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Change Questions: No More Flavor of the Month

Sonia Bot, D. Lynn Kelley, William C. Vantuono

William Vantuono:

Welcome to this edition of Rail Group on Air, the podcast series brought to you by Railway Age, Railway Track and Structures and International Railway Journal. I'm William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief of Railway Age. Today we will discuss the recently released change management book, *Change Questions,* by noted executive D. Lynn Kelley Ph.D. with prominent internationally known Lean Management expert John Shook.

The pace of organizational change has been increasing. Unfortunately, most change activities fail to deliver anticipated results and those that do often fail to sustain. The *Change Questions* book addresses these critical issues by providing a proven process with a strong record of sustainment that can be used by anyone responsible for implementing organizational change. The book includes a case study with examples and stories of transformation at Union Pacific Railroad during an eight-year period. Using the

Change Questions resulted in a dramatic increase in operational performance and a 96% sustainment rate over hundreds of change initiatives.

Lance Fritz, the former Chairman, CEO and President of Union Pacific, said, "Change questions came to life for me when I saw their power to transform our daily grind—improvement driven by the individuals doing the work."

We have two guests to discuss the book *Change Questions*. We have the author Lynn Kelley, and Contributing Editor Sonia Bot, Chief Executive of the BOT Consulting Group Inc., which I'm sure you will recognize from her publications and podcasts with Railway Age. So welcome to you both. Before we dive into the main discussion, how about you tell us about yourselves? Lynn, why don't you go first?

Lynn Kelley:

Thank you. You mentioned that the case study was at Union Pacific Railroad over an eight year timeframe, and that's because I worked there, and retired from UP a few years ago. I was Senior Vice President of supply chain and continuous improvement.

Now that I'm retired from Union Pacific Railroad, I work for Brown Brothers Harriman in New York City in their private equity group, advising them on railroad and manufacturing investments. Prior to Union Pacific, I spent most of my career in manufacturing.

I worked at Textron. Most of you have not heard of Textron, but you certainly know the companies that Textron owns, such as Bell Helicopter, Cessna Aircraft and E-Z-Go golf cars. Textron also owns companies in automotive, mining and other industries. I reported to the chairman and CEO and worked in over the 32 different countries in our hundreds of manufacturing facilities, helping to implement operational excellence. And that's where the Change Questions got their start.

I have a PhD in evaluation and research, and I taught statistics for a number of years. Prior to academia, I was an Executive Vice President at a small hospital in Detroit.

So, in essence, I've guided organizations in change management, through leadership roles in supply chain, manufacturing, engineering, and continuous improvement across diverse industries at a global scale.

William Vantuono:

Alright, thank you Lynn. Sonia, your turn. Tell us about yourself.

Sonia Bot:

Okay! I've played key roles in creating several strategic new businesses within corporations as well as leading and guiding complex transformations worldwide.

I've seen a lot. I've navigated through downsizing, right-sizing, deregulations, SEC investigations, economic downturns, heydays and scale ups, let alone worked through one of the largest and very high profile global corporate bankruptcies in the world.

I love doing innovation! And I have hands-on experience in dealing with operational issues for all the key functional areas in a corporation: it's customers, it's suppliers, the regulators, the whole ecosystem.

I focus on issues that include the more difficult decision-making or issues where previous attempts by others have failed.

And it's really important to me that I enable organizations to deliver breakthrough results along with providing them a foundation to continue to excel as the company and the world continue to evolve.

Like Lynn, I too, draw from practical methodologies. For me this includes entrepreneurship, business, precision, systems engineering, organizational behavior, and Lean Six Sigma. I'm a certified Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt, and I did that to become a better leader. I evolve and customized these methodologies as business models, technology and external dynamics of the world keep evolving.

William Vantuono:

All right, thank you very much Sonia. I'd like to turn it over to you now, and Lynn.

Sonia Bot:

Okay, Bill! Lynn, to start, let's acknowledge that there's lots out there on the topic of change, even dating back centuries, like Machiavelli in the early 1500s, as you mentioned in your book, Now, some material is really good and some is, quite frankly, limited. So, I have to ask, what do you see as the unique value that your book and your Change Questions methodology offer?

Lynn Kelley:

Oh, that's a really good question! There is so much out there, and you're right, I have probably read most of it because every time I failed, I would seek out what did I do wrong…what can I do differently? And there are, as you said, tons of good methodologies out there. And what makes Change Questions unique is that every other methodology that I have seen has a step-by-step process. And my feeling is no two changes are the same; every change is different. So the methodology should be able to ebb and flow and adjust to your own specific need. And that's why taking the approach of questions lets everyone decide what's appropriate for them and their change. They end up with a customized approach for their change. That's the first thing.

The second thing is this fabulous case study at Union Pacific Railroad. I loved working there! The book includes lots of good stories about the railroad and the people in the railroad. I hope every reader comes away with a new admiration for the railroad.

And finally, the book is accompanied by a digital workbook that's free. We'll give you information later on how to get that. But it's so that you can do this whole Change Questions process digitally, which is really helpful in this age of working on Zoom calls. I started using the Change Questions digitally years ago when I was working in those 32 different countries.

Sonia Bot:

Those are really good points that you make, Lynn, and it's really, really so true that no two change initiatives are alike. Nuances are important factors.

Now, you mentioned that your case studies, and you also get very specific about it in your book, that what you've done at Union Pacific, and what makes the Change Questions methodology really powerful, is when you apply this to what I would call initiatives that are in the "more complex" category. For example, railroads are an entrenched industry. And there's some beauty to the entrenchment. But railroads need to keep moving forward. There are new entrant competitors coming, as an example, but there's also extensive union involvement. And there's a skill and an art in terms of how to deal effectively with all different parts of a railroad or that type of environment. And generally speaking, you can also say the same about complexity when you factor into your change initiative, any external parties to an organization, or other legal entities that are external that come into your change initiative. For example, external business partners, suppliers, regulators, and customers.

Lynn Kelley:

You're right, Sonia. Introducing those other entities and the union does add a layer of complexity.

Sonia Bot:

One of the things, Lynn, that I, more than too often, hear is that 60% to 70% of change efforts fail. Studies keep reporting this. And leaders and organizations that approach me, they tell me their horror stories along these lines. And in my experience in leading complex change initiatives, and again across many industries and organizations worldwide, international proportions, similar to you Lynn, including railroading, is that it doesn't have to be that way. There is a way of systematically getting into that 30% to 40% success zone and, more so, achieving sustainable change. That's change that sticks.

Lynn, you've also experienced sustainable change. How about you tell us and give us some examples that you've come across in various industries and in railroading.

Lynn Kelley:

I love that you brought up that failure rate. I mean, I hate that it's there, but I love that you brought it up because so often we implement change as if failure's not an option or if we mention failure, it will jinx our change launch. We need to proactively recognize the probability that the change will fail, unless we systematically approach the change.

My first failure came with my first international assignment. I was in Textron's automotive segment. I was transferred to France to work in France and Germany with a dozen manufacturing facilities to help them figure out how to implement changes that their customers wanted. And I have to tell you, I failed miserably. I mean, Germany was not as bad, but France was dismal in terms of my failures. And for the life of me, I just really tried so many different things, but I kept going back to the research on change failures, and that's when I also discovered the statistic that you mentioned. You're lucky if you hit 30% to 40% success rate.

So that's how the Change Questions got to be developed--through all of my various failures. But I steadily added questions to ask myself before any change initiative. If a question was applicable to the situation, I knew I needed to address that thing. And I saw my success rate start at 30% and go to the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and up. By the time I left Textron, we were at a 90% sustainment rate across all industries, 35,000 employees, 32 countries and hundreds of different initiatives a year. And we were sustaining and they were delivering strong results at a 90% sustainment rate. So it really proved to me that taking that time before we implement a major change really pays the dividends. And actually we measured it at Union Pacific and when I left there, we had a 96% sustainment rate, which mostly included union employees in the field. We saw increases in productivity, velocity, and other metrics in ways that were just really rewarding and fun.

Sonia Bot:

You can say that for sure! It's always really rewarding and fun! I love doing this kind of stuff! It's just so much, much fun!

In my experience, and like you Lynn, we can say we've both been around the block many times over. I find that no two organizational change efforts are the same. There are so many factors both in and out of our control that are at play. And you really need to get into that.

Lynn Kelley:

You are absolutely right. There is such a tendency out there to just treat change efforts as if they're all the same. And so we just use the same approach . But they are all different.

Sonia Bot:

Unfortunately, I find that many organizations and change practitioners, they tend to get stuck in a method and then they apply it generically as a checklist while missing key things, or they take shortcuts and cut out important steps that are required, or they simply tinker, or they just don't know any better and they fly by the seat of their pants. Lynn, tell us how Change Questions helps reduce this risk.

Lynn Kelley:

Yeah, the thing is that I've read all these change methodologies and what I found is that a lot of them are accompanied with studies and they will say things like: "16% of the time when a change initiative fails is because of this." Well, that may make it into somebody's change methodology or somebody's model, but if you see a study that says that 5% of the time change fails because of something else, that probably isn't going to make it into a model. So with the Change Questions, as I failed, I kept pulling in anything that was relevant. And what I found is that I've got 11 questions. So it's bigger than a normal change model, but unless you have a super complex change, you probably won't answer or address every question. So what you end up with is you don't over-produce too complex of a change implementation plan or under-produce a plan that's not thorough enough. You end up with kind of the "Goldilocks" plan where it's just right. And that's my goal. That was my goal with Change Questions.

Sonia Bot:

Lynn, in your book, you provide many vivid stories, or more formally speaking, case studies of your experience at Union Pacific. And for a bit of context, Lynn, your mandate at Union Pacific was based on Lean being the underlying methodology that needed to be instilled there.

And for those of you that are not familiar with Lean, Lean is a way of thinking about creating needed value with fewer resources and less waste. Lean is a practice consisting of continuous experimentation to achieve perfect value with zero waste. And so, we need to recognize that Lean thinking and Lean practice do occur together.

Lynn, there are 11 Change Questions that one can pick from. Let's look into a couple of them and let's make them come alive for listeners. How about you pick the first one and I'll pick the second one that we'll cover.

Lynn Kelley:

All right, Let's start with the first change question, which is: "What is your value-driven purpose for the change?"

Sonia Bot:

Well, that's a real great choice! In fact, that's one that I notice that if it's not properly done, which includes addressing the value-driven purpose upfront and then refining or even pivoting as you move along, it would put the whole initiative at risk. And I can say the same thing for this particular Change Question,

the value-driven purpose, when it comes to other areas such as product and service development, or new innovations, or modernizing business models, and the like.

Lynn Kelley:

So, this is a powerful question on many, many fronts. It really is, and you probably noticed when you read it that it includes two elements. One is: what is your value-driven…? So I'm just going to take a moment to talk about value and then we'll really key in on purpose. There are so many big organizational changes that get rolled out, and we don't often define the value that we expect to get from the change. And the reason we mention value at the first Change Question is we want to identify what we expect to get from the change initiative. Later on in the Change Questions, we'll measure value to see if we really are getting the value that we expect.

That's a critical part of this. But purpose is critical. It's critical for so many reasons, but let's first talk about toddlers. Every toddler is known for a different phase. So the twos are the terrible twos, right? The threes, I bet you could immediately guess what the threes are. It's the "why" time. It's the time when the little three-year-olds ask why approximately eight times per day. And they don't take a vacation for weekends or any time off! So they are constantly seeking to understand what they see and what they experience. And why would we think that we outgrow that need when we get to the workplace? There have been studies on the role of purpose and all the studies find that people have a need, an intrinsic internal need to understand: why are you asking me to do this? Why are you asking me to change? What's the purpose? We may think that some ages outgrow it, but what's interesting is a recent study says millennials have a stronger need than any of the other age groups to understand why. So a value-driven purpose statement starts to give us alignment and sets us on a direction.

I'm going to give you a quick example from Union Pacific. So the railroad lives and dies by velocity, right? We all love velocity. We want to keep things moving. And at Union Pacific, like most railroads, we have two main groups that work on velocity. The one is the dispatchers and the other one includes the folks in the field-- in transportation. We have pairs of these dispatching and transportation managers who own the corridors. At Union Pacific, we thought they were aligned on purpose because they both had velocity as a goal, but their velocity measures led up through each of their own departments. We found that sometimes transportation would suboptimize dispatch's velocity in trying to make transportation's velocity better-- and vice versa.

We called the Lean change initiative at Union Pacific, UP Way. When we started doing UP Way at Union Pacific, we looked at this and we said, wait a minute. These two groups are not aligned with each other on purpose. So we started pairing them up on that shared goal with the shared purpose. And velocity immediately started to go up.

And I want to tell you about one quick wonderful story. Sometimes the people in the field felt the speed limits were too slow. And over the course of 150 years, maybe a track, a curve had been straightened or a bridge had been added or something's happened, and nobody went back to dispatch in every single circumstance and changed the speed limit. So one astute pair got out, they looked at everything, and they found that they could go through their corridor and they could increase the speed dramatically. Of course, all of the other pairs did it and our velocity went up. I mean, it just was fantastic because we were aligned on purpose.

Sonia Bot:

Lynn, there's certainly an art to asking questions and especially knowing why you're asking them! And this first Change Question, your value-driven purpose is a really important one, like you told us.

So now it's my turn. I get to pick from the Change Questions. So my pick is, how will you establish a supportive management system with the appropriate leader behaviors?

Lynn Kelley:

That's a great choice. Go for it!

Sonia Bot:

Lynn, what I liked in your book was your story about the leaders from the top of the company and through to the management ranks. They were so effectively supported. And I really laughed out loud when you quoted the Wicked Witch of the West: "These things must be done delicately."

Lynn, would you share that story with us and make this come alive in the context of this particular change question?

Lynn Kelley:

You picked one of the top reasons that leadership fails or that change initiatives fail, which is lack of top leadership support. The two top areas for change failure are communication and leadership,. Depending on the study, they flip back and forth, but leadership is critical. So the Change Question for that is: "How will you establish a supportive management system with the appropriate leadership behaviors?"

Management system: you may not be familiar with that term. Think of it as the infrastructure that might be working against your change. Things like how we're measured. Think of the velocity example I gave you. Each of those folks on velocity were being measured through their own department. So that was working against the actual goal overall. So, it could be how you're measured, it could be how you're promoted, it could be the org chart…all of those types of things. That's what a management system is, and we need to look at that and see if there's anything that's conflicting with the change that we want to initiate.

One example that I found at Union Pacific is related to proactive problem solving. We wanted to address railroad problems before they become a crisis. But it feels like the railroad lives a crisis daily. And we love the people that can get us out of emergencies --we love them. Those firefighters, we reward them, we love them. And we don't say the same thing about the people that avoid the fires. So that would be another example of finding a way to not only reward the firefighters, but also the people that proactively eliminate those fires from happening in the first place.

The second part of that change question involves leadership behaviors. And the research doesn't just say that change fails if leadership doesn't support it. It mostly talks about visible leadership behaviors so that employees get more than lip service. Employees need to see that leaders are supportive of the change. And so what we did at Union Pacific is something that's called catch-ball.

We went to leaders and we said, "This is the change we're going to implement. It's called UP Way. It's like Lean, from Toyota, but it's going to be for railroads. This is what it looks like. How could you show your people that you support this? What could you visibly do?"

We took all that feedback back to our team. Now, keep in mind, nobody wants to be told what to do. If we were to go to our leaders and say, you're going to do this, they'd say: "Yeah, right." That's something we have to do delicately. So instead, we asked them and they offered up their ideas. So mentally, psychologically, they're engaged. They've engaged in visualizing themselves supporting the change. That's a big step in terms of change behavior and internal buy-in.

Then our team put together what all the leaders were saying and we went back to leaders individually and said, these are the things you and your peers said you could do. Which ones can you sign up for? We showed them the data saying it will fail if they don't show support. They chose things like: We will train our own people. We're going to set up meetings to review the progress of the change. We're going to remove roadblocks. We're going to coach people. I mean, they just found ways that they could engage in the change, and it was really powerful.

I just want to give you another quick story if you don't mind. This involves safety, which is near and dear to all of our hearts. Years ago, I remember in manufacturing, we were very rules-based, as was almost everybody doing safety in that you had a set of rules, and if people on the shop floor or as in the railroad, if people in the field violated those rules, they would be written up.

And the whole safety approach went through a big change about switching over to behavioral-based safety where we encourage employees to have the ownership for their own safety and the safety of their peers. But trying to change that management system, that infrastructure around the old rules-based system, and having employees trust you enough that they're going to start saying when they're unsafe and coaching each other--that is huge change. So we had one safety coordinator who was seeing that in our safety department at Union Pacific, and said we had to switch over to behavioral safety, but was having a hard time getting a lot of buy-in. They had areas where they were succeeding and they were doing their very best. But we did have one person who had been exposed to UP Way and understood some of the principles of the Change Questions. And she said, I wonder if I can use this with behavioral-based safety. And she started experimenting and putting those things in place with the people she was responsible for. And by the third year, that department saw a 50% reduction in their injury rate. And a couple of years later, another 50% reduction. And I mean there were sparks like that happening on all over the railroad. But the point is that it's all about looking at that management system, removing the roadblocks and having leaders be active and involved in demonstrating the changes that need to be made.

Sonia Bot:

What I like about how you described it in the book is how the leaders were really supported. Now you're saying, let's remove the roadblocks. But the way in which the leaders were very effectively and constructively supported, it was something that was really powerful that was done there. And this particular question, it's an important one, this particular Change Question on a management system and the leadership behaviors, it's an important one for leaders to really take to heart, especially now at this time, as we are stepping into a new era of leadership in the context of artificial intelligence and decisioning. So, things are even changing how we lead. And with this mechanism that's in place, prompted by this Change Question, I believe is very powerful and effective and it's important.

Moving on, Lynn, one of the techniques that you describe in your book is how you use what is called the 20-60-20 rule. And that's something that I also find very effective, and it's never let me down.

Lynn Kelley:

I agree. It's one of my favorite parts of the whole book. And I stumbled upon it. I'll give you a little background. Again, another failure. You probably wonder how I kept my job. But I had been implementing change successfully and had a lot of the Change Questions developed. And for complex changes, (like a supplier portal for all suppliers across all of Textron) I was using the Change Questions. It was really working well. But I had one change that I had to roll out, and I had thought it was going to be easy. It was with a small group of people, granted probably 10 different countries, but not a big group of people. I had worked with a lot of them forever. I felt they trusted me. I'd kind of pre-warned them, Hey, this change is coming, this is kind of the deal.

But I didn't do the Change Questions. If I would've looked through them, I probably would've picked three and it probably would've succeeded. But I ended up thinking, I know this group. I'm just sending out the email that says: effective next week, blah, blah, blah. And I got slammed. I mean, really big time slammed. And in fact, a couple business units said, we're not doing that. I'm like, what? Are you kidding me? I report to the CEO. Really? You're not doing it? And I realized then in trying to figure out why was it just so out of proportion to what I expected, I stumbled across the change curve. And basically it says that no matter what change it is, 20% of the people will be open to it. They're the change agents. They're early adopters. 60% will be neutral. They're just going to wait around. They're not going to take a strong stance, and then 20% will resist. And if you just roll something out without any preparation, there are a lot of problems with that, which is what I did. You're going to have the resistors who have a really loud voice in trying to dissuade people from making the change. I also found you could use that curve to your advantage. So that was a big aha for me, and that formed the basis of a lot of my learnings, new learnings at that point.

Sonia Bot:

And Lynn, in your book, I really like how you make things come to life with your case examples at Union Pacific. So how about you share with us how you use the 20-60-20 rule for selecting the most appropriate candidate for running the test pilots, or as in your book, you call that the learning trials?

Lynn Kelley:

Think about most of the changes we've experienced. Maybe you get a notice from leadership on X date-- we're going to roll this out, and then three weeks later it gets rolled out to everyone at the same time. That whole peanut butter spread. And then think about that, the neutral group, they're the ones you want. You've got to get a tipping point, you've got to get some momentum. But the people with the loudest voice, which is what I experienced, are the negative people. And they will, and I hate to label them because sometimes they've just been given so many changes, they're burnt out. But people who will resist it, they're going to pull that neutral group in the wrong direction. You have to get momentum in the positive direction.

So what I always do, and I did at Union Pacific, I try to get some type of a pilot, an experiment, or a simulation, and I choose change agents because they're going to want to change, and I say, partner with me, we're going to get the bugs out together. You are going to give the resistors a lot of negative fodder to influence the neutrals if you have bugs when you roll out your change. And we've all experienced change where things don't work well, or not like it was supposed to. So what you do then is you get this pilot and you get with the change agent. One of the other Change Questions is, how am I going to recognize success? So even if you get a little spark of success, you immediately glom onto it and you have the CEO talk about it, you put it in a podcast, you put it out on the website and you put it in *Railway Age*, and suddenly everybody is listening and the neutrals are going: well, we want that! And again, psychologically, nobody wants to be told what to do, but if they say: how come they get that, and we don't? It's like FOMO: Fear Of Missing Out. They want to get what the change agents got. And so that really does transform a change. And I strongly, strongly recommend that for anybody implementing wide scale organizational change.

Sonia Bot:

And there are so many ways that you can implement the 20-60-20 rule throughout the different phases of the initiative. And you'll pick from different categories depending on what you're trying to do. You're not always picking on the change agents. You'll pick on some of the others as well. And that's nicely laid out in the book.

Lynn, you mentioned that you often tell executives that this Change Questions approach is slower, but it gives better results. In my experience, I find that there's the illusion or perception that this approach, which is then coupled with underlying proven methodologies, and in the Union Pacific case that was Lean. So, the perception or the illusion is that it's slower, yet it's less risky. And according to my data, it actually delivers breakthrough results significantly faster.

What I find is that people seem to get really uncomfortable in the fuzzy front end, and they want to prematurely jump to solutions, which is a later stage that would be more well-defined. So, they think they perceive the approach is slow, and yet you want to address the right problem with the right solution.

Lynn, how about you share with us the results that you achieved at Union Pacific using the Change Questions, this apparently "slower approach"?

Lynn Kelley:

You know what? I love that you expanded on that and you made a lot of really good points. Okay, this is my last failure I'm going to talk about. This time I was rolling out a change at Textron. And the implementation plan was a typical one in that it was all time-based. In other words, you've got to train this level of people by this date. You have to train this level by this date, this level, by this this date. And because it was such a big change across so many different countries, I thought, okay, I have to do this. And then it didn't deliver the results that we wanted it to deliver. And right then I stumbled across a Harvard Business Review article. This is the early 2000s on strategic speed versus operational speed. Sonia, you had asked for results, and I'll give you the study's results and then I'll tell you Union Pacific's results.

It was a really good article and it talked about how the researchers studied a lot of companies, I think 300 and something globally that were all implementing organizational change. And they found that there were two different implementation methods, the one that I described which they called operational speed, where it's all timeline based; everybody has to do X by X date. The other one was called strategic speed. And that was where the implementation plan has little pauses where we check and make sure the change is delivering value. And remember that first Change Question we discussed? What is your value-driven purpose? So we defined value in the Change Questions early on, but then we build in a check-in to see, okay, we know they were trained. Are they using it well? Are they using it? Is it delivering results? You're checking if it's delivering the value you want to get.

Let's say we want to improve customer satisfaction. Well then, is the change improving customer satisfaction? If it's not delivering value, you have to tweak it. You've got to change it. You've got to make sure that it's working. So the companies in the study that used strategic speed that I just described, I think it was five years later, had 52% better results than the ones that used operational speed. So to your point, you call it the fuzzy front end. I love that. It could be a little bit of stop and go, but ultimately the results are just great. Plus why put a lot of energy into a timeline-based implementation plan that doesn't sustain? It's worse than not doing anything because you leave people that are burned out at the end of it. And that's when we get the flavor of the month discussion.

I just want to briefly describe the panel survey we put in at Union Pacific. We had a lot of quick and easy ways to check if UP Way was succeeding, but we also thought we would steal an idea from the medical field where they do longitudinal studies. And we randomly selected 400 people, which at 350 would represent our whole organization statistically. But we took 400. We stratified the sample, which meant that say if 5% of our operating department was conductors on the northern region, then 5% of our sample are conductors. They were primarily union members. We reached out, we said, Hey, we're doing this new initiative over the next four years, will you sign up so we could interview you? Or we can send you a survey every six months which will take 10 to 15 minutes. Nobody but one person will know who you are, and your results will always be anonymous and you can mail them in or you can go on a website -- however

you want to complete your survey, but we want to gather this data. We did that because if we would've surveyed the whole population, we would've gotten maybe a 10% to 12% response rate. We couldn't make inferences with that. We were able to get over an 85% response rate over those four years, and we were asking them questions about the UP Way and we could see it spreading. We could see where it was working, where it wasn't working, where leaders supported it, where they didn't, where said their processes had approved, where they didn't. And then by year three, we were able to correlate that with our top level KPIs. We saw all of these great successes, but it's really hard to get to the top level where there's a lot of noise and a lot of other factors.

But we could see that the top five area service units who were doing UP Way the best were the top five in terms of operating results, in terms of KPIs. And the lowest five were the lowest. And we could see statistically all of their metrics were better than the other ones. And we also had a little spot check. We had one service unit that had always been in the bottom on KPIs. Service unit leaders came and went. No difference. Couldn't get up there. They asked us, come, please help us, please help us. We came out and in six months they went to the top of the KPI list. I mean, it worked. So in terms of operating results, it worked. The Change Questions helped sustain and helped us course correct, and the UP Way was the actual thing that was making the difference. So it was really rewarding to see that.

Sonia Bot:

Well, Lynn, that's a really great testament and I find that, depending on the starting capability of the organization, I find that sustained improvement ranges can be between 20% to 80%, that huge. And again, if the approach is done properly, and especially for the more complex changes, it does require having some experienced leaders and practitioners on the team, whether they're outsourced or in-sourced, and having both academic theory and deep practical experience, and with a proven track record as well.

Lynn Kelley:

Absolutely! And we just can't forget it. Change is really hard, and it's really not for the faint of heart.

William Vantuono:

Well, Lynn and Sonia, I really enjoyed listening to this exchange. How about some final comments? Lynn, you go first please.

Lynn Kelley:

I just think you can have the best solution, the best change initiative, the best anything. If it doesn't sustain, it's just not worth it. You have to do the upfront planning. No matter what change methodology you do, you have to do something so that you can sustain the changes that you're rolling out to your people, throughout various industries.
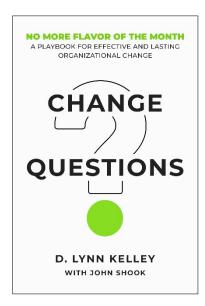
William Vantuono:

Alright, thank you. Sonia, your final thoughts?

Sonia Bot:

I often see reports that when undergoing under organizational change, things get worse before they get better. And I know that happens. Yet I'm adamant that it doesn't need to be that way. And I can personally attest to that.

One of the principles that's been drilled into me during my formative years is: "Do no harm. Do good." And so there are ways of going through organizational change, transformations, and turnarounds of sorts, and the trajectory pushes forward to getting better, step by step, getting better, and no worsening in between. And the Change Questions approach is one that will help reduce this risk so that you do no harm, you do good as you go along, with no worsening in between. So again, the Change Questions really, really help reduce this risk and get us to achieving the high levels of success rates and not what's typical in terms of all the failures of change initiatives. It puts us on the other side of the curve.

William Vantuono:

Well thanks very much. The *Change Questions* book is available in print, on Kindle and audiobook at amazon.com. I think we all know Amazon, right? You can download the free digital workbook at changequestions.net, and you can also contact Lynn at changequestions.net or through her LinkedIn account. So Lynn Kelley and Sonia Bot, I'd like to thank you very much for this discussion. And Lynn, I have to say I'm really impressed that you were able to drive some change at Union Pacific, which as railroads go, it's big, and it's kind of like trying to turn an ocean liner around. It's not easy, but you were able to accomplish some good things, especially with the all-important velocity. You're right, the railroads live and die by velocity. So again, thanks very much. It's been a pleasure and best to both of you and have a safe day.

Book: Change Questions: A Playbook for Effective and Lasting Organizational Change: Kelley, D. Lynn, Shook, John Y: 9780989081290: Amazon.com: Books

Digital Workbook: Digital Workbook — Change Questions

Change Questions Website: Change Questions

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