

## LEADERSHIP TIPS

January 2008

### Use Change as a Motivator

Change is inevitable. It can be viewed as either an opportunity or a threat. Unfortunately, most organizations avoid significant change until faced with a crisis, rather than capitalizing on change as a vehicle for continuous improvement and innovation. To create and sustain high performance and to motivate change, effective leaders need to communicate a clear, inspiring vision, communicate openly, and initiate positive change.

Don't wait until you are faced with a crisis--when some of your better people are leaving, when absenteeism increases, or when grievances increase. Learn to recognize some of the crisis mode behaviors such as increased complaints of stress, or a decline in enthusiasm or participation. These behaviors often signal a need to conduct an internal audit and to develop some recommendations for positive change.

When change is reactive and not well planned, you and your organization can get stuck in a maintenance or defensive cycle. Many view change as a threat and become defensive, reacting with a range of behaviors from yelling and blaming to avoidance and justification. Research from Kenneth Thomas, author of Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument, states that male managers tend to go into a competitive mode when dealing with the negative. On the other hand, females tend to seek a collaborative and team approach and



are usually more willing to listen to emotional reactions to change. Effective change agents capitalize on this difference and exercise collaborative skills.

When change is proactive, well planned, and carefully implemented, your organization can function in a productive growth cycle. Staff can overcome their fears and anxieties and shift their attitude to embrace change as an opportunity for innovation and problem solving.

#### Change Strategies:

##### Establishing the Need and the Benefits of Change

Organizations that are successful in implementing change usually undergo a thorough organizational assessment to determine customer satisfaction, internal morale and structure, productivity, and efficiency levels. Regarding organizational change, one of our clients, June Catalano, City Manager of the City of Pleasant Hill, cautions new leaders: "Don't make big changes for your first six months unless you have a serious problem that needs immediate action. You need six months to really get to know the organization."

Carefully weigh your options for change, assessing advantages and challenges. Once you identify the major changes you plan to undergo, clearly articulate the primary benefits for all stakeholders. Next, assess resources. Determine who will be the internal champions for various stages of the change? What money is designated for needed consultation, training, and implementation? What type of outside experts can guide the process, train during and after the changes, and help with the implementation and evaluation stages? After the initial plan is developed, how do you, as the leader, present the needs and benefits to staff?

#### Leadership Readiness is Essential

Organizations that thoroughly prepare others and obtain their commitment up front are far more successful than organizations that hope for commitment as change occurs. I suggest holding a kick-off celebration meeting. Articulate the clear and exciting vision for change. Map out the process, timelines, identified champions, and benefits. Discuss past successes and learnings. What changes have worked well and why? Which have failed and why? Give people ample time to talk about resistance and fears as well as what they expect from leadership. Be forthright; admit where you have concerns and describe some of your own resistance.

Most people benefit from some training in change management, managing conflict, team building, and coaching. Plan to have skill-building sessions throughout the change process. Rapid change cycles are a fruitful time for coaching. Leaders need to recognize indicators of increased staff stress and signs of diminishing trust, enthusiasm, or participation.

Many companies admit that leadership was not trained or ready for the change. When significant change is implemented, weak management practices surface like wild fire. Invest in developing good communication skills. After all, people will either resist and sabotage the change or get on board and be your champions and partners. Set up special "change" meetings throughout the process. It's important to keep lines of communication open and honest.

#### Highlight Core Values, Mission, and Vision

Research supports that mission and values-driven organizations are more efficient and productive than rule-driven groups. To implement meaningful change, it is imperative that the fundamentals of strategic planning are present. The core values,

by Dr. Marilyn Manning, CSP, CMC

mission, vision, and goals should be re-examined and recreated, if needed. Change needs to be compatible with the purpose and mission of your organization. The change should be incorporated into the future vision, which reflects a response to the needs of all stakeholders. A well-written strategic plan should include clear goals for each step of any major change. The strategic plan should forecast anticipated changes, which can then facilitate any future change processes. Dedicating time to revisit mission, vision, and goals will expedite the anticipated changes. Implement this process at all levels of your organization.

An in-depth, thoughtful vision process can be a major motivator. Our client Hal Anjo, HR Director, Lyngso Garden Materials, Inc., says: "When you are considering a strategic plan or large change initiative, it is essential to have team members participate in the development of one or more key parts of the process. Defining company values is one area in which team member participation will yield a significant payoff. Almost anyone in an organization will jump at the chance to identify what is important to them. Help staff understand the significance of their participation. They will be more willing to buy into the full plan when they realize the value of their contribution." A team that is emotionally involved in their mission, vision, and goals has the strength to overcome the rough spots any business faces and commitment and buy-in accelerate.

### **Formal Communication is Key**

Open lines of communication, both formal and informal, are essential for assuring a positive change process. Rapid changes in the work environment can create a sense of chaos and isolation. The lack of face-to-face communication in e-mail, voice-mail, virtual teams, and most mergers and acquisitions can dehumanize the environment and leave a group unfocused. Formal communication forums include regular meetings throughout the change process. Some might greatly benefit from facilitation or meeting management training.

Hold "All hands meetings" at least quarterly. This is an opportunity to keep everyone informed, to celebrate successes, to offer some skill-building, and to hold open dialog. No one likes surprises. Ask for group input and demonstrate direct actions and follow-up. Let people know how and when you use their ideas. Consider creating a simple internal newsletter which publicizes updates,

benchmarks, and successes.

Hold regular informational and discussion meetings to stay current in the change process. Everyone throughout the organization needs some formal communication link. They need to feel that there is an appropriate place to ask questions, express concerns, deal with fears and anxieties, and receive acknowledgment for successes.

One of our clients, Gary Hampton, Chief of Police of the City of Turlock, says that to effectively lead change, "mutual trust must be developed with those implementing change, a sense of urgency created to gain movement, and lots of positive feedback must be given as you progress."

Make haste slowly. It takes at least six to nine months to fully integrate a cultural change. Create a sense of urgency, but exercise patience as you build buy-in. Using these tips will help you to become an effective change agent.

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*Marilyn*



[www.TheConsultingTeam.com](http://www.TheConsultingTeam.com)  
[info@TheConsultingTeam.com](mailto:info@TheConsultingTeam.com)  
650.965.3663



Dr. Marilyn Manning CSP, CMC  
The Consulting Team, LLC  
945 Mountain View Avenue  
Mountain View, CA 94040-2411