

# Leading Change With Emotional Intelligence

by Shannon Shackerley-Bennett

*People, process, and technology are the cogs in the wheel of enterprise transformation – learn how to prevent people from wearing out over time as that wheel turns.*



## Meet The Author

*Shannon Shackerley-Bennett has 25 years of progressively responsible positions with corporate, new business, and start up teams.*

*She's worked with clients in the utility, finance and software industries. Her contributions to one of the greatest Canadian conservation-marketing campaigns is featured in "Power Smart", a book highlighting a program that would revolutionize how British Columbians lived and how businesses achieved their bottom lines through the efficient use of electricity.*

*Shannon earned her Bachelor's in Arts, with an emphasis on political science.*

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## Change Is Hard, Even When It Shouldn't Be.

A small but mighty team of four Customer Service Agents breathed a sigh of relief when they learned their team would soon double in size.

The new hires completed their organizational onboarding and training together and reported to the front office the following week. With the increased headcount, desk space had to be shared until new furniture could be delivered and the layout could be reconfigured. Lunch hour schedules were reorganized to ensure a seasoned employee was always available for customer escalations. The sudden influx of coworkers felt overwhelming.

Although no one wanted to admit it, the new team members disrupted established routines and added to the workload of a team already at full capacity. It was puzzling why this growth felt so challenging.

## Too Much, Too Fast? Or Sometimes, Simply Too Slow?



Difficulty with change comes in many forms. Most commonly, people become quickly overwhelmed when the scope of change is complex or the volume of changes is too great. Both situations require significant mental effort to process a lot of information, which can simply be too much for us to handle.

Sometimes, change happens too quickly, leaving insufficient time to learn and adapt. This can make the new environment challenging and tiresome. On the flip side, when change is prolonged, it can become monotonous, leading to boredom and a loss of interest.

## Feeling Fine with Feelings

Change can be challenging when we're pushed to do something differently, often triggering emotions that must be managed.

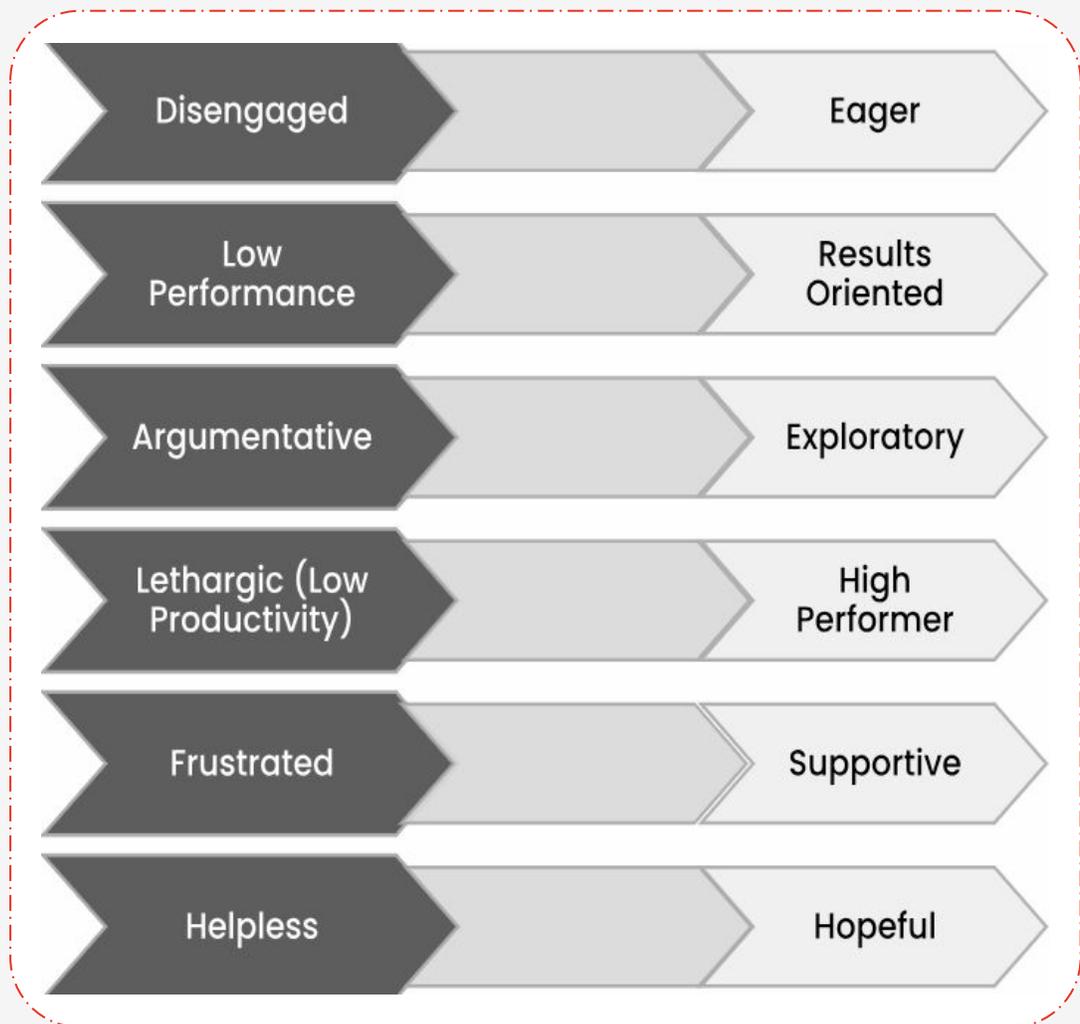
Developing greater emotional awareness and empathy can enhance your leadership in managing change.



By increasing emotional intelligence, you can more effectively identify early signs of resistance and take proactive steps to address them.

An easy way to improve your own emotional intelligence is to become more familiar with the range of feelings that people experience during change. By recognizing and understanding these emotions, you'll be better equipped to:

- Shift from negativity to positivity.
- Identify obstacles that are preventing progress.
- Determine what is needed to overcome barriers.
- Observe and address other feelings experienced during change.



## Bonus or Burden?

As team dynamics evolve during transformation, impacted employees can either support or hinder the program. Those with higher emotional intelligence tap into their self-awareness during this phase, taking time to reflect and adapt to the circumstances. But when employees don't quickly understand expectations, they can feel burdened trying to get it right.

Great change leaders help employees talk through any ambiguity they are experiencing, clarify expectations, and schedule follow-ups to check back in. Addressing challenges together can help teams reframe difficulties and find solutions.

### Bonus!

"Sure is great to have an extra set of helpful hands."

"Great summary -- would have taken me way too long to put this together."

"Oh yeah, that action item -- good thing you reminded me."

"Thanks for the meeting notes."



## Have To or Get To?

When considering how to address change resistance, we can explore solutions from two perspectives: the individual impacted by the change and the change management professional responsible for supporting individuals and teams through the transition.

In either case, the most powerful tool we have is attitude. Our attitudes are thought to be influenced by both inherent traits and life experiences. This means that leaders can shape these attitudes by creating experiences that effectively inform and engage individuals and teams.

A Scrum Master holds a daily stand-up meeting with her IT development team to discuss progress and identify any blockers she can help remove. This same group of developers has a weekly refinement meeting and a weekly sprint review to demo the work completed during the previous week.

Shortly after joining the group, one Developer asked another;  
**“Do I have to go to all these meetings?”**

The reply was,  
**“Have to or get to, it’s all a matter of attitude.”**

Consider this philosophy when facing change you’re not entirely positive about or when observing resistance in others.

What can be done to shift attitudes?



## Change Champions

The capacity for change varies among individuals, as each person's unique personality affects their response to shifts. To facilitate your transformation, enlist early adopters and high performers by establishing a change champion program.

A change champion program identifies and empowers influential employees to advocate for and support change initiatives. It's important to select champions who actively support and facilitate change, and to distinguish their role from that of Change Leaders, who are responsible for implementing change. These champions serve as role models, offering guidance and motivation to their peers and helping to ensure smoother transitions for other employees.

Champions effectively communicate the what, how, and why of change in a way that resonates with diverse audiences. They recognize different learning styles and possess high emotional intelligence. This unique role brings people together to move through change, confidently supporting the initiative and remaining committed to its success.



## Mobilizing

Here are a few tips to get started:

### What to Do:

- Create a list of emotions to reference and refresh your knowledge.
- Understand what changes in your organization impact your team (too much at one time, taking too long, too fast, ambiguous, uncertainty, people/role change).
- Support your team during times of change.
- Remain positive about change.

### How to Do It:

- Use word cloud software to artistically present the types of emotions that can be experienced during change.
- Schedule regular check-ins with those impacted by the change and ask what support is needed.
- Tie the change to the longer-term big picture – the company mission, vision, and evolution.
- Discuss barriers with others and seek support to collaboratively overcome challenges. Also, make sure to celebrate successes together.

## Tying it All Together

By addressing change with emotional intelligence, you and your team can become high-performing drivers within the organization. Your commitment to enhancing empathy will foster a positive environment, aligning attitudes, driving change, and building engagement at all levels.

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