

Leading Change

Definition: The ability to create a positive picture of the future and engage others in implementing the personal and organizational change needed to move into that future.

Strategies

- ◆ You go First.
- ◆ Paint a Positive Picture of Both the Reasons For and Expected Outcomes of the Change.
- ◆ Stand on Purpose – The “Why” Behind the Change.
- ◆ Disown the Fear of Change.
- ◆ Create Feedback Loops to Understand Concerns and to be able to Develop Performance Systems to Enable Staff to Move Forward.
- ◆ Demonstrate your EI
- ◆ Evolve Yourself

You Go First

What is it: Going first is the most powerful demonstration of your commitment. There are three aspects of commitment.

First, answer the tough question, for yourself: **“Can you fully support the change?”** If your answer to this question is “no,” you may have to create a future elsewhere. If it’s yes, you need to act.

Second there is action. **Committed people act.** Action crosses the line from comfortable certainty to the adventure of creating the future. A clear, observable change in your actions sends a powerful message. It says to those who look to you as their leader “I am not a helpless victim. I have both control and accountability”.

Third there needs to be a compelling reason for your staff to take action. This sometimes requires that you **set the platform on fire.** It is a fact of life that if where people are now gets too uncomfortable, they will eventually move on. Your job is to crank up the heat to the degree that people are sweating, but not incinerated. Refuse to coddle or sympathize. Hold people’s feet to the fire.

How to do it - Your challenge is to figure out what actions will clearly communicate that you support the organizational change. Some ideas:

- Offer to attend staff meetings in units where you can do more to collaborate across organizational lines. Ask for 10 minutes on the agenda to discuss “Here are some things we can do to help.”
- Schedule and participate in training/workshops/courses designed to teach people the “new way.”
- Take visible, dramatic actions that say “I support what is happening.”
- Examine your job to identify ways you can do it differently.

Ask tough questions about why people continue to do things the old way. Use queries like: Why are examinations worked this way? Why don’t we ask our clients...? How can we involve others?

Paint a Positive Picture of the Future (Vision)

What is it: Leadership, by definition, requires followership. People at any level of the organization can be leaders (with or without the title of manager). Followers, willing ones anyway, by definition, grant leadership to those who are paving the way to something better. Painting a positive picture of the future is “the vision thing.” It is the act of visualizing better conditions, or circumstances, than presently exist. Every true leader has at least some inkling about what the organization would look like if it were functioning differently. A robust, positive picture of the future mobilizes behavior appropriate to support that future. A robust, positive picture of the future uses memorable, simple concepts that make clear what needs to be different about tomorrow. It provides followers with something of meaning, value, and worth to move toward.

How to do it - Your challenge is to align people around a picture of a positive future in order to lead change. And, you need to do it in a way that fits for you. Laminated vision posters, rhetoric, drums and bugles are not necessary (although a little showmanship never hurts), but authentic optimism is absolutely necessary. A few examples of how you might do it:

- Develop a “change vision” for your organization. Every time you have a meeting, find ways to reference the vision: How things will be better in the future.
- Each time someone complains to you about the change refuse to buy into the negativity. Instead, respond with something like “Well, one of the positives that will come out of this change is...”
- Avoid negativity. Avoid all forms of stinkin' thinkin': “Awfulizing,” “Catastrophizing,” or “Shoulding.”
- Keep an easel, or a white board, in your office. Post the “success of the day,” or week.

Stand on Purpose

What is it: Strong leadership is built on the pursuit of purpose. Most people are unfamiliar with a deep and abiding sense of purpose – particularly as it relates to their careers. This is not because they don't have one, but because they have not applied the discipline to think about the difference they want to make in the workplace. Having, and demonstrating, a clear purpose requires paying attention to what matters most. Demonstrating purpose requires the courage to face up to what really needs to be done to create the ideal results and work environment.

Being clear about the purpose of the work you do enables you to be a role model for people no matter how ambiguous or chaotic the current situation. Being clear about purpose enables you to “endure” and present an optimistic bias because you have an overarching reason for what you do. Purpose provides solid ground amidst uncertainty and chaos. Purpose enables you to demonstrate confidence on your part and builds confidence in others. Organizational structure may change, policies may change, leaders may change, reporting relationships may change – however, the one constant can be purpose. Purpose is the reason you exist. Clarity about why you, and your unit, exist in the organization serves people well at all times, and even more so during times of change.

How to do it - In thinking about how you might develop a purpose, and stand on that purpose to lead organizational change, consider these two suggestions:

- Candidly discuss how your organizational purpose will be fulfilled in the restructured or new organization and what you can do to positively support the change.
- Reinforce your client's needs for change in the services you provide. Remind people that as long as we are here, we will always need to improve what we are paid to do – to serve our clients to the best of our ability.

Dis-Own the Change

$$D + V + FS > R$$

What is it: The formula D (*listen to people's "dissatisfaction" with how things are working now as you move in to a change*) plus V (*ask them to describe how the workplace, or processes and procedures, will work in the best manner possible after this change; their "Vision"*) plus FS (*surface ideas for the "First Steps" necessary to move toward their vision*) is an effective methodology for overcoming resistance (R) to change.

And – this is not revolutionary news – the primary reason for resistance is a sense of powerlessness. Big, large-scale changes are initiated from on high (at least in most people's minds) with no consideration for their experience, contributions or concerns. When you dis-own the change, you engage people in determining what is not working now and why it's not working, what the new environment could be, and what they can do to fix it – how to get from here to there. All of which helps to restore, for them, a sense of control.

How to do it - How can you "dis-own" the change? A couple of ideas:

- Town Meetings: Conduct town meetings or structured focus groups to find out what is, and isn't, working. How would things look if everything was working in the best manner possible? What are the logical first steps to make this work?
- When people complain to you about their situation, ask them to be specific about their complaints. In doing so, you are letting them talk about the D – Dissatisfaction. Ask them, realistically, what would make it better. The V – their Vision. Then, encourage them to think about the activities, processes and procedures over which they have at least some control and what can they do to make those better. The FS – First Steps necessary to create their future.

Create Feedback Loops

Why it is important: One of the primary objectives for change communication is to give managers and staff what they need to perform one of the most critical types of communication: informal, face to face, interaction among peers or with direct reports that is informative, accurate and timely. Bottom line, and simply stated, keeping all of the lines of communication open is extremely important. Hundreds of scenarios like the one that follows occur every day.

A supervisor, team lead, or manager passes by a workstation and a front-line employee asks: “Hey, what’s the story with the restructuring?” This is a critical moment. The effectiveness of change related communication hinges on what happens next. If the manager responds directly and personally with real, up to date information that staff person is reinforced as someone of value and worth keeping informed about the change. Additionally, that manager establishes that they, as a leader, have also have value in that they know what’s going on and that they care about staff concerns.

Whether you initiate it or not, change related communication will occur. During the initial stages of change senior leaders often decide to keep things quiet because there is little specific to communicate. *Rumors begin.* Too often, as the process moves forward, communication continues to be limited because nothing has been finalized. *Rumors increase geometrically.* Details start to leak out. *Escalating wildly, rumors now paint a picture worse than anything that is actually being considered.* When the news is finally announced, everyone has their own version of what they have “known” for weeks. The result: resentment, if not anger, and disenfranchisement.

How to do it - As you think about communication during times of change, consider the following:

- For managers: Immediately following any management meeting related to a significant change, meet with your staff to communicate or restate key information. Often, we assume that because we know, they know. However, all they really know is that their manager is coming and going from newly “important” meetings.
- For employees: Ask your manager for reports on progress. Also, ask your manager about rumors that are circulating. Often, if asked, and given an opportunity, managers can clarify misconceptions.
- For all: Do not stand by quietly when you hear rumors. Instead, speak up. Be willing to say something like – “That may or may not be true. Let’s ask someone about it before discussing it further.”

Demonstrate Your EI

What is it: Capabilities, competencies and skills that enable you to apply the power of emotion and use it as a source of energy, information and influence. The ability to:

- Acknowledge and value feelings in yourself and others.
- Respond to those feelings appropriately.
- Choose how you think, feel and act in relationships with individuals or in a group in response to problems, conflicts, and.
- Adapt to change, empathize with others, and handle adversity.

What it requires: The ability, capacity, and skills to perceive, assess, and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others, including groups. Emotional Intelligence requires that we learn to acknowledge and value feelings in ourselves and others, that we respond appropriately, and that we effectively apply the information and energy in emotions to life and work.

Emotional Intelligence does **not** result from the deliberations of rarefied intellect, but from the workings of the human heart. EI is an important factor in determining one's ability to succeed in life and it influences the quality of life.

How to do it:

- Listen for feelings when people seem upset about aspects of change, and acknowledge them as real.
- Find opportunities to acknowledge those who have gone above and beyond to lead change. Let others know about their positive efforts. Send electronic or written expressions of your gratitude – stating clearly what was done – with copies to others.
- Make sure you have a support network; people with whom you can honestly talk about your feelings and your reactions related to what is occurring in the work place and your personal feelings.
- Engage in activities to take better care of yourself, and do them daily. Take walks. Stretch at your desk. Start to work out.
- Apply constructive candor. If someone is behaving inappropriately let them know by saying something like: “I’m telling you this because I care about you... You may be limiting opportunities to be successful. Would you like to know what I see you doing here that may limit you?”
- Take time each day to identify aspects of your life for which you are grateful.

Evolve Yourself

What is it: Given that change is the “new normal” and periods of stability are now the exception to the rule, don’t create the impression that the work environment, or life, will always remain the same. Yes, we all need a period of stability following large-scale change. However, you must recognize that if you don’t continually seek ways to improve processes the organization will fall into stagnation and another large-scale change (vs. evolution) will be required. The primary way to avoid stagnation is to make continuous process improvement a performance requirement for everyone.

How to do it - A few suggestions:

- Ask yourself and others on your team:
 - What new skill, technique or process can we learn this month?
 - How can we streamline tasks?
 - What have we done to add value to what we do?
- Do something different every week. Listen to a different radio station. Take a different route to work. Try a new food. Learn a new technique.
- Identify different responsibilities, a different job in your organization, or even an alternative career. What else could you do? What do you need to learn to do that?
- Every week do something that adds VALUE to the organization.