

The Energy of Change

5 Leadership Behaviors to Drive Collective Action in a Fluid Landscape

FranklinCovey

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A great leader can turn disruption into an opportunity for innovation and growth, helping everyone on their team prepare for, persist through, and gain a new perspective from change—leading to better processes and outcomes.

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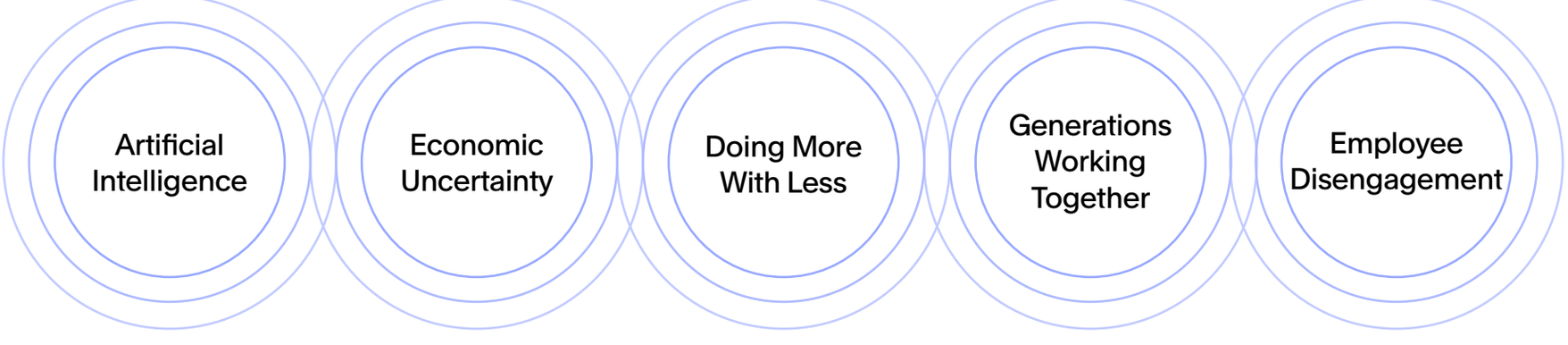
- Have a plan
- Understand reactions
- Cultivate persistence
- Think bigger
- Dialogue

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Disruption Comes in All Shapes and Sizes

Leaders today are navigating disruption on all sides. Whether it's keeping up with changing technology, navigating economic uncertainty and doing more with less, or experiencing talent skill gaps and general disengagement, every organization experiences confusing or unsettling times that can keep teams feeling paralyzed and apprehensive about the future.

How are the following shifts impacting your organization?



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The human challenge of artificial intelligence

AI has become something of a universal disruptor, with **LinkedIn** estimating that 70% of the skills currently used in most jobs will change by 2030 due to the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence. In both 2025 and 2026, nearly 90% of global C-suite executives and business leaders said accelerating AI adoption was their top priority, **according to LinkedIn** data. Unsurprisingly, the demand for AI skills is on the rise, as showcased by the more than **100% increase in job postings** requiring artificial intelligence skills between 2024 and 2025.

But while AI is undoubtedly impacting the way we live and work, the demand for human skills has never been greater. New research from **Workday** shows that over three-quarters of employees worldwide are craving increased human connection in the wake of AI's growing prevalence, while 83% of global workers believe that increased AI usage will make human skills—like ethical decision-making, relationship-building, and emotional intelligence—that much more vital.

Leaders who regard AI tools as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, personal and interpersonal effectiveness will be positioned to lead the charge in this rapidly evolving technological landscape. By leveraging AI to streamline workflows, leaders and teams can enhance their productivity and use their energy where it matters most—whether they're propelling strategic initiatives, engaging in creative collaboration, or developing new and innovative solutions to solve old problems.

Navigating economic uncertainty

The "unprecedented times" of the COVID-19 pandemic have made many people yearn for the routine and the run-of-the-mill. But according to the International Monetary Fund's **World Economic Outlook**, global growth has seen a notable decline—and **economic uncertainty skyrocketed** to historic highs last year. And while global growth is predicted to see slight increases in 2027, U.S. inflation, geopolitical tensions, and changing expectations surrounding new technologies could lead to continued instability.



In other words, the only thing we can predict is the unpredictable. As organizations grapple with stock market volatility, fluctuating tariffs, and potential supply chain shortages resulting from rapid shifts in policy, leaders must rely on their resilience, adaptability, and change management skills to help their teams weather the storm. When leaders focus on their Circle of Influence™ to make proactive decisions and drive impactful change, they'll rise above the reactivity—helping them to zero in on new opportunities for growth and get others on board, rather than become bogged down by what's beyond their control.

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Doing more (of what matters most) with less

Many leaders are faced with the challenge of "doing more with less." From supply chain issues and mass layoffs to talent shortages and evolving technology, organizations have to work smarter and streamline their resources to survive.

These changes may not always go smoothly. What might have started as a temporary measure can quickly become the new standard, leading to increased stress and disengagement. In fact, new data shows that burnout is at an all-time high, with **66% of U.S. employees**—and 83% of U.S. employees aged 25 to 34—reporting they experienced some degree of burnout at work in 2025. When teams are grappling with both increased workloads and general uncertainty, doing more with less can feel unsustainable.

But amidst all the volatility, leaders can inspire a paradigm shift in their teams and help them navigate change. Rather than be limited by a scarcity mindset—the fear-based perception that tells us there's not enough time or resources to get the job done—leaders can model an abundance mindset and reframe this paradigm as an opportunity to do the most important things with less. Ambitious employees may be surprised to learn that when they focus on less, they can accomplish more. When leaders and teams devote their efforts to the things they can actually change, rather than get stuck on what they can't control, they can expand their influence and discover more opportunities to create, collaborate, and innovate.

Bridging the generational divide

For the first time in history, five generations are actively participating in the workforce. And while a large portion of Baby Boomers are **delaying or eschewing retirement** entirely, the youngest working generation—Gen Z—is poised to make up **30% of the total workforce** by 2030.

Each generation brings its unique skills to the table, but they also have their own unique challenges to overcome. Gen Xers had to prove they weren't cranky slackers, while millennials needed to convince older generations that "lazy" and "entitled" were nothing more than unfair stereotypes. Now, Gen Z is being put under the microscope, with their work ethic and interpersonal skills being called into question. In fact, **40% of business leaders** believe Gen Z isn't prepared for the workforce—and 94% of those leaders admit they avoid hiring them at times.

But for organizations to survive, they need to embrace Gen Z and give them the support they need to acclimate to the workforce. By focusing on developing human-centric skills like collaboration, relationship-building, and personal effectiveness—and ensuring employees feel empowered to fulfill their purpose at work—leaders can engage Gen Z while bridging the generational gaps that can otherwise drive division and distrust.



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A new engagement low—with high costs

Leaders know that employee engagement matters, impacting everything from productivity to profitability. But **Gallup data** reveals that employee engagement sank even lower in 2025: Only 20% of global workers said they were actively engaged at work, with 16% reporting active disengagement. In the U.S., an average of **just over 30% of employees** were engaged, continuing the steady decline that began in 2020.

That's a major concern for business leaders, as Gallup's 2026 **State of the Global Workplace report** estimates that organizations lost $10 trillion in global GDP last year—up from $8.9 trillion in 2024—due to low engagement. And although talent retention correlates with employee engagement, unplanned turnover may not be the biggest risk organizations face. At a time when layoffs are looming and the **average job search** takes six months or more, employees may emotionally check out but physically stay put. One recent **study by Monster** found that "job hugging," not job hopping, is the dominant trend in an uncertain environment, with 75% of workers saying they plan to remain in their jobs through 2027—even as their engagement, productivity, and innovation dwindle.

To thrive, organizations must take proactive steps to address disengagement head-on. Over 60% of employees want to derive a greater sense of purpose from their work, according to **McKinsey** data. By promoting purpose and focus, investing in professional development, building trust, and modeling self-renewal, leaders can address the true root causes of low engagement to improve employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance.



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Better Change Management Builds Better Culture

As a leader, tackling change comes with the territory. But how leaders facilitate change can take teams and organizations beyond just business as usual. Building a culture of persistence and taking it beyond resilience during times of change allows leaders to turn adversity into growth opportunities and helps their teams do the same.

Many organizations focus on investing in expensive codified change management processes, but successful change takes more than that—at the end of the day, it's your people who make change happen.

Here are five behaviors leaders can adopt to guide teams effectively through change to innovation.

1. Have a plan
2. Understand reactions
3. Cultivate persistence
4. Think bigger
5. Dialogue



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1. Have a plan that's tailored to your people and organizational culture

Working with a net is working in a safe space. As the ultimate safety net, a plan is one way leaders build trust with their teams and prove themselves worthy of confidence. Whether it's a large-scale solution or an individual practice, a plan is a signal to teams that their leaders know how to proceed. And the most effective plans are built on the shared language and values of your organizational culture to help people get comfortable with change.

"A plan gives both leaders and teams a path forward in times of change," says Kory Kogon, Vice President of Content Development at FranklinCovey, "because it provides the principles needed to navigate change, such as understanding what the change is and having the proper tools to adapt it." Leaders who put the right information in the right order at the right time cultivate clear and inspiring plans that help their people navigate next steps with confidence.

2. Understand reactions to change both as a human and a leader

While change hits every person differently at different times, there are five common reactions we can look at to understand global attitudes toward change:

MOVE
You're all in on the change and ready to act.

MINIMIZE
You go along with the change but do what you can to contain disruption.

WAIT
You take no immediate action, waiting for additional inputs.

RESIST
You fight actively against change and do what you can to maintain the status quo.

QUIT
You decide a change ultimately isn't for you.



> "We can only graduate to leading people through change if we know how to deal with change as humans first."
>
> – Kory Kogon
> Vice President of Content Development, FranklinCovey

Leaders are people, too. As you get in touch with your own personal reactions to change, your empathy toward your team increases. This empathy is the key to helping your team persist through change. "We can only graduate to leading people through change if we know how to deal with change as humans first," says Kogon.

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3. Cultivate persistence

Resilience is an important skill for humans, teams, and leaders. Whatever change you face, resilience helps you move from a state of confusion back to the status quo—and we've all needed that skill over the past several years. But more than resilience is needed when you want to move beyond typical practice. That's when **persistence** comes into play.

As a leader, when you encourage your team to persist, the group is able to take advantage of the opportunity to do and be more. Not only does the group recognize the change, Kogon says, but they can "persist through the discomfort of the change and move on into innovation—the opportunity beyond what was asked."

The magic here is that people aren't just waiting for the next change and slogging along in the meantime. Persistence means teams and leaders are actively looking for ways to move past their usual routines and expectations every single day.

4. Think bigger than your usual processes

As a leader, you've learned you need systems to get things done. But even skilled people can only go so far with the right processes in place to drive results. To move your team forward in a time of disruption, you need to do more than follow your checklist. You also need to respond and adapt.

Responding to change is ongoing, and it includes the pre-work of creating a compelling vision of change that helps you engage with your team through the tough spots. As you develop, revisit, and recalibrate the awareness that responding requires, you're able to help people through their individual reactions to change and lead your team through disruption skillfully.

5. Dialogue instead of dictate

Helping your team get through obstacles requires encouraging leadership practices. When presented with change, many people have an initial response of fear or frustration that can send them spiraling into passivity or even resistance.

An employee in a reactive mindset requires special attention. Kogon calls on leaders to "dialogue, not dictate," requiring you to be both engaging and clear while seeking understanding. Demanding or expecting compliance hinders both the resilience and persistence necessary to turn change into lasting growth.



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Change is Untapped Potential

The challenges organizations face today may not be the same ones they'll face in six months, a year, or five years from now, but one thing is certain: Change is a constant. Leaders who understand their personal and team responses to change are positioned better to see change as a possibility—and reap its benefits. With the right mindset and toolset in place, leaders can teach their teams to value disruption and persist beyond short-term uncertainty.



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Transform your organization's approach to change

While every change is unique, it follows a predictable pattern. Understanding this pattern and building the skills to navigate it successfully allows you to consciously determine how to move forward—even in the most challenging seasons of disruption.

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