

# Mental Fitness for Change Management

**How to overcome invisible barriers &  
engage employee mindset**

Positive Intelligence® White Paper

**Inspire your organization to embrace change with this five-step strategy**



Change is necessary for survival. If the upheaval of the last few years has taught organizations anything, it's that. But leading a group of hundreds or thousands of employees through a successful change program is a highly-complex process, full of promise but also fraught with risk. Successful change programs can breathe new life into an organization's culture, operations, reputation, talent retention, and more. But when a change initiative fails — which many do — it can negatively impact all those things, sometimes irreparably.

Respondents to a 2020 Gartner survey went through an average of five major change initiatives in the preceding three years. To help manage these change initiatives, organizations worldwide spend close to \$10 billion a year on change management consulting services. But just because organizations are changing frequently doesn't mean they're getting any better at realizing the full financial benefits of transformation. In a December 2021 McKinsey survey, less than a third of respondents felt their organizations' transformations had succeeded in both improving performance and maintaining those improvements. It also found that a change program loses 22% of its maximum financial benefit in the initial phase of the program. As the survey's authors said, "The potential for value loss begins as early as day one." That's why it's essential to get change programs right from the beginning.

And that starts with convincing employees to embrace, rather than resist, the change.

Positive Intelligence founder and CEO, Shirzad Chamine, knows how the mindsets of both leaders and employees can make or break change programs. “All sorts of ambitious change initiatives initially have a good start and then eventually fizzle out,” says Chamine. “Often, when you introduce change to a group of people, you encounter a whole lot of resistance. The success of any change program relies on methodically overcoming that resistance.”

To understand the Positive Intelligence five-step strategy for inspiring change — also known as PQ-Powered change — organizations must learn how aversion to change is hard-wired into humans as a matter of life or death.

## **Saboteurs vs. Sage**

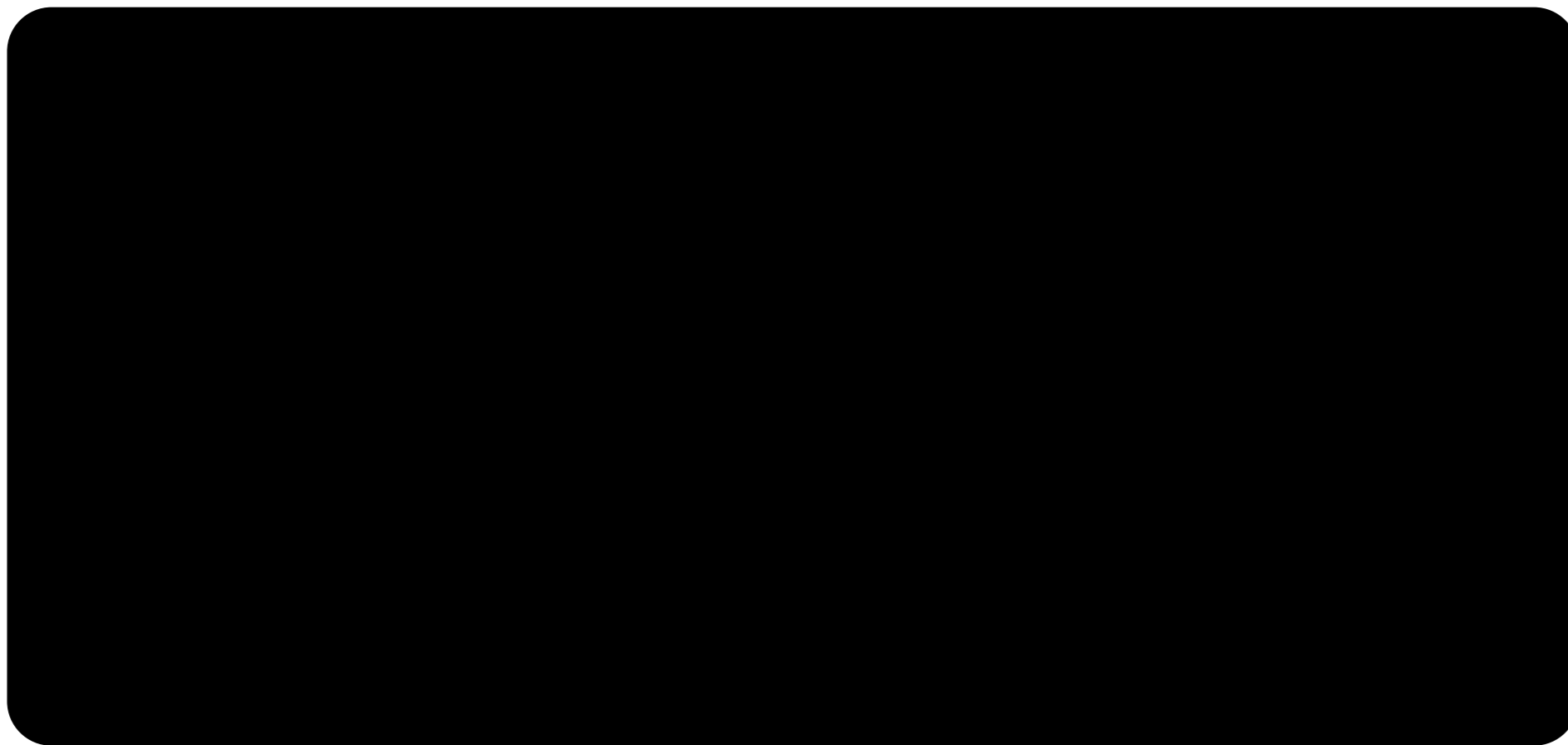
Certain modalities of the mind are generally associated with prolonged negative emotions that sabotage one’s mental wellbeing, performance, and relationships. These negative emotions are referred to as “Saboteurs.” Similarly, an individual can learn how to activate positive reactions — called a “Sage” mindset — to achieve a positive response. These concepts are fundamental to the Positive Intelligence (PQ) Program.

Saboteurs related to change are deeply-rooted agents of survival in human beings. Chamine explains, “If you’re alive in this moment, and nothing changes, you will be alive in the next moment. But if you’re alive in this moment and something changes, you may die in the next moment. Change brings a threat and creates stress, and stress activates Saboteurs.”

The PQ Program focuses on building mental fitness. Mental fitness is the awareness of factors that drive one's behaviors, decisions, and judgment and the ability to control those drivers. The PQ Program uses a tested and proven approach to teaching mental fitness to individuals and organizations based on proven neuroscience.

In launching any change program, there's a risk that it can trigger Saboteurs within multiple people in the affected group. This triggering effect can lead to a Saboteur contagion that creates both resistance and obstacles to change within an organization.

The opposite of a Saboteur contagion is a Sage contagion — in which positive associations and skills flood the organization as it embraces the upcoming change program.



**[Click Here To Watch The Video In Your Browser](#)**

The positive associations and skills that drive change are called the Sage Powers in the PQ Program. The Sage Powers are Empathize, Explore, Innovate, Navigate, and Activate. These powers lie at the heart of the PQ Program and play a critical role in successful change management.

## **Step 1:** **Create a compelling collective vision**

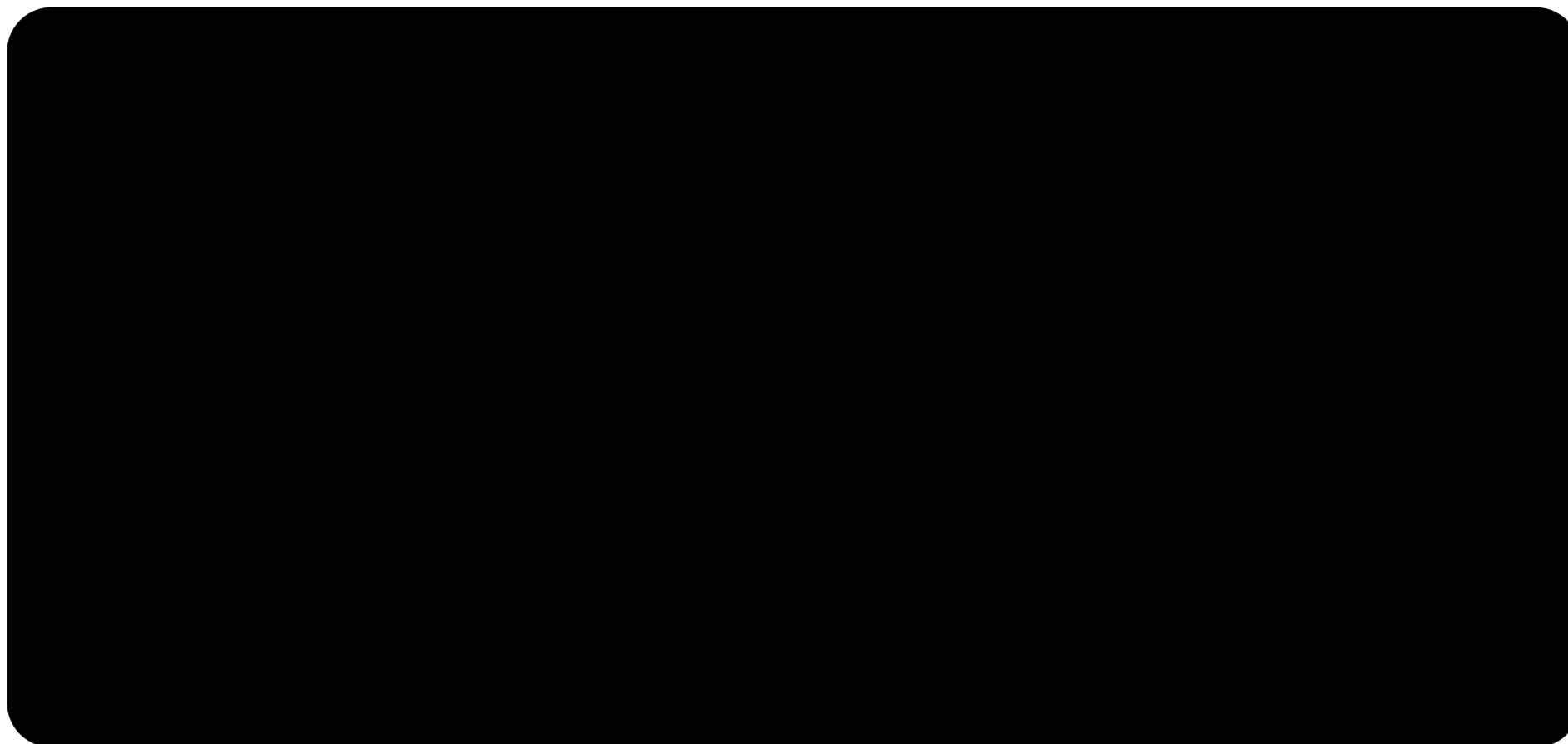
Change is often driven by data, but people are not. “The number one most important thing you have to do as a leader of change is to paint a picture that makes people feel rather than think,” says Chamine. “Bullet points speak to the rational mind. They’re not inspiring.”

At the outset of any change initiative, the participants will want to understand the reasoning behind it. It’s vital for change managers to not only provide an answer to that “why?” that explains how the transition will benefit them as a group but also encourage those within that group to think about how it will benefit them individually.

## **Step 2:** **Connect the collective vision with the individual “bigger why”**

To help people envision how a change to the group benefits them, change managers need to encourage individuals to identify their “bigger why,” the most profound reason the change would be meaningful and impactful for them.





[Click Here To Watch The Video In Your Browser](#)

Let's take the example of an initiative to enable employees to be more productive.

## I want to be more productive

**1**

Why is that important? →

Being more productive would help me work more efficiently.

**2**

Why is that important? →

Working more efficiently would allow me to finish work more quickly.

**3**

Why is that important? →

I would spend more time with my kids.

**4**

Why is that important? →

I would be the father or mother I always dreamed of being.

The logic starts with being more productive, getting more done, and being more successful — these outcomes are positive but not very emotionally powerful. Yet by the end of the inquiry, the participant can see that this change gives them a chance to be the father or mother they've always dreamed of being. That lands on a deep, inspiring level. That's the individual “bigger why.”

Once change leaders have laid this inspirational and motivational groundwork, they can pivot from the “why” to the “how.”

### **Step 3:** **Create a roadmap for change**

The next step in managing an inspired, PQ-Powered change program is to present a big-picture architecture that connects the key elements that will enable the change. But leaders must leave the group with enough detail.

A roadmap that outlines 52 weeks' worth of plans and milestones is not inspiring, it's overwhelming. Leaders should forget about month eight or nine to achieve a significant outcome and focus their people on month two. Determine what short-term steps to take now so that it feels achievable and allows the team to have early celebrations.

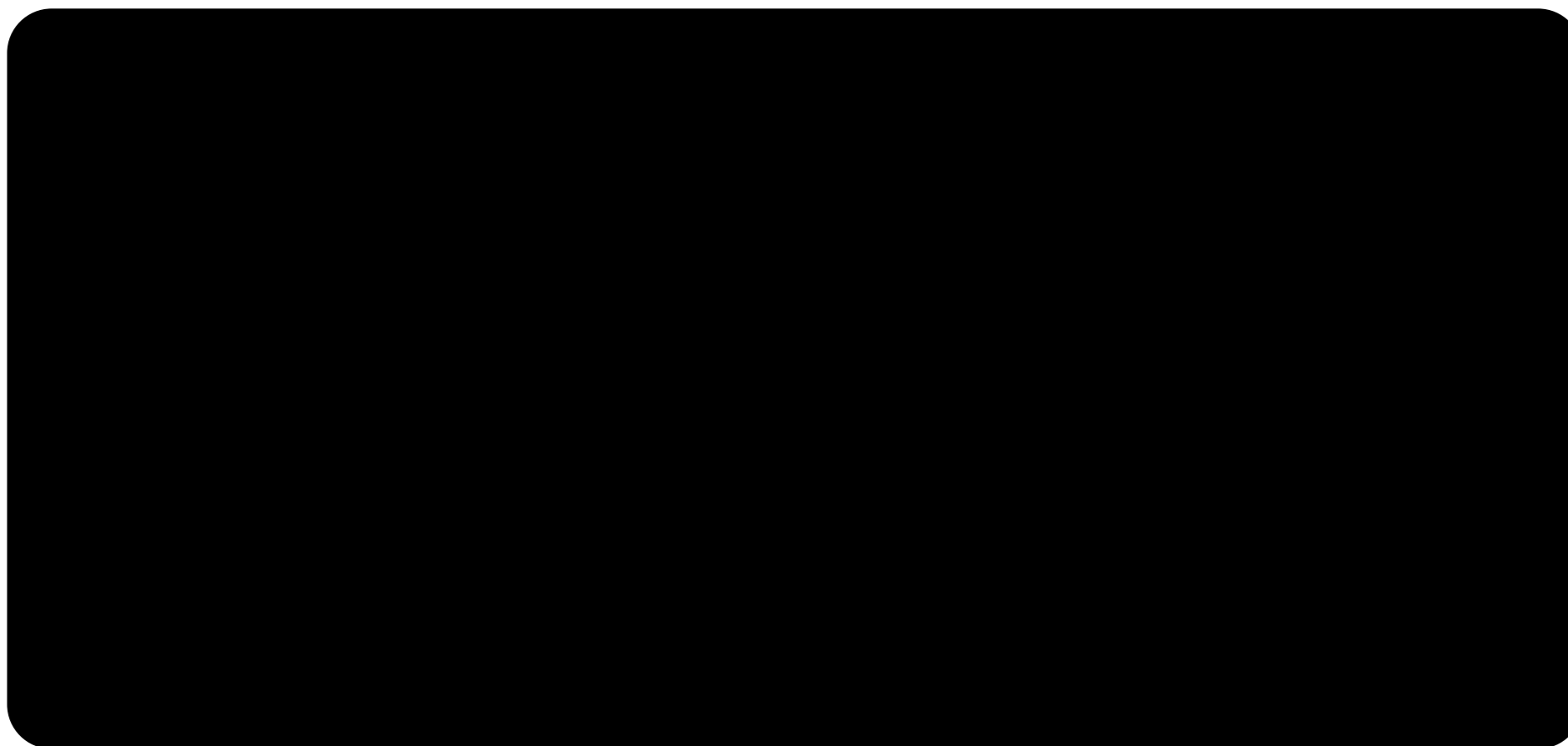
Those “early celebrations” are a crucial component in the next step.



## Step 4: Enable the flywheel effect

Organizations undertaking change often need to focus on the destination of a completed transition and pay attention to the little victories that happen throughout the journey.

“Imagine that there’s a giant flywheel, and for the change to be successful, this flywheel needs to be going really fast,” says Chamine. “But you can’t achieve the speed you need all at once. It requires consistency and cadence. Creating small wins and celebrating those launches a Sage contagion that makes that wheel turn faster and faster.”



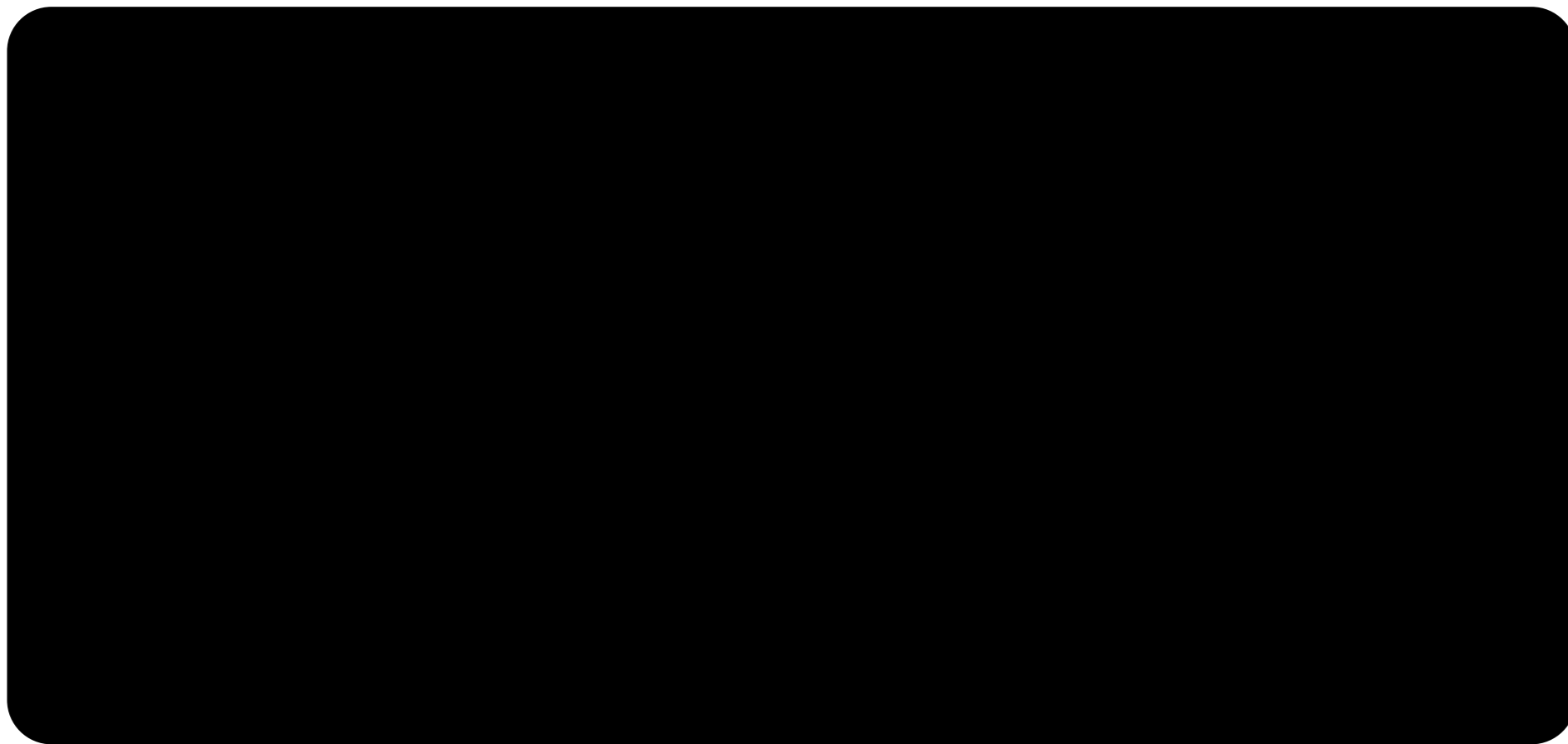
[Click Here To Watch The Video In Your Browser](#)

Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that the flywheel effect will inspire everyone to get on board with change or that the Sage contagion will reach every person in a group. Change leaders must plan for the fact that some employees will require more convincing than others.

## Step 5:

### Anticipate and normalize the change adoption cycle

Within each group undergoing change, there are generally three different types of people: early adopters, late adopters, and laggards.



[Click Here To Watch The Video In Your Browser](#)

To illustrate the role each of these subgroups plays and how they interact with one another, think about a charcoal grill. The person trying to start a charcoal grill will get a pile of charcoal, pour lighter fluid on it, and then light it up. The charcoal will catch fire immediately, but soon most of the fire will die, leaving only about 20% of the pile smoldering.

“That 20%, those are your early adopters,” Chamine explains. “Then, what do you do to make sure everything catches fire? You fan the flames so that the fire of the early adopter begins to spread over the adjacent charcoal, and, before you know it, everything has caught fire.”

Change managers often expect the same high level of fervor and buy-in from everyone immediately. Instead, they should focus on working closely with early adopters in the system. Once these early adopters have understood and embraced the change and begun to generate some results, they become the advocates — the storytellers who will inspire the late adopters. The key is to create an environment where the stories are being told and the early adopters communicate with the late adopters.

While some laggards will come to accept the change toward the end of the process, others never will. “Some of them may remain continually in resistance to change,” says Chamine. “Typically, once the change really begins to take hold, they just leave the organization. And that’s totally fine.”

Identifying the early adopters, late adopters, and laggards, and using that insight methodically to target change communications, will help the initiative succeed.



# People-powered change is lasting, positive change

Humans are hardwired by hundreds of thousands of years of evolution to resist change. So, it's no wonder people can be the biggest obstacle to the success of a change program.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Change managers who follow these five steps to PQ-Powered change can inspire individuals to embrace and get behind the change, subdue their Saboteurs, and let their Sage take over. When they do, they become the power that turns the flywheel, the force that fans the flames, and the engine that drives change initiatives to a successful conclusion.



**Discover how the PQ-Powered Teams Program can effect change in your organization.**

[Learn More](#)



# Thank You

©2023 Positive Intelligence, LLC

All rights reserved. No reproduction, in any form, printed or electronic, is permitted without prior written permission from Positive Intelligence, LLC. POSITIVE INTELLIGENCE and PQ COACH are trademarks of Positive Intelligence, LLC.