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Approaches to Change: No Pain, No Change

In this issue...

By Jeff Davidson

- No Time for Long-Term Planning, BUT All the Time in the World to Live with the Consequences

Suppose you want to move from point A where you currently are to Point B, the desired outcome that you want to achieve, or that has been imposed on you. For confronting significant, challenging, disruptive change, the process can't be left to chance.

Trail Boss on the Change Campaign Trail

You increase your success of moving from Point A to Point B by effectively managing a change campaign. During the campaign, many things are in transition. People don't feel comfortable. They resist. The change campaign represents upset for many people; it is a departure from what they were doing.

- Leadership Strategies to Overcome Adversity

The effective change manager helps people adopt new operating procedures, exhibit new behaviors, and develop new attitudes that all support progress toward the desired outcome.

- Approaches to Change: No Pain, No Change

Crossing the Pain Threshold

Keeping a change campaign moving forward is only likely when the pain of the present state is greater than the cost of the transition state. For example, it would be exceedingly costly to abandon your car if it were stuck on a railroad track. As a train approaches, it would be even more costly to not abandon the car!

- Seven Myths to Selling

Words from the Wise

"Vision without execution is hallucination."

- Thomas Edison

Many organizations want to keep offering the product or service that has brought them healthy profits in the past. Yet, as competition strives to offer superior products or services, and as the marketplace becomes more aware of opportunities to upgrade products and services, there is simply no standing still.

Is it expensive to develop new products or services, particularly on a continuing basis? You bet. However, it is more expensive to stay where you are.

Moving on in Discomfort

Even when people fully and intellectually embrace the need to change, the tendency to slip back to what they were previously doing is powerful. The keystrokes you're familiar with or the buttons you used to push no longer get the desired results. What's worse, you're not sure what will give that result.

Your reflexive action in the face of change is to gravitate back to what did work, such as the old software. At least you knew where you stood when you pushed the button.

Change managers—and by osmosis, targets of change—who are most effective in executing a change campaign, understand and accept the need to move on even when it's uncomfortable.

Pain as the Great Motivator

Some people regard pain management as the greatest single motivator for people to achieve what they want. By extension, pain management applied to a change team may be the greatest single motivator for the group to achieve the desired objective. Unless you identify sufficient amounts of pain with your current situation, in a week, a month, or a year from now, you will find yourself right where you started. You will likely be surrounded by all of the unpleasant aspects of your current situation, because you won't muster sufficient impetus to break through the transition state to get to the desired end result.

Personally, as well as group wide, if the level of pain is not high enough, there will be no change.

Passing Along the Pain

Since change campaigns are initiated by sponsors, and sponsors inherently feel some level of pain, it behooves the sponsor to convey an appropriate level of pain to the change manager, who will then convey such pain to the change targets. If an organization, department, or team seeks to change because it will otherwise lose out on a fun or interesting opportunity, will the level of pain be sufficient? In most cases the answer is no.

If failing to make a change will result in some minor upset, hurt feelings, or other temporary negative situation, then once again, the pain level is insufficient to stage a change campaign, which will be carried all the way through to the desired end.

Pain Threshold

What then constitutes appropriate and sufficient pain? How much is enough to motivate a sponsor to initiate change, to cause a change manager to feel the heat, and to pass on the intensity to the targets of change on which the responsibility falls? As it turns out, the answer is not crystal clear. Pain is subjective. The amount of pain and the form it takes impacts people differently.

Frustration or Dissatisfaction

The owner of an underachieving baseball team, who is frustrated with the team's performance and is dissatisfied with being the "cellar-dwellers" of the league, has sufficient incentive to make drastic changes. A new manager is hired. Expensive trades are in the works to get top players.

There is usually more off-season trading among clubs who did poorly than among those who did well. In basketball, during the heyday of the Chicago Bulls, the nucleus of the team remained intact for several years. Only the role players seemed to come and go.

In baseball, perhaps the owner feels he isn't getting sufficient support from the fans, and that by moving his ball club to a more attractive location, he could enjoy a larger fan base and more revenues, and hence better players could be obtained.

In the business world, frustration and dissatisfaction can show up as a result of loss of market share, loss of industry position, and even loss of prestige.

Fear and Anxiety

Never underestimate the power of fear as a motivator to change. Psychologists will tell you that following a person's divorce, he or she has the greatest incentive to get back into shape if more than a "few pounds" have been added over the years. This is because the newly divorced person fears that he or she will not attract a mate commensurate with his or her desires.

While married, this person may have had little incentive to shed pounds. Once he or she is back on the singles market, however, the pounds come off relatively easily compared to any previous weight reduction campaign.

With organizations that fear the loss of their viability as a result of virtually any stimuli are inherently primed for change. New sponsors have fewer hurdles to clear to get a change campaign in place. To sustain these sponsors they must have the ear of change managers, who in turn, have the attention and participation of staff.

An organization-wide fear can be harnessed by sponsors and change managers to great effect. It is not as if they brought about the situation, but they can make use of what has occurred.

About the Author

Jeff Davidson, CMC, MBA, is The Work-Life Balance Expert[®]. A speaker at many large companies, Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance. Jeff can be reached at jeff@breathingspace.com. Readers can also visit www.BreathingSpace.com and www.Work-LifeBalance.net.