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# WHEN LEADERS SAY 'YES' *but their behaviour says 'no'*

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Change doesn't care whether we like it or not. It will always happen, even without our permission. And when the rate of external technological change trumps the rate of internal agility, learning, and innovation, your brand is in real trouble.

**F**or CEOs in a world of the exponential, following through on your innovation agenda, change management project or R&D, vision is absolutely essential. Yet, as a futurist having worked with everyone from Fortune 500 CEOs to directors of SMEs and family enterprises across four continents over the past 12 years, I am struck by how often 'walk' and 'talk' don't match. Or even how leaders say 'yes', but their behaviour says 'no'.

Oftentimes CEOs and their C-suite play innovation theatre, or 'change charades', sometimes backed by enticing infographics, management consultant bingo and flowcharts, eagerly egged on by the internal communications team and former top-tier management consulting partners who have gone in house, while re-hiring their former team mates as advisers. Three years and several bonuses later, the company's share price has tanked or stalled and the remaining employees are disengaged or suffer from change fatigue. A new CEO comes in only to find employees who are unconvinced by their new strategic direction, infographics and rational PowerPoint decks.

While committed to a heroic journey of transformation, the CEO soon finds that culture is eating the re-invention strategy for breakfast. Sound familiar?

So what can CEOs do to ensure that they don't become known as the CEO who consistently pays lip service to change, innovation and adaptation?

## SIX FUTURISTIC, YET TIMELESS, TIPS

**1. Align yourself** When you design and co-create the vision, ask yourself whether you truly believe in the mission. If not, maybe it's not the one for you. If you do, proudly go forth and align your belief with your apostles and change agents.

### 2. Win hearts and minds

Company culture, as lived and nurtured by key stakeholders, managers, and staff is the immune system of the organisation and can effectively kill a new strategy in its infancy.

To ensure a future for your strategy, seek the advice of experts who can help you build a narrative that will connect with your audience's hearts and minds. Your vision needs to connect with rational minds, as well as emotional hearts, and inspire action, change, and momentum.

**3. Invest in the vision** The transformation vision will feel hollow if staff cannot see, feel, touch or hear how it will come to fruition. Change is a form of learning, and unless you invest in your staff's development, and if you don't successfully remove the naysayers, the hearts and minds you won will quickly be lost.

**4. Simplify concepts into behaviours** Culture words like integrity, respect, health, creativity and evolution mean nothing. Rather than plastering them on walls around the office, translate them into observable behaviours like: We take the stairs (health). We ask 'Why?' five times when confronted with red tape (creativity). We say 'Yes' to one new skill a year (evolution).

**5. Invest in digital and analogue communications** Digital is great for information; analogue is great for transformation. Few change management programs have been successfully launched and inspired via virtual worlds. While these digital platforms are ideal for information, status updates, project management and virtual collaboration, even holograms don't yet inspire the fundamental shifts required for an organisation to change.

**6. Lead by example** Showing vulnerability, emotion, transparency, humanity and humility in your leadership style (or being coached on it) and being seen to be learning, creating, innovating and changing your own ingrained habits (doing a meditation course, for example) will help you create street cred.

*Your vision needs to connect with rational minds, as well as emotional hearts, and inspire action, change and momentum.*

Start preparing yourself and your brand for your future today, because it is where you will spend the rest of your life. Doing nothing means that you as CEO, and the brand you lead, run the risk of being perfectly prepared for a world that no longer exists. ■