



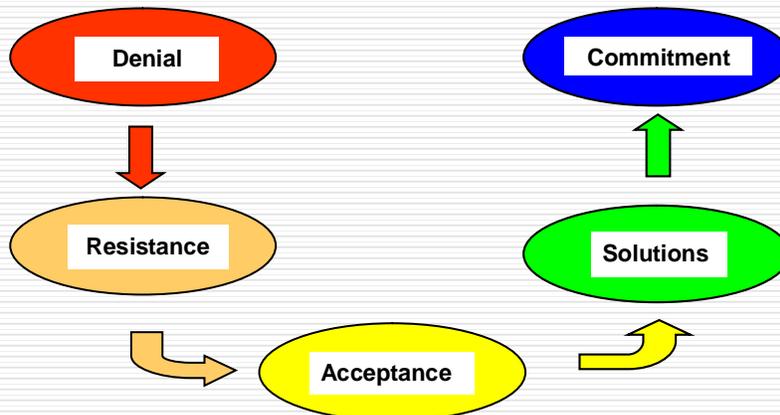
# Leading Change: Understanding the Behavior Change Process

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Behavior change is both a personal and team process. Clearly, how individuals react to a change message will collectively impact how successful the change initiative will be for the individual team member, the team and the organization.

Individuals normally move through five distinct stages as they attempt to change their behavior.

## Behavior Change Process





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## The Five Stages of Behavior Change

**Denial** – It is no surprise that that a great majority of people first respond to a change message by denying the need for the change. The more a person has to lose by the change or the higher their feelings of perceived risk, the stronger their denial is likely to be. When an individual is stuck in this stage, they are unwilling to accept that the change is going to really occur and they will invest much effort in trying to maintain the status quo. The change leader's job during this stage is to communicate the change message consistently, clearly and often and to guide the individual team member towards acceptance of the inevitability of the change.

**Resistance** – Think of a person being dragged along against their will and you have a good visual of what this phase is like for the individual. They are no longer in denial about the inevitability of the change; however, they are still not at all happy about it. Therefore, they will only do the minimum required of them and may even actively work to subvert the change process. At this stage, the change leader should be working to convert this individual team member and to ensure that they understand the reason for the change and to ensure that they understand how the change will positively impact them.

**Acceptance** – Accepting the change and agreeing to willingly work towards the change is the pivotal moment for both the individual team member and the change leader. When the individual achieves positive acceptance, how he or she thinks and feels also changes. This change in mental energy will often manifest itself in new positive behaviors related to the change. The job of the change leader during this stage is to reinforce the new attitude and behaviors through any reasonable means available.

**Solutions** – Solutions are really positive actions which reinforce the new feelings, attitudes and behaviors. Positive actions on the part of the individual team member will usually solidify the new positive feelings and attitudes, making them stronger while making the pull of the former way weaker. The job of the leader during this stage is to consolidate the positive gain of the new attitudes and behaviors. This is often accomplished through work assignments, rewards and incentives that reinforce and recognize the positive shift of the individual. It is the work done in this stage that builds the commitment that is vital to the change effort.

**Commitment** – Commitment only occurs after the work of the previous stages is complete. Not every individual will begin in the denial or resistance stage. However, all individuals will need to work through the acceptance and solution actions stages in order to build real and lasting commitment to the change effort. The job of the change leader during this stage is to maintain their commitment



and to look for opportunities to offer both individual team members and the entire team further challenges and opportunities.

## Leading Them out of Their Comfort Zone

One of the main reasons that people often languish in denial and resistance is because they are comfortable where they are and the proposed change threatens that comfort and replaces it with feelings of risk and uncertainty. Most people will stay in their comfort zone if you let them. This is equally true of teams, which have a collective interest in maintaining the status quo.

To get people out of their comfort zone, the change leader might consider employing two strategies simultaneously:

1. Reducing the individual's comfort zone by removing those things that make them comfortable and which work against the change message.
2. To the extent possible, reducing the amount of real and perceived risk to the individual.

## Getting through the **RISK** Zone



While all risk cannot be eliminated, by reducing as much risk as possible, the leader creates a situation where the individual can more quickly create a new comfort zone that is in line with the change effort.



The change leader must get both the individual and the larger team out of their comfort zone. To accomplish this, the leader must guide both the individual team members and the team as a whole. Focusing on just one of these two at the expense of the other greatly reduces the team leader's chances for successful change and transition.

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Since 1990, Rick Rumford has been the CEO of On Target Seminars, specializing in organizational leadership, change management and improving interpersonal and team effectiveness. Rick has worked extensively coaching executives at a variety of Fortune 500 companies and public sector organizations. He is also the author of over 100 training programs and is known as a dynamic trainer and public speaker.

For information on how to integrate a comprehensive change and transition plan or for information on how to improve your leadership, management and supervisory teams, visit [www.ontargetseminars.com](http://www.ontargetseminars.com) and use the Contact Us tab.