How to Successfully Make a Change to Your Vacation Rental Management Software

Moving from Entech to Barefoot

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Nothing strikes fear in the hearts of people and organization more than the word change. While change is a natural part of any lifecycle, it is often viewed from the perspective of crisis instead of opportunity. In the Chinese language, this dichotomy is addressed. The Chinese character of crisis is a combination of the two characters for *danger* and *opportunity*.

In this whitepaper we will discuss some suggestions for mitigating the feelings of crisis in your organization and instead focus on the opportunity. We will offer some well researched strategies that can be implemented to help everyone in your vacation rental business cope with change by understanding their approach to change or their change styles. Finally, we will present an example of how a one Myrtle Beach Vacation Rental company addressed their need for change when they moved from Entech's vacation rental management solution to the Barefoot solution.

The Opportunity for Change

Changes are natural in the lifecycle of all organizations. In fact, the ability to change is almost essential to continued existence. Change in business is often the result of needing to realign people, roles and process with new technologies.

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"I want you to find a bold and innovative way to do everything exactly the same way it's been done for 25 years."

What has served well as a business model for years may no longer be acceptable because of market forces beyond the control of your business.

In the vacation rental or property management business, this has never been truer. Even five years ago having a simple website was often enough to gain the visitors that you needed to adequately fill your rental homes, cabins or condos. Today, with aggregate sites like VRBO, FlipKey, Trip Advisor and others, consumers are no longer performing arduous searches to plan their vacations. They are turning to their trusted advisor, the aggregate site, to present them with a selection of options. If your properties are not part of these systems a huge portion of your potential market is falling away.

Another example of change that is taking place is the increase of credit card use for making large purchases like vacations. Vacation rental companies that offer online booking that is available 24/7 that allows the consumer to gain "miles" or other rewards can be at an advantage.

Yet another example is the expectation to build a vacation experience… the concept of one stop shopping. Vacation rental companies that can provide suggested activities or other experiences as part of the booking process has a

competitive advantage against the no frills vacation rental companies. More importantly they are gaining another avenue revenue and customer loyalty.

Even with these examples listed above (and there are many more that are being thrown into the mix everyday) the opportunity is massive but the ability to act on these opportunities with current staff or processes is a challenge. It often sets up a challenge against the way things have always been done. A challenge to the staff's ability to manually manage these time consuming processes. Finally, it is also a challenge to the leadership to provide successful strategies and vision.

This is where some knowledge about making successful change is useful.

Understanding Change Types in People

As you might guess, there is plenty of research that has been done to understand how people react to change. This is largely because, as we mentioned, change can result in fear, resistance and discomfort. Not everyone responds to change in a cookie cutter manner. This is why researchers have suggested that each person has a "change type". Understanding these change types and the best way to communicate to them is important to help prevent or minimize complaints, resistance or even sabotage.

Discovery Learning Inc. took the aggregate results from 150,000 change-style assessments performed using their propriety Change Style Indicator®. They determined that people can be grouped into three categories based on how they deal with change. These groups are Conservers, Pragmatists and Originators.

Conservers tend to be the most reticent of the change type and this may seem as if they are inflexible or resistant. They prefer to work in existing structures and processes. They honor tradition and highly value the way things have always been done. When faced with change, Conservers want clear communication, guidelines and processes to mitigate their internal stress. Incremental change suits them best.

Pragmatists are in the middle of the continuum. Pragmatists are more likely to evaluate the ability of the change to solve problems. With this understanding, they will often be the ones in the organization that see both sides and function as a mediator between those who are resistant to change and those who will it.

> "The Change Styles Survey, conducted by Discovery Learning between 1996 and 2001 on over 5,000 mid-to-upper managers, placed respondents on a continuum between "Conserver" and "Originator," with "Pragmatist" in between. Not surprisingly, most individuals are a blend of Conserver-Pragmatist or Pragmatist-Originator. Of the entire population surveyed, 51 percent of managers (57 percent were men and 43 percent were women) scored in the pragmatist range, 26 percent in the originator range and 23 percent in the conserver range."
>
> www.discoverylearning.com

Originators are the agents of change. Usually they have a strong streak of entrepreneurial spirit. They like change for change's sake and will often seem too spontaneous or "willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater". It is also a trait that with their enthusiasm for change, they may miss the details that need to be taken into account as they are so caught up in their vision.

So how can you best use the understanding of these change types? First, take a look at yourself. What change type are you? This influences your perspective and how you communicate. If you are more entrepreneurial, you may find it easy to see a pragmatist or conserver general manager or senior reservationist as someone who is blocking what you are trying to do for the good of the company. It is worth taking some time to consider that those that are most resistant to

change are likely those that have the most loyalty to the company. It is just not expressed in a way that you recognize immediately.

Ultimately, it is all about effective communication. Understanding the different perspectives and helping to both inform each type in a way that they understand (hopefully not "it's my way or the highway") will make the process of change smoother for your company. There are some strategies for communication about change that will aid different change types as you move through your internal processes.

Strategies for Successful Change

Here are some strategies and tactics that can be used for successful change.

1. Ownership/Vision
2. Examine the consequences
3. Communication
4. Request feedback
5. Structure and timelines
6. Create a map of success
7. Document your changes

> REMEMBER:
> Periods of change are an excellent time to think about and implement your best practices.

Ownership and Vision

Something has gotten you to the place where you are considering making a change. What are the goals that you are trying to achieve? This includes personal goals if you are the owner of the company. With this goal in mind, you take ownership of the change process and become the visionary. Want to grow your inventory or acquire a competitor or be acquired? You need to own the vision of the company and potentially the change you need to make to achieve your goal.

Examine the consequences

One way to reduce fear of change is to understand the consequences of the change. Identify three opportunities and potential pitfalls of making changes. Involve people in all levels of the organization to weigh in on these and consider even involving owner customers if that would be helpful to you.

Communication

Part of the structure of your timeline should include taking time to communicate. Whether that's a presentation to staff at the outset of your goals and the opportunity or weekly check-ins against your timeline, build communication into all parts of the change process. Remember that Pragmatists often can function as a go between for the Conserver and Orginators, so make sure that all change types have equal weight in both discussions and your communication planning.

Request Feedback

One of my colleagues loves to say "There are three reasons why you do what you do at a vacation rental company. The first is that is how you have always done it, the second is because of the limitations of your software, or other structures, , and the third is because of best practices." Take the time to get feedback from all levels of the organization to uncover best practices. Once change is underway, remind everyone that this is the perfect time to speak up about the way that

they have always wanted to do something. Use rounds of feedback to gain both business and operational efficiencies but also to build consensus.

Structure and timelines

Remember your conservers and pragmatists in your organization and their need and comfort from structure. Take the time to develop a logical sequence of events that everyone in the organization can agree is in manageable blocks. This will also hold everyone in the organization accountable to task oriented goals.

Create a Map of Success

Everyone likes praise and positive feedback and it is never more valuable or useful then during a time of stress like change. Build a series of "quick wins" into your timeline and then when those are met, celebrate them. This will show how much everyone on the team is appreciated for their willingness to undertake the change that is needed for you to reach your goal.

Document Your Changes

Not one of the most interesting aspects of the change process, but a definite necessity is to document how you implemented this change. What worked and what didn't work will be invaluable to you as you come to another time of change in the organization.

How Organizations Have Actually Implemented Change

Seaside Vacations, in Myrtle Beach, SC, determined that they needed to make a change from their Entech vacation rental management software to increase efficiencies. They made this change for several reasons:

- They wanted to move to a cloud based solution to avoid the constant capital investment in equipment.
- They wanted updates to their software to address changing market conditions
- Marketing was a challenge. There was no easy way to export the tenants to generate marketing campaigns.
- There was no automated email of reservations, which meant time consuming manual processes were the norm.
- They needed to be able to change their tax structure. Additional resort fees were being charged by the local Chamber of Commerce to raise marketing dollars for the region. This was not possible in the Entech solution and thus no reporting capability or balancing of the trust account was possible.
- Support was becoming more difficult to get when it was needed.

Brande Brock, Director of Marketing at Seaside Vacations, is an originator. She felt that it was important to be proactive and address the need to increase both the capabilities of the accounting system and staff efficiencies. Brande understood that most of her colleagues were going to be conservers. As a family run business, most of the staff has been with the business since its inception.

Brande knew this transition was going to be difficult. She also determined it was also going to happen in a four month time frame. To facilitate staff buy in she spent a lot of time communicating with the reservation and front office staff about the benefits of moving to the Barefoot solution. She showed them how the ability to see individual reservations, reservation histories and the ability to market back into their customer database was simpler.

She also felt that it was important to get the staff working inside of the system during the training process. Instead of porting data over, the staff entered their properties, owners and tenant information. This way the staff was invested in the system even before they went live.

Brande acknowledges that the implementation timeframe was so rapid that they really didn't take the time to celebrate their successes or document the change process, both of which would have been useful.

Most importantly, Seaside Vacations has felt the benefits of increased efficiency in the tasks that they used to have to manage with manual work-arounds. Brande's time is free to create and manage marketing campaigns that help Seaside remain competitive in the Myrtle Beach market. Accounting processes have matured after the implementation and save hours of time each month.

With the implementation under their belt, Brande and the team have begun using some of the other tools that Barefoot has to offer like Coupon Codes to increase occupancy. They are looking forward to implementing Barefoot's Automated Portal response tool to automate the responses to VRBO/HomeAway leads that take hours of staff time to manually respond. This tool will also allow them to respond to these inquiries 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They anticipate increased booking revenue with lowered costs. This will be their focus when they make their next big change with a revamped website.

Brande notes that "change is always difficult but with realistic expectations, change can be managed successfully. We are thrilled with the difference that Barefoot has made in our day to day processes and in our more strategic business goals."

Conclusion

Change is part of any organization. Successful change is possible with some foresight, education and communication. Vacation rental companies should evaluate the change types in their organization and then develop a strategic plan to create a vision while evaluating potential consequences of change. By communicating realistic timelines and underlying structure of the process all change types will have the opportunity to feel more comfortable in what could be a time of stress or crisis. Finally, celebrate successes large and small (a cake, additional recognition, etc.) and be sure to document what worked and didn't work so the next time your organization makes a change you can refer to your notes.

About Barefoot

Barefoot Technologies offers one of the most innovative and flexible, cloud-based vacation rental software solutions. Working with Barefoot is about more than a conversation about technology; our core values are intertwined in our vision to offer ourselves as consultative partners to help you achieve your business goals. For thirteen years, our focus has been to provide a solution that allows you to do business you way, and not because of the limitations of any software you might be using. If you would like to learn more about Barefoot's solution, please visit www.barefoot.com or email sales@barefoot.com.

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