

Lead Change, Don't Manage It

BY GREG SCHINKEL

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“If your organization is experiencing change right now, it's interesting to think of all the possibilities that are being created.”

When you first learned to drive a car, chances are you focused on looking just over the hood, trying to keep within the lines and avoid bumps. This made your driving erratic and your driving instructor likely told you to focus on the horizon. When you look to the horizon and focus on where you want to go, your driving becomes less erratic. The same concept applies to leading change in your organization.

Managing Change is an oxymoron. Change is not something to be managed. By definition, management is focused on efficiently applying resources to achieve pre-determined standards; deviation being something to be reduced or eliminated. Change, on the other hand demands deviation from standards towards something new.

If your organization is experiencing change right now, it's interesting to think of all the possibilities that are being created. A few years from now you will be able to look back to today and appreciate something that changed. Changes in the economic landscape are motivating companies to innovate at a frantic pace. The fruits of these improvements will have a long term impact. Instead of waiting for this change to happen to them, it would have been better to lead the need for change in advance.

For a person with a constructive mindset, change is exciting. Think back to a significant change in your personal or professional life. At the time it was likely painful to deal with the change. Now think about some of the things that have happened in your life or career because of that change. If the change had not occurred you would have missed out on some very positive moments that followed.

At best, managing change can only create incremental improve-

ment. You only need to look at the ailing General Motors, Chrysler and Ford and the unions that represent their workers to see how managing change is working for them. They have been trapped in incrementalism for most of their history.

A defensive posture is embedded in most management teams. Defending the status quo is seen as the safest route because it appears to have the lowest risk. In fact it may be the riskiest because the assumption is that other factors are static and will not change.

When we work with supervisors and managers to develop their leadership skills, we recommend the following actions to become more effective in leading change:

- Look into the future: While we don't have a crystal ball to know exactly what is coming, there are a number of leading indicators that help you understand what may be coming. The evidence of the need for change is likely reflected in your company results and the behaviour of your customers.

- Create a compelling vision: Lift your eyes to the horizon and paint a picture of where your organization needs to be in the future. With supervisors we ask them to list all of their hassles and frustrations and then think about how their department would be if those frustrations were replaced with excellence.

- Communicate the vision powerfully: Employees are craving leadership. Deliver your vision in everyday communication instead of fancy speeches. Link what you are asking employees to do with your vision.

And finally, remember that today's change is tomorrow's normal. Be ready to initiate more change to keep moving forward.

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