



CHANGE MANAGEMENT | STARTUP & SME PLAYBOOK

The Founder's Change Playbook.

From Why Changes Fail to Making Them Stick



01

Why Change Fails

02

When to Change

03

Who Is Affected

04

The Playbook

05

Making It Stick

"People challenges are part of building any company. Meaningful change happens when founders look beyond individuals."

Nhi Hong, Founding Partner at SOSP Consulting Group

Written by **Nhi Hong**

WHAT'S INSIDE

How to Use This Playbook

This playbook condenses the 5-part Change Management series into a single practical reference built for founders who need real frameworks.

- 01 Why Change Fails** *What is really blocking progress?*
 - 02 When to Change** *Is this the right moment?*
 - 03 Who Is Affected** *Who will resist, quietly or loudly?*
 - 04 The Playbook** *How do I run this step by step?*
 - 05 Making It Stick** *How do I stop it from fading?*
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PART 01

Why Change Fails

...and why it is rarely just about your people

Most founders arrive at the same conclusion when things do not improve: "People are the problem."

In reality, individual performance is often a reflection of the system around it. Strong systems elevate average performance. Weak systems make even capable people inconsistent.

COMMON SURFACE SYMPTOMS

- Performance does not improve after new processes are introduced
- Team agrees in meetings but daily behavior does not change
- Some employees struggle to adapt as the company grows
- Budget limits prevent building the ideal team

The 3 Layers to Look At

Sustainable change rarely comes from fixing people alone. Look at all three layers together:

PEOPLE	SYSTEM	LEADERSHIP
Skills, mindset, motivation, experience	Processes, roles, KPIs, incentives, tools, decision flows	How direction is communicated, reinforced, and modeled daily

WHERE FOUNDERS GET STUCK

- Expecting mindset change without adjusting structure
- Asking for ownership while keeping decision-making centralized
- Introducing new processes without removing old ones
- Moving too fast without allowing time for adaptation
- Operating the same way while expecting the team to change

PART 02

When to Change and When Not To

Timing often matters more than design

You can have the right strategy and the right intentions. But introduce change at the wrong moment, and it will slow execution, exhaust your team, and create resistance that did not need to exist.

GOOD MOMENTS TO CHANGE	PAUSE AND WAIT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + After a clear operational pain. Pain creates readiness. + Before a scaling phase. Easier to build structure early than retrofit later. + When onboarding new leaders. Fresh energy, no attachment to old habits. + After external triggers: market shifts, regulations, new competitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o During peak operational periods. The team is already stretched. o When the team is emotionally exhausted or burned out. o When the cash runway is very tight. Focus on survival first. o When founders lack bandwidth. Change without leadership presence fades.

Not All Changes Are Equal

SCALE	EXAMPLES	APPROACH
Small	Process tweaks, role clarifications, reporting adjustments	Test quickly, low overhead
Medium	New team structures, performance systems, workflow redesigns	Plan, communicate, pilot
Large	Business model shifts, cultural transformation, technology overhauls	Phased rollout, high leadership presence

READINESS CHECK:

1. *If you answer no to two or more of these, slow down.*
2. *Is the problem clearly visible to the team?*
3. *Do I have at least 30% of my attention available?*
4. *Is the business stable enough to absorb short-term disruption?*
5. *Have I defined what success looks like?*

PART 03

Who Is Really Affected

Why silent resistance matters more than open pushback

Change does not land on spreadsheets. It lands on people. The biggest reason change struggles is not open resistance. It is the resistance that stays quiet.

THE 4 GROUPS IN EVERY CHANGE

CHAMPIONS	Understand the reason quickly, support actively, and help others adapt. These are your early momentum builders.
NEUTRAL MAJORITY	Most employees sit here. They wait and watch. Their behavior depends on what leaders reinforce and what peers do. This group decides whether change becomes reality.
SILENT RESISTORS	The most underestimated group. They rarely argue. Instead they delay, follow old habits quietly, and comply superficially. They slowly change invisibly.
ACTIVE BLOCKERS	Openly criticize and challenge decisions. Visible and loud. But silent resistance usually causes more damage long-term.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS TO REDUCE SILENT RESISTANCE

- Involve people before decisions feel final. Even limited input increases ownership.
- Be specific about what will change and what will not. Ambiguity fuels anxiety.
- Create safe spaces for concerns. Small one-on-one conversations matter more than group meetings.
- Use champions strategically. Peer influence is powerful.
- Watch behavior, not words. Real adoption shows in how work is done, not in meeting agreements.

PART 04

The Practical Change Playbook

From diagnosis to reinforcement: a sequence that works

Change is a process, not an announcement. Most initiatives fail because they jump straight to execution. Follow this 7-step sequence: Diagnose → Define → Gap Analysis → Narrative → Interventions → Execute → Reinforce

1 Diagnose Current Reality

Understand what actually happens on the ground, not what SOPs say or what people say in meetings. Shadow daily work, run short interviews, map core processes. The goal is a shared and honest picture.

2 Define the Future State Clearly

Avoid vague goals like 'be more professional.' Define who owns what, how decisions will be made, what success looks like, and which behaviors are expected.

3 Identify the Gaps

Compare current reality to the desired future. Look for gaps in skills, processes, role clarity, mindset, and capacity. Not every problem needs a big solution.

4 Build a Change Narrative

People follow stories, not spreadsheets. Cover where you are, what is not working, what will improve, and what each team's role is. Repeat it consistently across meetings and one-on-ones.

5 Design Interventions, Not Just Training

Training alone rarely changes behavior. Think in combinations: communication, role adjustments, SOP updates, KPI alignment, pilot projects, and incentives.

6 Execute in Waves, Not All at Once

Start with a pilot team. Test new ways of working, learn from friction, adjust, then scale. Early wins build confidence and prove the change is practical.

7 Reinforce Until It Becomes Normal

Review progress regularly. Recognize new behaviors. Remove old processes. If old habits remain available, people will return to them under pressure.

CORE RULE = Align People + System + Leadership.
Not sequentially.
Together.



When one layer is missing, progress slows.

PART 05

Why Change Dies After Launch

And how to make it last

Most change does not fail with conflict. It fades quietly. People adapt just enough to survive, then drift back to familiar ways under pressure. The real work starts after launch, not before.

HOW FOUNDERS UNINTENTIONALLY UNDO PROGRESS

Moving on too quickly: Teams are still forming habits while leadership shifts focus to the next fire.

Old systems never removed: Parallel processes mean people revert to what feels easiest under pressure.

No link to performance management: If KPIs stay the same, behavior stays the same.

Stepping back into micromanagement: Sends a clear signal: ownership is temporary.

Not tracking adoption: Business results are monitored but behavior change is not.

REINFORCEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

- Review progress with a simple cadence: weekly check-ins and monthly retrospectives.
- Make new behaviors visible. Call out examples and recognize teams who apply new ways of working.
- Align KPIs with change goals. If ownership is the goal, measure ownership.
- Remove old options. Choice creates inconsistency; clarity creates adoption.
- Stay personally consistent. Your actions define what truly matters.

SUSTAINABILITY CHECK:

1. *Are new behaviors part of regular meetings?*
2. *Are KPIs aligned with the change?*
3. *Have old processes been removed?*
4. *Do leaders model the change daily?*
5. *Is adoption discussed as much as results?*

THE FULL PICTURE

Change Management at a Glance

PART	CORE IDEA	ACTION
1) Why Change Fails	People, System, Leadership must align. Fixing only people rarely sticks.	Look at structure and leadership, not just individuals.
2) When to Change	Timing matters as much as design. Poor timing exhausts teams and kills momentum.	Do the readiness check before any initiative.
3) Who Is Affected	Silent resisters cause more damage than vocal blockers.	Map stakeholders. Involve people early.
4) The Playbook	Follow the 7-step sequence: Diagnose, Define, Gap, Narrative, Intervene, Execute, Reinforce.	Do not skip steps. Pilot before scaling.
5) Making It Stick	The real work starts after launch. Remove old systems, track adoption, stay present.	Think habits, not projects.

“Change does not succeed because of perfect plans. It succeeds because founders stay engaged long enough for new ways of working to become normal.”

Nhi Hong



GET IN TOUCH

SOSP Consulting Group

We help profitable Vietnam-based SMEs become investment-ready and scalable.



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