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Leadership Excellence

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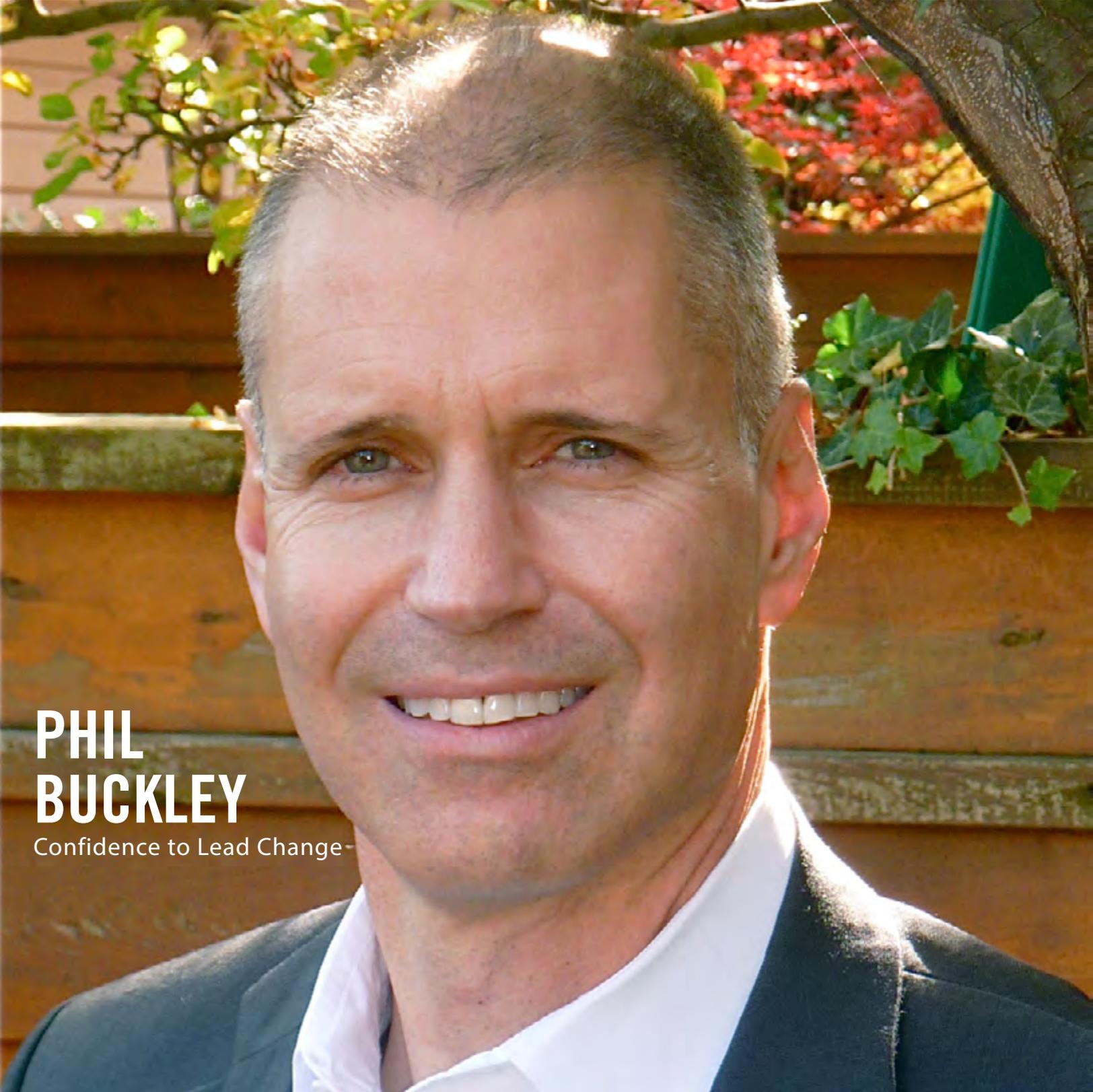
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**PHIL
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Confidence to Lead Change-

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Knowing the Questions Leaders Must Face

by Phil Buckley

Confidence is the most important characteristic leaders can draw upon when leading change. It improves focus, promotes good decision making, and motivates teams. Confidence also helps leaders lead big organizational changes while delivering quarterly operating goals. A steady hand is required to do both.

Dan Rockwell notes: “Confidence is a product of knowing what to do next.” I’ve seen leaders lose confidence when confronted with questions they can’t answer based on their experience. They either act on the first information they receive or rely on their gut instincts—sending their teams charging down a path full of potential land mines.

Leaders must lead change from the front. If behavior change is required, they must go first, and do so confidently. If not, people will be reluctant to change how they work. The vision they paint of the new organization has to be different, compelling and better than the current one, and shared from a position of knowledge and conviction. People need to believe that the future will be brighter and see themselves with a role in that future. With belief comes engagement in the change and participation in creating a new norm.

Confidence is essential to winning employees’ minds and hearts. Leaders must credibly articulate why the change is good for the organization—and why it is good for employees.

Leaders can build their confidence in leading change by creating a leadership playbook based on key questions they must answer during the project.

Leading Four Phases of Change

Change projects have four phases:

1. Figuring it out—getting a leader’s head around the change they must lead. Change projects require you to move people from how they now think and act to new ways of thinking and acting. Often, leaders commit to a big change before assessing the scope, magnitude, and resource implications of the change. They don’t understand where colleagues are and where they need to be. Comparing these two positions gives leaders a sense of what needs to change (mind-sets, behaviors, skills, processes, and systems), how big a change is required, and how difficult it will be to make. Assessing all aspects of your project will give you a sense of exactly what you need to do.

The project-related questions focus on scoping the change (“How do I identify

what needs to change?”) and evaluating success factors (“What have we done before, and did it work?”). The people-related ones determine the groups that need to be aligned (“Who are the stakeholders who can influence success?”) and current views about the change (“What is the talk about the proposed change?”). Combined, these questions give you a realistic view of the size and complexity of the change, the positives and negatives you must manage, and people’s view of the change.

2. Planning for change—creating a plan that outlines what needs to happen, by when, and by whom. Leaders need to set expectations for deliverables and define how people will transition to the desired post-change state. This involves breaking down the change into sequenced activities, defining the resources required to implement them, selling the plan to their stakeholders and communicating it to their organization. Although leaders have teams to do this work, they have to answer the questions to ensure the plan is sufficient for the change to be successful. Project-related questions focus on plan structure and design (“What does a good plan look like?”), and governance process (“What governance is required to run the project?”). People-focused questions center around resourcing (“How do I know what resources I need?”) and positioning the change to individuals and teams (“How do I describe the better future the project will bring?”).

3. Managing change—Once the plan has been designed and approved by stakeholders, leaders need to take action quickly to implement it. Ideally, they’ll follow the plan as written, completing each activity and achieving each milestone on schedule. When roadblocks appear, changing timelines and the sequence of events, they need to marshal their resources to address these challenges, while managing stakeholders to ensure they remain supportive of the project and its leadership. In this phase, project-related questions focus on completing the plan (“How do I show progress?”). Most of a leader’s time and attention is spent on people-related questions around motivating employees to make the change (“How do I minimize change fatigue?”). Leadership confidence helps people push through the discomfort of doing things differently.

4. Making change stick—embedding the change into operations. Many big change projects end immediately after the change is made. This approach assumes their operating business will take on the work

of supporting and nurturing the change, still in its infancy. Leaders must ensure that plans are in place so that the change lasts. If this doesn’t happen, it’s likely that old ways of working will seep back into the business, some of the benefits of the change will be lost, and the project will not be deemed a complete success. Project-related questions focus on critical closing procedures such as assigning responsibility for ongoing support, and documenting lessons (“How do we hand over responsibilities to the business?”). People-related questions center on motivating people to stick with the new processes and behaviors (“How do I prevent the return of old ways of working?”), and rewarding the people that made the change possible.

People-related questions are most challenging since they require adjustments to how people think and behave, take a disproportionate amount of time, and are difficult to measure.

Leaders must adapt to stay competitive or risk losing relevance and becoming obsolete. They need to do so confidently, leading from the front as they build their better future. By creating a playbook based on the questions they must answer to be successful, leaders can build their confidence to manage big changes while also delivering results. **LE**



Written by
Phil Buckley

Phil Buckley is a change management professional, speaker, and author of *Change with Confidence*. www.change-withconfidence.com.

All leaders face change; few lead change with confidence; and yet, as Phil Buckley notes, confidence is the single most important characteristic leaders can draw upon when leading change. The buck always starts and stops at the top. Hence, when behavior change is required, leaders must go first, with vision and confidence. As an experienced guide, Phil coaches you through the process.



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