

## **Leadership: 5 Ways Leaders Strengthen & Prepare Their Teams For Change...**

Was there ever a time that was more uncertain than today? Are leaders prepared to manage change in ways that strengthen the teams around them?

Leadership is about taking the initiative to do the things others would rather avoid doing – and about allowing risk to be your best friend. Leaders make those around them better by being wise enough to anticipate the unexpected and by being accountable to take action all the way through to the end.

They know how to help their teams tackle change head-on and remove the fear-factor from their minds. They do this by creating environments that embrace clarity around the issues, collaboration to produce new ideas, and strategic focus. They build solid ecosystems where thinking courageously and challenging the old ways of doing things create competitive advantage.

As many companies enter 2015 in full-blown transformation mode, the value of leadership lies within the outcomes of reinventing the ways teams think, act and innovate.

Leaders must become change agents and must teach their teams to do the same to assure circumstances don't force their hand and to create and sustain the required momentum to win.

Leaders must maximize the performance of their teams, but doing so without disruption during times of uncertainty can be a challenge. Yet, it's not impossible. Here are five things effective leaders teach their teams to prepare for and manage change:

### **1. Clarity of the Issues**

Teams learn how to embrace change when leaders take the time to clarify the issues at hand. This requires leaders to make sure their teams understand the changes they are faced with – and what they potentially mean to the organization, its supply chain, and its clients. Clarity is the foundation for understanding the "what-if" scenarios around which the team can plan and take action. Clarity of the issues allows the team to objectively break down the risk factors, anticipate potential outcomes with a clear line of sight, and identify a path towards the real issues they should be really solving for.

Clarity eliminates the guesswork and makes change management less about dealing with potential adversity and more about seeing and seizing the opportunities that are right in front of you. When teams don't have clarity of the issues, they complicate matters by making false assumptions, and quickly lose sight of the opportunities at hand. Just ask companies like Kodak, Blackberry and Blockbuster, who lost clarity when they didn't see through the right lens of opportunity.

### **2. Embrace Diversity of Thought**

True collaboration means embracing diversity of thought, and the different ways people think, act and innovate. Collaboration is just an overused word when the intention behind the action is not fully leveraged. Collaboration done rightly means not just working closely with and learning from each other – but cultivating a treasure hunt of ideas and ideals. Great teams know how to collaborate not only amongst themselves, but with other teams as well. Collaboration is about creating a serendipitous environment where the interconnectivity of people creates momentum that drives everyone closer towards the end game.

Collaboration that embraces diversity of thought amplifies the discovery of knowledge – especially when you can align your proficiency in opportunity management with those who may have complementary or compatible skill-sets. For example, are you a seer, sower, grower and/or sharer of opportunity? My organization has studied workplace cultures, team building and the power of collaboration for years. We have identified that when these four skills are brought together as one, they produce an optimal collaborative environment that breeds the most successful teams and a workplace culture that continuously propels innovation and initiative:

Seeing opportunities with broadened observation. Sowing opportunities with extensive innovation. Growing the seeds of opportunity of greatest potential. Sharing the opportunities you create and sustain with others

In fact, a study by my organization revealed that the workplace is not innovative enough because employees are mostly proficient “sowers” (with the propensity of doing what they are told very well). This makes it difficult to maximize the outcomes of diversity of thought, collaborative activities and breed the discovery of new ideals and ideas. The results of this study were based on more than 500,000 people that took the Workplace Serendipity Quiz – which measures one’s proficiency in each of the four opportunity management skills. Our conclusion: the optimal team players that embrace change management the most are those that have a proficiency in all four skills and/or align themselves with others to make-up a combined proficiency in the quartet of skills. Put yourself and your colleagues to the test. Perhaps you will discover why you are not collaborating optimally nor fully leveraging and/or valuing diversity of thought.

### **3. Strengthen Your Ecosystem**

An ecosystem can only be designed and subsequently strengthened when teams have clarity about the change they are solving for and have fully mastered and leveraged the ability to collaborate by embracing diversity of thought. When an ecosystem is built, your team can begin to integrate and multiply its know-how, intel and insights with other teams whose functional competencies can further stretch your team’s thinking and provide inputs that can strengthen its outputs. Ecosystem design can be challenging when teams are not willing to be open-minded enough to accept that there are better ways of doing things. They must be willing to accept and embrace a transformative environment that can be cultivated from within the ecosystem.

Ecosystems are created to help transform organizations, change the status quo and lead new paradigms. Leading the development of organizational ecosystems requires a deep understanding of what each team brings to the table – the value they can contribute, their willingness to learn, the desire to reach a higher level of performance through the sharing of best practices, etc. – all for the betterment of a healthier whole.

Though they may experience some constructive disruption along the way, with proper strategic focus, teams that are stitched together into an ecosystem in the right combinations will be geared for success and are aligned to have the most effective change management results.

Opportunities are everywhere, but few have the eyes to see them. Within the right ecosystem, one can see what others don’t, do what others won’t, and keep pushing when prudence says quit.

### **4. Create Competitive Advantage**

With an environment that embraces clarity around the issues, collaboration to produce new ideas, strategic focus to build solid ecosystems that challenge the old ways of doing things – teams are now ready to create competitive advantage.

Creating competitive advantage means more than teams making the ecosystem that they are assigned to stronger – it means creating distinction for themselves throughout the organization at-large. Leaders must view their department and/or functional areas as “mini-organizations” within the organization – especially after experiencing the role the team played in strengthening the ecosystem.

Every department (“mini-organization”) leader must want for their team to set-forth the example for other departments to follow. For example, one of my clients has a department leader that everyone wants to work for. This leader’s goal is to maximize the performance potential of each team and the employees on the teams. By setting the right tone, this leader allows employees to discover their full potential – and their performance heavily influences their salary increases – not once, but twice a year. But people throughout the larger organization want to work for this leader – not because of the money – but because this leader has made the department much more entrepreneurial and a lot more fun. Job descriptions have been thrown out the door in support of a boundary-less environment which incentivizes both purpose and performance.

Creating competitive advantage is about course correction and being adaptive throughout the journey; finding what your team is best at doing and then keep improving upon it. This requires teams to think critically about what they must keep doing, start doing and stop doing – taking a more mindful and purposeful approach to reach their full potential. These are simple questions that we don’t ask ourselves often enough and that we must hold ourselves accountable to answer.

## **5. Encourage Critical and Strategic Thinking**

We all recognize that we must create a strategy for change. Most teams don’t take enough time to define their strategy, since this is the basis for accountability. Unfortunately, many teams fall into the trap of wanting to be accountable more for what others want them to be, rather than what they seek to be themselves.

Sustaining the outcomes associated with steps 1 – 4 requires a team to think courageously and their leaders to encourage it at all times. Thinking courageously creates and sustains the momentum during change management efforts. It demands that each member of the team challenge each other to think more critically and see through a lens of continuous improvement by:

- Seeing opportunity in everything
- Anticipating the unexpected
- Unleashing their passionate pursuit of excellence
- Living with an entrepreneurial spirit
- Working with a generous purpose
- Leading to leave a legacy together

Success comes most to those teams that are surrounded by other teams that want their success to continue. Thinking courageously as a team and inspiring the other teams within your ecosystem to do the same will bring sustainable success and significance.

Now is a good time for leaders to strengthen and prepare their teams for the changes ahead in the New Year, whatever they may be. The strongest teams are those where different points of view – diversity of thought – converge and are given free expression. Where there is clarity of the issues, a real collaborative spirit, and the leadership to think courageous, you will find sound ecosystems designed to create competitive advantage and prepared for change during the best and worst of times.