

# Signature Press

## NEW MANAGEMENT, NEW WORK STYLE, SAME STAFF: HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A CULTURAL SHIFT



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For more from Ely, visit his blog, *Once Upon a Customer Experience*.

**By John Ely**  
*Hotel & Motel Management*

**Cultural** [kul'chur-ul] - of or relating to the arts and manners that a group favors.

**Shift** [shift] - to change place, position or direction.

**Cultural Shift** [kul'chur-ul shift] - a manager's worst nightmare!

If you're a manager, you have either experienced a change in company culture, or you will. At least once in our careers, every one of us will be faced with new ownership; merger or acquisition; a change in strategy; a change in business environment; or simply a change in corporate direction.

According to a wise old adage, "Change is."

Our natural reaction to change is to resist. Why? Because our experience is our reality, and change disrupts our beliefs in what is real. Change shifts the ground under our feet, on which our lives are based. Change brings about a defensive human nature to protect what we know is already true. Change always seems to come around at the most inconvenient times and waits for no one.

Wow, no wonder we resist! The trick for a manager is to move your staff through the process (see the Kübler-Ross positive change cycle) from informed pessimism to informed optimism. Basically, human nature is to see what's wrong with change first and defend the status quo. As a manager, it's your job to help your staff see what is positive about the shift, and open their eyes to the new opportunities and advantages.

The best defense is a strong offense, and planning and communication are keys to the process. A good plan of action is to proactively outline in advance all the negative reactions you may face from your staff.

Develop a list of possible push-backs and create methods to overcome the resistance, all while listening to their concerns – just like a seasoned salesperson.

Next, outline all the positives that the change will bring. During a merger, most companies don't plan well for the cultural shift, and as a result, most mergers don't realize the full benefit of combined workforces. Many times only the operational aspects are considered and the human element is left out.

Consider the advantages from the employees' point of view. Will they have a larger budget due to a merger? Will they have opportunities in new markets because of a strategic shift? There may be a new computer system to learn, but ultimately will it reduce job overlap, make them more efficient and make their jobs easier? Make a list of every benefit you can imagine.

In the past, I've tried to empathize with my staff's negative emotions to change saying things like, "I don't like this any more than you do, but ..." Keep in mind that statements like this only reinforce the negative. It's better to be optimistic. Optimism is contagious and people follow the emotions of their leaders.

Be sure to convince yourself of the benefits of change before you attempt to convince others. The slightest hint of resistance on your part will transfer to your team, and overcoming it becomes a longer and more difficult process. Change is never easy, but it can be a much smoother process when you prepare, and take the time to plan, listen and communicate.