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If you're a penguin, you have to be ready for surprises. Hunting for fish, you could be caught by a leopard seal or killer whale. Your neighbor could beat you up, trying to steal your food. Or your iceberg could melt and break in pieces.But "Our Iceberg Is Melting" is not really a story about penguins. It's about leadership, relationships, and communication. But... most importantly - it's about managing change: how you initiate change, get others to buy-in to the change, and how you make change stick.The authors, John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber, say it "does not look remotely like a typical professional book": the plot is set in Antarctica, and the characters are penguins - funny birds that cannot fly and look as if they were wearing tuxedos.However, these visual stimuli create a very memorable image. And when you have to deal with change in real life, it will be easier to recall this fable, rather than to remember many chapters of theoretical advice.Just ask yourself what your iceberg is, and put yourself in the penguins' shoes.Here's our summary of "Our Iceberg Is Melting."The Iceberg Is Melting and Might Break Apart Soon!There was a colony of Emperor penguins living on an iceberg. One of them was called Fred. Fred was different from the rest of penguins: he would socialize less, and instead study the sea and the iceberg.At some point, he realized a terrifying thing: their iceberg was melting!It meant the colony was in big danger, as many of the young and older penguins would not survive the collapse. Something had to be done about it.Fred wasn't influential enough to make an announcement himself. He needed someone else.What Do I do Now?So Fred decided to talk to Alice - to one of the ten penguin bosses, the most approachable one. She listened carefully, paying attention, but asked if Fred was going through a personal crisis.Alice and Fred went to a place that showed the problem most clearly - to the hole in the iceberg which led to a huge cave filled with water. Alice didn't understand what she saw - because she was a leader, not a scientist. So Fred had to explain: during a cold winter, the water will freeze, and expand in volume, and the iceberg will be broken in pieces. And the winter was only two months away.Problem? What Problem?Alice contacted the penguin board members, but no one wanted to go swim and see the problem. Louis, the Head Penguin, invited Fred to present his conclusions at the board meeting.The members of the Leadership Council had different characters. Two of the birds liked debating about statistics. One liked nodding, only because he didn't want to get involved. One kept falling asleep. Two more liked to tell others what to do - not hearing it themselves.Fred understood a traditional speech will have no impact on these penguins, so he brought an iceberg model made of real ice and snow and used it to illustrate his points. Alice confirmed she saw it with her own eyes. Many penguins nodded in agreement. But not NoNo. NoNo was in charge of weather forecasting, and was always blamed for making mistakes. But he didn't want to be blamed this time - it was too big of a deal. So he started to provide counter arguments - or rather, to put seeds of disbelief in other penguins' minds. Maybe melting ice didn't open the canal. Maybe the canal will not freeze and trap the water. Maybe the water won't expand in volume. Maybe it all is just speculation. Yet, the penguins decided to form a committee to find a solution. One of the birds suggested keeping it secret, so that the routine of the penguins on the iceberg remains the same. Alice objected - she said that issue was too huge to be kept secret.Suddenly, Fred brought a glass bottle. He didn't know what it was - but it looked like ice. He filled it with water, saying if the glass broke tomorrow morning, it would be proof that the iceberg would break as well.The next morning, the bottle broke in pieces.The bosses decided to assemble the colony and let them know. The iceberg model and the bottle convinced them - yet, this also created chaos as the birds started to worry.(To understand why we often react to the prospect of change with shock, fear, denial, and frustration, you might want to take a look at the change curve model which has been popular with psychologists for decades).I Cannot Do the Job AloneLouis, the Head Penguin, gathered Fred, Alice, and two other penguins - Buddy, a very amiable bird, and Jordan, a very smart one, asking them to form a team to solve the issue. Each of them had their own strengths:Louis was wise, patient, although not liked by some younger penguins;Alice was the one that would make things happen; she didn't care about the status, and was impossible to intimidate;Buddy was not ambitious, and not even smart - but he was well trusted in their penguin community;Fred was creative and curious;And Jordan was logical and well-read.They started discussing the problem, but the conversation was difficult at first. It seemed that they weren't talking about the same thing. So the Head Penguin suggested having lunch together.Penguins love squid, but squid isn't easy to catch. To find enough food for everyone, they needed to cooperate and coordinate their movements. After having the meal together, they talked for hours. Louis's plan worked - they was able to make a team out of five separate individuals.The SeagullThe penguins had different ideas about how to solve their iceberg problem. Someone suggested drilling a hole to let the water and pressure out. It would prevent the iceberg from exploding in the upcoming winter, but wouldn't stop it from melting. Someone suggested finding a perfect iceberg, and someone - creating superglue to put the iceberg together. These were bad ideas. Then one of the penguins said, "Maybe you should do what Fred did when he found our terrible problem. Walk around, keeping our eyes and minds open. Be curious."And then they saw a seagull in the sky.At first, the penguins couldn't believe a bird could fly. Then they talked to him - and it appeared the seagull was a Scout looking for where his clan could live next. He explained they were nomads, and never stayed in the same place for a long time. The penguins stopped to think about it. They and seagulls were different. Seagulls could fly, and they couldn't. Then Alice said: "We're different... That means we can't just copy them. But the idea is very interesting... We'd learn to move around."Getting the Message OutThe next day, they had a meeting with the colony again. To help the penguins understand his idea, Louis didn't just tell them about it: instead, he asked questions - in other words, he used the Socratic method. Do we respect each other? Do we value discipline? Are these beliefs connected to a large piece of ice?The answer was obvious. Even though some part of the penguins were confused, and others were skeptical, overall, they accepted the idea. There was one problem though - not everyone was present at the meeting.So Alice came up with an idea: they needed to put slogans on iceposters. Everywhere, even underwater. Everyone had to know what was going on.Good News, Bad NewsThe good news was that a dozen penguins agreed to be Scouts. The mysterious news was that a kindergarten teacher started telling the young penguins scary stories about killer whales, which gave them nightmares. And the very troubling news: adult penguins never picked food for their adult penguins, only for their children - which meant the Scouts wouldn't have a supply of food.These were obstacles, and they had to be overcome. Because even the most devoted penguins started to surrender, as their families were unworried by NoNo's skepticism, their children had nightmares, and they were scared they'd be left without food.Buddy's role was to talk to the teacher and find out why she would make things more complicated with her stories. Her answer was simple: she was scared she wouldn't be needed once they started a nomadic lifestyle. But Buddy explained to her that children will need to learn even more then.The teacher was reassured. And instead of horror stories, she started to tell children tales of heroism under the circumstance of change.Then a chain reaction happened. Sally Ann, a kindergarten student, whose mind was full of heroic stories, met Alice and asked: how can I become a hero? Alice responded that she just had to let her parents know the Penguin Head needed their help in catching fish for Scouts. And Sally Ann did pass the message on - to her parents, and to her friends (of which she had many). And then they passed it to their own parents.The ScoutsThe penguins picked Scouts, but who would catch fish for them?Little Sally Ann came up with the "Heroes Day Celebration" - a celebration with a performance, a band, and a flea market, the price of admission to which was two fish per adult. And that was the fish for the Scouts.When they got back, the Scouts told amazing stories about what they'd seen. The birds who were skeptical got less skeptical. And that was a short-term win.The Second WaveThe birds got enthusiastic, and many volunteered to be among the second wave of Scouts. Alice tried to keep the momentum and not let the birds lose courage. Some still wanted to wait till the next winter.They found an iceberg, and moved there in May, before the Antarctica winter started. They had problems: the wind was strong, they didn't know all the safe places on the iceberg, and so on. But those problems weren't too bad.The next season, they moved again. Not because the iceberg was bad, but because it was crucial not to stop.The Most Remarkable ChangeMany changes happened to the colony in subsequent years. The Scouts' status went up. "Scouting" became a new required subject at penguin school. And the colony became nomads.Louis was asked to tell the younger penguins the story of the Great Change. He did, splitting the story into the steps the leaders had taken:1. Realizing there was a problem. Fred created a sense of urgency.2. They formed a group in charge of solving the issue.3. They found a vision of the future.4. They communicated that vision to others.5. They removed the obstacles.6. They achieved a short-term win.7. They let the new way of life to get established.8. They ensured the old traditions will not come back.That was the end of the story.Of course, you're not a penguin, and you probably won't have to look for new icebergs and care about fish for Scouts. The challenges you'll have in life will be different. But if you ever face a necessity to undergo a change, just read this story again. You'll remind yourself that change is not inherently bad, or impossible. And you'll see it doesn't have to be painful. Inspired to learn more about change management? Take a look at our rundown of change management models and examples of change management to inspire new thought and action. Home > Book Summaries > Book Summary - Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing And Succeeding Under Any Conditions Through a simple fable about a penguin colony, with life-like characters that we can identify with. This book by John Kotter presents important lessons for working and living with changes. It illustrates 8 steps that can anyone can use to deliver successful change. In this free version of Our Iceberg is Melting summary, we'll outline the key ideas in the book and the 8-step change process. Here's a quick overview of the book highlights. The story was set in Antarctica, on an iceberg where a colony of emperor penguins had lived for as long as they could remember. This was the only home they had ever known. The fable unfolds with Fred - an unusually curious and observant penguin - discovering that the iceberg they are living on had melted in some places and may literally fall apart. Throughout the story, Kotter packed numerous interesting details, analogies and insights about change-management challenges at work e.g. fear of change and motivating action. Kotter suggests that you read and reflect on the story more than once to get the most of the details in the fable. In this summary, we will outline the gist of the story, alongside Kotter's 8 Steps to Successful Change in 3 Phases. Here's an overview of the 8 steps to change, interwoven into the fable: In a nutshell: Step 1: Create Sense of Urgency Step 2: Form a Guiding Team Step 3: Define a Vision & Strategy for Change Step 4: Communicate to Get Buy-In Step 5: Empower Others Step 6: Achieve Short-term Wins Step 7: Build Momentum Step 8: Build a New Culture The power of the fable lies in its vivid details and analogy, which helps us to reflect on our work, workplace and the people around us. Consider the melting iceberg that you could be on (e.g. outdated curriculum or product lines, deteriorating services), the potential change champions and nay-sayers in your organization, and what role you can play. The book is especially powerful when it is read as a team, as it provides a tool to align your thinking and approach toward change. For more examples, details, and actionable tips to apply these strategies, do get our full summary bundle which includes an infographic, 9-page text summary, and a 15-minute audio summary. You can purchase the book here to get the most from the fable or visit kotterinternational.com. Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing And Succeeding Under Any Conditions is written by John Kotter-an author, speaker, Harvard Professor, and management consultant and founder of Kotter International. At the age of 33, Kotter was given tenure and a full Professorship at the Harvard Business School, making him the youngest person ever to receive that award at the Business School. Dr. Kotter is the author of 18 books, 12 of which have been business bestsellers and two of which are overall New York Times bestsellers. He is still working tirelessly to achieve the goal of "millions leading, billions benefiting". Kotter is a proud father of two and resides in Boston, MA with his wife Nancy Dearman. "Culture changes with as much difficulty in penguin colonies as in human colonies." "When you act in concert with others, because you have all read, reflected, and discussed the same fable, the end results can be very powerful." "Handle the challenge of change well. And you can prosper greatly. Handle it poorly, and you put yourself and others at risk." "Our method is showing, much more than telling." "The colony needs a team of birds to guide it through this difficult period. I cannot do the job alone." Click here to download Our Iceberg is Melting book summary and infographic Our Iceberg is Melting Summary Bundle Includes: A 1-page infographic in pdf A 9-page text summary in pdf A min audio summary in mp3 Available for download or via web app Buy Now for \$13.97 See all bundle details Recommendations for Struggling Managers Identifying the difficulties that managers may be having in establishing self-directed, high-performing teams, first you have to look at the basics that include team building, having a clear purpose, problem solving, decision making, negotiation, setting goals, conflict, effective leaders, and proactive planning. All of these together help create a self-directed high performing team, so you need to look at each of these to find out what problems you are experiencing in your teams and then assess what steps you need to take. We will look at the ineffective issues we find and look at what will make them effective, with the team. We found that the team was not a cohesive team, using ineffective work methods... What is John Kotter's Our Iceberg Is Melting about? How does his story about penguins teach readers about change, teamwork, and leadership? John Kotter's book Our Iceberg Is Melting, he tells a fable about penguins who are faced with the reality that the iceberg they live on is melting and they must find a new home or perish. The story outlines the steps it takes and the difficulties companies face when they must adapt or die.Below is a brief overview of Kotter's fable Our Iceberg Is Melting. John Kotter's Our Iceberg Is Melting is a fable about a colony of penguins who realize that their home might be destroyed soon, and that they need to move the entire colony to a new iceberg. However, despite the looming threat, making such a big change isn't easy. This book by Dr. John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber will teach you, through the penguin fable, the necessary steps in making major changes to your company or your personal life. In this guide, we'll explore some of the topics in greater detail and present alternative theories or points of view; we'll provide the kind of in-depth study that a short story like Our Iceberg Is Melting has to forego in favor of simplicity and clarity in its lessons. The first problem the characters needed to overcome was their colony's false sense of security. They did this by convincing the others that there was an immediate, dire threat, and that they had to do something about it. In short, they created a sense of urgency to motivate the colony. The penguins had lived on the same Antarctic iceberg as far back as any of them could remember, and they saw no reason why that should ever change. Some argue that people are hard-wired to resist change; that millions of years of evolution have ingrained the instinct to accept "good enough" (which is to say, survival), rather than risk that stability to pursue something better. Furthermore, change is risky—the outcome is uncertain, and people don't like uncertainty. To sum it up using a common idiom: People prefer the devil they know (the current situation) to the devil they don't (change). However, a penguin named Fred made an alarming discovery: The iceberg was riddled with deep cracks due to Earth's warming climate, and those cracks were filled with water. When winter came, that water would freeze and expand, which could shatter the whole iceberg.Fred took his findings to Alice, one of the leaders of the penguin colony. Alice took Fred seriously, and arranged for him to present what he'd learned to the Leadership Council—including the Council head, a penguin named Louis.It took some convincing, but eventually most of the Council members agreed that there was a dire threat to the colony, and that something had to be done. They began spreading the word to the other penguins. What Fred and the Council accomplished here was replacing complacency with urgency. In other words, they convinced the colony that things were not normal, that they were in serious danger, and that they needed to take action to protect themselves from it. In order to make it clear why the penguins need to take action, the authors created a situation that was both extremely dangerous and easy to see: Namely, that the place the penguins lived was falling apart beneath their feet. Unfortunately, problems in real life aren't always so visible or so immediate—you might have trouble convincing others that there even is a problem. Creativity, Inc. offers some suggestions on how to make your coworkers see the need for change, including:Discuss why you need to change (this is what Fred did in the penguin fable). Examine your current processes honestly, and look for problems. Accept—even embrace—the fact that the change may not go smoothly at first. Promise yourself and your coworkers that nobody will be punished for mistakes. The next hurdle the penguins needed to face was figuring out who would actually solve the problem of the melting iceberg. Louis—the head of the Leadership Council—knew that protecting the colony was his responsibility, but he couldn't possibly save the penguins on his own. Therefore, he assembled a skilled and qualified team to help him make the necessary changes. (Shortform note: When you need to solve major problems, working with others is crucial. So why do so many people try to go it alone? It may be due to a lack of trust: One study suggests that only 32% of leaders worldwide believe their teams have the ability to meet their goals. We'll discuss how to develop trusting teams below.)Besides himself, he chose four other penguins for the team, each with a unique personality and skill set. The final team was: Louis: An older penguin with the experience to make wise decisions. His position in the Leadership Council means that almost every penguin in the colony respects him (except for NoNo and some of the teenagers). Alice: Smart, practical, and driven. She's an excellent project manager, treats everyone with respect (as shown by the fact that she listened to Fred), and isn't intimidated by anyone. Fred: Younger than the others, but intelligent and curious. He was the first to notice the problem and bring it to the Council's attention. Jordan, aka The Professor: Probably the smartest and most learned bird on the iceberg, though lacking in social skills.Buddy: Not exceptionally smart, nor a natural leader, but he's a people-penguin who's great at talking to people. Essentially the polar opposite of The Professor. It would take all of them working together to make the kinds of changes that could save the colony. How to Choose the Right Team MembersLouis assembled a skilled and qualified team, but qualifications weren't the only factors he took into account. While skills and qualifications matter, team members' personalities, values, and diverse experiences contribute to team success as well, and these can be hard to evaluate. One CEO recommends starting the search by focusing on three essential factors: humility, experience, and the "then vs. now" factor: Humility. Humility is crucial to the teamwork mentality—someone who thinks he's better or more important than everyone else isn't going to be an effective team player. Experience. You'll need a mixture of experienced team members who can guide the team through its change, and younger, less experienced team members who are flexible and open to new ideas. Adaptability. Your needs will change over time, and your organization does. At first, you'll need motivated and free-spirited people who can work well without strict guidelines. Then, as your changes solidify and become a permanent part of company culture, you'll need people who can set down appropriate rules and abide by them. You can do this either by recruiting people who are willing and able to change their approach as time goes on, or by recruiting people with the understanding that they may be replaced as the project and the organization evolves.The next problem the penguins ran into was the lack of a clear vision for the colony's future. They knew that they needed to do something, but they didn't yet know what they wanted to do. Therefore, their next step was to brainstorm solutions and pick the one that seemed most likely to work. In short, they needed a concrete plan before they started making any changes. (Shortform note: The Leadership Challenge combines this step and the next (Spread the Word) into a single principle: Be inspirational. In other words, both your vision and the way you communicate it are part of inspiring your colleagues to make the change that your organization needs.)The team of penguins started thinking about possible solutions to the expanding water inside the iceberg, and also asked other penguins in the colony for suggestions. However, none of the ideas they came up with were practical. Eventually, a passing seagull landed on the iceberg, and Buddy and the Professor went to speak to it. They learned that the gull was a scout for a nomadic flock—the seagulls lived by constantly moving from one place to another, and this particular bird helped find places for the flock to go. The visiting seagull gave the penguins an idea for a simple, practical solution: They would leave the iceberg. Seeking wisdom from unfamiliar sources, as the penguins did by befriending the seagull, does more than just give you new ideas—it boosts your ability to think creatively and improves your mood as well. In the Magic of Thinking Big, author and life strategist David J. Schwartz suggests finding friends and social groups with diverse backgrounds, religions, and political views. He describes such connections as "psychological sunshine"—both enlightening and enjoyable—and says that they're part of being, and younger, less experienced team members who are flexible and open to new ideas. Adaptability. Your needs will change over time, and your organization does. 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