

Now Let's Break It!

A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

I was part of a group that was assisting in the redesign of an accreditation system into an online platform. The system, developed years ago, was antiquated—those wishing to be accredited mailed in forms and documentation, that information was then entered manually into a computer, and eventually, the results were sent back via United States mail. We were thrilled to be working with others to create an online system for submitting and entering data, generating information based on the data, automating results, and electronically sending feedback to the person who submitted the information. We worked on the system for over a year and when it finally was ready, the company that designed the system told us to try and break it! We felt a freedom like no other. We were set loose to experiment and be creative.

Trying to break the system was actually an invigorating process. All of the features were tested, sample data was entered, challenges and inaccuracies were noted, inefficiencies were identified, unusual scenarios were developed, and there were discussions about what worked and what did not. I loved this process. I think I enjoyed it so much because it went against the traditional ways we are taught to approach change. We were being forced to think negatively in order to come up with better results. Throughout our lives, we are often taught that negative thinking is bad. We are conditioned to respond positively and “think possibility.” And, while I am not suggesting we eliminate this positive and optimistic approach to thinking, I am suggesting that when a change is nearing the final stages of development, you make sure to include a step that involves trying to “break it.” Take time to think of alternatives, obstacles, inefficiencies, inaccuracies, and unique situations. Provide critical feedback. In doing so, you will eliminate many problems that would have occurred after the change was considered finalized.

Another benefit to this method was that trying to break the system was anticipated. There was actually a lot of time built into the process to break and rebuild the system. How many times do we change something, immediately put it into practice, find out there are problems with it, and then have to quickly punt to come up with a solution? We often do this because there is limited time, we did not consider errors might happen, and as a result, we need to “fix” the problems immediately because the change has already been launched. When we have limited time to come up with solutions, we often pick the first one that will work instead of continuing to brainstorm and selecting the best one from a variety of good choices.

What if the next time a change is instituted in your organization, you build in time to try and break it? **And by break it, I mean make it better.** When time is built in to break a new change, you can come up with several good solutions and, from there, select the best one. There is time for reflecting, considering options, experimenting some more, and brainstorming multiple right answers. When you do not build in time to “break it,” you pay for it later through lost time, employee and customer frustration and dissatisfaction, and lower team morale.

Interested in learning more about how to lead change? We offer a full-day session for administrators of early care and education programs titled, [Change is Good...You Go First!](#) We also offer a 10-month

leadership academy for administrators of center-based early care and education programs titled, [Taking Charge of Change](#).

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