

Getting people on board: the key to making change stick

Why mindset matters more than methods

If you're trying to lead change in your business right now, you're not alone, and you're not imagining it if it feels harder than it used to.

Whether it's adapting to economic uncertainty, shifting customer needs, hybrid working, or staying competitive, most businesses are navigating some kind of change on multiple fronts. And while the pressures are usually external, how your people respond, and how your leaders show up, will make or break whether a change achieves its intended outcome.

A 2022 study by Professor Malcolm Higgs and Deborah Rowland (*Is change all in the mind?*) suggests that when it comes to successful change, mindset and presence matter more than any particular model or process. In fact, leaders who demonstrated mindful behaviours; being self-aware, present, and intentional, were significantly more effective at delivering change than those who relied purely on top-down, task-driven approaches.

Change is personal, and so is leadership

According to Higgs and Rowland's research:

Leaders who were *present* and tuned into what was happening around them were better at adapting their approach to better support their teams

Mindful leaders were more emotionally intelligent and could handle tension or resistance without defensiveness or conflict

These leaders were also more likely to hold space for others, creating psychological safety and trust during times of uncertainty

It's not that plans, tools, or change programmes aren't useful. It's that they don't work if the human side is missing. And in business, where culture is often shaped by a small number of leaders, that human impact is hugely magnified.

What further recent research adds

Contemporary research backs this up. Gallup (2023) found that

employees are far more engaged during times of change when leaders are visible, honest, and act with empathy. CIPD (2022) emphasises the need for leaders to be “emotionally agile”, and able to navigate their own responses as well as others’.

Meanwhile, McKinsey (2020) notes that during major transformations, organisations that focused on trust, transparent communication and people-first leadership were 1.8 times more likely to outperform peers.

What does this all mean for business leaders?

In smaller businesses, change often happens fast — but also messily. There is no corporate playbook or endless resources. And leaders are often wearing multiple hats, and sometimes even all the same time!

But even with limited time and headcount, the research is clear: how you lead matters more than what you roll out. Change doesn’t succeed because a plan was written. It works when people believe in it — and in the person leading it.

Here are some common challenges business leaders face when driving change, and how

insights from mindful leadership can help:

1. People are resistant or disengaged

Instead of pushing harder, try slowing down. Tune into what’s really going on. Is it fear? Confusion? Burnout? Acknowledging it with empathy and care builds trust.

2. You’re unsure how to lead when you don’t have all the answers

You don’t have to. Mindful leadership is about presence, not perfection. Being transparent about uncertainty, while still showing direction, can actually build credibility.

3. You’re feeling the pressure to “just get on with it”

Taking time to reflect, listen, and stay grounded isn’t a delay, it’s a purposeful strategy. When leaders pause and respond intentionally, they lead with more authenticity and impact.

How GrowPros can help you lead change in your business

We help business leaders develop the mindset, behaviours and confidence to lead through change in a way that actually brings people with them.

We work with businesses of all shapes and sizes because we get the reality: you're busy, things move fast, and change can't be a 'side project.' Our support is practical, grounded and human.

Here's what we offer:

Mindset-first leadership development – workshops and coaching that focus on presence, confidence and emotional intelligence

Practical behavioural tools – simple ways to shift habits, conversations and team norms

Support for middle managers – helping your day-to-day leaders communicate clearly, stay calm under pressure, and build trust

Change that sticks – not because it's mandated, but because your people believe in it

A final thought...

Leading change isn't about having all the answers. It's about showing up in a way that gives people something, and someone they can trust.

If you're navigating change in your business and want to build leadership that people want to follow, let's talk!

Key references

Higgs, M., & Rowland, D. (2022). *Is change all in the mind? A study of leader mindfulness and behaviours in implementing change*. *Journal of General Management*

Gallup (2023). *State of the Global Workplace*

CIPD (2022). *Leading Change*

McKinsey & Company (2020). *Leadership in a Crisis*