



Seven Strategies for Leading People through Change

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His voice is intense. His speech is fast. His words are graphic. He's frustrated, impatient, and said he feels like he's pushing the river...upstream.

He's been CEO for three years. He came into a paternalistic culture where people were taken care of, business was rolling in, and life seemed good. Managers eased into their day, had plenty of resources, and did what they were told. They worked hard, but they didn't have to think or innovate very much.

"Good folks, my managers. Many here a long time," he said. "It's just that I can't get them off dead center. They are so hooked in operations and tasks. They don't see the bigger picture. They have no sense of what's really going on out there. They are stuck in their own little world, and don't have a clue that we could be out of business if we don't change."

Many leaders today tell us similar stories. They want to change their culture and get people to think, act, and lead differently. And they want it right now! They have a sense of urgency and don't have time to waste. They see what needs to happen and they know what will happen if they don't change the way they do things. It's called competition. It's knocking at their door.

How do you change an organization? A team of people? What does it take to get people to rise up, like a helicopter, and get a new view of their organization and their jobs when they are so busy putting out the immediate fires in front of them?

Here's a start. Following are seven proven strategies that will help you move your organization and your team through change to a healthy level of acceptance and action.

1. Understand the change process and how it affects people and an organization. The culprit isn't change anyway! It's transition, which is the process that people go through to adjust to the change. It's unique to each person. Know each team member individually and their personal barriers to accepting change. Have the willingness and the skills to coach them through the change to a new beginning.
2. Develop and communicate a clear mission, vision, and values for your organization or your team. They are the foundation and the springboard from which all decisions, goals, and plans are made.
3. Communicate, communicate, and communicate! Determine which systems and processes need to be instituted to foster good communication, and which need to be eliminated that block communication.
4. Create, commit to, and communicate a learning plan for your team. Include the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior that are expected in your new culture. Take learning to the next level with individual development plans and tie them into performance reviews. Have clear expectations with accountability. Answer the question, "What happens if people don't meet expectations?"

5. Identify about 25 percent of your team that catch the vision and prepare them in communication and coaching skills to lead the change process. They are the architects, designers, gardeners, and cheerleaders whose job is to develop more leaders on all levels.

6. Identify and track Critical Measures of Success, those quantifiable benchmarks that tell you how you are doing. Celebrate your successes along the way; even the small ones.

7. Develop personal mastery as a leader. Make the way, show the way, and light the way by modeling the change you want to create. Align your personal mission with the organizational mission. Build trust by being honest about the changes, and build credibility by doing what you say you will do.

The train is moving! Recognize that all members of your team may not want to get on this new train. If there is deep resistance or even sabotage, deal with it up front. Remember, what you permit, you promote! Help people make a choice. If necessary, help unwilling people transition to another area or another organization.

It's true that today's fast-speed environment can be frustrating, energy draining, and demanding. However, it can also be exciting, rewarding, and full of hope and possibilities of what can be!

Apply these seven leadership strategies and watch what happens!

It's what leaders do.

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