

# Successfully Leading Change

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Imagine you are an expert chess player. You've worked at mastering the game for years and are confident in your ability to act decisively on the board. Now imagine, that without warning, your opponent has the ability to change the playing field to a video game that requires a joystick and quick agility. Your training and experience don't count for much in this changed environment; the two games require very different skill sets. Using a chess match mentality and strategy while attempting to play a video game will lead to a predictable outcome—ask any parent who has been enticed into a video game competition with his child!

The greatest challenge to anyone in a leadership position today is the ongoing need to be mentally flexible and adaptable. Established beliefs and past success in any given endeavor can lead to executive dysfunction. How can past success, which is generally considered the best indicator of future success, bring failure? Not only have the rules of the game changed, the entire playing field is beyond past recognition. Continual leaps in technology, expanding free markets in the global economy, and internet access have transformed the way business functions. And, the metamorphosis continues to occur at an increasingly rapid pace. Organizational viability and profitability depends on the ability to embrace and adapt to change. The challenge for the executive is to develop new perspectives and mind sets essential to effectively compete in a constantly evolving game.

Change cannot be managed; it must be led. Leadership and management are distinctly different in philosophy and character. Yesterday's organization employed a management model, focused on the status quo by keeping people and technology running at functional levels. Today's organization, driven hard by change from every direction, demands leadership focused on the big picture and vision of the company. Executives who

practice leadership continually show their people what the future is going to look like and strive to align them with that vision. Leaders inspire people to see change as an opportunity and empower them to act, create and actualize the desired vision into reality.

Significant change requires leadership that understands the dynamics of human nature. Resistance to change is an obstacle that needs to be openly addressed and properly negotiated. As people are forced to leave their comfort zones and engage in periods of uncertainty, constant communication between executives and the workforce is essential. People at all levels must see the need and have a role in the change process to optimize buy-in. These practices are fundamental to employee involvement and ultimately, the success of the operation.

Sadly, few organizations practice *leadership*. Most still employ management orientations, which primarily function from the top down and typically stifle employee involvement. Many management-oriented executives have excellent track records and extensive past success. However, past success in today's market does not prognosticate the ability to successfully deal with current executive challenges. In a dynamic, complex environment that demands flexibility and agility the management mind-set becomes overwhelmed and ineffective. Today, a management mind-set is quickly becoming more of a liability than an asset. More and more executives are quickly being shown the door, as the drive for results gets stronger and more emphatic by boards and stockholders.

Their failure, primarily, is an inability to effectively work through the human side of change. Underscoring this point, recent research demonstrates that about 60% of mergers and acquisitions yield less than desired or expected

results because the people issues were poorly understood and executives simply failed to consider the importance of correctly addressing these issues. Based on my consulting and coaching experience, I find these conclusions to be accurate.

Business today is in the throes of a leadership crisis underscoring the need for executives to understand their people's abilities more than ever before. Quoting *Fortune*, "So how do CEOs blow it? More than any other way, by failure to put the right people in the right jobs and the related failure to fix people problems in time." Facilitating human

dynamics must become a core competency of all organizations that intend to thrive in the decades to come. Assessment, coaching, and development programs can help companies select executives that share their corporate vision as well as providing the skills and mind-set required to evolve them into effective leaders. ■

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