

Talking Change Influence with Friska Wirya

Gavin Wedell: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, this is Gavin Wedell from ChangePlan. And today I am delighted to be joined by Friska Wirya, the CEO of Fresh by Friska. Friska has built an enormous following on LinkedIn of over 25,000 people and seems to have a voracious social media engagement strategy. Aside from that seems to also certainly be amongst the most glamorous change management thinkers in the world. Welcome, Friska.

Friska Wirya: Thanks for having me, Gavin.

Gavin Wedell: Friska, when we see you on LinkedIn, it's always as though you're globetrotting, you're attending cocktail parties and events, you're launching books, you're all doing all sorts of glamorous and incredible things. I'd love you to just tell us the story of your journey thus far in change management.

Friska Wirya: All of those things are true, but what looks stylish and seamless on top and is underpinned by a lot of hard work, grit, and dedication that spanned a number of years. So I first dove into change probably about a decade ago.

Friska Wirya: And during that time, I've worked for biggest names in mining, engineering, and tech. I cut my teeth in general management consulting, that's where I started after I did my MBA. I was in Los Angeles at the time. I came back to Australia and it was only then change management started to be recognized as a discipline. And as luck would have it, I was really bored in management consulting.

Friska Wirya: It just seemed like every project was the same and change intrigued me. Because every day is different, every client's need is different, every culture, and hence every change. And so what works for company A is not going to work for company B. And that really feeds into my kind of analytical ability. So it played to all my strengths and I wanted to try my hand at it because I thought I'd be really good at it. Because it played to all my strengths. I took a 40 percent pay cut and I started from nothing. I started as a change analyst, but didn't have any qualifications. I think a year or two later, I did all the other accreditations, your ProSci,

your PCI, Kotter. And ever since then, it's been learning from other disciplines that inform my change management practice.

Friska Wirya: So since then I've led changes of all shapes and sizes and all sorts of types. So restructures, mergers and acquisitions, digital transformations. Uh, culture change, and it's really, and it's brought me all around the world. So it's been quite a ride.

Gavin Wedell: Were you in house as a management consultant in those different verticals that you were talking about and then switched to also being in house? Or did you switch to working as a consultant as you switched into change?

Friska Wirya: I was a consultant first, so I first cut my teeth at Fujitsu, so really one of the founding members of their digital consulting team. I hated it. I hated it. And I really didn't believe in the lifetime career anymore, and I switched to contracting. After I switched to contracting, I never looked back and after contracting, that's when I birthed Fresh by Friska.

Friska Wirya: So November, 2019, I decided I wanted to try creating something out of nothing, because I didn't want to look back when I was 60 and wonder, you know what? What if, what if I took a path less traveled?

Gavin Wedell: Thanks very much for that. It seems quite brave that you surveyed those people around you asking about those three attributes. Is that something that you would recommend to change managers who are either working in house or working as contractors?

Friska Wirya: And try to get a cross section of people. So I didn't just send it to a hundred of my besties. I sent it to people that didn't know me very well, because I was interested in how I was being perceived in the world. I sent it to people that know me on a very deep personal level and people that have only known me in the office.

Friska Wirya: So I think just like when you do a change impact assessment. The more voices and perspectives you have in the room, the more well rounded a picture you have of the impact. The same goes for a personal brand.

Gavin Wedell: So what were the questions? What three words would you use to describe me? And that was the only question you sent out?

Friska Wirya: No, and then I asked what do I do head and shoulders better than anyone you've ever met? Like just knock it out of the park. And what about me do you think is unique or rare?

Gavin Wedell: Fantastic. I love it. You're allowing those people around you who've seen what you do to really help you to understand yourself, the things that you might have been unconsciously aware of, or just not consciously aware of.

Gavin Wedell: I'm interested to know as a little bit of an introvert or an extroverted introvert, I'm wondering, and of course, I realize that that whole paradigm is questionable, but I'm wondering for those of us that might be less willing to, or less likely to sort of put ourselves out there in a big way. Do you have any advice for those of us who prefer to sort of be a little bit less visible?

Friska Wirya: I just think you're not doing yourself any favors by remaining invisible. Life's too short to play a small game. I mean, what's the worst that can happen? Like someone corrects your spelling or your grammar. I mean, who cares? Like some people have done that to me before. I just don't care. You know, I think about the risk and the impacts of being invisible.

Friska Wirya: The pain of that is greater than the pain that you may have of someone putting a negative comment on one of your posts. And I'm not saying you have to go all out singing and dancing in a video, just start small. Start by leaving really articulate comments on someone's post that you really admire.

Friska Wirya: You don't have to go plunge into the deep end. And I did plunge into the deep end, by the way, I started doing videos. That's how I grew my following really fast, really big on LinkedIn. Because back then no one really was doing any videos and. Especially about change management. And also we were all in lockdown.

Friska Wirya: So people were very bored. Everybody was at home, everybody was online. So there were a lot of eyeballs. So I think do what feels comfortable to you, but just know. On the other side of that discomfort is your growth. So always like to try to level up, you know,

maybe month one, you just do comments. Then month two, you start doing polls. Then month three, you start doing articles. So just ease your way up. It's just like when we first learned how to ride a bike, right? We didn't go downhill on two wheels. We had our training wheels on. We did it bit by bit. We practiced to get our balance. Same goes for a personal brand. Anything you. Doing it the first time will be crap. So don't beat yourself up over it. You want to get better, keep doing it, and doing it more often.

Gavin Wedell: So it sounds like LinkedIn really is the sort of primary place that we build our professional branding. Stepping away from LinkedIn or that kind of social media within an organization, let's say we're working in house, what do you think are the biggest ways that change managers can build their influence? And also, I guess their credibility from senior leadership in particular.

Friska Wirya: Definitely find out what the highly tracked traffic is. And talked about platforms within the business. So for example, at Raleigh, I made a really big name for myself by blogging on their intranet portal. It was called The One Page and anybody could submit blogs to the communications team and the good ones were highlighted.

Friska Wirya: So by blogging, I had C-levels from all around the world reaching out to me asking for a virtual coffee. So find out what those platforms are in your organization and use them. It's a lot harder if the organization is conservative and doesn't have that but that's where you can get a little bit creative.

Friska Wirya: How can you start your own newsletter? Then you are actually the editor. You are actually the talent, not just simply writing something for another publication. Number three would be events. So most organizations have town halls, they have quarterlies, et cetera. How can you get involved?

Friska Wirya: How can you start becoming more visible on that platform? Because the audience for that is literally everybody, right? Right from the CEO, right down to the shop floor.

Gavin Wedell: Fascinating. Thank you very much for that. You've just recently released a book, The Future Fit Organization. And I know that that's been really popular on Amazon. I'd love you to just share a little bit

about that book. And what can you tell us about the book or what is a future fit organization?

Friska Wirya: The reason why I said future fit and not future proof, is because I really think if you think you can future proof your organization, then you're either delusional or very, very arrogant.

Friska Wirya: We've seen COVID just happen a few years ago, even countries that had gone through the very similar pandemic style diseases, such as the bird flu or SARS in Hong Kong, even they were caught blindsided. So to think that we can predict the future and make certain strategies in place to hedge against that is very unlikely.

Friska Wirya: So some things you really won't see coming. And because of that, you need to build your future fitness muscles. And when I say future fitness muscles, I mean, leadership that is collaborative and co creative. I mean, building change management capability. I mean, investing in your culture, because that is what's going to reap you dividends when times are tough.

Friska Wirya: What are the systems, the structures, the skills that you need? For your organization to be resilient, to be agile, to be adaptable in times of constant disruption and uncertainty. So that's what I mean by future fitness. So it lays out the blueprint of how leaders can build future fit organizations. I also like to use the term 'people stack'. Everybody talks about the 'tech stack.' Have you got this? Have you got that ChatGPT, whatever Salesforce. But what about the people stack? Right. There's no point investing so much in the tech stack if you don't have the people to use it effectively. If you don't have the people to drive home the ROI, you don't have the people to increase that performance. So I talk about that as well in the book.

Gavin Wedell: Fantastic. Now, this is a question that is a little bit off script, but I'm super curious because you mentioned you moved into the world of change. You undertook a number of change certifications like Prosci and Kotter and PCI. I'm really curious about your view on the role of change methodology certifications. Obviously we have our own views at ChangePlan on their importance and their use. I'd love to hear your perspective on the importance of those kinds of certifications.

Friska Wirya: I think if you've never done change and you have no other educational qualifications, they're very useful as a starting point, not an

ending point. If you end there, then you're in deep trouble because they're a bit basic. They're easily understood for everybody to apply. I think they're a great starting ground for further study and further research.

Friska Wirya: So I still reference some good old Prosci and PCI stuff, but I don't rely on it. I have quite an extensive toolkit that I've built over 10 years of frameworks, models, step by step process flows, et cetera. And they come from published work and my own IP that I've created.

Gavin Wedell: Friska, what are your views on top down versus bottom up change?

Friska Wirya: I think expecting bottom up change to take hold, to be sustained, somehow get magically embedded in the organization is a pipe dream. It sounds really popular and new age-y, but it doesn't work in reality. Any change needs to be supported, endorsed, sponsored at the top. It doesn't have to start at the top, but it definitely needs their support. So without that, any grassroots change initiatives are going to flounder and they're just not going to last.

Gavin Wedell: Friska I understand you're writing a second book already. Can you tell us about that?

Friska Wirya: Yes. My second baby, I just submitted the manuscript three days ago. So my first book was about future fit organizations. And I was thinking about the experiences that I've had where change hasn't gone well. It's imploded. And the number one reason is due to a clash of cultures, either a clash of professional cultures, ethnic cultures, maybe subcultures. And I thought there's something that I wanted to double down on.

Friska Wirya: With Asia emerging as the next superpower, my second book is about transformation of large organizations in Asia, how to do it, what are the common mistakes, who's done it well, who's blown up in a blaze of glory and what you can learn from it if you are leading. Transformation of that sort of size in that region. So it's going to be out in August this year.

Gavin Wedell: Fabulous. Well, we'll be watching out for that one. Thanks so much for joining us today. A real pleasure to be with you. And you're a great friend and ally of ChangePlan. So we really appreciate you. Where

can people find out a little bit more about you and your work and your book?

Friska Wirya: So I'm most active on LinkedIn. As you'd know, it's [linkedin.com forward slash in forward slash Friska](https://www.linkedin.com/company/friska). My website is fresh by Friska and my Instagram handle is the same.

Gavin Wedell: Fantastic. Well, thank you so much for joining us at ChangePlan today.

Friska Wirya: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.