

# LEADERMAG

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by Fraser Marlow





by Bruce Hodes  
Author of [Front Line Heroes](#)



**M**uch business literature regards change. There are terms such as: change agents, change initiatives, transformational change. Yet many organizations still struggle after all this changing. This begs the question, what is really happening? What eludes us? What obstacles (ogres) are blocking improvement?

When we considered the resistance to change, we created six assertions – five ogres and an angel. These five ogres impede improvement. Once you are aware of them, you can improve performance. Assess to what degree they exist for you.

#### ➔ **Ogre 1 - Fear**

People who have never been held accountable are scared of accountability. In most organizations, people are assigned accountability for activities or to oversee activities rather than being assigned accountability for results. Also, most people hold themselves accountable for activities not results. When people are accountable for results, they have to deliver. If they do not, they are failing at their job, and there are consequences, real or perceived. Some people have such accountability. For example, commissioned salespeople can't feed their families if they do not sell and make their quotas. Many people resist accountability because they fear not being able to produce the desired results. They fear that they will fail, look bad, and suffer the consequences. Fear of accountability impedes performance improvement and produces terror. However on the other side of terror is freedom.

If you are accountable, you do not waste time blaming or justifying.

# Five Ogres and an Angel

## Guarding the Gates of Improvement



**"Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have - and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up." - James Belasco and Ralph Stayer, Flight of the Buffalo (1994)**

You can focus and engage in creating results by looking at what steps you need to take to produce the desired result.

#### ➔ **Ogre 2 - Comfort**

Most people just want to be comfortable. People like things to stay the same. Now, imagine how it is at work. You learn your job; you have a certain routine, and you feel good about what you do. Then along comes somebody who says, "We are going to do things differently around here and ensure that you all have measurable goals that you'll be accountable to accomplish." It is a double hit: This

change agent threatens your world. Many people just wish to be left alone to do the job they know how to do. Resistance to change comes from simply not wanting to adjust to something new. This resistance often blocks willingness to listen to why the change needs to happen.

For many people, their first reaction to any change, big or small, is to be annoyed. The way out of the box is to first understand that you are in this comfort box, comfortable with a routine and resistant to being uncomfortable. The way out is to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.



### ➔ **Ogre 3 - Broken Promises**

People do not keep their promises. If you think you're the exception, we challenge you to record all the promises you make, big and small, this week and see if, in fact, you keep them all. You do not have to say "I promise" for it to be a promise—just say, "I will" or "okay" to a request. If you say you are going to do something, it is a promise. You likely believe that you keep your promises. But as long as you believe you keep your promises, you don't recognize when you do not. If you don't recognize that you do not keep your promises, then the chance of getting better at keeping promises and doing what you say you are going to do are slim and limited. Getting better at making and keeping your promises is essential in improving performance.

### ➔ **Ogre 4 - Language**

Most words associated with performance improvement have negative connotations. To many people, accountability means "somebody will beat me over the head if I do not do what I was told to do"; worse, is the phrase hold people accountable, which for many means we can't easily get away with stuff. We don't need to change the words; rather, we need to redefine the context. The language of performance improvement needs to relate to accomplishing the vision, initiatives and goals. Shift the context of being a victim and powerless to one of being a partner and empowered. Southwest Airlines, Google, Apple and Zappos have done this.

### ➔ **Ogre 5 - Drift**

Drift aids in avoiding discomfort and repeating history (most people call it culture; we call it drift). What is drift?

If you are swimming in a river and stop to float, your body will move in the direction of the current. You will drift away. Every organization has its own drift – it is how things work around here. The tendency is to maintain the status quo; drift maintains the status quo. Drift is very strong. There is a "no change here" attitude. If you try to change things, know that this ogre will rear its ugly head and, if it can, eat you. Handle the drift as if you were trapped in a canoe grabbed by a rip tide and being pulled out to sea—begin to paddle at an angle, not directly against the tide, to break free.

When dealing with drift at work, adopt a similar strategy. Honor the drift, and at the same time introduce strong initiatives that will allow the organization to move in a new direction.

Examples of such initiatives would be adopting lean manufacturing, breakthrough business planning, or the Keyne Method of improving performance.

When you try to improve performance, know that these five ogres are at work to resist change. Some team members will likely try to nix the idea. They will say, "Our way works. We've tried these improvement interventions before, and they do not stick." Or, "We have enough to do without another initiative that supposedly improves performance but only worsens the situation because it is one more thing to do." If you're aware that you'll disturb sleeping ogres, don't run the idea by your team first. Trust your intuition—be convinced that even in the face of resistance this is the way forward. As a leader, you need the vision, intuition, courage and commitment to make the decision alone and

move forward. Then figure out how to get your team on board.

Improving and transforming performance is not for the faint of heart. Such transformations require leaders who understand that they are ultimately accountable for the success of the enterprise. It is a terrific idea to empower your team and involve them all you can in the decisions. But there are some decisions that you can't make by going to the team and discussing them. The decision to go forward with implementing gut-wrenching transformational improvement is one of them. Responsibility, comfort, language, broken promises and drift—all of these ogres will stand in your way.

### **Now, One Angel**

### ➔ **Angel 1 - Performance Improvement**

The age of performance improvement is upon us! Intelligent and systematic performance improvement plans are being created and implemented with real results. The signs are there. Three Laws of Performance by Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan, Great by Choice by Jim Collins and Switch by the Heath brothers outline some ideas and possibilities. In the past, when speaking to leaders about transforming performance, we might as well been talking about space aliens. Now, change gets people's attention. More performance improvement and transformation systems are appearing.

This age of the angel is upon us, and this angel will trump the ogres every time! Knowing about the ogres gives you power in dealing with them. Being in the age of change, the age of angels, empowers you.