

Don't Forget to Ask the Cats

By Rachelle Disbennett-Lee

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I read a great story about a cat food company that decided to launch a new product. They did extensive research on packaging, marketing, and advertising. They conducted focus group surveys with cat owners and consulted with top cat food nutritionist. They paid millions in advertising and positioning the cat food in the grocery stores and pet food stores. In the first six months, the food flew off the shelves. They could not keep it stocked. Then something strange happened. The sales stopped. No one could figure out why, so the company started more research. They discovered that they had failed to ask the most important participants in the market research. The cats!

How often do we create a major change or a new process revamp to find out that it does not work because we did not consult the people most affected by the change? I experienced this during a change in the programming of a company I consult with. We created a whole new program adding additional classes that needed to be led by trainers. We spent hours creating a training schedule and with new trainer slotting. When the schedule was presented to the trainers, there was uproar. Although a lot of time and effort went into creating a fabulous schedule, we missed out on one very important aspect. We did not check to see if the trainers were available and if the schedule met their needs. Due to the lack of availability from the trainers, the schedule had to be completely reworked. We could have saved time and money if we had asked the trainers first.

Often, we get so caught up in the process that we forget to include everyone that the change will affect. No matter how good the new program, system, or whatever is, it won't work if everyone involved isn't involved. When making huge changes, make sure everyone affected by the change is made aware of the change. Ask for input during all stages of the planning and make sure everyone agrees to the change. Nothing is worse than to spend time, money, and energy creating an exciting new change only to realize that it doesn't work for the people most affected.

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