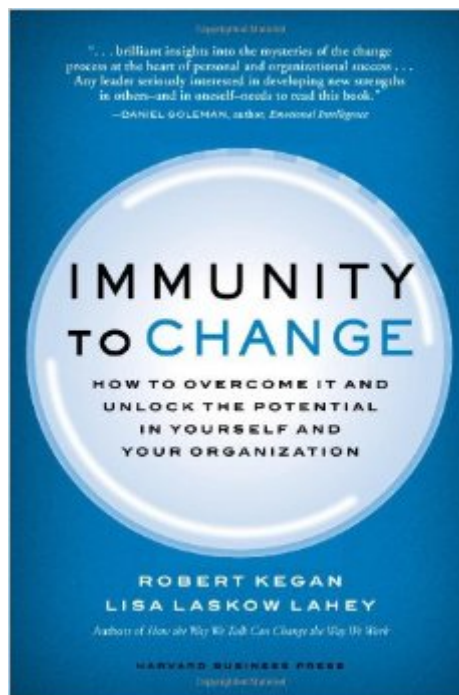


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# Immunity To Change: How To Overcome It And Unlock The Potential In Yourself And Your Organization (Leadership For The Common Good)



## Synopsis

A recent study showed that when doctors tell heart patients they will die if they don't change their habits, only one in seven will be able to follow through successfully. Desire and motivation aren't enough: even when it's literally a matter of life or death, the ability to change remains maddeningly elusive. Given that the status quo is so potent, how can we change ourselves and our organizations? In *Immunity to Change*, authors Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey show how our individual beliefs--along with the collective mind-sets in our organizations--combine to create a natural but powerful immunity to change. By revealing how this mechanism holds us back, Kegan and Lahey give us the keys to unlock our potential and finally move forward. And by pinpointing and uprooting our own immunities to change, we can bring our organizations forward with us. This persuasive and practical book, filled with hands-on diagnostics and compelling case studies, delivers the tools you need to overcome the forces of inertia and transform your life and your work.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Not simply a book about organizational transformation, *Immunity to Change* is a challenging analysis of how our well-developed methods of processing information and experience become barriers that hinder our attempts to achieve adaptive change. The first section of the book describes the theory and can be pretty tough going. The second applies the theory to case studies of organization change. The last is a primer on how to detect and overcome change immunity in your own organization. At the risk of being overly reductive, I will try to summarize the theory. People deal

with fear and anxiety as a normal part of life. They don't feel this fear most of the time because they have created effective internal anxiety management systems. Those frameworks for evaluating experience are beneficial and necessary but can also form a hidden barrier to the desire to achieve adaptive change. The development of a more complex mental framework (the "self-transforming mind") help the individual recognize the filtering effect and limitations of his/her own frame of reference. This recognition will allow the individual to begin to negate the effects of an internally imposed change immunity. Looked at this way, any change which is adaptive rather than technical will, as a matter of course, put at risk "a way of knowing the world that also serves as a way of managing a persistent, fundamental anxiety." The authors argue that we can only succeed with adaptive changes by recognizing the seriousness of the internal challenge we face. The desired change can put at risk "what has been a very well-functioning way of taking care of ourselves.

I write this review from the perspective of an Executive Coach who has been practicing for 15 years and who has used this methodology with executives/leaders over the past three years. I can vouch that it works, not only with individual leaders but in a team development context as well. Working well means that individuals have changed behaviors; in the case of the team, that it learned to overcome difficult communication challenges resulting in a measured increase in trust among its members. In clear language, Kegan and Lahey lay out a step by step methodology that facilitates a person's conscious understanding of his or her intentions, aspirations and goals to an identification of hidden "competing commitments", which may unintentionally hinder reaching these goals. The articulation of these competing commitments ultimately lead to an uncovering of the assumptions, beliefs and systems of meaning which can then be critically evaluated for their ability to promote or hinder success in the achievement of the goals and aspirations that anchor the process. Their methodology helps people to reflect on themselves and their competing commitments in a clear way. As an Executive Coach, I have repeatedly observed that leaders are limited most significantly by their inability to not only take the time to reflect but to know how best to use this reflection space. I also appreciate the fact that Lahey and Kegan link their methodology to a theory of development, demonstrating the process of increasing complexity of mind. This important link between practice and theory moves the user from an increase in self awareness (a very important step) to a broadening of how the leader thinks and acts. I and my clients find their methodology very user friendly, specific and actionable.

As a worksite wellness specialist, I am constantly reminded of how difficult sustained behavior

change can be. Despite strong desire and sincere commitment, most people fail in their attempt to permanently change their behavior. This book offers an explanation as to why. According to Kegan and Lahey, behavior change consists of two types: technical and adaptive. Technical behavior change involves the acquisition of new knowledge and/or skills which are then applied to achieving the new desired behavior. The necessary knowledge and skill are usually easily identified and straight forward in nature. Most behavior change, however, also involves an adaptive element within the mind. This adaptive element requires a change in mindset, in addition to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Our mindset is made up of feelings, anxieties and motivations based on unconscious assumptions that can and often do result in equally strong desires and commitments not to change. The mindset is driven by "big assumptions" which create an immunity to change. Our mindset often sees our attempts at behavior change as being "life threatening." This book lays out a theory and framework for how individuals and organizations can identify and change their mindsets and their underlying supportive assumptions. The book is divided into three sections. The first lays out the underlying theory and change framework. Chapter 1 is especially tough reading, so don't get frustrated, discouraged or bogged down in it. The rest of the book is better. Section two is about case examples which serve as good illustrations of the theory and framework. You can gain an understanding from the cases that will help you to make sense of what you read in Chapter 1.

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