

Are you properly addressing the sticky issues?

High-impact practitioners don't shy away from helping clients recognize, acknowledge, and take action on the various "sticky issues" that inevitably arise when the status quo is disrupted.

Change-related sticky issues center around certain topics, information, decisions, events, circumstances, etc. that have a bearing on the outcome of important initiatives, but that clients are reluctant to discuss. Instead of exploring causes, implications, potential responses, or resolution strategies, they prefer not to bring them up at all or to gloss over things in a casual, superficial manner.

Sticky issues come in two forms—those that are *directly* generated by a change itself and those that a change *indirectly* dredges up from the past.

Direct: Sometimes the introduction of change creates opportunities and/or challenges that never existed before. These discoveries are not always well-received because they can shed light on previously unseen complications, predicaments, vulnerabilities, troublesome questions, and other difficulties. Also, people might find themselves in such delicate political or interpersonal territory that they are reluctant to be forthright about the ramifications (or even the existence) of what has emerged.

It could be that they don't have a history of addressing difficult topics or that they are normally gutsy people who are now facing entanglements and intimidations they've never confronted before. Regardless of the past, these people need an impetus to come forward with the frankness necessary to resolve the situation. One of the roles we have as change practitioners is to provide that motivation.

Indirect: Sometimes, it's not the change itself that muddies the water with sticky issues, but rather the secondary (often unintended) ramifications that stir up uncomfortable sediment from the bottom of the political/interpersonal pool.