March 26, 2009

Book Review 21 The Immunity to Change by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

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**An Expanded View of Behavior Change**, March 26, 2009, Rating: 4 Stars

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 straightforward 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. The cases do a good job of filling in the blanks, or in clearing up any confusion. The third section walks the reader through the process of applying the immunity to change framework to your own personal or organizational change initiatives.

By recognizing the need to identify and address the “sociocentric and psychocentric perspectives” of behavior change, this book adds to the current change management literature. If you are involved in the world of behavior change, you will definitely want to read this book.