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LEADING CHANGE WITH RESILIENCE

BY SIOBHAN BROWN, CMP, PMP, CTDP

A LEADER'S ABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE PERSONAL RESILIENCE IS ARGUABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN COPING WELL DURING STRESSFUL SITUATIONS AND TIMES OF CHANGE. SINCE WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING AND CHANGING, BEING ABLE TO MANAGE OUR OWN REACTIONS TO CHANGE, AS WELL AS LEAD OTHERS THROUGH IT, IS CRITICAL.

WHY CHANGE IS CHALLENGING

Typically, most individuals choose the comfort of familiarity (even if things aren't functioning as they should) rather than the anxiety that comes with the unknown. In a recently published book, "Change or Die," Alan Deutschman explains why "the odds are nine to one that individuals will not alter their behavior even when faced with the likelihood of dying prematurely as a result of bad habits." Business leaders who see this statistic might question their chances for success in leading less threatening initiatives in their organization. Surrounded by the pressure to respond to a rapidly shifting world, leaders need tools to address the many challenges

in building and maintaining new initiatives, so that they can address the needs of their employees and respond appropriately to their reactions to change.

CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to remain productive during turbulence. Resilient leaders help people achieve better outcomes for themselves and their organizations. If a team can recognize and use its resilience strengths as effectively as it uses other knowledge and skills, it lays the groundwork for outstanding performance when the team encounters major change, according to "Managing Change with Personal Resilience" by Mark Kelly and Linda Hoopes.

RESILIENT
LEADERS
HELP PEOPLE
ACHIEVE BETTER
OUTCOMES FOR
THEMSELVES
AND THEIR
ORGANIZATIONS.

An effective leader will attempt to combine their personal resilience and the synergy of the team to operate efficiently in the midst of disruptive change. This can be accomplished by encouraging the team to be:

- Positive about each member's capability to contribute and the team's ability to influence the organization.
- Focused on the team's shared goals.
- Flexible about incorporating diverse perspectives into their approach and elicit open participation from team members.

In addition, an effective leader must be able to anticipate the needs of their team members and where they may be in the change curve. Not all team members will jump onboard when a new change initiative is introduced. It will take careful planning by the leader to adapt their communication when explaining the vision and purpose of the change. A resilient leader will also want to engage their employees through the process and ensure mechanisms are in place to support the change.

BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

There are many theories about how to "do" change. Arguably, many originate with leadership and change management guru, John Kotter. A professor at Harvard Business School and world-renowned change expert, Kotter introduced his eight-step change process in his book, "Leading Change" and follow-up book, "The Heart of Change." While Kotter describes some of the actions a leader needs to take during all eight steps, the first four seem to necessitate the most direct action from a leader. Let's take a look at the first four steps and the actions a resilient leader can take.

STEP 1: Establish a Sense of Urgency

For change to happen, it helps if the whole company really wants it. It is important to develop a sense of urgency around the need for change. This may help spark the initial motivation to get things moving.

This isn't simply a matter of showing people poor sales statistics or talking about increased competition. A resilient leader will begin with an honest and convincing dialogue about what's currently happening in the marketplace and with the competition. If many people

start talking about the proposed change, the urgency can build and feed on itself. To increase momentum toward the change, a resilient leader can:

- Identify potential threats and develop scenarios that show what could happen in the future.
- Examine opportunities that should be, or could be, exploited.
- Start honest discussions and give dynamic and convincing reasons to get people talking and thinking.
- Request support from customers, outside stakeholders and industry people to strengthen the argument for change.

STEP 2: Create a Resilient Change Team

Convincing people that change is necessary often takes strong leadership and visible support from key people within the organization. To lead change, it is important to bring together a team of influential and resilient people whose power comes from a variety of sources including job title, status, expertise and political importance.

Once formed, the resilient change team or "guiding coalition" as referred to by Kotter, needs to work together to continue building urgency and momentum around the need for change. The resilient leader can:

- Identify the true leaders in the organization that are respected for demonstrating resilient behavior during turbulent times.
- Ask for an emotional commitment from these key people.
- Work on team building within the resilient change team/coalition.
- Check with the change team to determine areas of opportunity and ensure that there is a good mix of people from different departments and different levels within the company.

STEP 3: Develop a Compelling and Shared Change Vision

When you first start talking about change, there will probably be many great ideas and possible solutions floating around. A resilient leader will be able to link these concepts to an overall shared vision that people can grasp easily and remember. If the vision is not compelling and relatable, people will simply not commit to the change.

A clear vision can help everyone understand why they are being asked to do something differently. When people see for themselves what is trying to be achieved, then the directives they are given tend to make more sense. To create a compelling shared vision, a resilient leader should:

- Determine the values that are central to the change.
- Develop a short summary (one or two sentences) that captures the future direction of the organization.
- Create a strategy to execute that vision that involves key stakeholders.
- Ensure that the resilient change team/coalition can describe the vision in five minutes or less (similar to an elevator speech) so that it is memorable and easily communicable.

STEP 4: Communicate the Vision for Buy-In

What is done with the vision after it is created will ultimately determine the success of the change. The message will probably have strong competition from other day-to-day communications within the company, so it is recommended to communicate the vision frequently and powerfully, as well as embed it within everything that is done.

Don't just call special meetings to communicate the vision. Instead, talk about it at every chance possible. Use the vision daily to make decisions and solve problems. When it is fresh on everyone's minds, they will remember it and respond by taking action that is aligned with it.

As a resilient leader, it is also important to "walk the talk." What a leader does is far more important and believable than what a leader says. To increase buy-in to the vision, a resilient leader should:

- Talk about the change vision often.
- Openly and honestly address peoples' concerns and anxieties.
- Apply the vision to all aspects of operations – from training to performance reviews – and tie everything back to the vision.
- Lead by example.

ACKNOWLEDGE LOSSES

Once information has been received that a change is about to happen, people's

LEADING WITH RESILIENCY

The following are actions that a leader should consider to increase their effectiveness when leading others through change:

- Increase your own resilience by role-modeling productive behaviors especially during high levels of disruptive change.
- Work on your emotional intelligence to cope with stress and uncertainty.
- Shift from reactive (change victim) to proactive (change leader) stance through planning and active involvement of key stakeholders as well as those being affected by the change.
- Cultivate organizational resiliency as a strategic priority by engaging individuals and teams to create a shared vision and encourage commitment to change.

**Adapted from PBS 2005 Technology Conference, "Leading Change Building a Resilient Organization" by Cindy Browne.*

natural reaction may be shock or denial that there is even a need for change. This is the first stage in the change curve.

The second stage is resistance. People must recognize and acknowledge that something is over, gone and completed, before they can let go of the old situation. Until they let go, they will not be able to move on. This is often when resistance occurs since the person can no longer deny the change is happening. They may transition into a state of anger, accompanied by covert (i.e., passive) or overt (i.e., blatant) resistance. This stage is the most critical with respect to the success of the change implementation. Leadership is imperative at this stage to help work through the anger and to move people to the next stage. It is important for a resilient leader to:

- Acknowledge what each individual will be losing and show empathy to those affected.
- Honor the past and create excitement about the future.
- Create disenchantment about the past by gently reminding people of the consequences of not changing.
- Temporarily allow people to complain and grieve.
- Respond to questions and provide employees with lots of information.

RECOGNIZE RESILIENT BEHAVIOR

As people begin to get over the hump and move past resistance, they have entered the third stage of acceptance. It is important for a resilient leader to:

- Encourage staff to think creatively and take risks.
- Reward staff for demonstrating the desired behavior.
- Recognize staff for being resilient during this time of uncertainty and for remaining productive.

These actions by the leader will encourage staff to embrace the change by showing emotional commitment and becoming more involved (Stage 4).

By focusing on being a resilient leader, you can address your staff's skill gaps through personal development and responding appropriately to their responses to change. You can also increase the team and organizational effectiveness during times of change by acknowledging losses and recognizing resilient behavior. 🍀

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