

MAKING CHANGE STICK

Turning temporary change into
permanent culture



Why Change doesn't Stick

The elastic band effect: Old habits pull people back.

Lack of reinforcement: If you stop, they stop.

No accountability: No consequence = no commitment.

Leadership inconsistency: Actions override words.

Not embedded: Feels like extra work, not the job.

Competing priorities: Day-to-day work takes over.

No clear benefit: People don't see why it matters.

Have you ever started a new diet, done great for two weeks and then found yourself eating pizza on a Tuesday? That's the elastic band effect. Organisations work the same way - they have muscle memory.

If you don't actively reinforce the new way, people will snap back to what's familiar, especially under pressure.

In SMEs, this is even stronger because:

- People are busy
- Priorities shift quickly
- There's less structure



From Change to Habit

Repetition builds habits: Frequency over intensity

Consistency > perfection: Small actions, done consistently, win

Micro-habits: Small actions drive big change

Environmental cues: Make the new way visible and expected

The 66-day reality: Habits take time to stick

Remove friction: Make the new way easier than the old

Change is an 'event' a habit is a 'lifestyle'. We are not aiming for people to try the new way - we want it to become automatic. That happens through repetition and environment.

For example:

- If you want a CRM usage to stick, make it part of every meeting
- If you want a new process followed, build it into daily routines

Also - remove friction:

- Make the new way faster
- Easier
- More visible

People don't adopt what's better - they adopt what's easier. Your job is to make the new way the easiest way.



The Role of Leaders

Chief repeating officer: Your voice sets priority

Model the behaviour: You go first, always

Set the standard: What you accept becomes normal

Reinforce daily: Praise and correct in real time

Stay visible: Be present during the change

Don't move on too fast: Focus builds momentum



Your team is watching your feet, not your lips. If you say something matters - but behave differently - you lose credibility instantly. In SMEs, leadership behaviour is culture. That means:

- If you use the new system → they will
- If you ignore it → they will

Also don't disappear after launch. The middle phase is where leadership matters most:

- Reinforcing
- Supporting
- Correcting

Consistency builds trust. and trust is what makes change stick.

Embedding in Daily Work

Update SOPs: make it official

Align systems: new way = easiest way

Remove old options: limit the fallback

Integrate into workflows: build into daily routines

Standardise expectations: everyone follows the same approach

Make it visible: keep it front of mind

You have to make the old way difficult - or impossible. If both options exist, people will choose the familiar one - especially when busy. That's why embedding is critical:

- Update processes
- Align systems
- Remove old shortcuts

In SMEs, habits are often informal - so you need to formalise the new way just enough that it becomes standard.

The goal is simple:

The new way should feel like the default, not the extra.



Reinforcement Tools

Visual dashboards: make progress visible

Regular check-ins: keep it on the agenda

Feedback loops: continuously improve

Track behaviour: are people actually doing it?

Leadership visibility: stay engaged

Keep it simple: easy tools get used

You can't set and forget change. Reinforcement is what turns intention into behaviour. Use simple tools:

- A whiteboard
- A shared tracker
- A quick weekly check

Most importantly - talk about it regularly.

What gets attention gets action. If the change disappears from conversation, it disappears from behaviour.

Measuring Success

Lagging metrics: results (profit, speed, output)

Leading metrics: behaviour (usage, adoption)

Track what matters: focus on key actions

Simple measures: keep it clear and visible

Spot gaps early: low adoption = early warning

Adjust based on data: learn and improve

Most SMEs measure success too late. By the time profit improves - or doesn't - it's already too late to adjust. That's why leading metrics matter:

- Are people using the system?
- Are they following the process?

If behaviour isn't changing, results won't either. Keep it simple: Binary metrics work best - yes or no, happening or not. Measure behaviour early, so you can fix problems quickly.



Celebrate Progress

Recognise in real-time: call it out immediately

Public praise: reinforce in team settings

Share stories: show the change working

Reward adoption: incentivise the right behaviours

Build momentum: success creates energy

Make it visible: let others see what good looks like

Positive reinforcement is one of the most powerful tools you have. When people see what success looks like - and see it rewarded - they follow.

In SMEs this is even more powerful because teams are close-knit. Recognition spreads quickly. Don't wait for big wins:

- Celebrate small progress
- Highlight effort
- Reinforce behaviour

What gets recognised gets repeated.

From New → Normal

The tipping point: majority adopt the new way

Becomes routine: no longer questioned

Cultural integration: “This is how we do things”

Sustained over time: not dependent on reminders

Platform for growth: enables future change

Change as a capability: ready for what’s next

You will know you have succeeded when no one talks about the change anymore. Not because it failed - but because it's normal. New hires will learn the new way as if it always existed. That's the moment the culture has shifted. This is where SMEs gain a real advantage: You have now built the muscle for change.

It is no longer something you struggle with - it is something you do.

That's what separates businesses that survive from those that grow.

