

# PROCESSING CHANGE



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**M**ore change has occurred in supply chain management than just about any other aspect of business. Change can be good, and I would like to talk just a little about change in my worlds.

You are probably familiar with the book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson, M.D. It is an excellent book about change, and it's easy to identify oneself or others with the characters. The book—a story of innocent little mice who want a steady supply of cheese—has been popular and persuasive.

Enter a new book, *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding under Any Conditions*, by John Kotter and Holger Rathberger. The characters are penguins, and this book also uses a fable to express solid, life-changing truths.

This story has six principal characters. The setting is Antarctica, a penguin colony on an iceberg—the same iceberg to which the penguins have come for generations, where they feel comfortable and safe. There is nothing visible on the surface to cause concern.

One penguin, Fred, observes things none of the other penguins see. But he is afraid to tell anyone because he remembers a previous penguin who tried to express thoughts outside the mainstream and the treatment that penguin received. So he just keeps observing and collecting information until finally he feels the threat is too immediate to keep to himself any longer.

The story then tells of the trials and tribulations of trying to present a convincing argument for the need for change, using others' experiences to make the possibility of change seem more realistic, creating a compelling vision of the results, and involving as many people as possible in the process.

The book concludes with an “eight-step process of successful change.” While the content of these steps is similar to those expressed by other writers (including Spencer Johnson), the steps are clear, logical, and a fitting ending to this excellent story. If your organization is undergoing change, you could probably use this book to help employees adapt more easily.

Another good book about change is *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* by William Bridges, who lays out a series of similar steps. The author suggests it isn't really change people fear but the process of changing.

For example, how many people do you know who say they would like to lose weight, but how many accomplish that objective?

We know the result we want, but we also know the work it would take to achieve the result, and we apparently do not want to do that. There are no magic wands, only logical processes—proper nutrition and regular exercise—that will lead to the desired result. It isn't the change we fear but the changing.

It is my privilege to work in a higher education institution. There may not be a better job than that of a college professor. While not likely to become wealthy, a professor can enjoy the company of bright, highly educated colleagues and young, energetic, challenging students; follow intellectual interests; contribute to the body of knowledge; see lives changed through education; and provide service to the community. The dues for admission to the academic world are high—years of study and testing—but the rewards are great.

Those of us in business disciplines are blessed with the opportunity to work in two rewarding worlds: academic and professional or business, associating with academic colleagues but also those out “practicing what we preach.”

In the book mentioned above, at the moment I see myself as Fred, the penguin: genuinely concerned that our iceberg is melting. Where are the cracks? Perhaps the most immediate is the call for accountability, echoing from the Secretary of Education to state legislatures, rebroadcast by accrediting agencies, and repeated by students and their parents.

Why do we in the academy resist this call for sound assessment practices? The result is more knowledge about what we do and better student outcomes—knowing, based on data, students have achieved a level we indicated would be satisfactory. It must be the transition we fear. Sitting down to agree on what students need to know, creating a curriculum, using quantifiable measurements, and making necessary corrections is hard work but necessary to achieve the desired results. In this case, the ends justify the means. It not only is the right thing to do but may be necessary to save the iceberg.

I recommend reading all three of these books to my colleagues in both the academic and the “real” world. It will be time well invested. ■

TALES OF MICE AND PENGUINS