

MANAGING CHANGE

Change - it's a constant in today's world and managing it effectively has become one of the most critical issues facing business, and a vital ingredient for sustainability.

By Tricia Reardon

When we think of change in business, we often view it in terms of expansion, restructure, acquisition or merger, moving into new markets, launching new products, facing new competition, implementing new technologies or even business revitalization. Losing a valued staff member causes change to occur, with the need to manage a change process. Achieving this successfully has become one of the most critical issues facing business today, and a vital ingredient for sustainability.

In the life cycle of a company, change can occur at any given stage. Even companies in their infancy or adolescence need to embrace the concept of change if they are to move forward successfully, as keeping up with growth requires an ability to adjust to a range of challenges.

Change Needs To Be Driven From The 'Top'

Whilst flexibility is one factor needed to deal with change, strong leadership and clear vision are paramount. Change needs to be driven from the 'top'. This means each person in a leadership capacity must understand and impart the true meaning of being a team player; to accept responsibility and accountability; delegate to and empower those who are capable of doing a task well; recognise the achievements of others; listen; dare to think laterally and even take risks to solve problems; prioritise; and have empathy. Leaders set the example and employees learn from their leaders.

Employ People Who Are Ahead Of Where You Are Today & Who Share Your Passion

At the same time, having the right people in the organisation capable of adapting to and embracing change is leadership's responsibility. The people with whom you surround yourself must share your vision. Employing people who are ahead of where you are today and who share your passion becomes essential to growth and dealing with change. It can be difficult to try and take people rapidly through change when they have never experienced change, or are unwilling partners in change. A fast growing company [or one that is facing radical change] needs to have people who are ahead to be able to make empowered decisions. The leader of the business needs to provide the direction, the

energy and the culture, but that person also needs people to manage the process of change, who share the passion and fit culturally.

Whilst strong leadership and management are important, engendering trust is also a key factor. People who understand the 'why' of change and trust in the leadership of the business are more likely to work with change and actively engage in the process. Using authority to command loyalty is a battle rarely won. However, drawing people together who are passionate and build a sense of shared ownership regardless of a person's position in the company is more likely to result in success.

Training and coaching employees will also help to motivate them to deliver change successfully, as will developing an effective communication strategy. A clear, consistent, open and continuous message needs to be delivered to every level and corner of the organisation, and that message needs to be in a format and language relevant to its audience.

Develop A Culture Of Teamwork & Accountability

The credibility of the change process relies heavily on senior management's passion for it, combined with the ability to demonstrate this through a commitment to action and communication. That is, a culture must be created that will support the changes. Developing a culture of teamwork and accountability will provide the foundation that will allow constructive change to take place. Employees need to be encouraged to share the responsibility of supporting your vision as well as the objectives and strategies that will achieve this vision.

Change has become a part of our lives that we can count on. Effectively managing the change process will ensure both personal and business growth. It is vital to remember however, that the change process takes time. Day-to-day pressures and workload can lead us to stray from the goal. Persistence and constant reinforcement are imperative, but above all, a positive approach to change allows us to face any challenge.

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