“Get your A-Team together.”

Put together a team of influential change agents who can spread the word amongst the people. They are your leadership team and will need to be trusted.

OK, so what’s the A-Team? Who should be on it?

Well let’s start with explaining why the A-Team is needed. As stated above, they are Change Agents who will spread the word. They become part of your leadership team. That’s because you can’t do it all yourself. Try being the lone person spruiking the change. Been there? That’s a road to frustration and failure and for any decent size change it is physically impossible.

So you need a group of people who will represent the change throughout the organisation. Getting to all parts with the message. Being able to listen and learn from the reactions. Able to impart necessary information and take questions. Convey information back to the change team. So let’s look at who you need as part of your A-Team.

The first tier is a hierarchically critical one. It’s your senior leadership team. Now depending on how strategic and widespread your change initiative is, will determine how senior you need to get. For a transformational change it will require your executive team. People need to get confirmation that right from the top there is commitment to the change. This can only happen if the senior team is actually committed and ‘on the same page’. They are two big assumptions that can’t be left to chance. That means a change manager has to start working on the commitment of the senior team right from the start.

Presumably there will be a champion for the initiative who is part of the leadership team (Sponsor) who will help get this happening.

Once the senior team is committed, their actions as the heads of the organisation and the A-Team will be under constant scrutiny. The term “role model” becomes a very important one and it’s key that they understand this. People will make their judgement as to whether this change is important or not, by watching whether the actions and words of their leaders support it.

How many times have you seen a change initiative struggle because the senior management don’t walk the talk. It’s a change management killer. Conversely, when they do talk about it, action it, live and breathe it, it paves the way.
Many years ago I worked on one of the most successful culture changes in Australian corporate history. One of the lessons learned from that success was the CEO (sponsor) actively backing it through word and action and making a statement of commitment to the cause by appointing a Culture Director to the executive team. Your leaders are the drivers of the change and the most powerful on your A-Team so they must know that.

So on to the group known as change agents throughout the organisation. These people will represent the masses for an organisational wide initiative. They become the eyes, ears, arms and legs of the change manager to get to all the crevices of the organisation and for the change initiative to have an ongoing presence, on a day to day basis. Typically, the change agent represents a business unit. For this reason, they have to be carefully selected. There are some key skills and traits they must possess: communication, integrity, respected amongst peers. Let’s examine these.

Communication is a no-brainer really. Change agents will be the conduit for communication. They will bring key messages to their peers and receive information from them. They must have the people and communication skills to deal with people’s different reactions to change.

Integrity is a vital trait because they will be in a representative position. Their peers must have trust in them to allow them to function as a representative. This is the person people have to feel comfortable giving and receiving information from about the change. Any perceived fault in integrity will render their position as ineffective and tarnish the change effort. Respected goes closely with integrity. A person could be trusted but not necessarily respected, for instance due to lack of expertise or understanding of the work of their peers. So it is important that the change agent has the respect of their peers. A poor choice as change agent can have an adverse effect on the progress of the change initiative and a good choice can really help it.

One of the better ways I have seen change agents selected is by asking the line manager to nominate someone as a development opportunity. The person selected views this as the recognition it is and takes a positive approach to it.

The last key component to the A-Team is the line manager. In organisations this role title varies depending on the industry. It could be a Supervisor, a Team Leader, or any other form of frontline manager. Like the representative change agents group, line managers play the conduit role. The difference with the line managers is they are bestowed the responsibility of conveying all the official information regarding the change initiative due to their management responsibility. They convey the formal key messages.

How these messages get conveyed can make or break a change initiative. As they are also in a leadership position, their perceived support or negativity towards the initiative will be a powerful message to their people. For this reason it is important that a change manager invest their time into this specific group of stakeholders. Ensuring that the key messages are delivered as required. In the end, line managers are absolutely key to effecting the change.

So there they are. You’re A-Team. You now have to coach and mentor them as part of the the change management team. These are typically the people you want to train in change management at the start so they have a full understanding of the change effort and their part in it.

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