



Why Change Is Hard: How to Crack the Code **by Sally Ward, Ward Leadership** **www.leadership.com**

If you've ever tried to change your eating habits or modify a behavior that is holding you back professionally, you know that change can be difficult. People and organizations face similar challenges when it comes to change.

The fascinating insights on change which follow come from the work of Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey of Harvard University.

Meet "Kim" and "John". Both have recognized the need to change something that isn't working for them; each has set an improvement goal.

Kim is a hard-driving pharmaceutical sales manager, married with two teenagers.

She frequently finds herself exhausted and irritable. Kim's goal: "Increase my energy and lower stress with a regular physical conditioning program."

John is the founder and CEO of a nonprofit educational organization. He realizes that he takes on too much responsibility and that this prevents others from stepping up. John's goal: "Delegate more and better share authority with my management team."

Neither Kim nor John has made the progress they intended. What's going on?

Both are doing or *not* doing things that work against their goals.

Kim

Does not calendar times to exercise
Chooses early a.m. coffee and reading newspaper over exercise
Allows family demands to take precedence in evening

John

Looks over people's shoulders
Requires excessive reporting
Steps in too quickly to solve problems

Obvious solutions don't seem to work. Kim dutifully sets an exercise schedule and still falls short. John delegates responsibility for a project, but backslides and picks up the reins when it isn't done to his satisfaction.

Kim and John must identify the hidden motivations and assumptions that are sabotaging their change goals.

As we dig deeper, it becomes apparent that Kim and John are hostages to deeply held desires, needs, and beliefs.

Kim values flexibility, likes to indulge herself in the morning before work, and wants to please her family. Kim makes the assumptions that she will feel deprived and more stressed if she exchanges her coffee and newspaper time for exercise, and that her responsibility to her family is greater than her responsibility to her health.

John thrives on being in control and feels he must preserve his reputation as “captain of the ship.” He believes that he cannot allow anyone to fail on his watch, and that he’ll be considered a failure if anyone on the team fails.

The behaviors working against Kim’s and John’s goals are actually highly-effective anxiety management systems that safeguard their hidden motivations. As we identify the hidden motivations, John and Kim are better able to understand why it seems they have one foot on the gas and another on the brake when it comes to change. Their internal software also accepts their assumptions as truth, when in fact their assumptions are *perceptions* that may or not be true. It is these systems that create the barriers to change.

Assumptions are the filters through which we see things. When Kim and John notice and examine their filters, change is possible.

It’s as if each has put on glasses with a certain colored lens and they can only see things in this one color.

In order to change, Kim and John must step back and look critically *at* their personal filters rather than *through* them. This is a hallmark of the more complex thinking that leads to transformation in people and in organizations.

For an in-depth look at how to effect change, pick up a copy of Robert Kegan's and Lisa Lahey's seminal work, **Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization.**