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How to Deal with Employees' Resistance to Change

April Callis-Birchmeier

Has the current pace of change in the world hurt your business? How can you learn to adapt to and welcome change, not only as an individual, but as the leader of a company? No matter where you are in your life, you have experienced phenomenal change in 2020. And this is a topic that we're all thinking about right now, and how we manage and adjust our lives. April wrote a book about the topic well before we were even thinking about the kinds of adjustments that we've been making in our lives since 2020.

April Callis-Burchmeier is the author of *READY, Set, Change!*, a book that reflects her decades of creating strategies and programs that address and dissolve resistance to change. The number one pain point for most organizations or people going through change is resistance. And resistance is very natural, it's to be expected. But sometimes when we go through an organizational change, it seems like it surprises everyone like, "Oh, people don't like having to do this."

We don't like things to be different than what's comfortable for us. We're used to a certain pattern, we get into a habit, and we enjoy our habits and our patterns. And when we have to disrupt them or change them in some way, it's really tough. How do we disrupt behaviors that are comfortable, and that people love, and that they are, sometimes, quite emotionally attached to? How do we replace those with behaviors that they say they want, and that we know are going to be helpful.

April explores the answers to these questions in her book. She's also busy with public speaking, online teaching, and corporate work. This podcast is just what you need to initiate powerful change in your business. Check out this podcast episode of *Writing to Get Business*.

- Why is it essential to lead with benefits in promoting change?
- How can writing a book help to clarify and further your vision of change?
- How can telling stories defuse resistance to change?
- How can a book evolve into an online course?
- Can writing a book establish you as an expert in your field?

Patricia: Hi. This is Pat Iyer. This is the podcast *Writing to Get Business*. And I have with me April Callis-Birchmeier, who is a person who is well

versed in the art of change. She has fascinated me with our discussions as we were getting ready for this podcast about why she picked this topic. No matter where you are in your life, you have experienced phenomenal change in 2020, I would bet. And this is a topic that we're all thinking about right now, and how we manage and adjust our lives. April wrote a book about the topic well before we were even thinking about the kinds of adjustments that we've been making in our lives since 2020. April, welcome to the show.

April: Thank you so much, Pat.

Patricia: Let's talk about the topic of change. Tell me, how did you get interested in that?

April: Well, I think change is a very interesting topic for a number of reasons. But I came to it in kind of a haphazard way, I have to say. I was a corporate trainer. I was teaching at colleges. I had a birthday party business, also for children, because I was home with my daughters. And I was pursued by the director of change management for a Big Ten university who was going through a large ERP—which means enterprise resource planning system—change. And this was about 20 years ago.

So, they were moving from all these homegrown computer systems they were using to run the university and moving to an ERP. And that sounds sort of technical and boring but, in fact, it was fascinating. Because what I discovered was that there was this world called organizational change management that was a combination of business process redesign, communication, training, and pretty much anything else you could throw in and think of.

I was hired to be an organizational change management consultant for that project. I learned a tremendous amount there. And I've been involved with organizational and individual change ever since.

Patricia: I'm thinking about what it must be like for those individuals to go from a computer system, or a system that they were very familiar with, to something that they had to learn and master to be able to take advantage of those qualities and the strengths of that system. One of the things that I've been fascinated by is how people behave. I had to make a choice between nursing or psychology, and both of them were

very appealing to me. And what I enjoy when I think about the change process is teasing out, what do you do about the resistance to change? Is that a big issue or are people more fluid and flexible?

April: Well, I think you've really hit on the number one pain point for most organizations or people going through change, and that's resistance. And resistance is very natural, it's to be expected. But it's funny, sometimes when we do an organizational change, it seems like it surprises everyone like, "Oh, people don't like having to do this." Well, that's the way it is.

As humans, as you know, as you just referenced the psychology, we don't like things to be different than what's comfortable for us. We're used to a certain pattern, we get into a habit, and we enjoy our habits and our patterns. And when we have to disrupt them or change them in some way, it's really tough. I have to tell you, I, about 25 years ago, was helping people to stop smoking with a program called Smoke Enders. And it was a program where we were disrupting people's habits to help them change, to help them adopt a new habit of not smoking. And it was a fascinating experience for me in terms of thinking about how we disrupt behaviors that are comfortable, and that people love, and that they are, sometimes, quite emotionally attached to, and replace those with behaviors that they say they want, and that we know are going to be helpful.

And so, I think that when we see resistance, it is that frustration, the anger, and the annoyance, sometimes, that the way that I used to do things or the way that I like to do things has been disrupted. There's so many different types of resistance that we see. And actually, when I was putting together the book, I put together a section that gave different types of promoters of change, and what happens to them when they suddenly become resistant, and how does how does that play out, and how do they behave when that happens. And then I gave some suggestions for how to help that situation when it does occur, and also, more importantly, how to prevent it so that people don't get resistant to start with. But it is natural, we do see them.

Patricia: I did, as we talked about, some change management learning when I was in graduate school and put together a program to create preceptors for new nurses working in the hospital that employed me. I decided that I had two pathways, I could create the program based on

what I thought would be best, or I could create a community that would create the program. And I had this resistance to change in mind when I took the step of having people build the program through a series of meetings, hearing everybody's perspectives, so that when it was rolled out, the individuals on the committee who had helped to create this had a sense of ownership, and then they promoted the program on their nursing units to deal with that resistance to change.

Are there strategies like that that you cover in your book, that companies can use in order to anticipate resistance to change?

April: Absolutely. And I think your example is so spot on, because many times people are resistant because they don't know what's coming, and they don't have enough communication, or they don't have enough information. And they feel like, you know, they don't like to not know, they don't like to be in the dark or feel left out.

And so, some of the strategies that are suggested in the book are things like helping our leaders to tell the story of change as a story, not as bullet points of software, or bullet points of why something's going to be good for them. Nobody loves things that are going to be good for them. So, to help to tell the story of why and make it relevant and relatable, tell the story of the reason for the change in a way that just makes sense to people.

And I'll tell you, that group that I was working with at the Big Ten university, we had a large group of people that we needed to get engaged with this change so that they could do exactly what you had done in your committee, that they could go out and carry the message of the change and tell people that this was going to be a positive thing. But first, we had to deal with their resistance and get them on board with us. And they were not very interested in being on board with us.

Now, at the time, this was a long time ago. And the time they had all these different databases that they had created themselves, which I've mentioned. But what that meant in terms of their day-to-day work was that, like if I was in the school, let's say I was in the law school, and I had a student of mine in the law school who was taking a course, maybe an engineering course for some reason, I would have to log out of my law school database, I'd have to contact somebody at engineering, and get their login, and log into their database, get my

students information, take it back out and take it to my database and put it into my database.

So, there was all this going in and out of each other's databases. In fact, I saw people who had sheets of paper next to their desk that said, the different schools and colleges and what their login information was, so that they could get in and out of the databases to gather student's information in one place. At the same time that this was going on, and I was observing all this, we were meeting with this group of people, and we were saying to the 150 or so people that we were gathering, we said, "We need your help, we need your cooperation. This is a really important project."

And I had a really technical boss, and she was a whiz at everything technical, but she kept saying to them, "This is a relational database, you need to have this." And they kept saying, "Why? We don't want this." So, at the same time that this was all happening, I had my two oldest daughters, Violet and Emma, and they were three and one.

And because I was working all week, on Saturdays, I would put them in the car, we would go run our errands, and we would go, you know, put them both into those car seats, run to the grocery store, take them out of the car seat, go to the grocery store, take them out of the grocery store, going back to the car seats, and we go the pharmacy. Out of the car seats into the pharmacy, out of the pharmacy into the car seat. We go to the bank. We go to the hardware store.

And it was just constant putting these two little girls into and out of their car seats. And it was driving me crazy. And I was thinking about this. And I was complaining about it to somebody, and they said, "Well, why don't you go to that new store? It's about 20 miles away."

So, the following weekend I did, I went to the new store, which was Walmart. And I took the kids out of their car seats one time. And we went into Walmart and they had everything I needed. They had a pharmacy, they had a grocery store, they had a hardware store, they had a bank, everything I needed, even sandwiches so I could keep them quiet. And I put them back into their car seats, got everything we needed, and I went home.

And I thought, This is what I have to help these liaisons, these folks who are so resistant. I need to share this with them, so they understand what we're trying to create.”

Well, my boss thought I was a little bit silly because she didn't want to tell our unit liaisons that we were building a Walmart for this multimillion-dollar ERP project. But then she went to them and she said, “Okay, we're building a database, a very important one, and you must pay attention.” And they got up to leave. And so, she said, “Have you ever heard of Walmart? April's going to tell you about Walmart.”

And I did. I told them about my experience and how that's what we were trying to create for them. And it was a relevant and relatable story for them, because they were all women. I'd say 95% were women who were also in the same boat that I was of taking kids in and out of the car seats and having to shop. And they said, “Oh, man, this system sounds awesome. We want that.”

And so, when they started to understand, in a relevant and relatable way, what it was we were trying to create, they started to become less resistant and more interested. And then they ended up helping us to build the entire system. So, that's one way, I think, that we can really address resistance, is to describe things and tell things, share information in a story form that's relevant and relatable to those who are hearing it.

Patricia: And that's such a perfect analogy. And you got their attention, because you were telling them a story that they understood, and the solution was easily transferable to the challenge that they had in front of them.

April: Yeah.

Patricia: That's great.

April: Yeah.

Patricia: And you I know that you do a lot of speaking; you are a certified speaking professional. You have mastered this art of telling stories and making those connections for your audience.

April: Yes. I really enjoy change management in so many different ways. And I have to say that we expect resistance; we see resistance. And for those of us who are helping to lead change, understanding that relevant and relatable stories is the place to start is really a big step.

Patricia: Let's shift back to your book for a minute. You have that experience with helping this company with their database, consolidating their systems so they were working off of one system. How did you get involved in writing that book?

April: Well, that project really started me on my path, and I've spent the past two decades working in different projects on change management and helping users adopt change. And one of the things that I noticed; I do a lot of project management work. And so, I'm also a PMP, a project management professional. I noticed that my project management teammates and team members didn't always seem to understand change management, and they didn't really understand it in a way that they could use it. They knew they should be using change management to help people adopt the change that we're working on a project, they just didn't understand how, because there's so many different change methodologies.

And some of the change methodologies that exist are really complicated and have a lot of templates and a lot of steps and pieces and moving parts, and it tends to frustrate or maybe even intimidate folks, sometimes, when they see too much going on in terms of change management. So, I thought I would really like to build something that my project management professional colleagues can use easily. They see it, they get it, they can use it, but it's simple.

And I also wanted to build something that would help accelerate change, it would help projects to go faster, because I have seen projects that get kind of bogged down, sometimes, in too many plans, too many moving parts. So, I started to think about if I had to describe this and build this toolkit for my project professional colleagues to be able to implement change, how could I build this in a way that would make it easy for them to understand or remember, number one, number two, something that they could do as a team or that if there was just one person working on change, that person could do it all alone, something that could be stretched longer or shorter, didn't have

a specific timeframe, and something that would actually help people adopt the change.

And so, I built this model, the READY-Set-Change Model, which is using the word ‘ready’ as an acronym to remind people of the five-step framework to lead change.

Patricia: Can you tell us about those five steps or give us a quick overview?

April: Sure, yes. Well, R is for relevant and relatable, which we just talked about. It's being able to tell a relevant and relatable story of the change, and benefit of the change is key. If we can't describe the reason that somebody should adopt a change, then maybe they shouldn't adopt that change. I mean, we have to know what the benefit is. And I have to tell you, as a project management professional, there have been times I've been on projects where nobody seemed to know what the benefit of the change was. We need to have a real reason for that change.

E is for engaging sponsors. Engaging sponsors and leaders in that change. In many of our change management projects, we have one person, or maybe two people, but generally one person who is accountable for leading that change. And they don't always know what to do, we have to teach them what to do to be able to be successful with how to lead the change.

The A is for advanced communication and advocacy. So advanced communication is really critical. People need to know what we know when we know it. They don't need us to hold information until we have it perfectly tidy in a little box; they need to know it as soon as we know it. And we need to be able to communicate frequently. Pat, I have to tell you, the most recent Gallup poll suggests that people need 9 to 16 communication exposures before they understand something applies to them. Now, we used to say it was 7 in marketing terms, right? It was 7 communications, but now it's between 9 and 16. So we have to get out there fast and we have to be able to communicate frequently.

And, I think, advocacy is important also. Because when we're going through a change, we have to think about not just the stakeholders who will be impacted by the change, we have to think, also, about the

end user who is actually interacting with the system or interacting with that change kind of face-to-face in-person. They are the end user of that product. And sometimes, they give us a little bit of a shortcut. So, I always recommend that we're thinking of them and advocating for them when we're making decisions around change.

So that's R, E, A, and then we have D for develop and support. And that's all-around training and development, as well as supporting people after we go live. Once we've turned on the system or started a new program or reorganized our companies, we want to make sure that we're supporting them, that we have structures in place to help them sustain that change.

And then Y is going back to the why for resistance. So, when we have resistance, we are always looping back to the why, and we're talking about the relevant and relatable benefit of the change, the why. And that's the READY Set Change framework.

Patricia: That is slick, April, very slick.

April: Thank you.

Patricia: How long ago did you write the book?

April: It was published just last February, so we're coming up on a year.

Patricia: Came out at just the right time in our cultural history, right?

April: Yes. And the amazing thing was as we all became locked down, I just went on a virtual book tour. And I spoke to a lot of Project Management Institute chapters and Society Human Resource Management chapters, and anybody who wanted to hear about the book, I love to share information about it.

Patricia: How did that work out for you? What did you think was the benefit for you planning it that way?

April: Well, I mean it wasn't an initial plan. I thought I was going to speak to chapters in person, but ended up on Zoom for, I think, I probably did 60 or 70 Zoom meetings with different chapters for those organizations. And I really enjoyed it. For the Project Management Institute, I feel like it is an understandable model. It's something they

get, and they can remember. And they love the fact that it is somewhat streamlined. And they're able to use it right away, they don't even have to necessarily read the whole book, they can just think through the steps and have a sense of where to go.

The thing that I found for the Human Resource Professional groups; those groups seemed to really enjoy it because they could see the focus on people. They could understand that this is a people-focused process. And sometimes, I find that we think about project management as delivering a project, right, delivering technology, if you will. But change management is delivering the people to that technology, is bringing the people along. So, they are able to go through the transition state more quickly, they get to the future state more quickly, and they're able to experience the benefits of the change more quickly when we use change management. So, it's been an enjoyable experience, I've really loved sharing.

Patricia: One of the things that I focus on in the show is also that the process of writing the book helps you solidify your ideas. The publishing of the book helps you expose yourself to new opportunities because of having shown your knowledge in the book. Can you identify what has changed for you as a result of publishing this book almost a year ago?

April: Yes, yes. An immediate result that I can absolutely tie to the publishing of the book is that when I started sharing this book with all of these different groups, they started to give me feedback and ask for how can we learn more about this and how can we become trained in it. And so, I was able to create an online course that I teach live but is also on demand for people if they can't attend the live sessions. I was able to create a course called READY, Set, Change! Change Mastery 101. And not only did I develop the course, which was very exciting, because people wanted to have the framework, but I also worked with the Association of Change Management Professionals and became a qualified education provider. So, my course meets the criteria for people to receive their certified Change Management Professional designation. So, that was exciting, and really thrilling.

Patricia: Very, very nice.

April: And then I've also, now, taken the READY, Set, Change! course and I just met with Seminars World, and I'll be providing that for the PMI

Seminars World training in the next quarter. So very exciting. I wouldn't have had that opportunity if I hadn't written the book and published it.

Patricia: When you created the online course, how much of the content did you take from the book? How did the book feed the online course?

April: Well, the contents is the course, right? The interesting thing about the book and the way that I put it together was that, like I have this core material that's nonfiction, it's very step-by-step, easy to follow along. But I framed it in a fictional story, I framed it in a Patrick Lencioni kind of way, where I have characters who are a project manager, a human resource manager, and a change management consultant, and the three of them are working to implement a change.

And so, there's a little bit of narrative, at the beginning of every chapter, talking about some of the challenges that they're facing and what they're up against. And then it goes into more of the technical information around how to conduct the stakeholder assessment, and what you're looking for, and how to facilitate that. And then the next chapter begins, again, with this narrative of these fictional characters. I don't have any of the fictional characters in the course, but all of the framework is in the course.

For the approved ACMP course, I also have information about the *Standard for Change Management*, which is a document that is free for anybody who'd like to download it. It's at acmpglobal.org. You can download the *Standard for Change Management*. I'm one of the authors of that standard. And the standard is also in the change mastery course so that people who want to take their certification exam are able to learn not only the READY Set Change framework and how that works and how to do it, but also able to learn about the standard for change management so they can pass their exam.

Patricia: It's a beautiful thing, isn't it?

April: Yes, it is. Yes.

Patricia: And I was also thinking, as you were talking, what if you wrote a book anticipating you're going to turn it into an online course, and you structured it specifically as modules that could be included?

- April: That's a great idea.
- Patricia: If you think ahead. I released a book, in April of last year, on *Networking for Legal Nurse Consultants*. And when our professional conference was cancelled, and I knew that I wasn't going to be standing behind a table selling this new book, I got a colleague to help contribute material about LinkedIn as a networking tool, which I did not cover in the book. The book was more focused on in-person networking as well as a lot of other content, but I took a piece of the book and turned it into an online course. It sounds like you used the model of the book to create your online course, but you used some discrimination in terms of what do I include, what do I don't include when I'm building that online course.
- April: Yes. And I have other courses now that are kind of coming to mind, as I'm thinking about the feedback I've had over the year, and people have said, "Oh, I really like this section and I'd like more of that." And I heard that. And so now I'm planning to expand and to add another online course to respond to the feedback I've received.
- Patricia: Your knowledge goes into the book, and you use the knowledge to go into the online course, you use your knowledge to consult with people. Can you tell our listener what is your primary occupation now? Are you a consultant? Do you work as an employee for a company? How does this all fit together?
- April: Wow, I wish I could describe it, how it all fits together to myself some days. But it seems to flow very well. I have Springboard Consulting. It's a boutique change management consulting group. And I have clients. So, I'm employed by my company. I'm not employed by anyone else. And I perform work for clients. And I also have my online courses, speaking engagements. And I'm also having a membership startup in April this year, so that's exciting. So, I would have to say, if I had to divvy it up, I would say I probably do maybe 40% of change management consulting for clients, 20% speaking engagements, and 20% online course and membership pieces.
- I have a challenge that I've been running as well. And I'm really focused on trying to help people get their certification, that Change Management Professional certification. It's called the CCMP. And it's just a fantastic certification in the sense that it was launched from the

Standard for Change Management in 2016. So, there's only 1,500 people who've been certified.

So, what I've been talking about with SHRM, with Society of Human Resource Management, and project managers, and maybe even thinking about it for some of the authors that you work with, is that when you add this certification to what you already have, you really differentiate yourself, because instead of being, one PMP out of one and a half million PMPs, I am a PMP with a CCMP, which puts me at one out of about a thousand, right? Because not everybody who has the CCMP, there's 1,500 of us, and not everybody is a project management professional also. So, it really takes me from being one of 1.5 million to being one of a thousand. And I think people are looking for that kind of differentiation for their careers now, too.

Patricia: And you certainly have gotten visibility with those credentials through your book, through your presentation to the chapters. We were talking, before we started recording, about the fact that you've put together summits which have given you more visibility as well.

April: Yes, yes, the Change and Innovation Summits.

Patricia: Well, how could our listener find out more information about you, your services, your book?

April: Well, if anybody's interested in the Change Management course, which would help you to obtain your certification, it's online at changemastery101.com. That is changemastery101.com. And my book is available on Amazon, of course. And I'm always happy to have people reach out and connect with me on LinkedIn. So, if you'd like to stay in touch, if you'd like to connect, please, connect with me on LinkedIn, I'm the only April Callis-Birchmeier that there is, so you can find me very easily.

Patricia: You are unique, one of one.

April: Yes, one of one. Yes.

Patricia: Well, thank you, April. You have inspired me, brought me back to memories of what I thought through as I was taking on a new job in charge of staff development in a hospital and thinking about resistance to change, and how important it is when you are working with a group

of people, in whatever capacity, to think through the change process, because the costs, which we didn't touch on, but the cost of the resistance can be phenomenal in terms of morale, turnover, lack of engagement. Being able to manage that change process, whether it's in your own family, it's in your own business is a critical skill, to be aware of all those factors that influence how we react to change.

April: Absolutely, yes.

Patricia: And thank you to you, who's been listening to this podcast. Be sure to go to patiyer.com, P-A-T-I-Y-E-R.com. Pick up some of our free reports that will help you in your writing skills, refresh you, give you some tips on proofreading, on capitalizing on your book. We've got a variety of resources there for you. And come back next week when we have a new show and a new guest. Thanks so much.

This is Pat Iyer and Laura Conklin. We have been talking about Laura's two books. Laura has been a nurse for over 50 years and worked with me to create two books. Laura, tell our listener or our viewer on our YouTube channel, what are some of the key points that we covered in this podcast?

Laura: Well, one of the interesting points was I had mentioned to Pat that I wanted to write my memoirs. I've been a nurse for 50 years, I worked every field of nursing, and I wanted to share those stories. Basically, Pat said, "Who cares?" Okay, so I'd rethink that. All right, in those 50 years of nursing and all those areas I worked, what did I learn? What do I want to pass on as an opportunity to learn for somebody else? What can they accomplish walking through my steps? And it was a look at, oh, my gosh, how nursing has changed over the years, over 50 years, lots of changes in nursing. So, we talked about that.

So, when we came to "*Shocking Stories of Nursing: Memoirs of a 50-Year Nursing Career*" that book sort of focused on my life as a nurse, what I did, what I accomplished, what I wanted to accomplish, and why I wanted to be a nurse, till when I finally retired, which is a hyphenated word. I'm still working on it. So that was book one.

Patricia: And just to clarify, I'm thinking it sounds rather callous when I said, "Who cares?" The point of that was, what are the things that you learned in your life that would help other people, influence their decision to go into nursing, give them a perspective of what that type of nursing is like, for a nurse who's a staff

nurse or a manager. Sometimes, when people consider writing memoirs, they don't look at the broader aspects of their story. So that's what my "who cares" means.

Laura: Yes, I know. I did kind of mention it, what did you learn? What did you pass on? How creative could you get in any of those positions? And what made a difference you being there? And that's, I think, one of the focuses of my memoirs, is who cares? Why was there? What did I do? What did I accomplish? And how did that impact, in a positive way, nursing as it was at that time.

Patricia: And then we also talked, in your podcast, a little bit about your second book, which was very different than your first book in its focus. Can you tell our viewer some of the key points that he or she will get from watching this podcast and finding out about your second book?

Laura: Okay. The second book was totally different because it wasn't all about me. Over the years, I had reviewed many allegations against nurses for the state of Michigan Board of Nursing, looking at scope of practice, things of that nature. Michigan does not have a Nurse Practice Act, everything falls off of the public health code, which can be pretty broadly interpreted. Well, as I reviewed these cases, I looked at, well, what else could this nurse have done? I kept those reports.

So, I thought, you know, this would be a good second book, *More Shocking Stories of Nursing: What Were They Thinking?* Why did this particular nurse do what she did? Or he did what he did? Did it make sense? At the time, it may have. Was it a lack of knowledge or was it on purpose? Nobody sets off working, saying that "Oh, I'm going to harm somebody today." So, it was an interesting collection of stories that I think would be a heads up either for new nurses, or somebody interested in going into the profession, or for older nurses that can say, "Damn, I almost did that," or, "Oh, wow, I didn't know I can't do that." And kind of a heads up when you deviate from what you've learned, the basics, it will come back to bite you.

Patricia: And having been intimately involved in editing both of these books, I want to underscore that your second book is of interest to anyone who has a patient, or could be a patient, or is the child of a parent who is a patient, or in essence, anyone who has an interest in healthcare and a concern about wanting to spot some of the things that could go wrong in their own care.

Laura: Yes. When you keep silent about a situation that you're not comfortable with, that promotes it. And that can be a very dangerous thing. So, if you're not sure, it's best to ask. Ask somebody that you can trust their opinion on, "Does this

sound right? They gave my mom these meds like an hour apart.” Is that how it's supposed to go? Because errors can be prevented, a lot of them can be prevented. And that's only going to be better for the profession.

Patricia: Well, thank you, Laura. Be sure to watch Laura's podcast coming up next on this channel, and to leave a comment or a review on iTunes or Apple podcasts about the show. We value your opinion and hope that you are getting some valuable tips from the show, as well as I know you'll get valuable tips from listening to Laura Conklin. Thank you.

Laura: Thank you.