organizations often only reward results.

If your goal is to move up the Innovation Mindset Ladder however, you must reward the behavior you are trying to instill, even if those behaviors don't lead to immediate positive results. Remember, you are in this for the long term.

“You must to reward the behavior you are trying to instill.”

6) Introduce “Yes, And!”

As explained earlier, saying, “yes, and,” instead of “yes, but” is a simple but powerful idea that will vastly accelerate your path to getting people to embrace innovation. To smooth your road to success, start introducing this idea early so people are ready for it.

For more info: [“Say’ Yes, And!!”](#)

“Saying, “yes, and,” instead of “yes, but” is a simple but powerful idea.”

7) Let Complainers Complain

Some people just like to complain. Many will come around when you take them through the steps, but some will continue to resist and complain. Rather than struggling with them and making everyone (including yourself) miserable, let the complainers complain. However, make sure you do it strategically.

Remove the complainers from the idea generation/brainstorming/innovation process. Their negativity will destroy your culture of innovation. However, bring them in to the process later, once ideas have been fleshed out and it's time to apply a critical eye and evaluate. At that step, your complainers can be very useful.

“Remove the complainers from the idea generation/brainstorming/innovation process.”

Conclusion

Leading Innovation, and getting people to stop complaining about change is not easy. But it is doable. And it is worth it.

The ideas and steps in this document will help you on your way. You will meet resistance, but keep working at it.

Take it step-by-step, level-by-level, as you move people up the Innovation Mindset Ladder.

Eventually, over time, you will see the benefits of building a mindset and culture of innovation.

And if you need help...



How We Can Help

The first question to ask is, “where are we on this model?” This could apply to your organization, your leadership team, and yourself.

The next question to ask is, “is that where we want to be?”

If the answer is “no,” then we can help.

To be effective, these skills and mindsets must be implemented throughout your organization.

If only management and leadership adopt these ideas, people will roll their eyes and no real execution will occur.

If employees embrace these ideas but leadership does not, they lack the support, resources, and autonomy to effectively deal with change.

Our hands-on system engages and even entertains your team to move them from whining about change to embracing innovation.

This can be achieved through:

Speaking at Your Annual Meetings

Presenting these ideas to a large group of people in a short period of time (45-90 minutes). Avish's presentations are fun, engaging, interactive, motivational, and designed to open-minds and get people started down the path of adaptability and innovation.

Training at your Workplace

Working hands-on with a smaller group of people for a longer time where the focus is on skills-transfer. Giving your team the skills and practice to implement these ideas in the real world.

Consulting with Your Leaders

Working with your leadership or executive team to analyze and advise on how to create a more agile culture and organization.

Facilitation at Your Next Leadership Retreat

Taking your leadership team through a process that helps them create a plan of their own to increase creativity and innovation throughout the entire organization.

Contact Us Now

To get started creating a more creative, agile, and innovative organization, give us a call (484-366-1793) or send an email to avish@avishparashar.com.

Check out our website, www.DingHappens.com to see results our other clients have enjoyed.

